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PCGZine

Issue 28 | April 2009

Free Magazine For PC Gamers. Read it, Print it, Send it to your mates…

EXCLUSIVE #1

OVERLORD II

Exclusive in-game video and preview!



EXCLUSIVE #2

OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2

Exclusive Interview



EXCLUSIVE #3

FUEL

Exclusive Interview



EXCLUSIVE #4

JUMPGATE

Unseen new screens inside!



EXCLUSIVE #5

DIRT 2

Exclusive Interview



ALSO INSIDE!

DCS: BLACK SHARK
Reviewed! As real as sims get.

GRAND AGES ROME
Does it get a thumbs up?

WORLD IN CONFLICT: SOVIET ASSAULT
Re-release or expansion? Rated!

PLUS ALL THESE GAMES & MORE

REVIEWED!



BATTLEFORGE
Pokemon meets C&C!

REVIEWED!



EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR
Hussar! Total War's back!

BONUS MAGAZINE! H.A.W.X.



Welcome to PCGZine



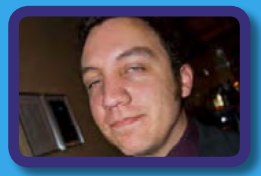
Crikey! Codies-gasm! We've got an epic exposé on Codemasters this issue, covering all their top titles for the summer. This bumper look at the industry veteran's best is crammed with exclusive in-game footage, screens and interviews you won't find anywhere else online or in print so get your gogglers around it now. My personal pick? The Jumpgate piccies. I'm a sucker for spaceships me. But we haven't gone completely Codemasters crazy. We've still managed to find room for definitive reviews of all the top games, in fact it's something of a Strategy-gasm this issue too with Battleforge, Empire: Total War, Grand Ages Rome, World in Conflict Soviet Assault and more all inside!

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

James Carey, Editor
pcgzine@gamerzines.com

MEET THE TEAM

Probably the best games writers on the planet



Jim Rossignol
A viscount of videogames, read his book "This Gaming Life".



Alec Meer
Maybe it's because he's a Londoner, but we love Alec Meer.

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



Overlord II

Minions, you've either got 'em or you don't. Overlord 2 has. Lots.



Operation Flashpoint 2

Exclusive Invterview!



BattleForge

Is it an RTS? Is it a cardgame?



FUEL

Petrolhead Preview Part 1



Empire: Total War

The definitive verdict on the daddy of RTS



Grand Ages Rome

An game with grand designs...



DiRT2

Petrolhead Preview Part 2

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away!

Dragonica	DiRT 2
Overlord II	BattleForge
FUEL	Tom Clancy's EndWar
Operation Flashpoint 2:	DCS: Black Shark
Dragon Rising	Empire: Total War
Jumpgate Evolution	Grand Ages Rome

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Dragonica

FIRST LOOK

Publisher: gPotato
Developer: Barunson Interactive
Heritage: Iron Master: The Legendary Blacksmith (DS)
Link: http://en.dragonica.gpotato.eu/
ETA: TBC

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

A side-scrolling beat-'eM-MO?



Aside from slightly phallic mushroom houses Dragonica's looks are primary-colour cute. Slighty at odds with the beat 'em up gameplay but meh...

What's the story?

It's a side-scrolling arcade beat-'em-up (which will conjure up images of Golden Axe if you're old enough…) but here's the twist: it's massively multiplayer. It's got all the features you'd expect to see in a fully fledged MMO, like a player-driven economy (P2P trading, or players can even set up their own shops) and PvP guild wars (Smash Bros-style frenzies). Heck, you can even get married and have kids. If *that* doesn't make it a honest-to-goodness MMO then we don't know what does.

What do we know?

It'll be free to play. You'll be able to pay cash-monies for additional items for your characters but hopefully this won't unbalance the game. Brunson have been developing Dragonica since 2003 so there's been plenty of time to make things fair for the freeloaders. The mix of super-cute graphics and ultra-violence strikes us as a little odd, but then kicking that wee Sprite in Golden Axe was a bit mean now we come to think about it…



It broke the screen! Look! the combo was so intense *it broke the screen!* Ooh you clever art chaps.



We're hoping those chunks of meat are loot drops of some kind and not the cadavers of the fallen. We've gone right off our ham sandwich lunch now...

Anything else to declare?

The main thrust of the game seems to be classic beat-'em-up button-thumping with all its D-Pad combo goodness. That's a fairly thrilling prospect if the tedium of most click-and-watch MMO combat leaves you cold. Apparently some of the developers even go so far as to use SNES controllers with USB adapters to get that authentic early 90's beat-'em-up feel. Nice one guys.

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THQ

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Games for Windows

7 UP

More golden nuggets of gaming glory to come

Battlefield 1943



Publisher: EA | **ETA:** Summer

Early footage and shots indicate something closer to Battlefield '42 than Battlefield 2 in terms of pace and play, with a touch of Battlefield Heroes style. Interestingly, this looks like it'll be a download-only – or at least download-focused – release from EA, with only a sprinkling of maps to begin with. If it's a hit, we're guessing there'll be DLC aplenty to follow.

Batman: Arkham Asylum



Publisher: Eidos | **ETA:** TBA

Bats what we're talking about; a Batman brawler set in the Arkham Asylum sanatorium. As the Dark Knight drops off The Joker in the madhouse he's lured into a trap by the other inmates. Cue the fisticuffs. Info dribbled from Eidos hints at some 'detective' work being involved somewhere along the line to complement the action, but we're betting this aspect of the game will be minor.

Majesty 2



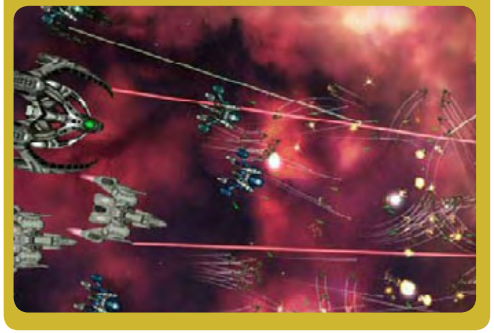
Publisher: Paradox | **ETA:** Late 2009

This sequel is ticking all the right boxes so far. It's a real-time strategy game that depends on the player-created world to drive the action. You have no direct control over the main protagonists, rather it's the way you shape your kingdom that determines their success or failure. Sounds intriguing. More soon.

Gratuitous Space Battles

Publisher: Positech | **ETA:** TBA

Details are scarce but there's word from the developer that, while this looks like a frantic Japanese shoot-'em-up, the focus will actually be on the thoughtful building of fleets of intricate ships. You've got to love this game for the name alone though right? We'll be keeping an eye on this indie gem.



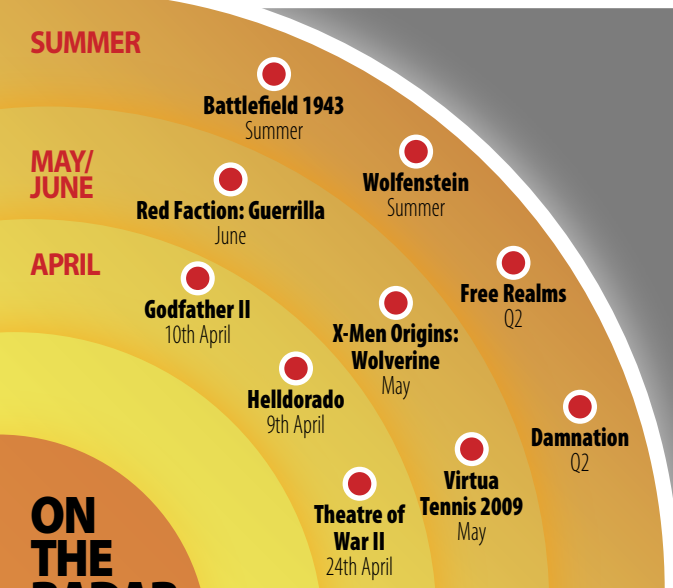
Demigod

Publisher: Stardock | **ETA:** Spring

Demigod is an RTS/RPG hybrid that conjures up memories of the legendary RTS Sacrifice. Godlings battle for supremacy and the chance for omnipotence in a warped and fascinating landscape. The real appeal of this is the chance to develop your god-lite character's powers and lead from the front, smiting the heathen with your brimstoney wrath. Sounds great to us.



ON THE RADAR



Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood

Publisher: Ubisoft | **ETA:** Spring

The first Call of Juarez didn't quite hit the mark unfortunately, which is ironic really for a gunslinger game. Hopefully this year's prequel will do more to rustle up some interest. The first game had some really neat 'ahead of the pack' features, like decent fire propagation and top-drawer horseback riding in open environments, but somehow still managed to flop. Bound in Blood certainly looks like it's going to push the frontier in terms of technology, and as long as you still get to have a Bible as a secondary weapon then we're buying…





Ruse

Publisher: Ubisoft | **ETA:** Spring

This new RTS may be about World War II, but its take on strategy is totally fresh. First up, it includes probably the largest battlefields you've ever seen – field after field in a true 3D space comprising land, sea and air. More next month.

IN A TIME WHEN MEN DIED
FOR CONQUEST OR FREEDOM, ONLY A FEW MEN
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EXCLUSIVE!

Overlord II

You're the Master of Puppets… pulling the strings

What with those familiar leathery ears, mischievous yelps and ability to wear saucepans on their heads to comedic effect – it's clear that the minions you control in the Overlord games are directly related (although not in any traceable legal sense) to the Gremlins that once ran riot through small-town America in the films of the same name. You may play the stalking sword-waving Overlord, but your minion charges are the stars of the show – your very own whirlwind of cackling destruction, directed over whatever looks either fragile or in need of maiming in the vicinity of your own third-person presence. >

Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Triumph Studios
Heritage: Overlord
Link: www.codemasters.com/overlordII
ETA: June

> Overlord II continued

What with the original Overlord being trapped in the Abyss at the close of the recent Raising Hell downloadable expansion, however, responsibility for the downfall of civilization now rests with his son – a particularly unpleasant child that you play as the game opens, having been sought out by excited minions. In the Overlord's absence, the Glorious Empire – a Roman-style world of discipline and order – has spread itself across the land and is attempting to stamp out any trace of magical creature. Meanwhile the airy-faerie Elves are hugging trees ever more strongly in protest. As such, both need to be covered in hair-pulling minions and murdered, or at least enslaved.

Roman around

As well as the newfound Asterix and Obelix-style anti-Roman trappings, there certainly seems to be a richer seam of fun and parody running through Overlord II. Not only is the gameplay and puzzling engaging, but you're continually amused by the goings-on around you. The tutorial level, for example, contains both a >





PCGZine EXCLUSIVE VIDEO



OVERLORD II

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



LORDING IT UP

A brief tour of Nordberg



Endangered beast | Dodgy hat | Angry locals

Endangered beast

The Yeti is an endangered beast, hunted by the magic-hating Empire – and now your good self to boot. He's rather upset that you're killing the baby seals he considers friends, simply for the sake of a gaming tutorial.

> Overlord II continued

knowing Donkey Kong riff in which an angry ape-like Yeti hurls barrels, a nod to Austin Powers' off-screen dying henchman and many, many scenes of wolf-back minions clubbing baby seals to death.

You see, one of many improvements to the Overlord template is the introduction of mounts for the four different varieties of Minion that you can raise up to help you – the rambunctious Browns ride the aforementioned leaping wolves for example, while fire-obsessed Reds charge around the place on flame-spewing salamanders and stealthy Greens scuttle up and down walls on spiders. You'll also get to know your companions a little better, alongside the familiar veteran Gnarl. When you return to your Netherworld domain – now a hanging downward spire, rather than a colossal dark tower – you'll be able to revive your favourites from a Cannon Fodder-style graveyard. Or you can just go and have some token nookie with one of your three mistresses. The choice, as they say, is yours.

Up on the surface though, you'll be directing your minions into battle with formation-obsessed Empire soldiers, over-running mighty siege engines and hurling rocks into ramparts, and essentially bending every area of the world to your evil >





"To war, yappy cohorts! To war!"

Roll over screen for annotations





> Overlord II continued

ends. Whether in snowy Nordberg, day-glow Fairyland or classical Club-Med Everlight, each area can either be destroyed for instant magical bonuses, or dominated for more long-lasting and slow-burning power. The fundamental ethos of Overlord II is to add several extra slices of evil to affairs, alongside the humour and angry minion-squawks, and for this we applaud. It would seem that the twisted spirit of Dungeon Keeper lives on once more… ●



The bond between a minion and his wolf is faintly charming.

PCGZine

HOW COMPLETE? 85%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 85%

Big, beautiful, silly… and also deliciously evil

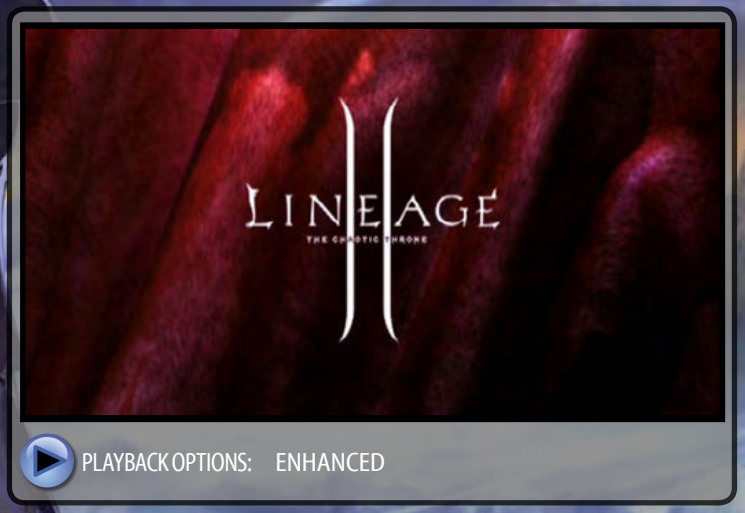
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Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Bohemia Interactive Studio
Link: www.codemasters.co.uk/flashpoint
ETA: Summer

The way of the Dragon

That silhouette on the horizon is Operation Flashpoint 2. Will it be worth the wait?



Clive Lindop, the Senior AI/ Game Designer on Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising.

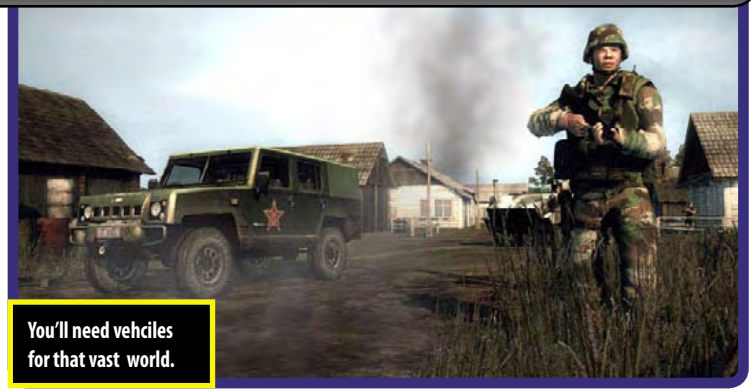
We were big fans of the original Flashpoint, so were keen to find out more about Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising. What would the major changes be? Better visuals? Gameplay wrinkles ironed out? We haven't got a clue, but we know a man who does…

So how real is *too* real? When does a game get so realistic that it simply isn't fun any more?
Within the confines of something which is ultimately a game, the line of realism is a difficult one to travel. For example, our character destruction system is very vivid and faithful to the terrible damage modern weaponry can inflict upon the human body. We allowed artists to choose whether to be involved in this work or not, since the reference imagery was stark and at times shocking. This said, our aim is to give the player the briefest of glimpses of what it is like to be a soldier. Nothing can of course fully replicate the actual experience.

What will original Operation Flashpoint fans notice first?
I think the detail of the terrain will be the first thing to be noticed. From the terrain mesh to the flora, the world offers much more cover and tactical possibilities. In terms of updates, the AI has seen the largest focus, with real tactics and dynamic decision making. In particular, we wanted to humanise the AI; It can make judgement errors, be over-confident or get suppressed. The idea is that the player shouldn't learn how to defeat a rule set, but learn how to manipulate and defeat an enemy with human reactions to events.

Is the island based on a real-world geographical location? What kind of different environments does it contain?

>



You'll need vehciles for that vast world.

"The key focus is to put the player in a combat experience as close to a real infantryman as possible."



Really, we just like playing soldiers in the woods.



Accurately modelled weapons are a must.



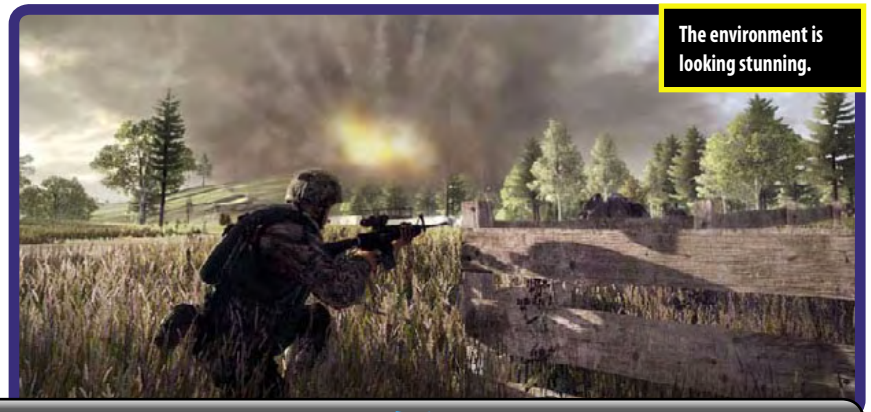
Grenade launchers are highly useful.



It would't be Flashpoint without Iron Sights eh?



We can't wait to get our hands on the UH60


The environment is looking stunning.

> Interview continued

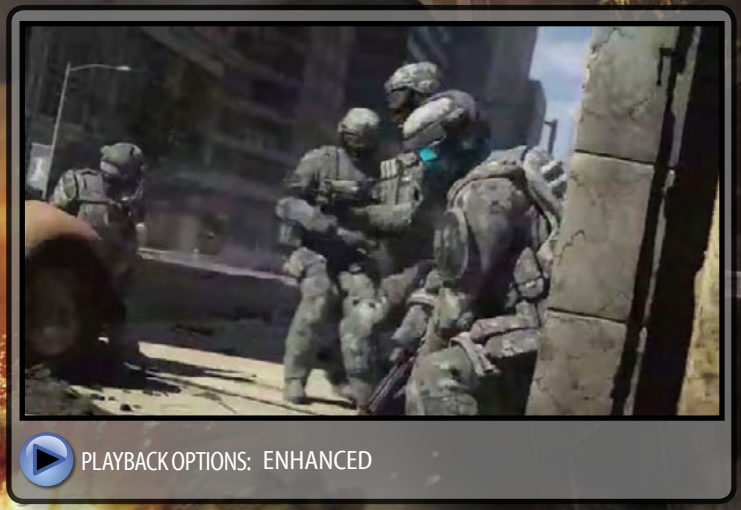
The island is based upon detailed satellite data and on-location photography of a real-world location – specifically, an Aleutian island called Kiska. We selected the island as a canvas upon which we could place the diverse environments and locations we wanted to provide. The variety allows for different tactical challenges and solutions to the combat situations the player enters. Specific environments include oil facilities, naval bases, villages, forests, mountains, lowlands and many others.

The island you're fighting on is just vast. How much of it, realistically, will the player actually see while playing the game?
Interesting question, but we really don't know! As the player has a huge amount of freedom, he could see any amount of the island's terrain. With the addition of modding as well, we hope to see different parts of the island used as the backdrops for user content.

How many military buffs do you have to ensure you don't get anything wrong in the game?
The key focus of Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising is to put the player in a combat experience as close to that of a real infantryman as possible. Part of delivering that is making the weapon in the player's hand, the tactics he uses, and the sounds and effects surrounding him all as accurate as possible. We have a number of military buffs on the team, but we have also meticulously researched all our material, including interviewing soldiers returning from tours in Afghanistan and Iraq. It's one thing to model the ballistic behaviour of a bullet, but quite another to touch the charged and powerful experience of facing that bullet and hearing it pass inches from your head.

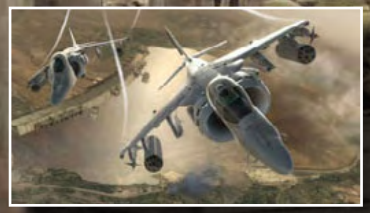
"We hope to see the island used as the backdrop for user content"

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Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Codemasters
Heritage: FUEL, Race Driver, TOCA
Link: www.codemasters.com/dirt2
ETA: September

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

EXCLUSIVE SCREENS!

DiRT 2

It's time to get really, really dirty…

"Might DiRT be looking to pick up some of the cool factor now that Need for Speed has mucked it up so dramatically?"



There will be seven different vehicle classes, and the powered-up ones will be available from your first load.



Coming over the hill: Monster Energy drink.



Disaster is only ever a metre away from your right wheel-arch.

There's a remarkable number of high-calibre racers currently doing qualifying laps around the gaming circuit – with both Need for Speed: Shift and DiRT 2 looking to take the leading grid positions. The latter looks remarkable – taking the game slightly away from its rallying roots and putting a bit of an 'extreme sports' spin on its off-roading world tour. You'll be able to grab your favourite car from the off, rather than painstakingly unlocking the usual hundreds, and take it through muddy, gravelly, dusty and increasingly dirty tracks from around the world. Races will run through the creeks of Utah, around Los Angeles stadiums, through Malaysian rainforest and around the Battersea Power Station in a series of neon-lit night races.

Might DiRT be looking to pick up some of the cool factor now that Need for Speed has mucked it up so dramatically and is having to distance itself from urban edginess with Shift? In anyone else's hands we would potentially get a bit worried – what with the slight deviation into the spirit of skate and snowboarding – but after the utterly remarkable racing in both DiRT and last year's GRID – who's to begrudge Codemasters a little loud music and anti-social behaviour?

MESSY BOY

Every driver needs his personal space…

Between races you'll hang out, in a menu style, in your trendy RV. Note the snowboards, clutter, unmade bed and general detritus on show. The message seems to be that people with tidy rooms aren't welcome on the DiRT circuit.

PCGZine DiRT 2

HOW COMPLETE? 60%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 95%

It's hard to believe that this won't be stunning

JUMPGATE EVOLUTION

Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: NetDevil
Heritage: Jumpgate: The Reconstruction
Link: www.jumpgateevolution.com
ETA: June

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Jumpgate: Evolution

EXCLUSIVE SCREENS!

JUMPGATE EVOLUTION

Space, the final frontier…

Apart from the supreme heavenly body that is EVE Online, very few space games have gone supernova in the online world – the halcyon days of Elite and Wing Commander seemingly long-gone in gamers' minds. Hoping to reclaim fans of Newtonian physics everywhere, however, is Jumpgate – a frighteningly beautiful universe of levelling, lasers and absolutely gigantic spacecraft. It appears to be a clever beast too. Warhammer Online-style public quests litter the multitude of systems you'll fly around, while the dangers of unregulated space await those brave enough to venture into PvP territory. So far then, and so rather good.

It is potentially an utter multiplayer delight – with good old-fashioned space blasting accompanied by the real world (universe) economies, item crafting and auction houses so integral to modern massively multiplayer gaming. As the game heads deeper into beta it'll become increasingly clear whether this intricate balance between Battlestar Galactica-style dogfight skills and traditional MMO levelling and equipment hoarding is a fun and engaging one. Up until then just gaze lovingly at these screenshots, and keep firm tabs on just when you'll be able to join the galactic grind for yourself.

"Warhammer-style public quests litter the multitude of systems you'll fly around"



It's BioShock's Rapture! Only in space!



Space battles are predictably thrilling.



PCGZine JUMPGATE EVOLUTION

HOW COMPLETE? 80%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 90%

Could be a serious rival to EVE Online

Driving ambition

Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Asobo Studios
Link: www.fuel-game.com
ETA: 31st May

A no-holds-barred racer with 5,000 square miles of jawdropping scenery to explore? Okay, we're intrigued…



David Brickley – FUEL's Executive Producer and all-round lovely chap.

FUEL sounds like being much more than your standard racer, so we tracked down the game's Producer to find out more.

So is the map based on real geographical terrain? How did you manage to put it all together?
Yes, but we took some artistic license with putting all our favourites in one map. While it's great to have Mount Rainier and the Grand Canyon to scale, there were bits in-between we didn't think offered the player enough diversity, so they were removed. The plan originally was to have five maps in total, but I don't think that people are ready for that yet!

So you've got your 5,000 square miles of beautiful scenery, but how do you then map the thousands of potential race routes onto it?
Well, not only is the world procedurally generated but the races are too. Kind of. We determined the rules – anything from length to surface type or location – and the code generated thousands of different events. We played them all and found our favourites, then used terraforming and manual object placement to tune them to get them the way we wanted.

What do you say to the argument that the traditional 40, slavishly designed and linear racing levels is likely to contain better tracks than a game with thousands? How do you ensure race quality?
Well, we didn't keep the thousands that were made. We realised we didn't have to, because as well as offering several hundred events – which developed >

"The original plan was to have five maps, but I don't think people are ready for that"



5,000 square miles of terrain and still nowhere to clean your windscreen.



The Fly had grown tired of scaring his wife and turned his talents to motocross...



When it looks like this, why not show off?



Beware the tornado-borne caravans...



Real-world locations like a to-scale Grand Canyon are impressive.

> Interview continued

using procedural and traditional techniques –we also give the player a race editor which is far more useful and flexible, and allows them to decide what they like best and what the conditions should be. So they get the best of both and can tune them to their heart's content.

So how is the game actually structured? Do you move around the map in stages?
You can do, yes. There are several-hundred handcrafted events that form a career and challenge mode, which is really just a taster of what you can make for yourself. At its core, FUEL is an open world of enormous diversity for you to explore, make and share your own races and have lots of different driving experiences, but the career makes it accessible for those who just want to have their fun fed to them.

What's with the crazy weather conditions? Do the tornadoes and hurricanes affect the racing at all?
Indeed they do. With the outcome being unscripted it can make things pretty hairy. I was showing the game off to someone yesterday when a caravan picked up by a tornado smashed me off a cliff.

How many different sorts of vehicles are there?
There's six classes: quad, bike, SUV, truck, muscle and 'special'. You trade FUEL for them which you earn or find, and you can get vehicles from race or exploration challenges.

How will multiplayer work? Won't the map be too big for 16 players to find each other?
We use a system called host migration which means in Free ride you're discreetly leaving and joining different sessions, so you see more than 16 people overall. In Race, if you're playing the career, then yes you can get split up, but you really have to play the game to realise that can be part of the fun because you're risking potentially dangerous shortcuts all the time.

What are your personal favourite locations within the world of FUEL? And where would you recommend that we visit?
Lake Powell is really stunning (it's called Dead Lady's Lake in-game – everything in FUEL has a kind of Point Break inspired nickname, even if it's a real location) but I never get tired of the Skywalk circuit, where you race quad bikes around that transparent bridge they built overhanging the Grand Canyon. We got permission from the tribe who built it. I hope we haven't given them ideas…

"At its core, FUEL is an open world of enormous diversity for you to explore"



Does this guy actually do anything *other* than wheelie?

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BattleForge

It's a card-collecting real-time fantasy strategy hybrid, okay?

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: EA Phenomic
Heritage: Spellforce series
Link: www.battleforge.com
OUT NOW

System Requirements:
Dual Core CPU, 2Gb RAM, DX9-compatible 3D card

Here's the pitch: Take a collectible card game, where you make up a deck of fantasy creatures to play against other fantasy creatures, and turn the actual battle bits into 3D real-time strategy. Then put the whole thing online so that gamers can buy and sell cards, and also play games with or against each other. More important still… charge small amounts for new packs of cards, meaning that real hard cash could dictate how awesome your deck is within the game world. That's the bottom line for BattleForge – an RTS that is as much about buying and selling virtual items as it is about imaginary conflict. Intriguing, and slightly mercenary, right?

First off, let's get one thing clear. You could just play BattleForge as a standard real-time strategy, without getting involved with any other players at all. There's a single-player story campaign, which both introduces you to the world, the card game conceits and the methodology of its real-time combat and resource management. This is packed with many hours of play, and generates a whole bunch of special items for your army and gold for your wallet. We suspect there will be more of these kinds of missions in the future too, so there's no reason why this couldn't be regarded as a moderately entertaining single-player game.

Head off into the BattleForge world via the map screen and you start to play through a series of familiar scenarios, where the mechanics of multiplayer loom large. The resource-grabbing



Lush gameworld details abound. The maps are 3D, but they look hand-drawn.



Tanking healers must be killed off before their charge can be defeated.



This big bugger is the twilight monster to be feared. He won't survive without some allies though.

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game, one step at a time…



20 MINUTES
Lots to learn quickly, including some basics like the mix of ranged and melee troops in combat.



45 MINUTES
Oh my God! Megabeasts come stomping onto the field and cause extreme havoc – take 'em down!



1 HOUR
The single-player story begins to unfold. Something nasty has happened to the world in your absence.



2 HOURS
NPC characters turn up here and there, but they're no match for having a real player working with you.



3 HOURS
Head into the multiplayer arenas if you really want to get your arse handed to you on a silver platter.



Walls, cannon towers, and range troops make this game a turtlers delight.

> BattleForge continued

stuff really does headline the game, and that story – while perfectly acceptable – plays second fiddle to the card game themes. And, of course, it's the multiplayer that really makes things diverse and surprising.

The game is online from the outset, and the incredibly detailed arena menu screen, from where all your exploits are expedited, puts chattering players at your fingertips instantly. Human interaction is big for BattleForge – whether it's in trading the cards that make up your decks, or in filling out a team for a PvE mission. Ultimately, though, we suspect BattleForge's great appeal is going to be in mano-a-mano battles, of the kind that card collecting games were designed for. Coming up with an incredibly clever deck and using it to win against real human opponents is going to be where the satisfaction lies with long-term BattleForge play.



The magical malignancy of the Twilight infects huge tracts of landscape.

It's all in the detail of course, and it's when we peer closer that we note BattleForge's vague awkwardness. Even if we put aside the achingly predictable visuals and super-traditional fantasy tropes that come spilling out of the game like guts from a fatty on the business end of a scimitar, this all feels rather bland. Even the supersized mega-monsters – one of the most impressive things in the game – seem watered down by the puffy cartoony visuals and horribly constricted camera.

BattleForge contains a wealth of content. It's dripping with different unit types, and the levels are rich with interesting details – such as defensive walls that can be manned, various resource types that dictate the course of a battle, and some special treasure items littered across a map. But there's a sense that it simply isn't a game that is as fine-tuned as something it's very similar to, such as World of Warcraft. Tactics in BattleForge do rather seem to be of the overwhelming force variety – if you don't have your biggest possible band of badasses, then you're probably not going to win, no matter how cleverly you've set things up.



Chokepoint battles are inevitable thanks to the map design.



Tie up enemies with tough melee troops and attack with plenty of ranged troops.

SPLIT PERSONALITY

The fattest wedges from the BattleForge pie



Getting defensive | **A brief spell** | **Boss battles**

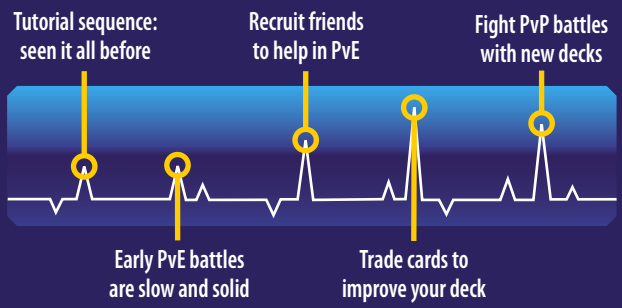
Getting defensive

These defensive fortifications can be built and placed in either direction, so both attackers and defenders can make use of them if captured.



Massive hordes of troops are a sure-fire way to make progress.

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*





Even early battles in the game give you a taste of the magic being thrown around.

Roll over screen for annotations



> BattleForge *continued*

Of course, the full, true breadth of tactics are essentially impossible for us to analyse, as we don't have access to all the cards the game has on offer. And in some ways, that's what makes this game so tantalising. Where other games reveal their tech trees to you at a single pass, BattleForge is always capable of producing an unexpected combination – especially when you are playing with or against other players.

Ultimately, we suspect this slightly above-average fantasy RTS is going to be saved by our collective profound impulse towards collecting, tweaking, and experimenting. The very idea of the deck system is deeply compelling, and we're sure that gamers will no doubt come to obsess over it, and to become astonishing ninjas of online play. We don't suppose for one moment that we'll be one of them, but perhaps BattleForge is just the first of many such strategies with a collecting twist.

Jim Rossignol

PCGZine Verdict

Compelling persistent deck idea melded with mediocre RTS systems

- Compulsive collector theme
- Solid multiplayer modes
- Predictable RTS fare

80%



Tom Clancy's EndWar

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Shanghai
Heritage: Total War, C&C Generals
Link: http://endwargame.us.ubi.com
OUT NOW

System Requirements: 2Ghz dual core CPU, 1Gb RAM, 256Mb PS 3.0 3D card, microphone

"EndWar employs a similar socio-political conceit to the other games that sport the Tom Clancy name"


Tiny Ghost Recons, kicking down tiny doors.

Talk military to me…

This. Is. A. Real. Time. Strategy. No, I said Strategy. STRATEGY. It. Uses. Voice control. Voice control. VOI… Oh, screw it. Let's just use the keyboard and mouse instead…

So long as you don't get too breathlessly excited and Consistently. Speak. Very. Clearly, ordering tanks around the map and even dropping devastating WMDs in this future-combat RTS shows it's actually a fairly well-realised system. The trouble is that, on PC, it's not terribly necessary. Console RTSes – which EndWar was first released as – have historically suffered from the fiddliness of using a thumb stick to control armies. EndWar's voice controls were one possible answer to that. On PC, we don't have that problem in the first place – which means the voicecomms end up as simply an optional gimmick. If you choose not to use that gimmick then, well, it becomes all too clear what EndWar really is.

Which we'll come back to. First, the all-important context. Tom Clancy might have had about as much to do with this as anyone with even the remotest understanding of cinema had to do with the most recent Indiana Jones film, but it does employ a similar socio-political conceit to the other games that sport >



Look! A colour! Treasure it always.

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game, one step at a time…


30 MINUTES
After a US-centric 'prelude to War' you get to choose to fight as Euros, Yanks or the Ruskies.


1 HOUR
You'll have been treated to its amazing sights by now – grey fields, grey cities, grey jungle and grey snow.


4 HOURS
With more than a couple of units to control, knowing exactly what's where at any time grows essential.


6 HOURS
Fuel-air bombs: make sure you don't mispronounce something and drop one on yourself.


8 HOURS
If you've not tired of it yet, you'll be deep into upgrading your troops in multiplayer by now.



A warning… FROM THE GAME ITSELF!



Choppers are the best way to get a good view of the battlefield, but they're horribly fragile against certain units.



The EMP power: don't waste it on meatbags. This one's strictly for messing up tanks.



Downed units can be airlifted from the field to be deployed in future missions.

> EndWar continued

his name. It's the near future, various superpowers are pretty grumpy with each other, and express it with military technology that is reasonably close to real-life modern death-machines.

Except this is a real-time strategy game instead of the usual Noble Army Men hero-piece. While GRAW or HAWX would love to be made into movies starring Christian Bale, here the narrative is just a character-free guiding backbone to a string of small-scale skirmishes. Which is, frankly, something of a relief after all that flag-waving.

When we say 'small scale', we really mean it. You units are capped at 12 per side, and the camera is never unhooked from the fairly restrictive over-the-shoulder perspective of whichever one you have selected. There is a 2D, overhead tactical map mode, but it's strictly for planning, not action. So it's fairly hard to get the traditional RTS sense of omniscience – which is an odd choice for a game that's about shouting orders to blindly obedient killing machines. It's perhaps a deliberate side-effect of the game's console design, where the voice commands are all – thus it's perfectly logical that the scope and scale are kept small. With the greater freedom accorded by a mouse and keyboard, however, EndWar's cramped maps and slow-moving units make for a claustrophobic, frustrating strategy experience.

There's no base building, simply the worryingly over-used current trend of capture points, and very little to separate the three factions. It's noble to strip the game down to almost chess-like purity in this way, and certainly it's a hugely accessible strategy game as a result – a good place for rank newcomers to take baby-steps into an infamously complicated genre. Unfortunately, the ultimate pay-off is bland and repetitive. The colourless visuals – suffering from the twin sicknesses of being technologically outdated and employing the faddish, slavish use of Next-Generation Brown 'n' Grey – hardly help matters, but it's more about a lack of variety than of fidelity. >



War is won and lost because of these tiny bunkers. Silly, really.





The Paris level is as close as BlandWar gets to looking spectacular.

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



> EndWar *continued*

Maps, in both single and multiplayer, are split into a handful of defend, conquer or annihilate templates, but once you've seen one of each you've seen 'em all. This is very much a game in which you have to buy into the mechanics of the design – one for mathematicians, not artists. If the cold, simple formulas behind it – the age-old rock, paper, scissors foundation being the most essential – don't thrill you in the first place, they never will. If, however, you like your strategy to involve pure, absolutely balanced logic, then you'll find EndWar a far more comfortable fit. Units lack any AI outside of Shoot It If It's Near, so you're required to nanny them at all times if you want to succeed. Or, to put it another way, this is a game that requires an attentive, reactive mind.

What, then, of those voice controls? Once again, they're unfortunately far from necessary, but they do make a rather anodyne experience a whole lot more enjoyable. Dropping an apocalyptic fuel bomb on the enemy is 10 times as thrilling when summoned from the skies with your own voice than by clicking on an icon. Even if it's fundamentally pointless in EndWar's PC port, it's genuinely a fun, effective gimmick, and it's exciting to think about what this technology could achieve in a more ambitious, characterful game.

"Dropping a bomb on the enemy is 10 times as thrilling when summoned with your own voice"

Really though, EndWar will only be of interest to the most sober of strategy gonks. This is a bold attempt to make a truly strategic game, one where every single move is calculated in advance, but that good ambition gets drowned by gimmicks and the aloofness of the presentation. War, end.

Alec Meer

Roll over screen for annotations



PCGZine Verdict

Hardly the war to end all wars, but the talky gimmick's a giggle

- Voice control works
- Simple to learn
- Bland and repetitive

65%



Publisher: The Fighter Collection/Eagle Dynamics
Developer: The Fighter Collection/Eagle Dynamics
Heritage: Lock On, Flaming Cliffs
Link: www.digitalcombatsimulator.com
OUT NOW

DCS: Black Shark

PCGZine GOLD

Finally, a chopper simulation with real bite…

Where can you get a high-end flight combat sim these days? The recent winding down of Microsoft's Flight Simulator studio was the mainstream harbinger of the death of a genre. A sad day a for a breed of games that were once synonymous with PC gaming. Sure there are plenty of indie efforts out there to keep the garage cockpit-builders happy – everything from interplanetary space flight to Radio Control – but recently it's seemed like combat flight fans were going to have to make do with Falcon mods, the Wings Over series or the 'buggier than a VW convention' LOMAC. But while the airfield of flight simulation was being decommissioned to make way for a boot sale of toys, The Fighter Collection and Eagle Dynamics have been tinkering away in the back of the hangar.

DCS: Black Shark is more than a mere simulation of the KA-50, it's a kind of platonic idea of what flight sims can be. It's a fearsomely compelling facsimile with an appropriately vertical learning curve, and a clear labour of love,



Civilian ground traffic isgood target practice for newbies. No return fire...

"DCS: Black Shark is more than a mere simulation of the KA-50"

stunningly authentic in the way only military fetishism can be. And what's more, it's a complete and utter blast.

It would be easy to rattle off facts and figures about the most banal, arcane, intricate lengths they've gone to in the name of realism, but we want to take a different tack here. Yes, Black Shark is stupefyingly realistic, but it's also very, very playable. That's not something we'd expected. Make no mistake, using the game's 'Real' setting will teach you short, sharp lessons in how to smash up helicopters, but what's startling about this game isn't the simulated reality, it's the work they've put in to welcome the uninitiated.

Steep learning curve

As we've already said, the learning curve is monumentally steep, but it's not unguided. The amount there is to learn is breathtaking, but the route to getting control, getting stable and shooting stuff is surprisingly short, even with the realism settings whacked up. On the lower settings it's positively arcadey – surprising given the

>

THE INNER WORKINGS

A guided tour of the cockpit



ABRIS | Missile display | Head tracking

ABRIS

More than a map/navigation computer, the extremely powerful ABRIS system can be a full-on virtual battlefield, presenting the pilot with a real-time situation report on all spotted units.



Expect to do this. Lots. We especially like his accusing arm gesture.

> Black Shark continued

breadth and depth of the accuracy here – and perfect for new pilots, but you're gently and thoroughly encouraged to take on more and more realism through comprehensive tutorials that do more than enough to get even the weakest joystick waggler up and running. In two days we'd nailed the basics of all the major functions at 'Real' settings – which is controlling the aircraft, navigation and weapon systems. The rest is really just tactics and experience. If two days sounds like a lot, just think about it. This is a high-fidelity, high-accuracy simulation of a seriously advanced piece of kit, and you'll be done with most of the hard stuff inside a weekend.

Reaping the rewards

We thought we'd say things like 'There are months, if not years, of play buried inside Black Shark, but you'll need patience' and 'You get out what you put in'. And that's all true. You will need to give the game some time to reap the rewards, but not nearly as much as we'd feared. If you like the idea of realism but are scared off by the thought of a cockpit that's nigh-on 100% accurate then we urge you to try DCS: Black Shark anyway. You may well be surprised.

Andrew Alcott



There's nothing like surveying a battlefield after you've flattened it.

A MIXED BAG

The highs and lows of helicopter simulations



Environment | **Detail** | **Co-op**

Environment

Although detailed, it has to be said that the ground environment does look much better the higher up you go. In a helicopter sim, where you spend all your time skimming the treeline, something's definitely left wanting.



Did we mention there are a lot of switches?



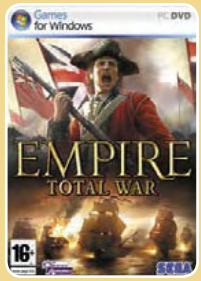
It can be a stunner, just don't look down to closely...

PCGZine Verdict

As close to a simulation of a KA-50 Black Shark chopper as you could hope to expect

- Very authentic indeed
- Deeply playable, too
- Unoptimised

90%



Publisher: Sega
Developer: Creative Assembly
Heritage: Shogun Total War, Medieval Total War
Link: www.totalwar.com
OUT NOW

System Requirements: 2.4GHz processor, 256MB video card, 1GB RAM

Empire: Total War

Huzzah for the hussars!

Name a famous 18th Century battle. Difficult isn't it? At first glance, the setting for the fourth instalment of Creative Assembly's warfare-fuelled strategy series seems a strange one. It's only after playing it for a couple of days though, that you realise it's actually a stroke of genius.

Choosing 1700 to 1800 means we get to choreograph battles involving massed ranks of gaudily uniformed musketmen, manoeuvre fleets of impressive cannon-crammed men-of-war, and lead nations through an age of extraordinary upheaval. Yes, the 18th Century wasn't all powdered wigs and coffee shops, as Europe was convulsed by numerous wars – not to mention industrial and social revolution. Britain, the emerging superpower, was busy grabbing new colonies in India, and

"Total War mixes pacey real-time battles with slower turn-based empire management"

fighting to hold onto old ones in North America. In short, it was a fascinating time to be a General or head of state, and ETW captures this brilliantly.

For those unversed in the Total War approach, the series mixes pacey real-time battles, with slower turn-based empire management. Roughly half your time is spent studying a gorgeous 'world' map (In ETW this includes Europe, western Asia, and significant portions of the Americas) deciding which territory to conquer next, town to upgrade or foreign dignitary to rub out.







The AI is at its least convincing in and around fortresses.

THE MARCH OF PROGRESS

Medieval 2 is gone but not totally forgotten



Cloak and pistol | **Up and at them** | **Missionary position**

Cloak and pistol

Assassins and spies are no more, but rakes and gentlemen do much the same thing. Need an army investigated? A building sabotaged? A man killed or a foreign tech stolen? These are your guys.

FREEZE FRAME

Guiding you through the game, one step at a time…



15 MINUTES
The tutorials done, it's time to embark on the 'Road to Independence' campaign. Death to the redcoats!



12 HOURS
The Brits are defeated, as are the Spanish, the French and the Indians. America is free – except for the slaves.



24 HOURS
Your first grand campaign, and you've researched your way to the top of the tech tree. The Puckle Gun is yours!



48 HOURS
You pass out from sleep deprivation after conquering Europe – plus most of Asia and America.



While you're waiting for the 15GB download to finish, get in the mood by watching Master and Commander.

> Empire: Total War cont.

The other half is spent on the field of battle, ordering cavalry charges, and daring flanking manoeuvres. It's a perfectly balanced fusion, and the new elements added for this instalment only enrich the mix.

The most striking introduction – naval warfare – has been executed with CA's customary skill and panache. Previous 'Age of Sail' wargames have captured the tactics of the era well enough, but this is the first time a game has also supplied the awesome spectacle. Watching exquisitely modelled warships, complete with busy crews and intricate rigging trade broadsides at close range, it's impossible not to be moved.

Long engagement

The engagements on dry lands feels distinct from their Medieval 2 counterparts, thanks mainly to all the muskets and cannons. Cavalry still play their part, but it's the impact of matchlock armed infrantrymen (preferably buffed with bayonets and the latest firing drills) and well-positioned artillery batteries (ideally able to fire special ammo like cannister shot) that usually determines victory.

On the world map, the changes are equally profound. Sensibly, considering the importance of technology and political ideas during the period, we get a tech-tree for the first time, and a government system rather than a family tree. Territories now spawn towns spontaneously, meaning invasions are much subtler affairs. Do you march on the capital straight away, or occupy your foe's industrial base or farming centres first? More choices means more midnight oil happily burnt.

It's hard to criticize a game so crammed with delights. Hard but not impossible. The Total War AI is as challenging and unpredictable as ever, but still has worrying flaws. At the tactical level, it's a poor fortress defender. At the strategic, it's currently completely incapable of mounting amphibious invasions. Should you steer clear because of this? If you do, you'll be missing one of the richest, most rewarding wargames in years.

Tim Stone



Formations and firing drill are unlocked through research.

Roll over screen for annotations



PCGZine Verdict

Strategy and tactics in perfect harmony

- Naval spendour
- New strat map subtleties
- Minor AI deficiencies

87%

World in Conflict: Soviet Assault

Take the Cold War onto American soil

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Massive Entertainment
Heritage: Ground Control
Link: www.massgate.net
OUT NOW

System Requirements:
2.0 GHz or faster single-core (2.2 GHz for Windows Vista), or any dual-core Intel or AMD (2.5 GHz or faster recommended), 512 MB RAM, 128 MB DirectX 9.0c-compatible graphics card

For those who never played the original, World in Conflict is a pure experience. You don't control huge squadrons of units, there's no resource management or base-building, and there's not the faintest whiff of researching new technology to fill up a tech tree. World in Conflict is pure because it focuses on the action. As a result, it's not the most strategically challenging game in the world – replacing chess-like thoughtfulness with urgency, teamwork and spectacle.

Soviet Assault builds on that, adding a short single-player campaign that's well-scripted and sensitively told from your control of both American and Russian sides. Told in a combination of in-engine movies and narrated stills, we're taken back to 1989. It's a slightly on-rails campaign though, with objectives too close together, and instructions too specific to give you a real sense of exercising any strategy.



The Russians pause their advance to admire America's arable farmland.

Internal conflict

But World In Conflict is a game that comes together in the multiplayer campaign. The expansion adds two multiplayer maps, both of which will require strict teamwork if you're going to succeed. As always, you can be hobbled by a lack of effective communication, or a glory-hunting team-mate, but play with the right person (using headsets) and the experience is one of the most satisfying you can find.

This expansion is too slight and overpriced to warrant an unqualified recommendation, though, and there simply isn't the range of new features you come to expect from an RTS expansion. However, if you're a complete newcomer to the conflict, now's the perfect time to grab the Complete Edition. It may not seem fair to the loyal players, but hey, it's all the more people in multiplayer, so everyone wins.

Jon Blyth

THE BASICS OF CONFLICT

It's the little things in Men of War that seem



Capture points | **Dropping in** | **Tactical strikes**

Capture points

Get your troops into these circles, and they'll capture them almost instantly. Capture and hold them, and they'll sprout defensive turrets.

PCGZine Verdict

A little more of the same, which is not necessarily a bad thing

- More World in Conflict is good
- Not *much* more is less good
- Confusing price plan

79%



Publisher: Kalypso
Developer: Haemimont Games
Heritage: Imperium Romanum
Link: www.grandages.com
OUT NOW

System Requirements: Windows 2000/XP/Vista, 1.7GHz Processor, 512MB RAM, nVidia GeForce 3/ ATI Radeon 9600 video card or higher, DirectX 9.0b

Grand Ages Rome

Real-time strategy with a hint of parmesan. Or is that Caesar salad?

Grand Ages Rome has a title screen which is a little *too* similar to another famous strategy game featuring the Romans. Like the Total War game, the Grand Ages team have gone with a bit of loading screen text to introduce their game. Rather than a clever quote from antiquity, however, it's a tip. Such as this: "If not supplied with food, the Plebs will generate crime." Quite so. Not just a tip for your actions in the game, but advice for life. As it turns out however, this tip is only one fragment of the equation, and you focus on food – and the Plebs – at your peril.

"Grand Ages mixes the creation and management of a city with some armed conflict"

Grand Ages mixes the creation and management of a city with some armed conflict. The focus is definitely more on the city than the troops, although the exact balance varies enormously from scenario to scenario. Some battles are fairly sizeable, but you'll be backing that up with a monster-sized city before the legions march forth. The campaign ultimately sees you building up a series of settlements across the ancient world, in a manner reminiscent of other real-time strategy games, such as the Age of Empires series. Visually and mechanically though, Grand Ages is very much its own game, and the city it creates is absolutely beautiful. Historical urban tweakers have never been quite so well catered for, and it does make you wonder why there aren't more historical SimCity games kicking about. The core of your Roman city is housing. Supply







Fight! Fight! Protect your city from hostile rivals.

GRAND DESIGNS

Three small details that make Grand Ages Rome all the more interesting



Troop types | Pretty city | The guv

Troop types

Combat takes place between just a few different troop types, including armoured infantry, archers and horseback troops. What's interesting is that idle troops can be paid to train, which increases their effectiveness as a unit. Each level up costs a little more.

FREEZE FRAME

Guiding you through the game, one step at a time…



10 MINUTES
Start with an outpost and work from there. This is the first in-game building.



30 MINUTES
Pretty soon you're building viaducts and erecting temples like a pro.



2 HOURS
The scenery changes as you journey from Africa to Germany.



3 HOURS
Being a productive governor only gets you so far. Cities mean war.



An aqueduct provides water, which is essential to some industries.

> Grand Ages Rome cont.

housing for workers, and you can get farming, industry and commerce all working as you require.

There isn't much wiggle room in all this; you've got to consider that while logging generates wood or brickmaking generates bricks, it's not just going to be used up in building as there are also upkeep costs. It's in making this kind of thing clear that Grand Ages first falls down on. Despite the incredibly beautiful presentation of the game, you're required to click then hover over individual icons just to get an overall picture of resources. Nor is there a hover for the status and function of individual buildings. This all seems like basic interface design, and it's shocking that a game which is so visually accomplished can throw away its credibility by making silly mistakes.

Crowd control

Nor is this a city-building game that forgives mistakes. Just as a Roman city would live or die on the strength of its infrastructure, so Grand Ages Rome is a game that will punish you hard for not providing a water fountain, or a gladiatorial arena, or a tavern. You are nothing without your people, and your people will not behave themselves if they are not fed, watered, and entertained. Keeping all this sorted, while also producing troops to fight battles, and occasionally demolishing buildings to prevent fire spreading all adds up to a game that's much more of a chore to play than it is a pleasure.

Jim Rossignol

Roll over screen for annotations





The far zoom on any given maps shows you the size of the game.



Individual scenarios are littered with detail, such as this ruin.

PCGZine Verdict

This Roman Governor game isn't quite the 'guvna'

- Beautiful cities aplenty
- Huge diverse campaign
- Annoying design throughout

65%

Commodore XX

PCGZine GOLD

Ultimate gaming performance comes with an ultimate price tag, but this customisable system will certainly put a smile on your face!

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SYSTEM SPECS

- Intel® CoreTM i7 Extreme Edition 965, 3.2GHz 8MB L3 cache
- ASUS® P6T Deluxe motherboard
- 880 Watt Hiper PSU
- 6GB OCZ PC3-12800, DDR3 1600MHz
- 2x NVIDIA® GeForce® GTX 285 1024MB (SLITM)
- 300GB (2x 150GB WD1500ADFD, RAID0) WD Raptor 10,000 RPM 16MB cache
- 1TB SATA 7200RPM 16MB cache
- SupremeFX integrated 7.1 audio
- LG GGW-H20L 6x Blu-ray Drive With LightScribe
- 7-in-1 Card reader
- Microsoft® Windows VistaTM Ultimate (32 bit)
- 2 Year pick-up and return with full support options



> Commodore XX continued

The Commodore brand is synonymous with gaming, and although the C64 may be consigned to history, the company was reborn just two years ago. Specialising in high-end PCs, one of the main selling points of Commodore PCs is G-Kin, a fully customisable case for your PC. G-Kins are not some tacky, stick-on graphics either, they are high-quality images that are printed onto the casing and covered with a hard coating for protection. Commodore has a library of over 250 designs, and each panel is easily removable, so you can easily change your PC's look in seconds.

BENCHMARK SCORES

3D mark Vantage	Performance 25,330
3D mark Vantage	Extreme 11,315
Lost Planet	138 avg, 147.6 snow, 171.8 cave
Left 4 Dead	60 fps 1600x1200

3Dmark Vantage scored a staggering 25,330 points in Performance mode, and an equally impressive 11,315 points in Extreme mode, a setting which will bring many systems to their knees. Lost Planet, which is designed to take advantage of multi-core systems, achieved 147.6 fps in the snow environment and 171.8 in the Cave. The final test was Left 4 Dead, using a custom timedemo running at a resolution of 1600x1200, which gave us an average frame-rate of 60 frames per second, with all effects on the very highest settings.

"The benchmarks speak for themselves; there's not much that'll phase this machine"

An arm and a leg

The Commodore XX's price tag is something many people will find hard to swallow (prices range from £945 to a staggering £3,777), but what you are getting is the ultimate gaming machine, that will blitz anything thrown at it. The nucleus of the system is Intel's new core i7 CPU – which in this case is the Core i7 Extreme edition – running at 3.2GHz, with 8Mb of L3 cache. Thanks to Intel's hyper-threading technology, the four cores can run a total of eight threads, while the on-board memory controller can run three channels of DDR3 1066 memory.

Commodore has chosen to install 6GB of OCZ 1600MHz memory in a triple-channel configuration, but because the version of Vista which is installed is 32-bit, the system can only use the first 4GB – and in reality only about 3.25GB is accessible to Windows. DDR3 is expensive stuff, so it seems wasteful to have over 2Gb completely unused, installing vista 64-bit would make so much more sense. Graphics are handled by a pair of SLI-configured Nvidia GeForce GTX285 cards, each with 1GB of on-board memory.

Storage comes in the form of three hard drives, with a pair of 150GB drives in RAID 1 mode, providing 300GB of space for Windows and program files, while a 1TB drive is provided for additional storage space. While RAID 1 has some positives in slightly faster read speeds, it does come with some downsides. Should one drive fail, you'll lose all your data, with no way to recover it. A RAID 0, mirrored set-up would give better data protection at the expense of storage space and very small performance hit, but then this machine is all about the numbers.

Power PC

But enough tech talk, what we really want to know is how it performs. Stuffed full of the most expensive, best-performing toys that money can buy, you'd expect it to show some pretty impressive figures, and you'd be right. The benchmarks speak for themselves; there's not much that will phase this machine. Although a lot of games are still only single-threaded, more and more developers are embracing the concept of multiple cores, and those games that are multi-threaded will really shine. The performance certainly fits the price tag, and the customisable case is a great feature, providing your case is on show and not hidden away under a desk.

For those all misty-eyed at the Commodore name, a pre-loaded emulator with over 50 C64 games will have you reminiscing to the small hours. Considering the hardware and the fact it has three system fans, plus one on each of the GPUs, plus the CPU, it's actually fairly quiet, thanks to sound insulation on the panels. But we can't help feeling that Commodore really missed a trick by using the 32-bit version of Vista.

Simon Pickstock

COMMODORE AMIGO

If you've got the cash then you could have a friend here for life. Here are three of our favourite designs



EVE Online | **Antelope Canyon** | **.Be Pleasant**

EVE Online

For Internet spaceship lovers everywhere, there are eight different EVE Online designs to choose from. Our favourite is the Eve Online: Gallente, which has a striking image of a Moros dreadnaught in formation on the right panel.

PCGZine Verdict

A truly stunning PC, but only for those of you with the cash to spare

- Unbeatable performance
- Customisable artwork
- Why not Vista 64-bit?

90%

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Tom Clancy's H·A·W·X

HIGH ALTITUDE WARFARE

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FEATURE

AIR COMBAT

Everything you need to win the war in the skies



WIN!

FLY A FOUGA MAGISTER JET PLANE



INTERVIEW

FLYING HIGH

Under the cockpit of Tom Clancy's HAWX



EXCLUSIVE PLAYTEST

Tom Clancy's H·A·W·X

Air-combat will never be the same

Tom Clancy's HAWX
HIGH ALTITUDE WARFARE

Welcome

As discerning, clued-up gamers, you're bound to have played one or more of Ubisoft's Tom Clancy games – the mark of the writer famous for his vision of near-future warfare and espionage has become a by-word for top-notch gameplay, thanks to the likes of Rainbow Six, Ghost Recon Advanced Warfare, EndWar and Splinter Cell. Now the Tom Clancy game universe has acquired a new franchise, HAWX, and like its siblings, it's an absolute corker.

In many ways, HAWX is Ubisoft's most ambitious Tom Clancy game yet, as it aims to drag a fairly obscure, special-interest genre (air combat) into the mainstream. That it succeeds, and provides a polished, thrilling and satisfyingly meaty gameplay experience – even if you're not a flight-sim-nut – is a testament to the skills of Ubisoft Bucharest. Its innovative assistance on/off system and clever virtual cockpit computer mark it down as that rarest of beasts: a game which has been the beneficiary of deep thought from an early stage and, as a result, it makes ancestors like Ace Combat seem pallid and one-dimensional in comparison.

We've enjoyed playing HAWX so much that we created this special supplement, in which you'll find pretty much all you need to know about it before it comes out, an exclusive developer's diary providing an insight to the making of HAWX and an interview with Ubisoft's head Tom Clancy honcho, Phil Brannelly. Hope you enjoy it.

Steve Boxer, Editor

WIN!
FLY A FOUGA MAGISTER JET PLANE



ENHANCED VIEW



Contents

Preview
Find out all about HAWX in our in-depth five-page preview feature.

Interview
We talk to HAWX's UK Senior Brand Manager, Phil Brannelly about the game.

Air Combat
Want to know more about how these planes really work? Our six-page guide tells you everything you need to know.



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Tom Clancy's HAWX
HIGH ALTITUDE WARFARE

HANDS-ON PREVIEW

Tom Clancy's HAWX

We feel the need, the need for speed...



Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Bucharest
Platforms: Xbox 360, PS3, PC
Heritage: Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII
Link: http://hawx game.uk.ubi.com
ETA: 6th March 2009

Solid and blockbusting though his films are, and however fascinating his books may be, it's us gamers who have consistently got the best of Tom Clancy. It's 10 years since Ubisoft first invoked his name, on Rainbow Six, and a steady stream of subsequent triple-A titles – Splinter Cell, Ghost Recon Advanced Warfare and EndWar – means that gamers now see his name on a box as a stamp of quality. And now HAWX is set to broaden the Tom Clancy repertoire still further.

Despite being a departure – it's an air-combat game – it emphatically carries on the tradition of quality.

"HAWX's storyline has a real impact on the gameplay"



Advice from your wingman will pop up in an on-screen video window.

Indeed, it single-handedly drags the air-combat genre – hitherto very much shunted into a niche – into the mainstream of 21st-century games. Which is quite an achievement. Its success can be attributed to two factors: clever use of the Tom Clancy universe and the investment of a considerable amount of thought into how to make air-combat games supremely playable.

THE PLOT

Like us, you probably don't set too much store by the stories which unfold in games (they're inevitably secondary to the gameplay), but HAWX's storyline has a real impact on the gameplay, allowing it to feature real (and future) aircraft without alienating all but flight-sim aficionados. It's 2019, and you play as David Crenshaw, who has been a special-ops pilot in the US military's HAWX flying division. But as it's Tom Clancy-world, HAWX has been disbanded, since private military companies (PMCs) have taken over from national armies, and you now work for Artemis Global Security. But there's a spot of bother in South America, which unfolds with you at its epicentre: war breaks out between Brazil and a bloc of

ENHANCED VIEW



The amount of ground detail is astonishing, with everything being accurately mapped in 3D.

Tom Clancy's HAWX
HIGH ALTITUDE WARFARE

The flight of your life

The three versions compared



PC | PS3 | 360

HAWX on PC

If you have a suitably pumped-up machine, you should be able to get this looking even more spectacular than the PS3 and Xbox 360 versions – but it will run on a fairly low-spec, albeit less than a couple of year old, PC. The PC version does support all the joysticks that the flight-sim brigade are likely to own, but we'd recommend you buy a console-style gamepad to play it – that's what it was really designed to take as a means of input.

> HAWX continued

South American countries which calls itself Las Trinidad. At first, because Artemis aligns with Brazil, you actually find yourself taking on American planes. But as Las Trinidad takes the war to the United States and Artemis switches sides, you return to the HAWX fold. Mercifully, none of this unfolds in lengthy cut-scenes, but rather through snippets of video and audio delivered in mid-flight.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

If, for example, you've played Ace Combat 6, one aspect leaps out at you the moment you boot HAWX up. All the landscape and cities you fly over have been properly modelled in 3D (using GeoEye satellite mapping as a base), so you can fly between skyscrapers or under bridges.

HAWX starts you off gently with a rerun of a GRAW 2 mission in the Middle East, except this time you're giving air support. Which instantly gives you a point of reference in the Tom Clancy universe.

"All the landscapes and cities you fly over have been properly modelled in 3D"



The plane models are nothing short of stunning.



HAWX takes in locations all around the world.



All the planes are packing some very serious weaponry.

Tom Clancy's HAWX
HIGH ALTITUDE WARFARE



Some of the 50 aircraft you'll get to fly are more obscure than others.

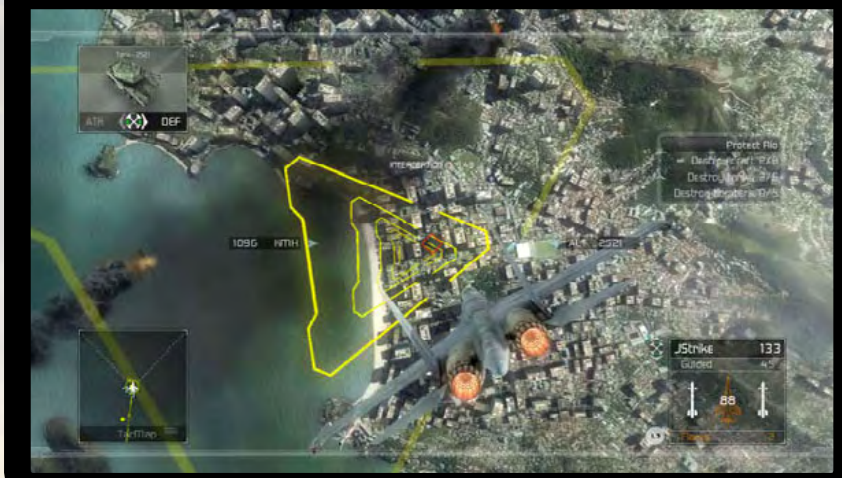


Four-player dog-fighting promises to be thrilling stuff.

>HAWX continued

The very fulcrum of HAWX, and the concept which renders it accessible to gamers who wouldn't necessarily class themselves as aviation-nuts, is the assistance on/off system. Essentially, it's a nannying system – when you turn it on your aircraft becomes less manoeuvrable, but also harder to crash, and you get a vast amount of info pumped through to your head-up display. Turning assistance off makes your aircraft super-manoeuvrable, but removes most of the HUD info, and moves you out from a first to a third-person view.

Roll over screen for annotations



Lead game designer Thomas Simon explains: "Assistance is useful for giving you the trajectories which can allow you to intercept enemies or make a surgical strike. You turn it off when you need to react quickly or when things start to get out of hand; when you have too many enemies to deal with."

The other key differentiator which defines HAWX's gameplay is the Enhanced Reality System (ERS). This too is a device enabled by the game's future setting – it's basically a head-up display which feeds vast amounts of information to you from spotters on the ground, AWACS radar planes and so on, as well as video-windows from your wingmen and support staff, and all your targeting information. It allows HAWX to sidestep the urge found in flight simulators to meticulously copy the planes' real HUDs, and present a consistent interface, no matter what you're flying. And it includes features that don't yet exist – for example, when you target an aircraft, you can press a controller button and the ERS will draw a series of gates allowing you to follow that plane and engage it in a dog-fight. And because – according to the game's story – you can download new features to it, it mutates

> *"You can press a button and the ERS will draw a series of gates allowing you to follow that plane"*

Tom Clancy's HAWX
HIGH ALTITUDE WARFARE

> **HAWX** continued

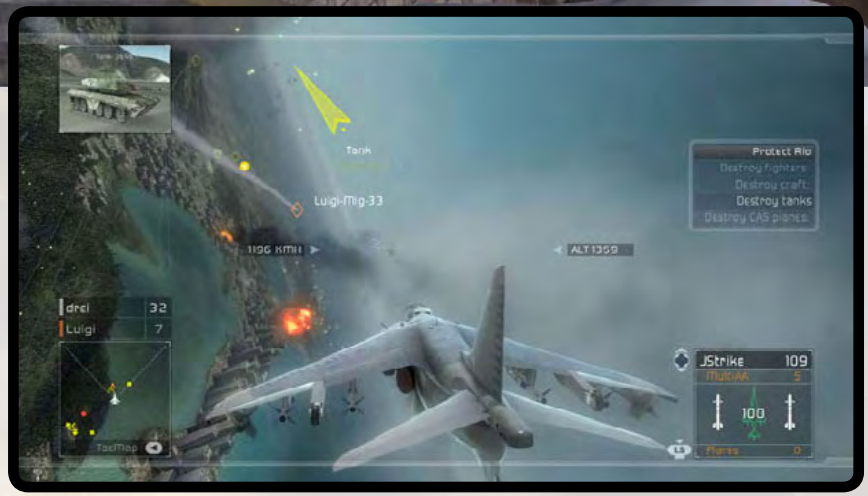
helpfully according to the mission your playing.

THE MISSIONS

The single-player missions are another area that marks out HAWX as a cut above previous air-combat games. They are varied, long, involving and played out in the skies above some gloriously rendered locations. You might, for example, have to evade radar and take out a succession of early-warning systems, protect Air Force One from attack or, indeed, the Space Shuttle as it bids to repair the crippled US satellite defence system – or take out both air and ground targets as Rio de Janeiro succumbs to a full-on enemy assault.

All the missions can be played by four people co-operatively and, while the overall objectives and geographical settings remain the same, they have been tweaked for co-op in clever ways, as Thomas Simon explains: "The pure level design evolves from the single-player to the multiplayer. So you really have to co-operate with

> "All the missions can be played by four people co-operatively"



Co-op gameplay: Players can jump in or out any time and, while overall objectives remain the same, more immediate objectives will alter according to how many people are playing. In the sequence shown above, you and your mates are defending Rio de Janeiro from attack – from enemies on the ground and in the air, as shown in the top left-hand corner of your ERS. Note how your plane doesn't remain rigidly positioned in the centre of the screen, giving rise to some luscious camera-trickery.



One mission has you escorting the President's plane, Air Force One.



It's fair to say that an air-combat game has never looked as good as this.

Tom Clancy's HAWX
HIGH ALTITUDE WARFARE

> HAWX continued

your team-mates. Enemy units will come from new directions, and will have to be intercepted in a different way." You can also engage in some pure, no-holds-barred dog-fighting, thanks to the four-on-four Team Deathmatch mode.

Some of the world's most iconic military aircraft can be unlocked: the F-22 Raptor, Eurofighter Typhoon and Sukhoi SU-27 Terminator are the stock planes that you fly, but everything from the slow but deadly A-10A Thunderbolt (aka the Tank-Buster) to the F-117 Nighthawk Stealth fighter are present.

WHAT DOES THAT ADD UP TO?

Perhaps the greatest accolade we can give HAWX is that it's good enough to turn us onto the joys of air-combat – a genre which, we'll admit, we previously approached with trepidation. You don't need to be the sort of person who hangs out at air shows to enjoy it – by the time it requires higher-end flying skills from you, you've been exhaustively trained to meet the challenge, without having to endure any tedious training exercises. The storyline is utterly engrossing and surprisingly believable, too.

Possibly the easiest way to describe HAWX is as a very solid, meaty, intelligently designed proper game, which just happens to put you at the controls of some of the most exotic military aircraft in existence. And that sounds like the sort of game we want to play.

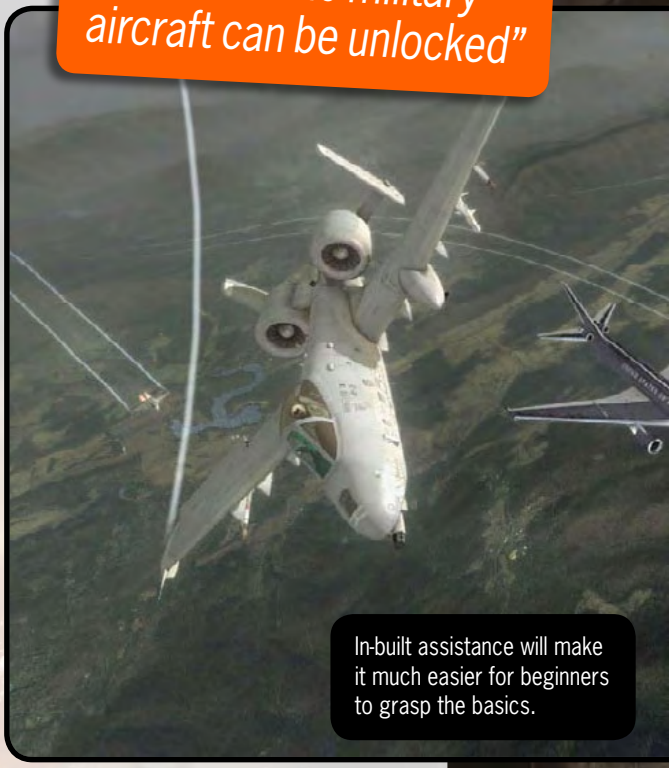
VERDICT

Percentage complete 85%

First impressions 91%

Tom Clancy and Ubisoft redefine air-combat games

"Some of the world's most iconic military aircraft can be unlocked"



In-built assistance will make it much easier for beginners to grasp the basics.

ENHANCED VIEW



Your plane will be colour-coded to the location your flying in. This camouflage will make it harder for your opponent to spot you.



Whatever you do, don't fire at the President's plane!

Tom Clancy's HAWX
HIGH ALTITUDE WARFARE

INTERVIEW

The sky's the limit

So how do you make the most playable air-combat game ever?

We caught up with Ubisoft's UK Senior Brand Manager, Phil Brannelly, in order to grill him about HAWX. This is what he said...

HAWX moves the Tom Clancy franchise into the air-combat genre. Do you think that is a risk, as it's probably much more of a niche than existing Tom Clancy genres are?

Phil Brannelly: I think it's a calculated risk. Yes it is niche but don't forget, in Ubisoft Bucharest we had a team that were already producing highly successful air-combat games in the Blazing Angels series, so the marriage of them to the Tom Clancy universe really wasn't such a difficult decision. And our key objective is to grow the air-combat genre beyond anything we have already seen to date.



This is the perfect opportunity to live out those Top Gun fantasies.

What new aspects does HAWX bring to air-combat?

PB: The Tom Clancy universe first and foremost, but the most exciting feature is the assistance on/off mode and the Enhanced Reality System. Also, for the first time ever in the air-combat genre, players will be able to experience the entire solo campaign with seamless jump-in/jump-out four-player co-operative play. In PVP mode, players can challenge each other in intense dog-fighting sessions and find out who's the top gun. Winning players are rewarded with experience points and money to unlock more weapons. Players have the opportunity to take the throttle of over 50 famous aircrafts, and take them over real world locations and cities in photo-realistic environments.

How much input has there been on the project from Tom Clancy and his team?

PB: Last March, Ubisoft



"HAWX is a good mix between simulation and arcade gameplay"

Tom Clancy's HAWX
HIGH ALTITUDE WARFARE

>INTERVIEW continued

concluded an agreement with Tom Clancy to acquire all intellectual property rights to the Tom Clancy name, on a perpetual basis and free of all related future royalty payments, for use in videogames and ancillary products, including related books, movies and merchandising products, meaning Ubisoft has total control of the franchise moving forward in all key areas. To be fair though, there was very little involvement from Tom Clancy himself in the past, or his team, apart from approval of assets that featured the Tom Clancy brand name and green-lighting games in their initial phase.

HAWX developers talk gameplay.



Is assistance on/off the game's key gameplay mechanic, and what does it mean for people playing the game?

PB: Players can ease into their flight missions and gain a level of comfort with the use of the assistance mode. Once employed, players can take full advantage of their technological support through the E.R.S and gain maximum piloting security, particularly if they are novice aviators. ERS is the core of the HAWX flight experience – aircraft interception trajectories, incoming missile detection, anti-crash system, damage assessment, tactical map and weapons trajectory control. ERS also allows players to issue orders to their squadron and other units, making this system as iconic to HAWX as the Cross-Com system is to Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter.

If the situation calls for the player to unleash the full potential of the aircraft, the assistance mode can be switched off and all safety features will be deactivated. This comes with increased risks, but allows the player advanced dog-fighting manoeuvres and stunning third-person views.

To what extent did you have to trade off realism (with, for example, all the existing military planes) and playability, and did the Tom Clancy licence manage to help with that process?

PB: HAWX is a good mix between simulation and arcade gameplay. We use a fully realistic physics engine, tuned in a way that allows every player to be able to

>

In-built flying aids will ensure that you'll be up and flying high within minutes.



"Our objective is to grow the air-combat genre beyond anything we have seen to date"

This one shouldn't be hard to spot.



Tom Clancy's HAWX
HIGH ALTITUDE WARFARE

>INTERVIEW continued

enjoy it. The focus is on the gameplay depth, not on the gameplay complexity. Even if, at a first glance, our game offers a very accessible piloting experience, we also managed to keep the experience authentic, with huge room for skills improvement over time.

"Players can gain a level of comfort with the use of the assistance mode"

HAWX does not aim to simulate reality, but to build on it and provide an experience that feels accurate, while allowing everybody to perform complex, fun and rewarding manoeuvres. So everybody will have the same realistic weapons but how you use them is another matter...

HAWX was given a bit of extra development time. What was that used for?

PB: Fine tuning, polishing and last-minute features that were not certain to make it. This wasn't really extra development time, but more of a strategic move in terms of release date. We already had EndWar from the Tom Clancy franchise in as a Xmas release, so it made sense to give HAWX its own launch space.

Can we expect downloadable content for the game in future and if so, on which platforms?

PB: The console version of the game will certainly receive downloadable content in future.

What is your personal favourite mission in HAWX?

PB: Rio is a great level, and will be the featured level in the Xbox Live and PlayStation Network demo, which we are planning to release on 12th February, but other levels encompass a variety of missions, including Night Strikes, Close Air Support, Air Supremacy, Escort (of Air Force One, of course!), Rescue and good old dog-fighting.

How important is the Tom Clancy brand to Ubisoft?

PB: Having published games successfully under the Tom Clancy moniker for the past 10 years – including blockbusters that set standards in the videogame industry, such as Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell, Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon, and Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six – the future of our industry lies in our capacity to create and develop brands that captivate consumers. That presents a myriad of opportunities for the full spectrum of entertainment, be it videogames, books, movies or other media. The Tom Clancy brand is recognised around the world for offering people exciting videogames, films and books.

In the words of our Chief Executive Officer, Yves Guillemot, "Capitalizing on the strong franchises that we've built over the past 10 years, we will take the Tom Clancy game brand to the next level of the global entertainment industry." I think that means it's important!



We're very much looking forward to four-player dogfights in the skies above Rio.



The level of ground detail is unlike anything you've seen before in an air-combat game.



If in doubt, fire off a couple of missiles...

Tom Clancy's HAWX
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THE MODERN AGE

Air Power in the Age of the Jet

In the decades since the end of World War 2, military aeronautics have evolved beyond measure, and now encompass aspects unknown in 1945. Manned flight is still essential but increasingly being usurped by electronic and unmanned warfare. In Korea in 1950, jet aircraft still duelled as in 1940, albeit with modification; increasingly air power was applied by Western nations to offset the numerical superiority of their enemies. Although with the introduction of helicopters to the battlefield, wars became more flexible, the limitations of air power were exposed in Vietnam against a largely hidden enemy prepared to accept high losses for political purposes. Then, and frequently since, the application of overwhelming air power has been severely curtailed for purely political reasons, constraints that did not apply in World War 2, even though, at the same time, unscrupulous and fanatical opponents have deliberately targeted defenceless civilians.

Between 1945 and the 1990s, technology remorselessly advanced but was often combat-proven by proxy in 'small wars' fought by lesser powers but armed by the two main protagonists, the Soviet Union and the United States, which equipped one side or the other. The escalating cost of all this 'hi-tech' type hardware eventually excluded all but the most major players, with the ultimate example being the way in which the mere threat of expensive 'Star Wars' technology helped to undermine the Soviet Union.



The Korean War of 1950 to 1953, saw the last large scale air-to-air clashes by groups of gun-only fighters. The F-86 Sabre and the MiG 15 fought bitter battles over North Korea in a war that ended in deadlock and partition.

Surface-to-air missiles proved an increasing hazard, but AAA continued to be a major threat. The same pattern is seen today in Afghanistan. Fighters continued to duel, but the opportunities for such aerial jousting continue to diminish. Air-to-air missiles, intended to revolutionise air combat, never totally replaced conventional fixed-cannon armaments, as evident in the F-22A, Mauser BK27-equipped Typhoon and the Rafale. With associated Forward-Looking Infra-Red (FLIR), ACS and HUD equipment, the fighter's gun still has its place as it did in the days of the hand-operated Lewis. The heavy bomber continued to decline; it brought North Vietnam to the peace table when used en masse, but was only a temporary reprieve, with the Vulcan attack on Port Stanley's runway in 1982 a defiant swansong.

Occasionally, as in the Falklands, totally outclassed aircraft, such as the Argentine Daggers, with superior pilots could still successfully hold their own, but mainly ECM warfare predominated. The need to avoid detection remained an important facet, with the introduction of the radar-absorbent, low radar cross-section F-111A Nighthawk, YF-22, A-12 and B-2 Stealth-featured warplanes, but even these are not invulnerable, as Serbia proved. The ability to overcome an entire nation's defence capability via 'Rapid Dominance' led to a 'Shock-and-Awe' concept of cruise missiles, laser-guidance bombs and B-61 'Bunker-busters', but was followed in Iraq by the same brutal stalemate on the ground. To counter today's clandestine terror-based conflicts, precision-guided weaponry, including unmanned drones, gives an added technological edge to an often murky, battle scenario. But the current Hellfire-C laser-guided-missile-armed RQ-1 Predator Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) is still a relatively slow, noisy and vulnerable machine that is easily taken out by the most basic weaponry. The enemy also moves with the times, using portable, but deadly, rocket-launching tubes to fire heat-seeking missiles. These Man Portable Air Defense Systems (Manpads), American Stingers or Soviet SA-7s, have already been used against both military and civilian aircraft, locking on to engine exhausts.



Dawn of the jet age. The revolutionary Me 262 changed the face of air warfare in the autumn of 1944. A considerable shock to the Allies when it entered combat, its technologies were much sought after by the Soviets and the West and both went to much effort to gather the relevant data in the ruins of post-war Germany.



Six-Day Air War. In 1967, four Arab states with 810 combat aircraft threatened to destroy Israel. The Israeli Air Force initiated a pre-emptive air strike (Moked) on 5 June. They destroyed 300+ Egyptian military aircraft in two hours. Jordanian, Syrian and Iraqi air forces were also eliminated. At a stroke, all aerial opposition was removed for the loss of twenty aircraft and twelve pilots. Israeli aircraft subsequently concentrated on providing close air support. Here, a MiG 21 explodes in flame, caught in the gunsight of an Israeli fighter.



An F-15 is refuelled in flight by a tanker. Logistical support has played a crucial role in conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan in recent years with large forces being deployed at relatively short notice.



The successful use of the Sea Harrier in the Falklands War of 1982 demonstrated the value of the aircraft carrier.



An Israeli F-15. Israel has continued to maintain its superiority in equipment and pilot ability.



An F-15 and a P-51 flying together at an air show. Although generations apart, many of the principles of air combat familiar to the pilots of World War 2, continue to be taught to current-day pilots.

Despite all these innovations, the skilled fighter pilot is still in demand, and today, no less than in 1918 or 1940, flying the world's most challenging aircraft in one of the most skilled, exacting and exciting professions.

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MISSION: VIETNAM AIR WAR

The lessons of fighter combat which were honed in World War 1, hurriedly re-learned during World War 2 and painfully resurrected in Korea, came close to being abandoned during the nuclear warfare obsession in the post-war era. In the USAF, the Tactical Air Command (TAC) mission became totally subservient to the overriding Strategic Air Command (SAC) lobby. The old maxim – 'Fighter aircraft would never again engage in dogfights because of the high speeds involved' – was heard again, as in the late 1930s and 1940s. In the 1960s, Air Combat Manoeuvre (ACM) was pronounced dead, deliberately abandoned for the need for pure interceptor missions which emphasised supersonic speed, electronic-target sensoring and total concentration on missile weaponry.

Moreover, political considerations began to dominate. The Beyond Visual Range (BVR) asset that missiles gave the fighter was, in itself, unacceptable to the cramping new Rules of Engagement (ROE) forced upon the military. Targets had to be 'eyeballed' before being taken out to prevent error, negating most of the advantages of the system! When missile-only armed McDonnell F-4D Phantom IIs subsequently intercepted MiG-17s of the Vietnamese People's Air Force (VPAF) over Vietnam at low altitudes, not only could these old aircraft, with determined pilots, out-turn and out-manoeuvre the Americans, but once all missiles had been expended, the latter proved incapable of destroying the MiGs, even if visually confirmed at point-blank range! Colonel Robin Olds, an early fighter-ace over Vietnam, summed it up concisely: 'A fighter without a gun is like an airplane without a wing.' Some very fast re-thinking had to be done after the resulting outcry when ancient MiG-17s shot down two Mach-2-capable Republic F-105 Thunderchiefs on 4 April 1965.

This led to a hasty 'fix' with cannon pods being added to the Phantom's weaponry, which adversely affected performance. The F-4E variant had an internally-mounted General-Electric Vulcan M-61 20mm cannon with a 6,000rpm rate of fire added, which quickly proved invaluable and was credited with one-third of all Phantom MiG-kills. So frustrated were the group known as the 'Fighter Mafia' at Systems Command policy, that they mounted a vigorous campaign, which later resulted in the F-15 being turned into a very different aircraft than that originally planned. Training was modified from 1968 onward, with the Dissimilar Air Combat Training (DACT), the Navy 'Top Gun' and Air Force 'Red Flag' programmes, reintroducing old skills from scratch.

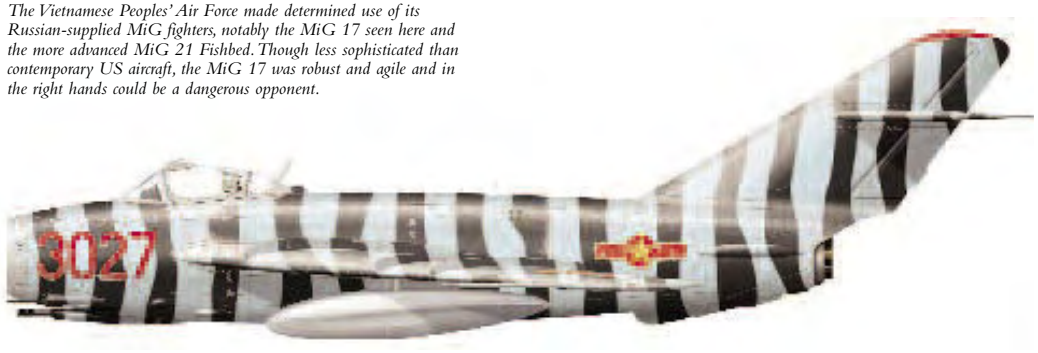
The fighter duellists in the Vietnam conflict were McDonnell Douglas F-4D Phantom IIs (145 enemy aircraft destroyed, making 75 per cent of kills); Republic F-105 Thunderchiefs – the 'Thud' – (30 kills) and Vought F-8 Crusaders (19 kills). The enemy was principally some 70 subsonic Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-17F/PF Frescos, agile and equipped with one N-37 37mm and two NR-23 23mm cannon with Chinese-trained pilots from 1964; and Russian-supplied MiG-19F-13 Farmers from 1965. These were effectively utilised and forced strong counteraction as in 'Operation Bolo', which tricked them into battle with F-4s, destroying 50 per cent of the VPAF's inventory.

American tactics reverted to variations on the old World War 2 'Barrel-Roll', this 'short-cutting' manoeuvre enabling Sidewinder ATAs to be fired from astern the faster enemy, locking on to its engine exhaust. After a few such experiences, the Communists thereafter avoided fighter combat as much as possible, relying instead on AAA and SA-2 SAMs to inflict most American losses. Toward the end, a few Mach-2 capable MiG-21F-13/PF/PFM/MF Fishbeds were used which could out-turn the Phantom II.

A grand total of 192 MiGs were destroyed for the loss of 76 American fighters.



HELICOPTER WAR
The war in Vietnam will always be associated with the extensive use of helicopters. Helicopters gave new mobility to airborne forces, but could be vulnerable to ground fire. Many were turned into 'gunships', heavily armed with guns and rockets to provide suppressive fire in the landing zones or 'LZ'.



MiG 17
The Vietnamese Peoples' Air Force made determined use of its Russian-supplied MiG fighters, notably the MiG 17 seen here and the more advanced MiG 21 Fishbed. Though less sophisticated than contemporary US aircraft, the MiG 17 was robust and agile and in the right hands could be a dangerous opponent.



MUD-MOVERS
Much of the American air power fielded in Vietnam had been designed with a potential war against the Soviet Bloc in mind. The supersonic nuclear weapons delivery bomber, the F-105 Thunderchief, found itself ranged against conventional targets in North Vietnam, armed with conventional 'iron' bombs.



MiG-KILLERS AND GROUND-POUNDERS
The F4 Phantom, together with the F8 Crusader, were the primary counter to the threat from MiGs over Vietnam. The Phantom was also widely used in the fighter-bomber role in support of ground forces. Here, a Phantom is readied as a bomber, its bombs fitted with fuse extensions to cause detonation above ground level, a sign that the aircraft is assigned to a close air support mission.



MiG 21
Newly arrived MiG 21 Fishbeds brought a modern edge to the defending Vietnamese Peoples' Air Force of North Vietnam.



NEW DESIGNS
Despite early teething troubles, the introduction of the F-111 brought new power to the strike forces available to the USAF. The F-111 could carry the same bomb load as four F-4 Phantoms and its new terrain-following radar meant it could strike deep into North Vietnam with minimal ECM back-up.



FAST LEARNERS
The Vietnamese Peoples' Air Force had to learn fast to have even a chance of interfering with the massive American air effort. Here, a group of pilots listen as a more experienced pilot describes tactics employed in a combat mission.

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MISSILE COMBAT

The introduction of air-to-air missiles changed combat in many ways. Most significantly, the range of engagement opened up hugely; the distances of engagement as seen in World War 2 with machine guns and cannon in a visual field of combat had now evolved to vast distances. Missile combat also introduced the concept of 'fire-and-forget' weapons, allowing the pilot to engage multiple targets. And in the present era, it has now become possible to engage targets beyond visual range.

KNOW YOUR MISSILE

Guided missiles use one of two main methods of guidance: Infrared (IR) homing and radiation homing. Infrared or heat-seeking missiles detect heat from the bandit's engine or parts affected by air friction. Radiation-detecting missiles home in on radar signals reflected from the target; the radar might be carried on the aircraft or, in some cases, the missile itself. Semi-active radars home in on radar emissions from an aircraft's radar. Active missiles like the AMRAAM have their own radar. Most examples of semi-active missiles rely on the aircraft's radar guidance and then transfer to terminal/active guidance when they close on the target. The first generation missiles were IR homing. Their crude sensors could only 'see' the intense heat from a bandit's engine, and as a result they had to be launched from more or less behind the bandit. Also, they could be easily countered by flares, by turning the aircraft to conceal the hot tailpipe or by flying towards the sun to confuse the missile with its own heat signature. The IR missile was the first example of a fire-and-forget weapon. Once locked on to a bandit and fired, the attacking aircraft had no further role in guiding the missile to its target. The next generation of IR missiles had a larger viewing angle, allowing them to target a bandit from a wider arc on their direct '6' line. The most recent designs are 'all-aspect' missiles, sensitive to home in on any parts of a bandit that are heated due to air friction. Radar-homing missiles can detect bandits at longer ranges, but early designs relied on the attacking aircraft to continuously illuminate or 'paint' the bandit with a beam of energy along which the missile could fly to its target. This could put the launching aircraft in danger because its manoeuvrability was severely restricted until the missile hit the bandit. If the attacker was forced to break off, the missile would lose its lock, stop tracking and turn 'ballistic'. In other words, it would fall to earth. The latest generation of radar missiles carry their own transmitters which maintain a lock on the target once launched (the aircraft radar usually provides initial guidance). This produces a formidable long-range fire-and-forget weapon that can only be shaken off by an aircraft equipped with electronic countermeasures (ECM) or by hard manoeuvring with chaff that may break the aircraft radar's lock. Despite this, semi-active systems remain popular as they are considerably less complex to manufacture.



PRIMED AND READY
A fighter pilot performs his final checks before a mission. Part of the check is to ensure that missiles are armed and ready for combat. Here the pilot can be seen removing the protective cover from the missile's sensitive nose sensor.



VIETNAM SHOWDOWN

High over Vietnam, an F-4 Phantom launches an AIM-9 Sidewinder at its North Vietnamese opponent. Missiles in Vietnam were not as sophisticated as their modern equivalents, especially the longer-ranged AIM-7 Sparrow. Frustrated Phantom pilots often found their missiles malfunctioning at the critical moment leading to the hurried fitting of a gun aircraft. Modern fighters carry both cannon and missiles, despite the increased power and reliability of contemporary missile models.





MiGS AND ATOLLS
The Russian and Chinese-supplied Vietnamese MiG 17s and MiG 19s were purely gun fighters, but from 1965 the North Vietnamese Air Force began equipping with the MiG 21, a true missile-era fighter. The MiGs were armed with up to four K-13 Atoll, a reverse-engineered copy of the AIM-9 Sidewinder. An example of the AIM-9 had been captured intact during a border clash between Taiwan and China in 1958, the missile having hit a Chinese MiG 17 without exploding and consequently being carried back to its base for examination.



NEW ERA
An AIM-9 Sidewinder missile successfully launches from an F/A-22 Raptor during a launch test, demonstrating its ability to fire an air-to-air missile from an internal weapons bay. In its primary air-to-air role, the F/A-22 will carry six AIM-120C and two AIM-9 missiles.



SIDEWINDER
An F-16 Fighting Falcon pilot fires an AIM-9 missile. The Air Intercept Missile-9X Sidewinder, developed by Raytheon engineers, is a fifth generation AIM-9 missile that is a substantial upgrade to the Sidewinder family featuring an advanced infrared seeker and a higher off-bore sight capability.



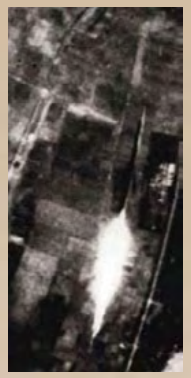
OUT WITH A BANG
There is no target like a real target and with the cost of missiles it is imperative that any test-firing be aimed at something as close as possible to the real thing. As a result, the conversion of redundant airframes into target drones has been a way of making sure that practice is as real as it can be beyond a shooting war. This F-102 Delta Dagger was converted to act as a target drone after serving with a National Guard unit in America.

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SAM EVASION

In today's war zones it is often the missile that poses the greatest threat to warplanes. Made in their thousands and widely exported, the SAM can be a potent danger to operations and where enemy air forces have done little to hinder operations in recent wars, they have continued to take their toll. Surface-to-Air missiles were the most feared threat to US aircraft in North Vietnam. The MiGs might come up when the conditions were in their favour, but the SAMs were always there. Knowing what to do when the alarms sound and the sky lights up is critical. Plan ahead and follow the drill. Every second counts.



FLYING TELEPHONE POLES
Caught on the camera of a US warplane over Vietnam, a SAM climbs towards its target. SAMs claimed 196 US aircraft in Vietnam up to 1973, their success making them a priority target in that war and every war since.

The F-15's Electronic Counter Measure pod (ECM) is mounted on the wing. If it is up-to-date, it should counter the SAM's onboard guidance

SAFETY FIRST
SAMs can be launched visually, for example, infrared shoulder-launched SAMs such as the SA-7. They can also be launched ballistically without guidance or with the aid of radar. If you want to avoid detection, avoid flying at high altitude which produces contrails and highlights your aircraft against the silhouette of a cloud. If detected, you can confuse the enemy radar by overloading its system with chaff, fooling it into believing the sky is full of multiple aircraft. Also, intelligence is key – know where the location of enemy installations are prior to your mission as it will give you the opportunity to conduct countermeasures.

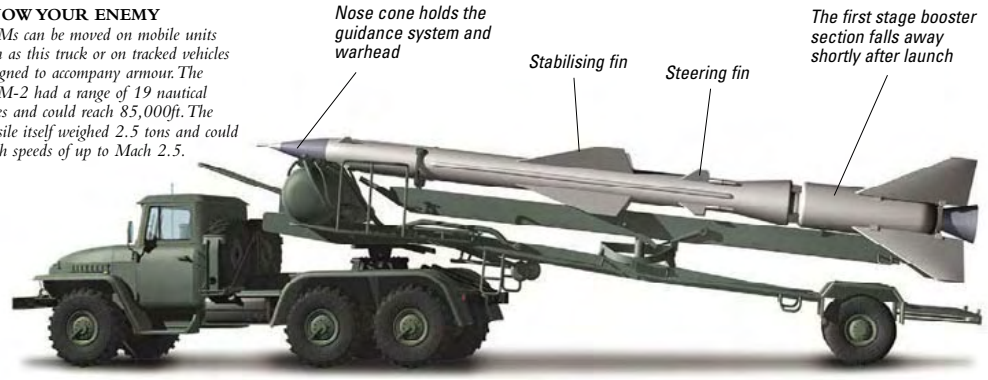
SHOW-STOPPER
An F-15 is witness to the fiery launch of a SAM over a desert target. Staying cool and making the right decision in the next few seconds will be vital if the crew are going to make it home.

There is nothing, absolutely nothing to describe what goes on inside a pilot's guts when he sees a SAM get airborne

Commander Randy 'Duke' Cunningham, US Navy, 5 kills

The SAM leaves an impossible-to-miss trail, especially at night. If the pilot is alert he will see it, if not then only the aircraft's warning systems can alert him to the threat.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY
SAMs can be moved on mobile units such as this truck or on tracked vehicles designed to accompany armour. The SAM-2 had a range of 19 nautical miles and could reach 85,000ft. The missile itself weighed 2.5 tons and could reach speeds of up to Mach 2.5.



EVASION
Once the radar-guided SAM has launched, a 'lock-on' frequency beam is used to guide the missile(s) to you. When your 'threat warning' equipment notifies that the beam is active, you have to assume that a SAM is in the air and is coming your way. Make a hard turn and pump out two chaff bundles. It is possible for the lock-on beam to be confused by the multiple contacts and lose the lock on your aircraft and shift to one of the chaff bundles. Always manoeuvre violently!



FLARES AND CHAFF
Once a missile is sighted, you can try either to defeat its lock-on via electronics or fly out of its operating range. The use of flares can be important even with radar-guided missiles as some can carry infrared guidance as a back-up. Remember that a missile has a fixed time limit due to its limited fuel capacity. When the missile reaches your location, it may be travelling at a supersonic speed and can pull a substantial amount of Gs. The Aim-9X for example, can literally square a corner.



SAM SITES
Another option is to deliberately attack the SAM sites themselves, thereby making other sites wary of switching on their radars in case they are attacked as well. Fixed sites such as this are more vulnerable to attacks using anti-radiation missiles fired by 'Wild Weasel' aircraft specifically tasked with destroying SAMs.



JAMMING
Trusting on your electronics and radar alone is not advisable; keep your eyes peeled for threats and what you have on hand to detect and jam enemy defences. Jammers are usually contained in a pod on a wing and come in a range of types that can confuse, blanket and distort enemy radars. When the jammer is activated, it fills a portion of the SAM operator's screen with noise. However, the closer you are to the site, the better his chances of 'burning' through the jammer interference and finding you. Note that barrage noise is just one type of jamming as there are others. Here groundcrew prepare an ECM pod for use on a warplane.

HIDE AND SEEK
Of the various ways to defeat a SAM, the most efficient is to avoid detection in the first place. If the SAM battery does not know where you are, it cannot fire at you. Going in low allows the terrain to 'mask' you from radar detection.



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MISSION: A-10s in Desert Storm

The Hawg goes to War

The Fairchild-Republic A-10A Thunderbolt II ground-attack aircraft had a long and complex gestation period before entering service in 1975. By then, the 'Warthog's' role had been refined to 'tank-buster'. The A-10A had inbuilt capacity to absorb punishment and unmatched battlefield loiter capability. Her targets were the thousands of Soviet battle tanks expected to burst through the Fulda Gap into the south German plain if the Cold War went 'hot'.

The A-10 was virtually an airframe built around the mighty General Electric GAU-8/A Avenger Gatling gun, with its seven 7ft 6in long barrels, each with their own breech, firing 30mm PGU-13 high-explosive incendiary or PGU-14 armour-piercing incendiary rounds at 35 rounds per second. Each API round had a 15mm depleted-uranium penetrator in an aluminium base, capable of penetrating the toughest Soviet tank armour. Depleted-uranium strikes inject a jet of flame into the tank's interior, voiding tank and crew totally.

The A-10A also has eight underwing and three under-fuselage pylon stations with capacity for a huge range of Smart ordnance; AGMs, GBUs (AGM-65 Mavericks, GBU-10/12 Paveways, Mk 20 Rockeye or CBU-52 anti-personnel Cluster dispensers and Mk 77 Napalm canisters) plus conventional Mk 80 GP free-falling bombs, infrared countermeasure flares, chaff-dispensers, radar jamming pods and illumination flares, as well as defensive AIM-9L/M Sidewinders, although rarely used. To protect the pilot from incoming threats from SAMs to multiple AAA, the pilot is seated inside a titanium-armoured tub.

The feared Soviet tank breakthrough never materialised, but when the Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, invaded the independent Gulf state of Kuwait on 2 August 1990, the bulk of his 4,000 tanks were Russian-built and supplied T-55, T-62 and T-72s. Eliminating these was the A-10A's prime task during the subsequent Operation Desert Storm.

The USA deployed 155 Warthogs, including six reserve aircraft, from the following units: 23rd TASS (15), 74th TFS (23), 76th TFS (28), 363rd TFS (26), 355th TFS (25), 511th TFS (20 and 706th TFS (18), although not all saw combat. The first mission of 322 sorties flown on 17 January 1991, was by Captain Tony Brown and Lieutenant Bryan Currier of the 74th. So-called 'Hawg' missions built up to three sorties per A-10A per day from Al Jouf. Despite the extreme heat and terrain, the Hawgs maintained a 98.67 per cent serviceability, far higher than any other warplane.

Besides tanks, APVs and the vast Iraqi ammunition dumps, A-10A targets included Scud-B missile mobile launchers, both by day and night with specially-adapted 'Night-Hawgs' using infrared targeting. Targets of opportunity included two enemy helicopters shredded by the GAU-8 at close range. Use of Mk 22 or LUU-2 flares and target-markers aided the destruction of hundreds of hostile targets in these night attacks and the A-10A took zero losses in return.

When the Iraqis sent fifty T-55 tanks into Saudi Arabia on 30 January, the A-10As pulverised them, one pilot, Captain Jack W. Thomas, personally taking out three tanks. The enemy was kept under continual pressure by the 'Push-Flow' method, ensuring a constant A-10A presence was continually reinforced over the battle zone.

A total of 987 Iraqi tanks was confirmed destroyed by the A-10A during Operation Desert Storm, along with 1,106 trucks, 926 artillery pieces, 501 APCs, 249 CPs, 11 Frog missile-launchers, 96 radar installations, 72 bunkers, 28 CPs and 10 enemy aircraft on the ground. An entire Iraqi tank column surrendered to the Hawgs as they circled overhead preparing to attack! During the panic-stricken flight from Kuwait City to Basrah, excellent servicing was achieved on enemy columns despite intense political restrictions on their usage. The A-10As flew only 16.5 per cent of all coalition missions – 8,655 combat sorties – and survived heavy damage. Just six Hawgs were lost in combat, five of them to SAMs, one to AAA.



BATTLEFIELD LOITER POTENTIAL
The great asset of remaining over the combat area for protracted periods was enhanced by the Hawg's ability to use in-flight fuelling to maintain their presence for extended periods, unlike fighter-bomber adaptations which could only run 'in-bash-out' type missions. The refuelling slipway was mounted high up on the nose of the A-10A, just ahead of the pilot's cockpit, for maximum visibility.



PENETRATING POWER!
When a PGU-14 DU penetrator round fired by the General Electric 7-barrelled Avenger Gatling gun penetrates the target's turret through the thickest armour, it lacks power to exit, thus remaining inside and voiding the occupants. Decapitated T-72s littered the battlefield in the wake.

DESERT HAWG - NATO COLOURS!
Designed for Close Air Support work in Vietnam, then converted to act as the 'Trip Wire' against the expected Soviet tank assault on Western Europe during the Cold War, the ungainly but supremely efficient and effective A-10A Hawg was based in England and Germany for many years and practised operating from autobahns and the like. Hastily switched to the baking sand deserts of Saudi Arabia when Iraq invaded Kuwait, many went into action still sporting their European camouflage schemes, but were just as effective. The A-10A also carried Maverick underwing missiles and eliminated other targets like SCUD missile launchers, heavy artillery guns, APCs and trucks – 6,834 targets in all for the loss of six of their number.

The Avenger spewed out a lethal cone of 35 APIDU rounds per second, each capable of gutting any known Soviet battle tank and vapourising its crew. They culled Saddam's Tank Corps during Desert Storm.

Digging in the armour to escape the attentions of the roving coalition aircraft merely rendered them inoperational and tactically impotent and in most cases the efforts proved unable to prevent them falling prey to the aircraft seeking to destroy them

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FUTURE WAR

Where Next for Air Combat?

Front line piloted aircraft are pricing themselves out of existence. At the time of writing, the F-22 Raptor costs over US $105 million per aircraft. Even the other US front line fighters are US $35 to $60 million per machine. Only the richest of nations can afford to manufacture these aircraft and those that cannot, can only afford them in limited numbers or buy older F-16s and Russian aircraft. The newest fighters are approaching the fine line where military assets cost too much to risk in combat, yet the various air forces of the world are just now starting to reap the full benefits of communication, Artificial Intelligence and unmanned aircraft technologies.



A CHANGED WORLD
The introduction of stealth technology has seen a reduction in the number of aircraft required to hit key targets in enemy territory. Less aircrew at risk and greater accuracy of the weapons deployed is a tempting scenario for governments wary of funding and political considerations. To remove the pilot and therefore the human risk implications is an understandable driving force. Stealth bombers such as the F-117 have proven their value in numerous recent engagements.



A QUESTION OF EXPENSES
Because new generation fighters as the F-22 Raptor cost over $105 million per aircraft, the pressure on government budgets is growing to new levels. Removing the human fighter pilot and his life supporting technologies could drastically slash the costs as well as allowing the aircraft to be designed with altered streamlining specifications.



NEW POSSIBILITIES
Pilots would be in no danger from training accidents or suffer losses in combat. The expertise of the pilot is safely retained. Depending on how important the destruction of a target is, a combat UAV may be used in a 'Kamikaze' role as a last resort. The combat UAV may be cheaper than a piloted fighter, but they will still be expensive enough that they cannot be casually thrown away. In their combat role they can provide firepower equal to the manned aircraft and remain on station longer. This Predator is preparing for a mission, armed with a range of air-to-ground missiles.

ATTACK OF THE DRONES

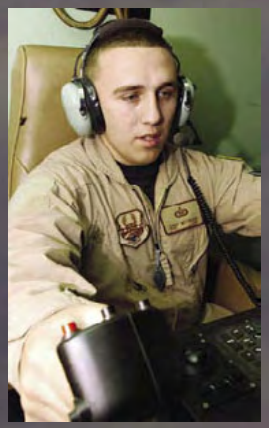
Reconnaissance and surveillance Unmanned Autonomous Vehicles (UAVs) have changed the way battlefields are viewed and fought and there have been the first moves away from a passive role to that of a combat one. So far however, targets have only been restricted to the air-to-ground scenario. Nevertheless, the full combat UAV will not be long coming and both the USAF and US Navy have been performing research along these lines. Such UAVs will be lighter and smaller than human-carrying fighters and cheaper to build and operate. How long before a country starts building these as its national fighter? When this happens, will the traditional fighter pilot fade away?



A BLURRED LINE
Today there are many flight simulators on the market that have very good flight dynamics. The Federal Aviation Authority in the United States even permits student pilots to use Microsoft Flight Simulator for some instrument-only flying time. There are many flight simulators devoted to aerial combat ranging from World War 1 to modern times. The more 'realistic' the flight and weapon models, the more real-world tactics have to be used. There are many sim-only pilots who have more 'flight' time than real fighter pilots. These sim pilots – the best of them – can go head-to-head with real pilots and come out ahead some of the time. While these sim pilots could not step off the street and effectively fly a combat UAV, in all likelihood they could at least attempt a credible mission. They would need training in formal tactics to refine what they already know.



FUTURE ACE?
With the remotely-controlled UAV replacing the piloted fighter, the loop comes full circle. Now the flight simulator and the real life fighter are both working from the armchair rather than the cockpit. In a future war, who knows? Perhaps the best of the simmers will find themselves in the front line!



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