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PCGzine

Issue 27 | March 2009

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EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON PREVIEW

BATTLEFORGE

Plus! New screens & wallpapers

MASSIVE GIVEAWAY!
50,000 beta keys inside...

REVIEWED & RATED

WARHAMMER 40,000 DAWN OF WAR

The RTS classic is back!

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FOOTBALL
MANAGER LIVE

PREVIEWED!



ELVEN LEGACY

PREVIEW & INTERVIEW

HEARTS OF IRON III



FREE INSIDE!
HALO WARS
OFFICIAL 17 PAGE
MAGAZINE

Welcome to PCGZine



Hello. James is away this month, so I've jumped in to his size nines. It's a blinding issue nonetheless and first up we have a mighty preview of BattleForge. A brilliant RTS / MMO combo, EA looks to have come up trumps once again. But you don't have to take our word for it - we have 50,000 beta keys to give away. Today. It's first come first served, so I'll leave you to crack on with that...

Of course there's more though and this month Dawn of War II is put through its paces in our lead review and we take a long hard look at the much awaited Football Manager Live.

Enjoy the issue...

Dan Hutchinson, Editor
pcgzine@gamerzines.com

READER FEEDBACK!
Click here to tell us what you think of the magazine!

Don't miss! This month's highlights...



BattleForge
Hands-on preview!
50,000 beta keys up for grabs!



Terminator Salvation



Wanted



Dawn of War II



Elven Legacy



Hearts of Iron III



Football Manager Live

MEET THE TEAM

Probably the best games writers on the planet



Steve Hill
Down with Dawn of War II and Football Manager Live



Steve Boxer
Toe to toe with Elves and Terminators

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away!

Terminator Salvation	Batman: Arkham Asylum
Hearts of Iron III	Wanted
Blood Bowl	Elven Legacy
Battlefield: Bad Company 2	Hearts of Iron III
BattleForge	Warhammer 40,000:
Majesty 2	Dawn of War II
The Sims 3	Football Manager Live

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PLAYBACK OPTIONS:

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Games for Windows

EMPIRE TOTAL WAR™ OUT 4TH MARCH



TERMINATOR SALVATION

Publisher: Warner Interactive
Developer: Grin
Heritage: GRAW, GRAW 2
Link: www.grin.se/news.aspx?i=112
ETA: May

PREVIEW FEEDBACK!
Click here to tell us what you think of Terminator Salvation



You can't beat a bit of split-screen co-op.



Much of Skynet's threat, naturally, comes from the skies.

FIRST LOOK

Terminator Salvation

Not just a game-of-the-film

What's the story?

It's the game of perhaps the year's most anticipated film, documenting what happens when John Connor forms his resistance to the takeover of the world by Skynet's machines. But, developer Grin and publisher Warner Interactive assure us, it won't just be a game-of-the-film.

What do we know?

You play John Connor, but at the start he's just a cog in the resistance. The game takes you through the story of how he came to lead them – taking the initiative when the nerves of those around you fail. It is, of course, a third-person shooter, with a cover mechanism, and plenty of on-rails sequences.

The environment plays a part – Grin has had full access to the movie, so has recreated its post-apocalyptic setting impressively. Gameplay will involve drawing fire so your colleagues can take early Terminator machinery down – and as a rule, the bigger the machinery, the less advanced it is. We'll get to take on Skynet's early attempts at humanoid killing machines.

Anything else to declare?

It will come out at the same time as the movie, naturally. The size of your squad will change throughout the game, and you'll even have to use improvised explosive devices, terrorist-style.

CODENAME: PANZERS COLD WAR

Tactical troop management

PLAYBACK OPTIONS:

Action-packed street battles

Intelligent enemies

Hard-hitting air support

Tactical infantry constructions

Comprehensive unit upgrades

Physics-supported deformable terrain



The strategy hit Codename: Panzers™ is back!

March 2009. Playable Demo available.

www.codename-panzers-coldwar.com



World War II is history and the Cold War has just begun!

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Publisher: Paradox
Developer: Paradox
Heritage: Hearts of Iron, Hearts of Iron II
Link: [http://forum.paradoxplaza.com/forum/paradoxplaza.com/forumdisplay.php?f=415](http://forum.paradoxplaza.com/forum/paradoxplaza.com/forum/paradoxplaza.com/forumdisplay.php?f=415)
ETA: March

PREVIEW FEEDBACK!
 Click here to tell us what you think of Hearts of Iron III



The wealth of info available to show you how your war effort is progressing is simply mind-boggling. A bit of colour-coding helps identify problem areas.

The heart of Hearts of Iron III, as it were, is the map. The whole world is split into provinces, which you can drill down into individually or treat as blocks.

Naturally, all the major political players from each country involved in WW2 are present and correct.

Hearts of Iron III

FIRST LOOK

Doing for World War II what Football Manager did for soccerball

What's the story?

Paradox's World War 2 sim-strategy game, which supports a near-infinite range of possible outcomes, receives a much-needed update. Splitting the world into 15,000 provinces, it lets you take control of any country, and work your way through the period surrounding the war.

What do we know?

As with previous versions of the game, it's not exactly a graphical experience, as Hearts of Iron is all about deep strategy gameplay. This time around, you can develop networks of spies, engage in diplomacy, research new technologies, cream off your best-educated subjects and assign them to certain roles and engage in internal politics – making new laws and so on. Plus, of course, there are more military manoeuvres to get

through than you can shake a stick at. This is a game that's guaranteed to keep you playing for months.

"Hearts of Iron is all about deep strategic gameplay"

Anything else to declare?

Any aspects of Hearts of Iron III which don't float your boat can be assigned to the AI, so you effectively decide how you want to play it. You can drill down to individual units in your army, or sit back and take a general commanding officer's view. All of which is fantastically good news for the revisionist megalomaniacs among us.

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7UP

More golden nuggets of gaming glory to come



Blood Bowl

Publisher: Focus Home Interactive | **ETA:** Q2
We're not quite sure whether Blood Bowl will turn out to be a stroke of genius or a disaster, but it's certainly different – it's a thoroughly unlikely collision between the worlds of Warhammer and American Football. Graphically, it looks pretty good, and it certainly has cult-hit potential.

Mount & Blade Expansion

Publisher: Paradox | **ETA:** September
Love riding horses and swordfighting? Then you'll definitely be a fan of Mount & Blade then, and Paradox is preparing an (as yet unnamed) expansion pack, which is more like a whole new release. Still a free-roaming effort, it mainly brings modern graphics technology to bear, although the physics have been upgraded, too.



Majesty 2

Publisher: Paradox | **ETA:** Late 2009
The second instalment of this unconventional 'indirect control' RTS, in which you'll have to recruit heroes by offering bounties, is being worked on by developer 1C. It describes itself as a mix between Warcraft, Settlers and The Sims, which sounds intriguingly mouth-watering. More on this game soon.

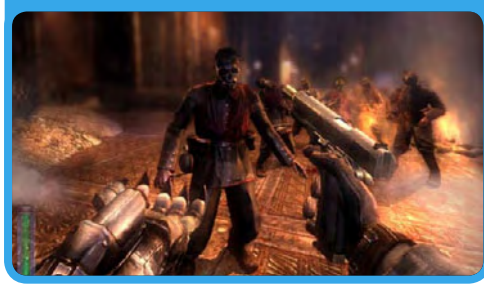
Batman: Arkham Asylum

Publisher: Eidos | **ETA:** Late 2009
Here's a rarity: a Batman game which doesn't drag on the coat tails of a film. It's an 'Action-detective game', with Batman using his sleuthing skills but, of course, flexing his melee skills, and beating up baddies in Arkham Asylum. An exciting prospect for fans of the Caped Crusader.



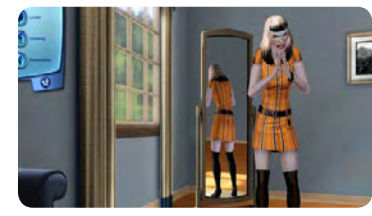
NecroVision

Publisher: 1C/Aspyr | **ETA:** Spring
We like the sound of this wacky horror first-person shooter, which somehow ranges from the trenches of the First World War to Hell itself. As if things weren't bad enough without demons and vampires adding to the mix by engaging in their own war. Classic B-movie-style stuff.



Battlefield: Bad Company 2

Publisher: EA | **ETA:** Late 2009
The wonderful DICE is at it again, bringing us another slab of intense, often vehicle-based, squad shoot-'em-up action. As ever, in a modern warfare setting. All we know right now is that they're working on it, but we know you'll be glad to hear that.



The Sims 3

Publisher: EA | **ETA:** June
Yes, we know that you know all about The Sims 3 – certainly one of the biggest releases of the year, and one which we can't wait to get our hands on. Except we're going to have to. It was supposed to come out this month, but it has been delayed until June. Boo.

SUMMER

APRIL/MAY

MARCH

ON THE RADAR

Ghostbusters
June

Champions Online
April

Tom Clancy's HAWX
6th March

Wheelman
20th March

EVE Online

X-Men Origins: Wolverine
May

Virtua Tennis 2009
May

Mafia 2
Summer

FUEL
Q2

The Sims 3
5th June



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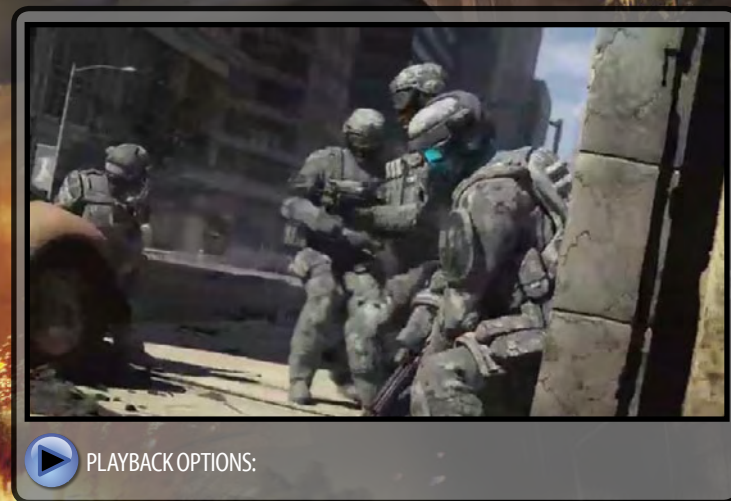
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EXCLUSIVE!

BattleForge

The Collectible Card Game genre is about to get upgraded – gotta catch 'em all...

PCGZine
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There was a time when games were easy to pigeonhole. Most titles fell comfortably into one of six main genres – first-person shooter, point 'n' click adventure, simulation (mostly of the aviation variety, but with the occasional tank or submarine thrown in for good measure), sports, role-players and real-time strategy. Gamers were happy, games publishers were happy, game shops were happy, and most importantly, magazines were happy. Then some bright spark decided to play god with the gaming universe and tried to mix and match a couple of these genres into a single title and all hell broke loose. Suddenly, all games had to have a bit of this, a bit of that and possibly a bit of some





Publisher: EA
Developer: EA Phenomic
Heritage: SpellForce
Link: www.battleforge.com
ETA: March

PREVIEW FEEDBACK!
 Click here to tell us what you think of BattleForge

> BattleForge continued

other all 'thrown into the mix', PR teams and marketing bods started to see their brains overheat as they tried to figure out how to pitch these unholy unions to the world, and the buyer's guide pages of magazines were forever thrown into turmoil as they tried to figure out if Black & White should go in the god game column, or with the RTSes, RPGs or if they should just forget it and list everything alphabetically instead.

Well, EA is still at it, with BattleForge helping itself from the Jar of Many Acronyms, combining the

dependable world of RTS games with the obsessive-compulsive life of the CCG fanatics (that's Collectible Card Game for all you non-Magic: The Gathering fans out there).

Cards On The Table

On face value, BattleForge comes across like just another fantasy-themed RTS: resource-generating control points to capture, armies of varying warrior types to build and position and enemies to 'zerg rush'. But it's the manner in which you deploy said troops that brings BF's uniqueness to the fore. When





ROLL OVER
 THE BIG
 PICTURE



> **BattleForge** continued you start with BattleForge, you'll have approximately 150 or so 'cards' to build a deck with. Split across four types of 'power source' (Fire, Frost, Shadow and Nature – each with a specific style of play) and containing everything from standard squads of 'grunts' to enormous fire-breathing dragons, you build decks of up to 20 cards to take into battle with you, either a varied mix of all types, or a focused selection of a specific type.

Each card has a cost to play, paid for by capturing power generators and monuments during each game. The strategic aspect comes from making sure your monuments deliver

the right kind of power for the chosen cards. So, go with an all-offensive, nothing-but-fire deck, or balance things out with nature's healing powers and frost's defensive style. It's simply a case of making sure that you have the right power sources for the chosen deck on the map.

A brief spell
 Aside from your armies, there is also a selection of spells to choose from – direct damage fireballs or earthquakes, for instance, or a quick burst of healing juice for everyone in range. Which is where the story of powerful wizards and warriors battling for supremacy across the world comes into play – these cards

representing 'you' on the battlefield, where you're influencing events godlike from above.

BattleForge actually features a rather robust single-player campaign,

"BattleForge actually features a robust single-player campaign, but its real attraction lies in the larger multiplayer aspect"

but its real attraction lies in the larger multiplayer aspect, with many maps being PvP arenas, either 1-on-1 or team games for 2, 4 or 12 players at a time – meaning there are going to be some almighty battles taking place – or almighty messes if players on the same team don't work well together. >





> **BattleForge** continued

Another wrinkle on the traditional RTS gameplay is the way many maps eschew any notion of a 'home base'. Because you don't need to build barracks and training grounds to train new troops, new units can be introduced to the field of battle almost anywhere you have friendly units nearby. Just play the unit's card, and for the most part it'll pop up next to your currently depleting forces, giving each level a very real sense of a constantly shifting 'front line', and meaning you are constantly able to assess current tactics and adjust things on the fly.

Now, being a CCG, that first 'C' plays an important part in things too. You may start the game with

around 150 cards in your collection, but the launch set actually contains a total of 200 – split across the usual CCG categories of common, rare and ultra-rare. With booster packs to buy through micro-transactions, plenty of duplicates to be had, and a potentially thriving community of collectors wanting the best units to be had, expect a lot of activity in the trading chat window as you try to work out how many of your orc brute copies are worth that siege tower being offered for exchange. Alternatively, if you don't want to trade, you can use your card copies to help upgrade others, making existing units considerably more powerful.

Quite the genre-busting little number, all in all. Come March and you can expect plenty of the old

"You may start with around 150 cards, but the launch set actually contains a total of 200"

playground Panini football sticker 'got, got, need, got, need, need' action to be taking place across Europe, although with potentially more violent outcomes once the trading has been concluded – unless you went to my old school of course, in which case orcs vs. dragons would seem tame by comparison. ●



PCGZine **HOW COMPLETE?** **FIRST IMPRESSIONS?**

95% **95%**

The strategy genre could hold another ace up its sleeve

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PLAYBACK OPTIONS:



NECROVISION

THE YEAR IS 1917 AND THE WORLD IS DEEPLY ENTRENCHED IN WWI. ENTER SIMON BUKNER, AN AMERICAN SOLDIER WHO HAS JOINED THE RANKS OF THE ALLIED FORCES IN EUROPE. ALL TOO SOON SIMON FINDS HIMSELF THROWN INTO THE HEAT OF THE CONFLICT WHERE HE UNCOVERS MORE THAN HE EVER IMAGINED...



UNLEASHED 27TH FEB 2009

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PC DVD ROM



FREE!

BATTLEFORGE

A whopping 50,000 beta keys available for this superb new MMO RTS!

In BattleForge, players use virtual trading cards to build the perfect army and lay waste to their foes. The cards are the tools of war each representing a spell, building or unit that is conjured directly onto the battlefield. With no base building and production queues, BattleForge players are instantly immersed into fast-paced RTS action. BattleForge features single-player and co-operative scenarios, as well as Player vs. Player (PvP) ranked

duels. Co-op battles are played in teams of two or four, or players can hurl themselves into epic 12-player battles. In these scenarios, players must work co-operatively to fulfil the mission and earn rewards. With co-op play, guilds, chat rooms, and a robust marketplace featuring direct trade, an auction hall, and in-game mail, BattleForge is the first RTS to combine the social and community aspects of an MMO with an exciting RTS.



Downloading your free beta of the game really couldn't be easier. All you have to do is simply follow the five simple steps below...



- Fill in the form on the right to get a beta key.
- Download the Client software from: <http://na.llnet.battleforge.ea.com/u/f/eagames/battleforge/battleforge/beta/installer/BattleForgeInstall.exe>

- Then install BattleForgeInstall.exe.
- Log into the BattleForge online service with a free EA Account at: <https://profile.ea.com/login.do>.
- Enter your beta code in the game when it asks for a serial number and off you go!

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◀ **FIRST LOOK!**

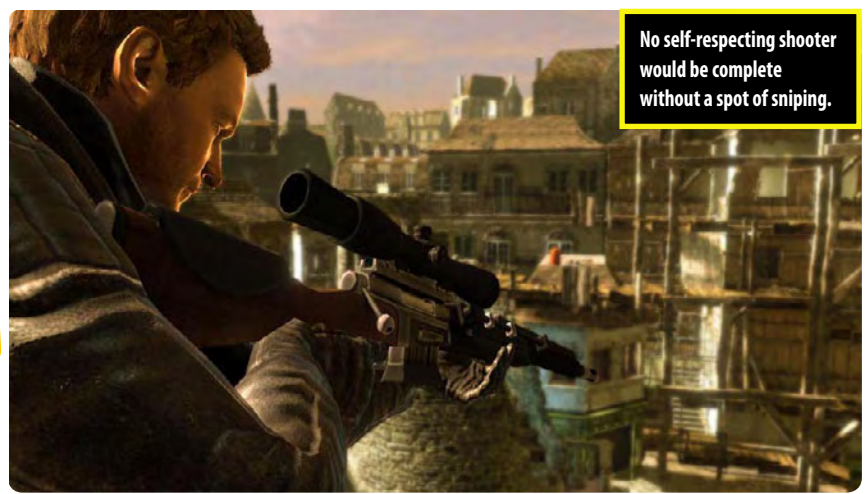
WANTED: WEAPONS OF FATE

The ultimate cover-shooter – with curving bullets



Publisher: Warner Interactive
Developer: Grin Barcelona
Heritage: GRAW, GRAW 2
Link: www.wantedvideogame.com
ETA: Summer

PREVIEW FEEDBACK!
Click here to tell us what you think of Wanted: Weapons of Fate



No self-respecting shooter would be complete without a spot of sniping.

Run-and-gun is such old hat – no 21st-century shooter with any respect would dream of doing without a cover system. After all, in real life when the bullets fly the shooters dive for cover, so why shouldn't that be the case in games? Warner Bros' Wanted has a lofty aim: to be the ultimate cover-based third-person shooter. And early indications suggest it may achieve it.

Wanted is based on the film which came out last year, itself based on a comic book by Mark Millar. It starred Angelina Jolie and James McAvoy as

reluctant assassin Wes Gibson, who discovers he can make bullets bend around obstacles. You can see how that would be a promising premise for a game, and developer Grin's game is clearly a labour of love, rather than the usual game-of-the-film dross.

View to a kill

Thus Wanted has a claustrophobic, close-in view, and to get through its levels you must advance from cover to cover – expose yourself, and you won't last a moment. This gameplay is greatly aided by the ability to send bullets on



If you're a fan of the film then you should find plenty to love here.

curved trajectories, plus 'Assassin's time' – much like the slo-mo from Max Payne. You can power it up in a pretty conventional manner, by building up an Adrenaline meter through nailing headshots and other flashy take-downs.

The bullet-curving mechanic looked pretty usable – you select a target and

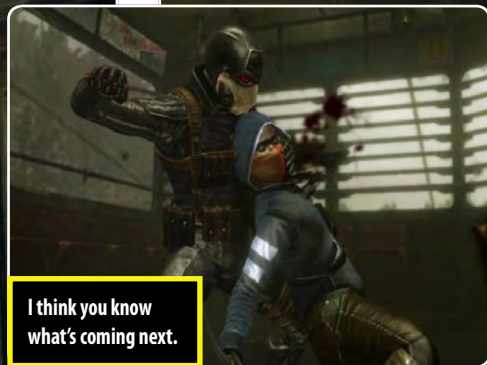
then set the curve. If that curve isn't sufficient to circumvent whatever the target is hiding behind, it will be picked out in red. If you send off a particularly spectacular curved shot, the game may switch to a bullet-cam.

Wanted is a single-player-only game – unsurprisingly, as multiplayer with





Those hoping for a mini-game where you shoot the wings off flies may be disappointed...



I think you know what's coming next.



At last, a proper blind-fire mechanism which doesn't let you shoot with pinpoint accuracy.

> **Wanted** continued

everybody curving bullets around everybody else's cover doesn't sound like a whole barrel of fun. You can also take a stealthy approach, sneaking up unseen and taking enemies out silently. Indeed, Wanted has Close Combat, Time Attack and Headshot modes as well as the Story mode.

There's also a blind-fire mechanism which, perhaps for the first time in a game, looks genuinely realistic. Not because it will let you take out vast amounts of enemies, but because it will force assertive enemies to take cover, allowing you to move to new cover and set up your kill. Story-wise, the game picks up where the film – which covered Gibson's transformation from wimp to assassin – left off.

“Mini-games should add some replay value, as will the chance to unlock 11 characters”

Wanted also features what Grin describes as ‘Cinematic Sequences’ – which are filmic interludes in which you're beset by a ridiculous amount of enemies, but the game helps you take them out in spectacular ways. The sort of stuff we've always dreamed of seeing in a James Bond game, these were faintly reminiscent of Midway's John Woo game, Stranglehold.

Sniper and fixed-gun mini-games should add some replay value, as will the chance to unlock 11 characters and replay the levels with them. Grin's demo of Wanted showed that those

characters unlock some comic possibilities: one of the assassins is an overweight, matronly woman and perhaps the unlikeliest assassin ever. The unlockable characters are merely a skinning exercise, as they all have the same abilities as Wes Gibson.

Pulling no punches

Warner Bros' executive producer Pete Wanat says that, with Wanted, “Grin is creating entirely new gameplay mechanics and an experience that pulls no punches. Gamers and fans of the film alike will be blown away by the

ability to curve bullets, pull off amazing combat sequences and conduct a symphony orchestra of action with the arsenal available to the most powerful assassins in the world.”

Hyperbole, you may argue. But after all those clunky cover-shooters in which snapping to cover is a lottery and you find yourself dying too often due to a faulty control mechanism, it's time someone took responsibility and showed everyone how they should be done. And we're happy that, with Wanted, Grin and Warner Bros appear to have done just that. ●

 	HOW COMPLETE? 	FIRST IMPRESSIONS?
	<i>Setting the bar for cover-shooters</i>	



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10/10

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HANDS ON

ELVEN LEGACY

State-of-the-art turn-based fantasy battling

Publisher: Paradox
Developer: Ino-Co
Heritage: Fantasy Wars
Link: www.paradoxplaza.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=483&Itemid=
ETA: April

PREVIEW FEEDBACK!
Click here to tell us what you think of Elven Legacy



Graphically, it's stunning throughout.

Lovers of fantasy games should be well acquainted with the efforts of Swedish publisher Paradox – most probably through 2007's turn-based strategy game Fantasy Wars. In which case, you will be glad to hear that Russian developer Ino-Co has wasted no time getting to work on Fantasy Wars' sequel, Elven Legacy, which should provide another irresistible dollop of elf-battling. Paradox took us out to Stockholm for a showcase of its games, and Elven Legacy was very much the star of its line-up.

Turn-based fantasy games may not represent the cutting edge of the future, but they constitute a tried and tested genre which vast amounts of people love. And Elven Legacy doesn't *feel* turn-based – there's no selecting from menus as you perform your move, or waiting around for responses. Just move your units or click on an enemy to attack. To be honest, it feels more like an action game.

As with Fantasy Wars, Elven Legacy's battlefield is split up into hexagons, each cell containing one unit, although



As you'd expect, the Orcs are a bit tasty with a bow and arrow.

"As with Fantasy Wars, Elven Legacy's battlefield is split into hexagons"

Zoom out, and your units are represented by one giant unit. Note the airship – could come in handy for ranged attacks.

one unit could comprise a group of soldiers. You can zoom out pretty much to infinity, and once you get past a certain point, all the soldiers on any given hexagon will become represented by just one. Ino-Co was at pains to stress that the type of landscape affects battles, and that one of the game's key gameplay elements

is capturing towns, which provide a source of new recruits, gold and so on. Ino-Co's Maxim Bodrimov describes Elven Legacy's plot: "It's set in the same world, Illis, as Fantasy Wars. You're commanding an Elven army, and you find a human mage who has dared to cast an Elven spell. You have to follow him through the human lands." ➤





> Elven Legacy continued

Among the forces you can command in Elven Legacy are scouts, archers, cavalry, siege machines and even airborne units, in the form of airships and dragons. Broadly speaking, there are two types of units: ordinary troops and Heroes. Bodrimov emphasises that the Heroes are key to the game – which he emphasised by demonstrating their ability to take out multiple enemies with one attack.

Heroes can be levelled up – they have ten levels, while ordinary units have five levels. Bodrimov explains: “Experienced Heroes will form the heart of your army.” Which also means you’ll need to make sure they don’t get taken out by the enemy. Whenever you level up a unit, you’ll be able to choose one of three new abilities. Each race in the game has over 100 units, of which 24 are new for Elven Legacy – so you’ll have fun exploring their abilities.

While your Heroes are vital for taking out whole groups of enemies, it's sometimes fun to get down and dirty with a bit of close combat.



This is a hero. You can tell this by the way he stands.



“Elven Legacy’s single-player game contains 19 missions, and there are 16 multiplayer ones”

Elven Legacy’s single-player game contains 19 missions, and there are 16 multiplayer ones, each playable by two to four people. And there’s a good old-fashioned Hot Seat mode in the multiplayer game, allowing two people to play on one PC (naturally, network and Internet play are also supported). As you would expect, there will be a Level Editor – Ino-Co couldn’t say whether it will be ready for the game’s release, though. As you progress through the single-player game, you’ll be able to unlock bonus missions, which will be playable as humans or orcs (the core game limits you to elves)

Bodrimov stressed that, in the interests of making the game accessible to the less hardcore among us, we’ll be able to select a difficulty level at the beginning of each mission. Depending how well you do in each mission, you’ll get a silver, gold or bronze rating,

This guy looks like a right intellectual. Mind you, only a Wild Ogre would want to live in a snowy wasteland like this.



which will unlock things like gold to use in the shop, new units and those bonus levels we mentioned earlier.

If balanced gameplay in an immersive world which exercises your strategy muscles is what you seek – as opposed to flashy graphics cloaking a lack of depth – then Elven Legacy should prove to be your bag. Which isn’t to say that it doesn’t have flashy graphics, as its visuals are pretty decent.

If you visited the Fantasy Wars world and liked what you found, you’ll be delighted with Elven Legacy – it takes full advantage of the relentless advance of PC development technology, and marries that with the seemingly in-built Russian propensity towards – and expertise in – strategy games. And the best news is that you won’t have to wait too long for it, as it’s down for an April release. ●

 	HOW COMPLETE? 	FIRST IMPRESSIONS?
	<i>Action-fantasy heaven</i>	



WARHAMMER 40,000 DAWN OF WAR



▶ PLAYBACK OPTIONS:



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Hearts and minds

Publisher: Paradox
Developer: Paradox
Players: Many
ETA: March

Strategy on an epic scale, we decided to find out more about the excellent Hearts of Iron series...

“We wanted to make it easier to play, while not dumbing down the game”

Johan Andersson is Director of Development at Paradox, and as such is overseeing the creation of Hearts of Iron III, the Swedish developer/publishers exhaustively realistic World War II sim. Seeking further insight about the game, we subjected him to a good grilling...

It covers the years 1936 to 1948, the same as Hearts of Iron I and II.

What are the main areas in which you’ve improved the game?

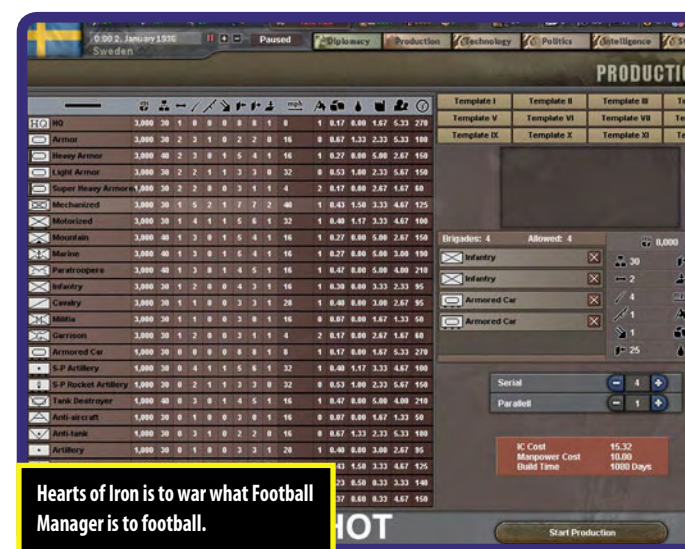
We’ve redesigned a lot of things, but the interface has been one big thing – we wanted to make it easier to play while not dumbing down the game. I can’t point at any one thing though, as we’ve been changing so many things as we’ve been going along.

What period of time does Hearts of Iron III cover – the build-up is as important as the war itself in the game, is it not?

How do you manage to reconcile making it more accessible with the exponential increase in the number of districts that you have to conquer?

We’ve looked carefully at how to add everything without that adding complication to the game. We’ve also reduced the micro-management – there’s basically no province-management, so when you conquer a country, you don’t conquer every position within the country.

Let’s take Poland as an example: There are eight of the 300 positions in the country that you have to take. It’s more a means of getting battle-



There’s every indication that this will be the best in the Hearts of Iron series so far.



Each country is split up into its various areas.



Graphics are generally minimalistic.



You'll need to be careful when planning those dawn raids into Europe.

> Interview continued

strategy options to the player. You just capture the key objectives. Another aspect of the reduction in micro-management is that you see all these panels at the top of the screen, and if you're a new player, and you don't want to worry about politics or technology, you can just tell the AI to handle them, and focus on building up troops and moving them.

You can play as any country in the world. How do your objectives differ according to the country you play as? You said you could play as El Salvador, for example?

El Salvador doesn't really have a game-winning objective. It can be part of

either the Axis, the Allies or the Comintern. I don't think it would be a good for you to play El Salvador as the Axis, as they don't have any natural allies nearby. The game is about the clash of the three different ideologies.

What kind of gamer is the Hearts of Iron series aimed at?

Take Football Manager versus FIFA as an example. Loads of people play Football Manager, and we think that it has the same complexity level as Hearts of Iron III. But lots of people also play FIFA. It will attract the same kind of people that play Company of Heroes. It's for people who want their games to be deep, challenging and intellectual, more than action-based.

Will you handle combat the same way as in the last game?

Yes. It's a real-time game, so we wanted granularity. The combat is abstract – you get information on a side-screen and you see that there are so many battles going on at one time. We believe that you can either make a planned, structured game that has abstracted battles, or you can make a tactical battle game which doesn't have a structure.

Are there recognisable historical events that crop up during the war, or is what happens entirely down to the player?

There are events that take place, and characters that arrive during time

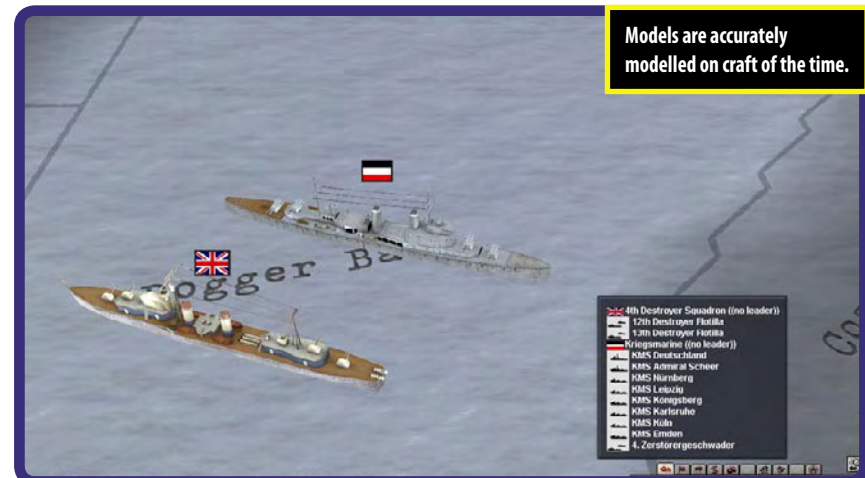
periods – there are people that will die and so on. There's a huge database – I think there are about 50,000 ministers, leaders and so on, based on reality.

The espionage side of the game is new. Can you tell us how prominent is it in the game?

It's prominent in two aspects. First of all, the intelligence, which determines what you can see on the map, where you can do feints with troops and try to

fool the enemy. You can do a D-Day, say, by putting troop headquarters in Dover, but hiding your troops in Southampton, so the Germans will think you'll cross to Calais and will put their troops there.

The other aspect of espionage is that you can strengthen the resistance in enemy countries. You don't place the spies themselves, as it's more about setting their priorities, making decisions and waiting for things to happen. ●



Models are accurately modelled on craft of the time.

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When the young Cornet decides to pursue her Prince Ferdinand, she finds herself lost in a world of witches, dancing and adventure!



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Warhammer 40 000: Dawn of War II

Waaagh! What is it good for?

Games Workshop's Warhammer franchise has spawned a number of games over the years, not least 2004's original Dawn of War. Taking a traditional approach to the real-time strategy genre – effectively Command & Conquer with orcs – it proved a hit among tabletop warriors and RTS veterans alike. So what have developers Relic

done for the sequel? Churned out the same game with a lick of paint? Surprisingly no, as DoW II is a pared-down squad-based affair with none of the base-building historically associated with its ilk.

Eyebrows are immediately raised when you consider that the same team's Company of Heroes trod a similar path, and indeed DoW II





Publisher: THQ
Developer: Relic Entertainment
Heritage: Dawn Of War, Company Of Heroes, Homeworld 1 & 2
Link: www.dawnofwar2.com
OUT NOW

System Requirements:
 Windows XP SP2 or Windows Vista SP1, P4 3.2GHz, 1GB RAM (XP), 1.5GB RAM (Vista), 128MB Video Card — Nvidia GeForce 6600 GT/ATI X1600 or equivalent

> Dawn of War II continued

uses the same engine, leading some cynics to dismiss it as little more than a CoH (green) skin.

Whereas there is some validity in the claim, CoH worked well enough, and DoW II takes a similar concept into the mysterious world of orcs, eldar and tyranids. And of course space marines, of which you play one. Or at least you give your name to one, being installed as leader of an eventual total of six squads, all fronted by impossibly macho warriors, replete with gravel-strewn voices and a world-weary attitude, as displayed in the inter-mission interchanges. A maximum of four squads can be chosen for each mission, at which point you're squeezed into a pod and dropped from the spaceship Armageddon onto the surface of an inevitably hostile planet.

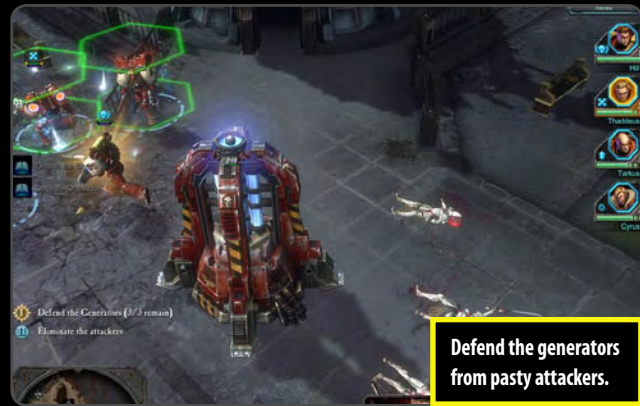
Once there, it's wise to immediately seek cover before tentatively exploring the map. Each squad brings something different to the table, so a nimble scout unit could invisibly have a peak ahead before the big



guns leap into the air and decimate whatever threat you encounter. The quick-fire missions generally involve traversing the map, fighting your way through the hordes of natives, and defeating whatever boss awaits at the end. On the way you can dive into buildings, pick up bonus items and commender satellites. These then

act as a safety haven, enabling you to regain health and even beam down fresh recruits to replace the fallen.

Whereas habit suggests that you simply select everyone and charge at the enemy, that way trouble lies, and you will eventually learn how to utilise the various units for maximum effect, as well as what weapons



KNOW YOUR ENEMY

The unusual suspects



Orc

Eldar

Tyrandid

Orc

Also known as Greenskins, these snaggle-toothed oafs are as ugly as they are stupid. They put up a good fight, though.

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through a mission, one step at a time...



1 MINUTE
 Each squad has different skills and qualities. Be sure to choose the right boys for the job.



2 MINUTES
 A number of missions are generally available. Orbit the relevant planet and select one.



3 MINUTES
 Plunge to the ground in a metallic pod. It also acts as your first base, replenishing your health.



9 MINUTES
 Fight your way to the end of the level and defeat the boss. Feel pleased with yourself.



10 MINUTES
 Get rewarded with XP points that can be spent on upgrading squads. On to next mission...





> Dawn of War II continued

and gadgets to give them in the load-out screen beforehand. While the opening levels are a breeze, the action is soon ramped up, and you essentially spend the ensuing hours with your right hand clutching the mouse in a vice-like grip, and your left hand hovering over the 1-4 keys that instantly select the respective squads. In the heat of the battle, squads will be constantly healing each other and then making a dash for safety before returning to heal their saviours in turn, all the while chipping away at a stubborn boss character. Squads are upgraded in RPG fashion, so if you do fail a mission you come back to it stronger and more determined.

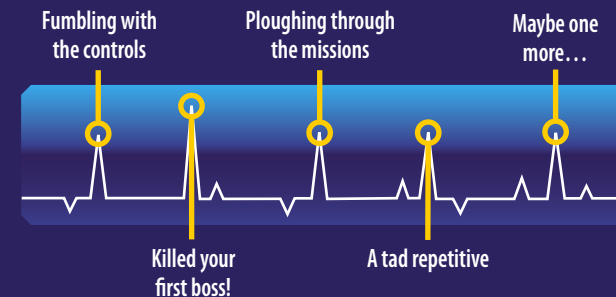
Roll over screen for annotations



Mission improbable

As an earnest voice informs you at the end of each mission, "Victory is a but a prelude to the next battle." They come thick and fast, and you can loosely choose the order. It's all good fun, but at almost the exact point that you work out what you're doing it all begins to get a bit familiar. Due to the vagaries of the story – or plain laziness – you are often required to revisit the same areas in order to kill a marginally different boss. Some variety is added, such as defending a base, but ultimately it does get a bit samey. And for some reason, fighting the sylph-like eldar or swarming tyranid just isn't as much fun as thumping a bunch of oafish orcs. While the game is almost risibly po-faced, there is an attempt at humour in the orc names, such as Bakstabba or Badzappa.

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



If you can stick with it, you'll plough through the single-player campaign in a matter of days, probably never to return, although a co-operative mode gives it some legs. What will of course keep the game alive is the competitive multiplayer, which follows a more traditional path of rapid build and rush tactics, with head-to-head battles as well as mixed teams. As for the core game, in making DoW II squad-based, Relic stand accused of losing the essence of what made the original so good. All the same, this is a highly competent affair with the bite-sized missions that prove exceedingly more-ish. ●

Steve Hill

PCGZine Verdict

Squad-based
Warhammer action for
nimble-fingered heroes

- Compelling gameplay
- Rich universe
- Repetitive

81%





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Football Manager Live

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sports Interactive
Heritage: Championship Manager, Football Manager
Link: www.footballmanagerlive.com

OUT NOW

System Requirements:
1.6GHz CPU, 256Mb RAM
and a graphics card

Alive and kicking?

When football management pioneers Sports Interactive originally announced Football Manager Live a couple of years ago, there was a great deal of chin-stroking. How could such an obsessive – and essentially solitary – experience be translated into a massively multiplayer online world? Would it lose its essence? How would the fixtures work? Can you still manage your favourite team? And crucially, will anyone play it?

Clearly a lot of difficult decisions have been made. Firstly, there are no real teams. This would have proven a logistical nightmare, so instead you build a club from scratch, give it a

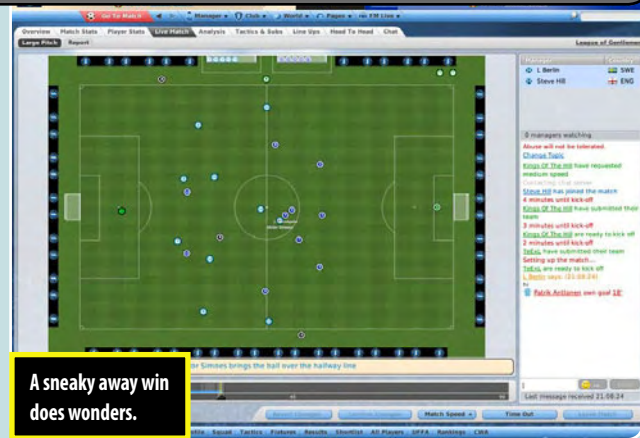
name, design the kit, and even tinker with the stadium. So the club doesn't exist – nor does the team – and you can either painstakingly select players within your budget or automatically be assigned a balanced squad.

You won't have heard of the vast majority of them, and it takes time to warm to your players in comparison to the prior knowledge afforded by

managing an established real-life outfit. In some ways, it makes you closer though, as for better or worse, this is undeniably your team. You'll also have to get rid of the dead wood while trawling the transfer market for replacements, either from the unattached list or by bidding in eBay fashion to buy players from other humans. Indeed, you may well be outbid by other humans.

Without fellow managers however, there is no game, and fixtures are played on an ad-hoc basis, with the AI taking over after a predetermined date. While there are officially sanctioned leagues and cups, user-created competitions play a major role, often

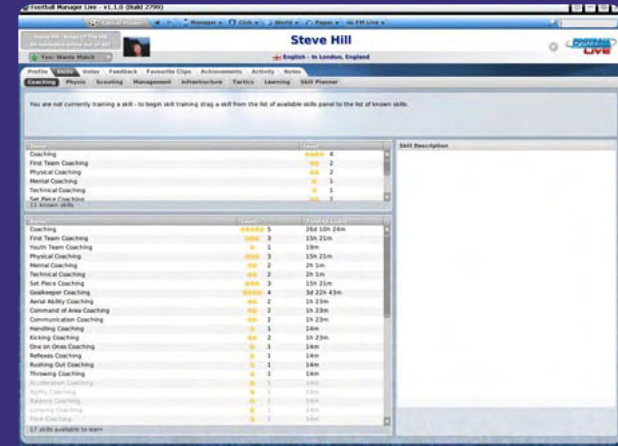
“Without fellow managers there is no game, and fixtures are on an ad-hoc basis”



A sneaky away win does wonders.

THE MANAGEMENT

Can you hack it?



FREEZE FRAME

Guiding you through a game, one step at a time...



1 MINUTE
Carefully select your team, substitutes, formation and tactics.



3 MINUTES
Immediately go a goal down due to some very sloppy defending.



9 MINUTES
Why not let in another goal to compound the misery some more?



10 MINUTES
Take time out to tinker. Throw on Inzaghi – he's still got it.



11 MINUTES
He's scored! You're a genius! The comeback starts here...

Skills for thrills

Grounds for improvement

Search engine

Skills for thrills

Select what skill you wish to specialise in, and then drag it into a box. And wait. Then do it again.

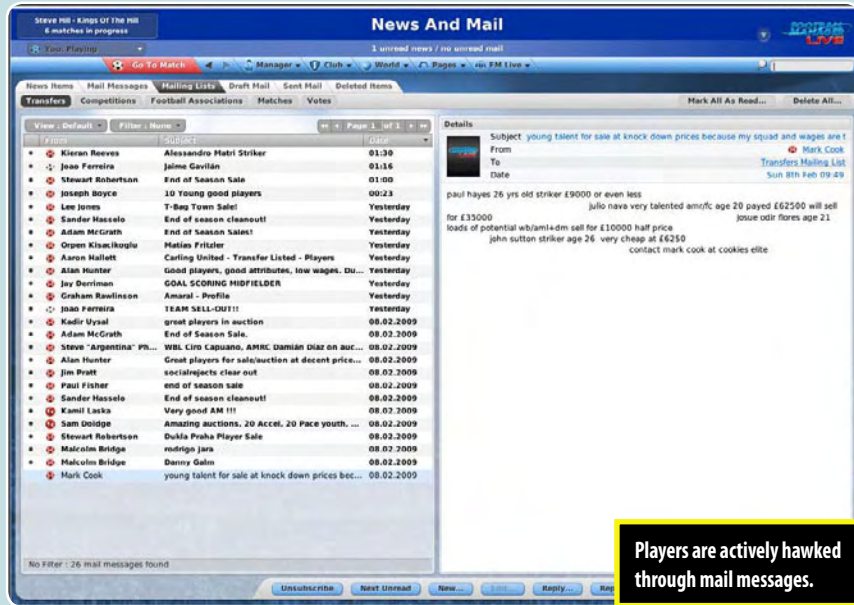




> Football Manager cont. involving an entry fee and also a commensurate prize pool. As for the matches themselves, Football Manager 2009's new-fangled

3D engine has been eschewed in favour of the old-school overhead 2D numbered dots, which still creates a remarkably watchable rendition of Association Football. Tactically, it's familiar ground, although somewhat controversially, all of the options are not available to you from the outset. For instance, instructing your wingers to get to the line and whip it in to the big man is no longer a case of clicking a few boxes. Well, actually it is, but only after you got the correct coaching badges in the shape of the game's Skills, which is effectively a way of levelling up your team.

It's as simple as choosing what area you wish to specialise in, and then dragging the relevant skill into a box and waiting for it to level up, which can take a matter of minutes or possibly days. In traditional MMO fashion, this naturally rewards those who spend





> **Football Manager** cont.

every waking day online. In theory this is tempered by what association you choose to join, as these are set up to cater for how often and at what times you wish to play. It's not perfect, and is subject to abuse, but you pay your subscription and take your choice. The game comes with four months free and is then about eight quid a month.

As is the MMO's perennial quandary, how many people are prepared to

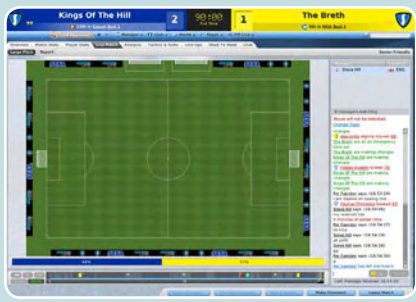
continue paying this will depend on how many people are prepared to continue paying this. A game world without players is a dismal place, as you endlessly trawl for an opponent simply to keep your players fit (while simultaneously risking injury). That said, a busy world brings a real sense of community, with chat rooms, endless quirky competitions, players being advertised, goal of the week contests and all manner of interaction that the solo game could never deliver.



"A busy world brings a real sense of community"

It might be a cliché, Ron, but at the end of the day you get out of it what you put into it, and the game is set up to encourage you to frequently log in. Leave it more than a couple of days and your players have gone to seed, you've missed out on some bargain transfers and drifted towards the bottom of the league.

Without the structure of vanilla Football Manager, you do sometimes find yourself wondering what to do next, with the real-time gameplay denying you the comfort blanket of pressing 'continue' to move the calendar on. As Cher memorably ascertained, you can't turn back time, and neither can you turn it forward, being stuck with a three (real) week



PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



season, with a week off in-between to do a bit of admin. A change of pace from traditional FM, it's still early doors, and the best is hopefully yet to come. Join us. We need you... ●

Steve Hill

PCGZine Verdict

Football Manager goes multiplayer with (mainly) good results

- 👍 Compelling action
- 👍 Egalitarian world
- 🗨️ Reliant on people

80%



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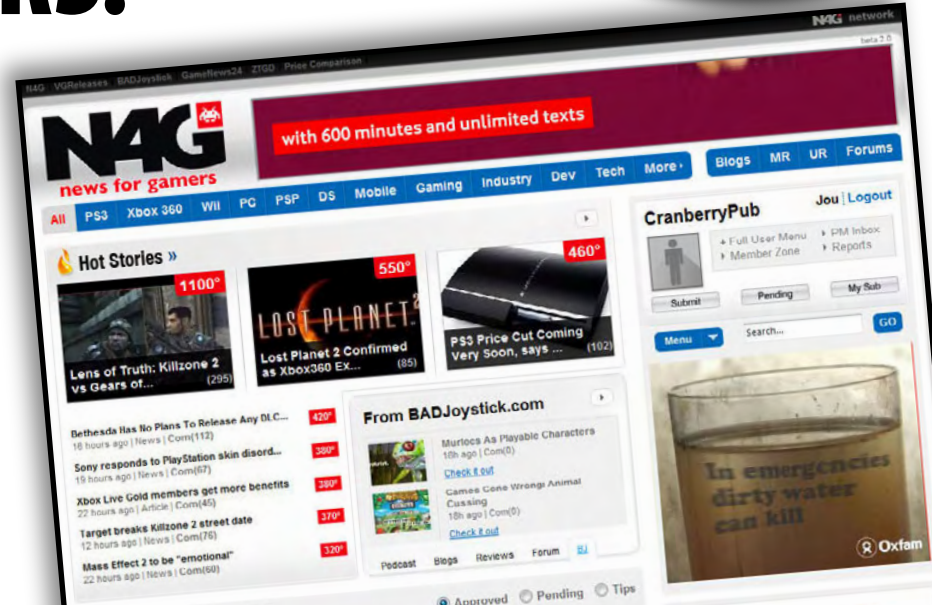
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- Exit. Read the Halo Wars Supplement attached.



HALO WARS™

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INTERVIEW

GRAEME DIVINE

The game's lead writer speaks!



FEATURE

MULTIPLAYER MAYHEM

Skirmish mode explained



EXCLUSIVE PLAYTEST

HALO WARS™

Everything you need to know about the RTS of the year!

WELCOME

Branching out from a series as popular as Halo is always going to be a difficult undertaking for any developer. You've got the diehard fans concerned that it won't be anything like Halo, and the others hoping that it's going to offer something different. It's testament to Ensemble Studios' skill that Halo Wars manages to effortlessly satisfy both groups.

Okay, it's a totally different genre, but this is Halo – its world, its character, its universe, everything looks and feels just right. Warthogs leaping gaps and bounding over rocky terrain, Elites cutting a swathe through UNSC grunts, Locusts and Hunters, Scarabs and Spartans. The only change is that you're viewing them from a totally new perspective. Instead of being in the thick of battle on the surface, you're controlling events from above. But it instantly feels familiar, with exceptional audiovisual detail making those initial steps into new territory seem a whole lot more welcoming for Halo fans.

But it's also been a chance for Ensemble to branch out and explore the universe a little more – you get settings you've never seen in a Halo game, vehicles you've never piloted (or faced off against) and the chance to finish the fight as an army instead of just one man. Oh, and plenty of all-too-fleeting glimpses at how a CGI Halo movie could look in the sublime cut-scenes.

We've spent several enjoyable hours with the game, and this special supplement carries an extensive hands-on playtest which tells you everything you need to know about Halo Wars, as well as an interview with Graeme Devine, lead writer at Ensemble Studios.

Enjoy the issue.

Chris Schilling, Editor

"This supplement will tell you everything you need to know about Halo Wars"

Contents

Playtest

Our massive eight-page hands-on playtest will let you know exactly why this is one of the most exciting Xbox 360 games you'll see this year.

Skirmish mode

How to play multiplayer without having to go online.

Interview

We talk exclusively to the game's lead writer, Graeme Devine.



CONTROL →



HALO WARS



Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Ensemble Studios
Heritage: Age of Empires series
Link: www.halowars.com
ETA: 27th February

OFFICIAL PLAYTEST

HALO WARS

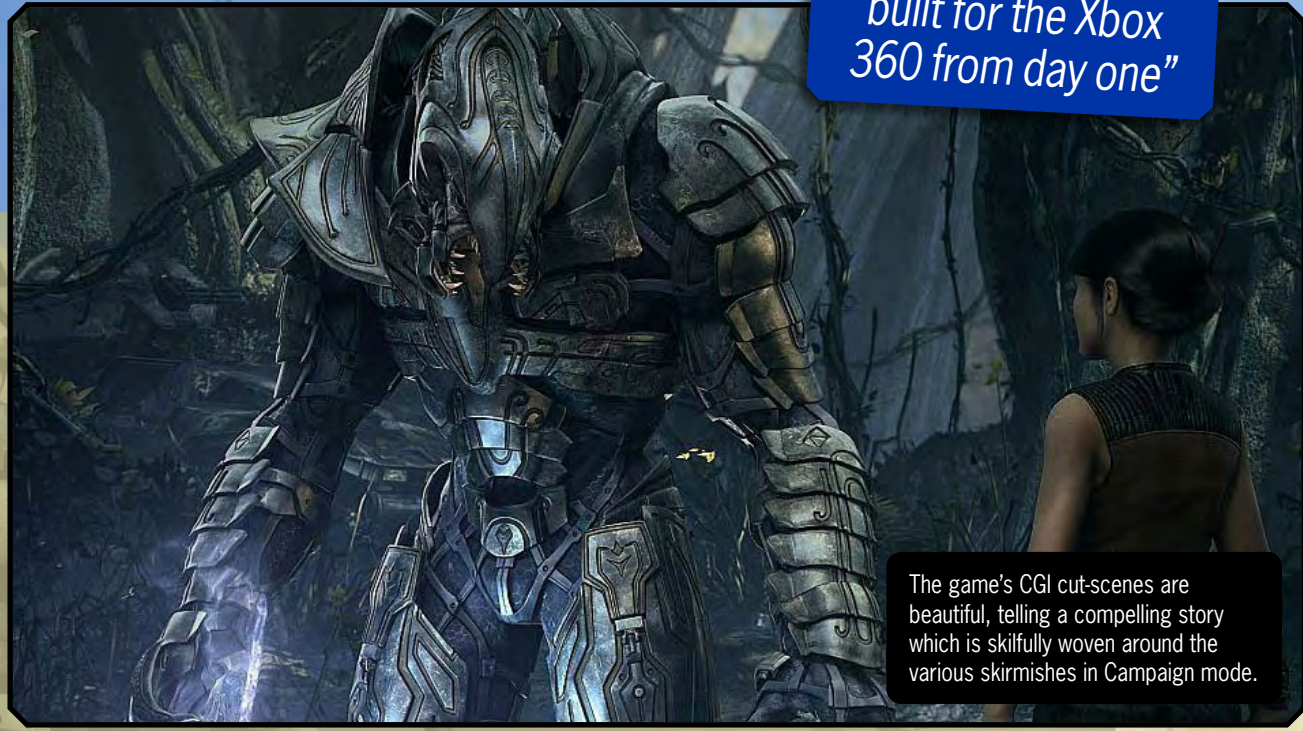
A real-time strategy blockbuster?

The humble RTS has never really worked on consoles, with traditional controllers being no match for mouse and keyboard control. The genre's complexities make porting PC strategy games a near-impossibility – with orders difficult to execute accurately and at speed, menus tricky to navigate and uncommon commands often mapped to unwieldy combinations of buttons. Clearly fed up with holding LT while pushing the analogue stick up-right and pressing Y just to execute

a strategic retreat, developer Ensemble Studios has crafted an RTS which has clearly been built for the Xbox 360 from day one. Halo Wars contains none of the thumb gymnastics required by many of its peers, instead bolting an intuitive and accessible control scheme onto a remarkably solid and surprisingly tactical strategy game that just happens to be based in the Halo universe – which is a good thing. Initially, it all seems a little 'My First RTS', the game's tutorials patiently explaining the



"Halo Wars has been built for the Xbox 360 from day one"



The game's CGI cut-scenes are beautiful, telling a compelling story which is skilfully woven around the various skirmishes in Campaign mode.



It's best to mix up your units a little rather than sending a battalion of tanks alone – one unit of anti-vehicle troops and your best-laid plans can go to waste.

Behind Enemy Lines

The art of the Covenant



- Jackal
- Hunter
- Arbiter

Jackal

Jackals are the Covenant's anti-infantry units, and can be particularly devastating from sniper towers – even taking down Spartans in just a few shots. Meanwhile, Brute units are the Covenant's special forces, with powerful plasma guns which can take out UNSC infantry units in seconds.

> Halo Wars continued

simplest of commands. Yet genre stalwarts have the option to skip these, and it's clear that Microsoft is perhaps aiming more to entice fans of action games – especially those who loved Halo – rather than preaching to the converted. Venture further however, and even enthusiasts will have to admit that this is a game with real depth – perhaps beyond the expectations of many. Those vehemently opposed to real-time strategies may not find what they're looking for, but if you've ever been curious enough to take your first tentative steps into new and unfamiliar territory, it's likely that Halo Wars will be the perfect entry point for you.

AVOIDING PITFALLS

Let's start with those controls, because it's here that Ensemble skilfully avoids the pitfalls most developers fall into when crafting a console-based RTS. Simplicity is the key – the left analogue stick scrolls around the map, while the right pans and zooms. The A button selects units, or the build areas of your base, and X sends them to move and attack. The Y button



Deathmatch mode ups the pace, allowing you to quickly amass an army of powerful vehicles, with training time reduced for every unit and a boat-load of resources to start you off.

"Simplicity is the key with the controls in Halo Wars"



Different leaders have different play styles – we beat the more measured General Cutter in one battle before being surprised by the aggressive approach of Forge in the next.



> Halo Wars continued

uses each unit's special ability, while the D-pad zips you immediately to any alert, your base or your army, with Up used for special commander powers. You can use the triggers to fast-scroll and sub-select units, with the bumpers used to select units on a global or local basis. Selecting a small on-screen group of units is simply a case of holding the A button and dragging the cursor over those you wish to issue an order to.

This simple and elegant system eschews menus almost entirely, keeping the action on-screen at all times – apart for those occasions when you're upgrading your base. This keeps things feeling more immediate, maintaining the sort of frantic pace you'd expect from the Halo games, while affording players the level of instant control the best PC strategies provide.

“While the focus is on combat, it's vital to keep your bases in order”

While the campaign has you playing as the UNSC, Skirmish mode offers the chance to control the Covenant, it's certainly entertaining to switch sides, particularly once you have the resources to unleash the Scarab.

While the focus is on the combat – and more on that shortly – it's vital to keep your bases in order to ensure your units are efficient in the field. Your base initially has just a few spaces on which you can add buildings – start with a supply pad and you can build up your resources quicker. These can be spent on other additions – a barracks will train ground troops, a depot sends vehicles into the fray, an air pad provides you with Hornets and Vultures, while a field armoury



If you feel like one of the two races has a bit of an advantage, you can pit one UNSC force against another – that way you can't blame the game if you lose!



Warthogs are best utilised in the early game – scouting out enemy emplacements and securing base positions before beating a hasty retreat.

ROLL OVER
THE BIG PICTURE



> **Halo Wars** continued

offers research into special buffs and upgrades. Meanwhile, a reactor increases your base's tech level, offering you more advanced units but at greater cost. All of these buildings can be upgraded to increase their efficiency, and you can build auto-fire turrets to protect the base. All straightforward stuff for strategy veterans, but it's implemented in a wonderfully unobtrusive way – a booming voice informs of any

“All buildings can be upgraded to increase their efficiency”

completed buildings or upgrades, as well as notifying you when your base is then under attack, so you can just set the wheels of construction in motion while still keeping an eye on the bigger picture.

There's a rock-paper-scissors approach to combat



Though initially fairly flimsy, Warthogs can be upgraded with a grenadier or machine gunner to add a bit of clout to their attacks.



The Elephant is General Cutter's special unit. It's a mobile base which can be used to train infantry units away from home.

> Halo Wars continued

which keeps the early game straightforward before things get progressively more complex. Initially, all you need to know is that vehicles beat infantry, which beat aircraft which beat vehicles. And that knowledge is perfectly fine for the first couple of missions of the game's campaign, which is undoubtedly the best jumping-off point for newcomers.

Set 20 years before the Halo event, you control the crew of the Spirit of Fire, a UNSC ship in the orbit of a planet named Harvest, now under UNSC control after a prolonged battle against the Covenant. As veteran Sergeant Forge, you're sent down to the

snowy wastes to rescue a series of pinned-down crew members, valiantly fighting against the Covenant resistance. Forge leads from his Warthog, whose special ability is to ram enemies – not particularly useful against other vehicles, but perfect against the infantry here. Though it's viewed from a distance, there's still that familiarly springy feel to the Warthog's movement, as you lead a cavalry charge into enemy territory, the vehicles having



The Banshee is the Covenant's standard air unit. It's quick but not too strong, so probably best used as a scouting vehicle.



Forge's special ability is the Carpet Bomb – a powerful air strike which can be directed towards a line of enemies or a base.



> **Halo Wars** continued

no problem with the bumpy terrain, leaving tyre tracks in the snow as they skid into position. Once you have the marines, you need to swap to controlling the ground troops, who are the only units able to pass through the Covenant shields, destroying the generators so vehicles can pass through.

Though your ultimate aim is to destroy the Covenant troops attacking your base, score bonuses are awarded for completing optional objectives – the first mission offering points for killing 100 grunts. With gold, silver, bronze and tin medals awarded depending on how long you took, your kill-to-killed ratio and the side objectives completed, there's the potential for plenty of replay value, particularly on the Heroic or Legendary difficulty levels.

Mission two then sees Forge attempting to stop the Covenant from detonating a mysterious holy relic – gradually introducing more ideas and units into the equation before the third mission mixes things up further, with enemy Elites trapping Forge and potential love interest Professor Anders, with the player taking command of some

“There’s the potential for plenty of replay value here”

Grizzly Tanks to fight their way through as backup. That accomplished, you then have to protect Anders while she hacks some bridge controls to provide an exit and racing away before Covenant forces can arrive in numbers. Brilliantly, there’s an optional objective which sees you killing Covenant pursuers by deactivating the bridge while they’re crossing, while the brisk pace is maintained – none of these missions should take players more than 20 minutes to complete.

RESCUE MISSION

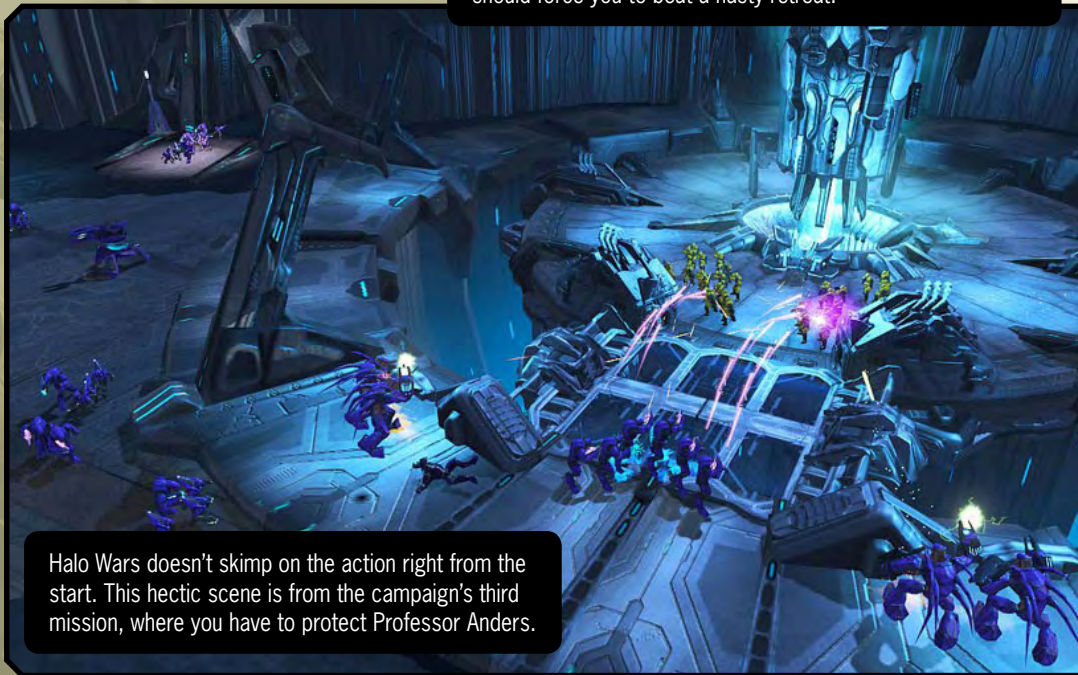
The artifact sends the UNSC to a planet named Arcadia. With alien forces inside the city limits, you’re tasked with rescuing the populace by guiding them to cargo transports, and ensuring the ships themselves are kept intact. This terrific mission is a real balancing act, forcing you to keep tabs of at least three different areas of the battlefield, with frequent alerts on your mini-



ROLL OVER
THE BIG PICTURE



If you’re playing as the Covenant, you know you’re in trouble when Vultures join the fight. A couple of these hardy air units should force you to beat a hasty retreat.



Halo Wars doesn’t skimp on the action right from the start. This hectic scene is from the campaign’s third mission, where you have to protect Professor Anders.



> Halo Wars continued

map requiring careful yet rapid prioritisation. It's a sign of how well-moderated the learning curve is that this doesn't seem like too big an ask, while the utopian city environment makes you yearn for a Halo level that looks like that.

Mission five of 15 – and the last we're permitted to discuss – sets you against overwhelming odds as your squad attempts to secure a defensible position until backup can arrive. With so few units initially available, it's here that your hero is most likely to perish for the first time – yet Forge can be revived by another unit remaining close for a certain amount of time. The same goes for the Spartans you control in this mission, meaning as long as your base can maintain a steady flow of new units, you'll have enough to get by until the Omega Spartans are dropped in, whereupon the tide of battle turns in your favour. You'll feel like yelling 'oo-rah!' along with your troops as the Omegas lay waste to the enemy base. Well, we did anyway.

Any questions about lack of depth of variety are blown away by those

opening five missions, and of the 10 which follow, the ones we've experienced have all added their own wrinkles to the formula. From larger vehicles which can be locked into position to fire on distant targets, to missions where you've a wealth of resources to deal with one particularly fearsome enemy (let's just say Halo fans will likely know which kind of foe we're talking about), Halo Wars keeps things fresh throughout its campaign. And that's arguably not even the



"Halo Wars keeps things fresh throughout its campaign"



Covenant dropships are useful in air-to-air battles, though they're in danger from the more powerful ground vehicles.



Forge insists that Anders isn't his girlfriend, though he's prepared to put his own life at risk to protect her. He's fooling no-one.

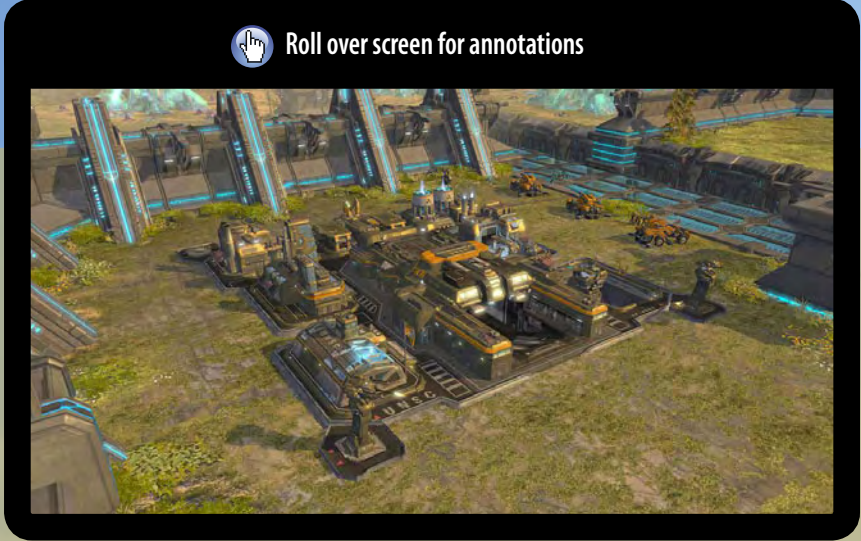
> Halo Wars continued

meat of the single-player game, which can be found in the Skirmish mode – a series of 14 maps offering one-on-one or team-based games, with adaptable difficulty if you want a challenge best suited to your own abilities. The chance to play as the Covenant may be too difficult for some to pass up, particularly given the effectiveness of their special powers – the Arbiter has a Rage mode which puts him under full player control, able to destroy vehicles with just a few swipes, or to decimate groups of infantry in seconds. Meanwhile the Prophet of Truth's Cleansing Ray can turn an undefended base to rubble when fully powered-up. Each leader also has a unique unit – General Cutter can call upon ODSs, while the Arbiter has Suicide Grunts – while the UNSC members have additional bonuses. Bases starting at a higher tech level is undoubtedly useful,

though you might prefer Anders' half-price unit upgrades instead.

With a suite of online multiplayer

options, Halo Wars is undoubtedly a substantial package. It's an RTS that has plenty of appeal outside the genre's usual reach, and its exceptional presentation means it looks as good as it plays. Hopefully this and the Halo setting will be enough to tempt the masses who have yet to be won over to the RTS genre, so Ensemble's swansong should be the first real breakout hit for the strategy genre on console. ●



While there's always plenty going on, the action is remarkably straightforward to control.

“Halo Wars is undoubtedly a substantial package”

THE SKIRMISH MODE

FINISH THE FIGHT

Why Skirmish will soon be taking over your life

As we've suggested in the main preview, it could be argued that the Campaign is merely training for Halo Wars' Skirmish and online multiplayer modes. Skirmish offers battles against up to five AI bots – you can face off against a single AI opponent or join forces with other computer-controlled leaders for 2-v-2 and 3-v-3 matches.

The Standard ruleset starts you with limited resources and one base. You'll need to spend time waiting for your supply pad to start bringing in resources, or you can send out infantry to obtain some from crates scattered around the field.

A deathmatch game is much quicker and chaotic – offering you a base with a maximum tech level, all land and air vehicles, and ground troops available as soon as their

buildings are built. Leader Powers recharge much quicker too, allowing Anders to freeze groups of enemies with her Cryo bomb, or the Prophet of Regret to wreak devastation with his cleansing ray. Deathmatch also allows you to get your Uber units out earlier. The UNSC has the powerful Vultures which are vulnerable to anti-air units but which can withstand a fair battering and deal out a barrage of missiles as their special power, while the enormous Scarab can only be built if you're holding enough bases, but is virtually unbeatable when deployed. A combination of Leader Powers and quick-fire attacks work well, but it takes some punishment before finally exploding.

The maps offer a good mix of more tactical play and all-out action – Blood Gulch has teleporters which allow you to spring surprise attacks,

while the snowy Chasms offers sniper towers to defend key positions. Meanwhile, Terminal Moraine has timed bridges to access difficult to reach areas – should your units be crossing when the lights start blinking then they'd better hurry, otherwise they'll fall to their doom. Occasionally things can get a little hectic on the 3-v-3 stages, but Halo Wars is all about large-scale battles, and the battles that ensue when several forces converge are stunning.

AVOIDING PITFALLS

The game's AI is generally very good – the difficulty adapts according to your previous performances in the field, though you can also revert to the presets of Easy, Normal, Heroic and Legendary. While AI allies tend to attack at their own pace, they can often come to your rescue in a sticky spot – one particularly pleasing occasion saw our UNSC

chum step in to repair one of our armies after we unleashed a barrage of shots at an enemy base and found ourselves caught from the rear just before we were finished. The additional health boost allowed us to finish the job and our troops scraped through by the skin of their teeth. Should your buddies be running short on numbers then you can transfer any supplies which are surplus to current requirements.

While this can't quite compare to the thrill of the online battle, Skirmish feels as close to competing against real opponents as you're likely to get, and it means that solo players won't feel short-changed once they're done with the Campaign. And with the chance to add a dash of variety to proceedings with any Skulls you've unlocked – from magnified destruction physics to rainbow-tinted Scarab lasers – you'll find plenty to keep you busy for months. ○



▶ PLAYBACK OPTIONS:



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INTERVIEW

DEVINE WRITE

Still need to know more about Halo Wars? Time for a chat with the game's writer

Realising the Halo universe from a new perspective was a challenge that lead writer Graeme Devine relished. We spoke to him about the game's plot, its unique controls, its future, and how exactly Ensemble managed to

create a real-time strategy out of a first-person shooter.

What was your first priority when you set out to make Halo Wars? What one thing above all else did you want to achieve?

I think the biggest priority was to get the controls right. It's great to be doing a Halo game, but no one will play it if the controls are bad, and real-time strategy games on the console are notorious for bad control schemes. We actually spent the first 18 months of the project on getting the controls right, and a lot of that work is still in the product today (things like the circle menu, build from buildings and select/move controls are all the same).

The game is set 20 years before Halo. Can you tell us a little more about the plot, and how it links to the original Halo?

In 2526 the Covenant attack the UNSC colony 'Harvest', which is one of the main agricultural planets humans have. After five years we have reclaimed the planet

"The biggest priority with Halo Wars was to get the controls right"

To be honest, it doesn't look good for the human race.

Graeme Devine: The man you have to thank for the excellent storyline in Halo War.



CONTROL →



> Interview continued

and won it back from the Covenant but the planet is no longer livable; it's a nuclear winter, and so it's a very hollow victory for the human race. On the surface of Harvest though, near the northern pole, the Covenant have found a Forerunner structure in the ice and have been excavating it. The UNSC has sent two ships to investigate. The first ship, 'The Prophecy', is destroyed when it arrives, and a lot of that story is then told in the limited

collector's limited edition comic book, but the second ship 'Spirit of Fire' is the one we follow throughout the campaign. It discovers that there is more to the situation than meets the eye, and that unless action is taken very quickly, the war may go bad for the UNSC.

Does Halo Wars add enough to the Halo universe to tempt first-person shooter fans across to the strategy genre?

I think seeing the combat from a different perspective – while still



Fans of the Halo series might not recognise the gameplay, but the graphically style should be very familiar.

being deeply rooted in Halo – is something Halo fans will want to see. All the Halo action is there, the sounds, effects, physics and so forth, but instead of seeing it from the single unique perspective of Master Chief, it's from the perspective of the whole battle, and there is something pretty darn exciting about being able to both see and control that aspect of the

game. It's still very visceral and combat-focused – you're not sending peasants to go and dig in the dirt!

Halo Wars is a more accessible RTS than some will be used to. Are you concerned about alienating hardcore strategy fans with the game's more immediate approach?

You're absolutely right; it is more accessible, but getting real-time strategy fans to appreciate that is very important. I think that while it is very accessible, Halo Wars offers depth that's not immediately obvious to casual players but should be something hardcore players can latch onto very quickly. For example, the upgrade to the reactor is very expensive – much more

"Halo Wars offers depth that isn't obvious to casual gamers"

FULL SCREEN
Click here to see watch full screen!





> Interview continued

expensive than building a second reactor – but that cost then has to be countered against losing a building slot to build something else on around your base. It's actually a pretty interesting little strategy there, and just one of the ways that I think depth is still there, but perhaps represented a little differently than how we've seen it before in other strategy games.

Did having a universe already in place make development easier, or did that make certain elements harder to implement?

I think mostly it helped. It's hard to answer because we didn't go both ways. If anything, it takes a while to appreciate the story, and why you can't suddenly give humans ray guns and be done with any balance. Humans still shoot lead, while the aliens are big and have plasma rifles. But that's part of any classic alien invasion – War of the Worlds, Independence Day, etc. All these films pit humans against some overwhelming odds, and so I think we like being that lopsided. The units, vehicles and so forth were pretty balanced for the most part.

We added more to the UNSC than the Covenant, because the UNSC had one pretty vital character that played through all three previous games, and we needed a little more than Master Chief this time around!

“The fact that we made the game for the 360 alone allows us to do much more with the controls”

Previous console real-time strategy games have often been developed for the PC first and then ported across. What would you say is the main advantage of having created a console-focused RTS game from the ground up?

I think that is the single biggest flaw in other strategy games right there. The fact that we made this game for the 360 alone allows us to do so much more with the controls, and take advantage of being on a TV without having to think about how it's all going to work on a PC down the road. Halo Wars



> Interview continued

could not take advantage of the 360 controller if we had to keep thinking about the mouse and keyboard at the same time, and so those other games have found a pretty uncomfortable middle ground in my opinion that hurts both their console and PC versions in the long run.

Do you feel you've managed to strike the balance between creating a standalone game and offering fan service to those who love the Halo series? How have you managed to ensure that it appeals to both groups?

I think this is the best campaign that Ensemble has ever made, and it's very sad it's our last. Ensemble is also always very focused on the multiplayer experience, as that's what most of us here play every day.

I feel we're definitely there with an awesome Halo story in a very compelling campaign that has some really fantastic moments, and an online multiplayer experience unlike any other on Xbox Live. Certainly when I watch people play the game that's the impression I get. It's great to watch people play the game as you get a lot of feedback from it.

Can you tell us any more about Bungie's involvement with the game? Were they very hands-on?

We went up there a lot in the beginning of the game's development and talked about the story and what it meant to be a Halo game. They were pretty busy working on Halo 3, but throughout the project we would talk to them about the current build and listen to their feedback. The guys at Bungie were great to work with, and their insights were extremely valuable.

Is there any chance of a map editor at some point?

That would be totally awesome, but I don't think it's going to happen. We don't have the people to support the tool, and it wasn't part of the core design in the way that Forge was integrated into Halo 3.

Which single aspect of the game are you most proud of?

I think the campaign and campaign story are done really well, and I'm proud that we tell such a strong story in the Halo universe.

With Ensemble sadly being wound down after Halo Wars, does this mean that there is no



Another batch of soldiers head off to certain death...

"I feel we're definitely there with an awesome Halo story in a very compelling campaign"

chance of Halo Wars 2, or is the team moving elsewhere in Microsoft to continue the fight?

I can't comment on what's going to happen in the future. I would very much love to see (and work) on Halo Wars 2 though!

What is the one thing you couldn't do in this one that you'd like to see in a sequel?

I think make the Flood playable and make that work. We tried in HW to make that happen but nothing seemed to gel and feel like the Flood so we stuck with the Covenant/UNSC playable civs. I'd love a chance to get the Flood civ working in the next one. ●



Battles are epic, and beautiful to watch.

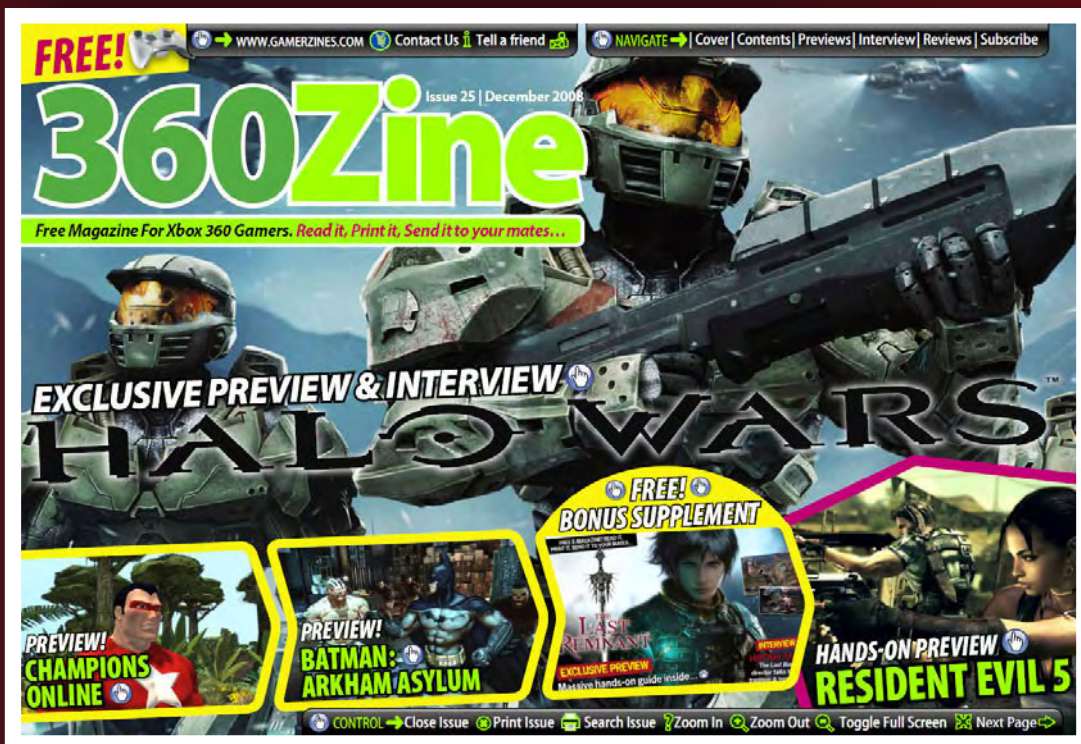


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