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SPECIAL

WARGAMING

★ CONQUERING THE WORLD, ONE GAME AT A TIME ★

WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

There are some good reasons we're obsessed with conflict.

CONSOLE WAR DIARIES

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FROM SOFTWARE



EMBRACE THE DARKNESS

AS FIRES FADE AND THE WORLD FALLS INTO RUIN, JOURNEY ONCE MORE INTO A UNIVERSE FILLED WITH MORE COLOSSAL ENEMIES AND ENVIRONMENTS. FANS AND NEWCOMERS ALIKE WILL GET LOST IN THE GAMES HALLMARK REWARDING GAMEPLAY AND IMMERSIVE GRAPHICS. NOW ONLY EMBERS REMAIN...

APOCALYPSE EDITION*



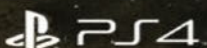
GAME



METAL CASE



* WHILE STOCKS LAST



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YOUR GAME WORLD LIGHTS UP



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A dynamic aerial dogfight scene featuring several World War II-era fighter aircraft. In the foreground, a dark blue P-51 Mustang is prominently displayed, banking sharply to the right. Behind it, a P-47 Thunderbolt is visible. To the right, a Japanese Zero fighter is engaged in combat. Other smaller fighters, including a P-39 Airacobra and a P-40 Warhawk, are scattered throughout the sky. The background shows a bright blue sky with wispy white clouds and a sun flare on the right side. The overall scene conveys a sense of intense aerial warfare.

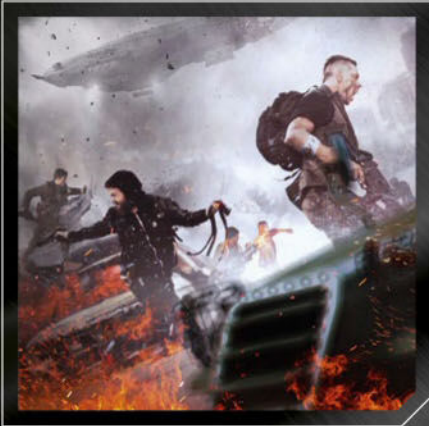
» Games thrive on conflict. With few exceptions, games involve some kind of competition against another force of some kind, whether it be an armed enemy or a turtle that has to be jumped on. Rather than looking at a specific genre in this issue of Hyper we instead chose to investigate a unifying concept in many games - war. Whether you're fighting the undead, Nazis, evil aliens or any combination thereof (space Nazis and Nazi zombies never seem to go out of style), the war for conquest, justice or simple survival lends an easily understandable and palpable urgency to games. Why do we love conflict so much? Read on to find out.

DANIEL WILKS

Ever-Victorious, Iron-Willed Commander

WARGAMING
Nothing but war. And gaming.

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HYPER

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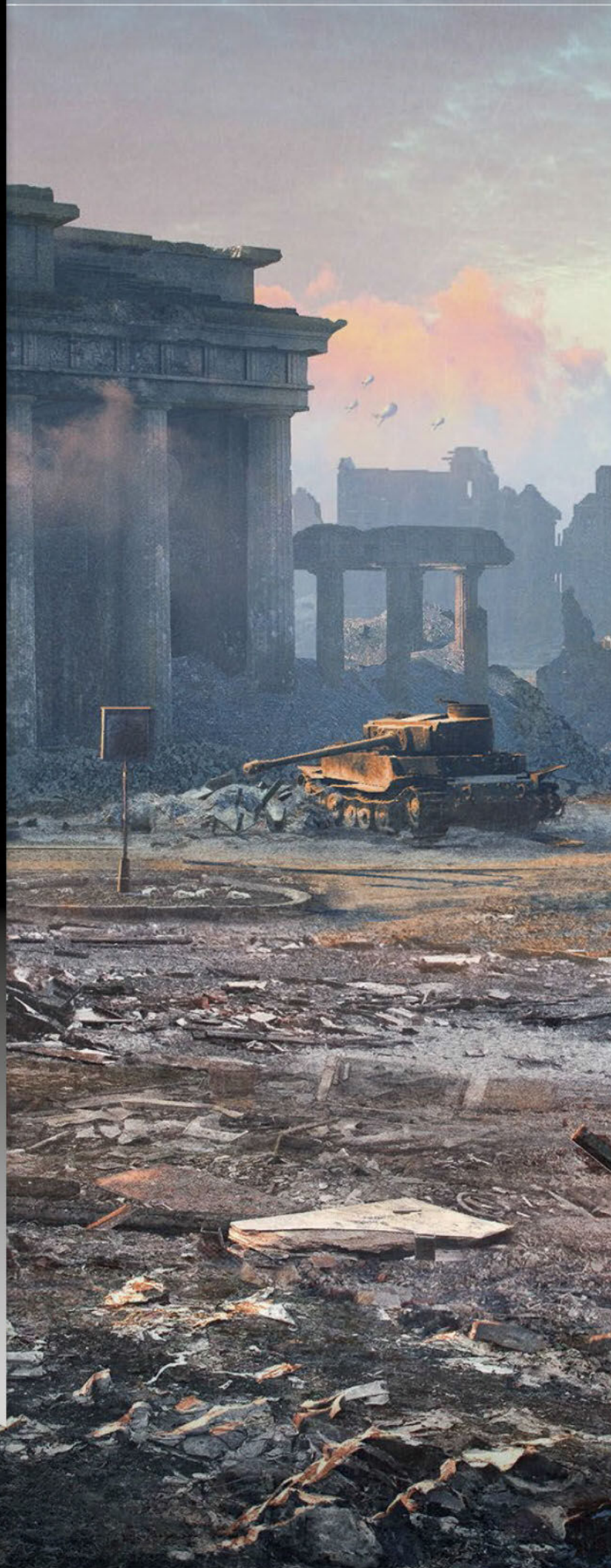
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The background image is a screenshot from the game World of Tanks. It depicts a desolate, war-torn cityscape with heavily damaged, multi-story buildings. In the foreground, a dark-colored tank is positioned, its main gun barrel pointing towards the left. The ground is littered with rubble, including what appears to be a destroyed anti-aircraft gun base. The sky is a pale, hazy blue, suggesting a dawn or dusk setting. The overall tone is somber and gritty.

CASUALTIES OF WARGAMING

*From 120 employees at the launch of World of Tanks to 4,500 staff across 16 offices worldwide today, Wargaming.net has come a long way in the last six years since it launched its sleeper hit. **NATHAN LAWRENCE** breaks down the history of the 'World of' series: through Tanks dominance to Warplanes lows, the rebuilding of Warships, and everything in between.*

Wargaming.net knows what it means to create niche games. In 1998, Victor Kislyi co-founded the company in Belarus, with a handful of enthusiast friends from high school whose initial development ideas revolved around improving on strategy juggernauts such as *Civilization* and *Warcraft*.

Because of this, Wargaming was initially focused on PC-exclusive multiplayer strategy titles. *DBA Online*, the company's maiden title, was a licensed digitised version of a tabletop game with 1,300 hand-painted units. This paved the way for Wargaming's first original IP, *Massive Assault*, with another three releases in the series in as many years. Then Wargaming expanded. It bought out fellow Minsk-based studio *Arise*, and focused on creating real-time strategy series *Order of War*, with back-to-back titles released in 2009 and 2010.

It was during this time that household-name developers such as strategy guru Chris Taylor (*Total Annihilation*) were at the height of their careers, while Wargaming was a barely known developer. In 2010, the same year Taylor released the divisive *Supreme Commander 2*, Wargaming took a gamble on releasing free-to-play action-strategy title *World of Tanks*.

"We were smart enough to realise that the retail, boxed business model was not going to survive for long," said Kislyi at the Wargaming 15th Anniversary panel. Little did he know in 2010, *World of Tanks* was going to change everything for both the future of Wargaming and the way publishers looked at the free-to-play release model.

THE LITTLE TANK THAT COULD

Wargaming knew it was onto something with *World of Tanks*

and attempted to sell the idea to big-name publishers. It was rejected by all of them. "Not a lot of people know, but most of the game publishers at that time said, 'It's not going to work. People cannot associate themselves with a tank that doesn't have a head, that doesn't have arms and legs, and cannot have personalities,'" explained Jasper Nicolas, General Manager of the Asia-Pacific region at Wargaming, at the Wargaming 15th Anniversary event.

"At that time, everything was on subscription, or most of the free-to-play games were only fantasy games. It was really difficult to convince publishers to take it on. Nobody wanted it." Kislyi was determined to prove those publishers wrong.

He bet big on *World of Tanks*, self-funding its release with all of Wargaming's available money, and published the ambitious project in Russia. The unthinkable happened: thousands of people signed up for the game every day. What's more impressive is these were word-of-mouth subscribers, as Wargaming hadn't invested in advertising or assistance from PR.

Less than a year after the launch of the closed beta, *World of Tanks* had collected more than 1 million registrations across Russia, Europe and the United States. It was a resounding success that paved the way for the expansion to other platforms and the next chapters in a thematically related planned trilogy.

WORLD DOMINATION

When *World of Tanks* released, Wargaming was quite sizeable with 200 people working on the game. Fast-forward to today,

and Wargaming has

expanded to 16 offices around the globe with more than 4,500 staff. To put that growth into perspective, that's 1,000 more staff than 18 months prior when we spoke with Kislyi at Gamescom 2014.

In 2013, the juggernaut developer/publisher was 15 studios strong with some 2,000 employees. "Right now, in just three years, we've transported from a small enthusiastic group of friends into a global, capitalist, blood-sucking corporation," joked Kislyi at the Wargaming 15th Anniversary panel.

It's a meteoric expansion that's been made possible almost exclusively on the strength of *World of Tanks*. The anniversary was also used as a way to spruik the then soon-to-be-released *World of Warplanes*, which Wargaming saw as the next logical iteration of its war-centric franchise. *World of Tanks* spans the "golden era" of tank warfare, so *World of Warplanes* was meant to replicate a successful gameplay formula in a similar era, albeit at a different altitude.

WHAT GOES UP...

World of Tanks was announced in 2009 and released a year later, while *World of Warplanes* was announced in 2011 — just two months after the release of *World of Tanks* in the US and Europe — but didn't fly into release until the end of 2013. Compared to other studios, it's not a long development cycle, but given Wargaming's history of fast turnaround, internally, it felt like a long time.

"We never release games that are not ready for the market, and when I say ready, it has to be really perfect," said Nicolas, in relation to the then in-development *World of Warplanes* at the Wargaming 15th Anniversary. "Wargaming is very passionate about our development efforts and we cannot fail. We cannot move back in terms of quality, because we've already set the

LOCALISED FEEDBACK

Deon Pek, head of customer relations for Asia at Wargaming, said the two biggest points of feedback from the Asia-Pacific region relate to matchmaking and latency. Oceanic players used to have to connect to US servers, which was shifted to the better latency of Singapore in 2013. Despite talk, there are still no local servers in Australia.





Hopes for a repeat of the success of World of Tanks were shot down in flames



bar with World of Tanks and we have to do better than that.”

Despite the confident picture he painted, Nicolas still maintained “very modest” expectations for the release of Warplanes in light of the runaway success of Tanks that preceded it. At the same event, Producer Sergei Ilyushin talked us through the changes for Warplanes: the rebuilding of the render engine, community feedback that helped to shape development during closed test phases, and the ultimate separation of the game into ‘arcade’ and ‘simulator’ multiplayer offerings.

From what Wargaming was showing of World of Warplanes at the Wargaming 15th Anniversary, it seemed like it was poised to replicate the winning formula of World of Tanks.

...MUST COME DOWN

World of Warplanes was supposed to be a game that could fly circles around competitor Gaijin Entertainment’s War Thunder, but it started at a disadvantage given Gaijin’s proven flight-simulator pedigree. As it turned out, trying to recreate the lightning in a bottle of Tanks’ successful gameplay formula was incredibly difficult in a 3D space

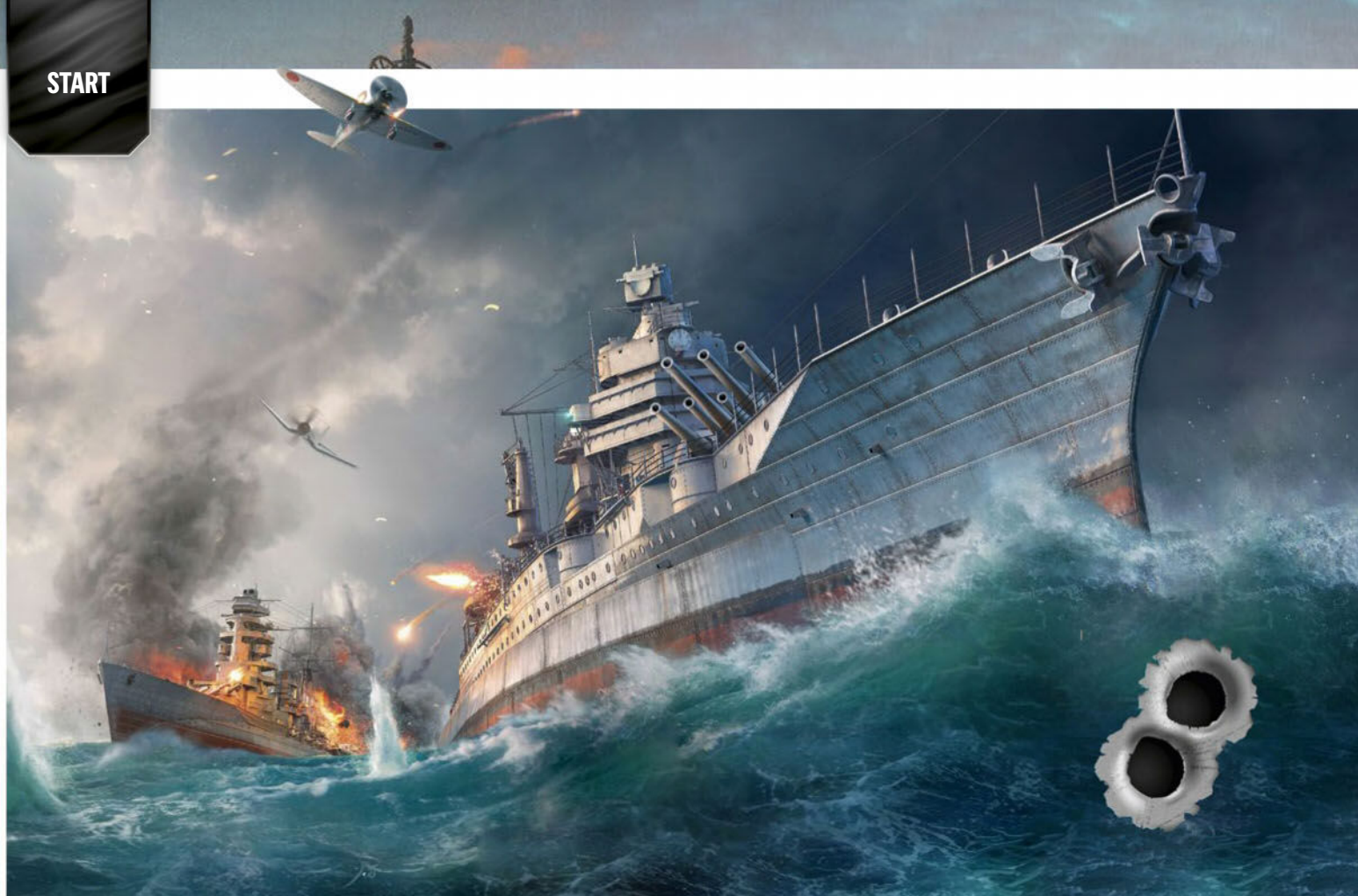
with vehicles that are in a state of perpetual forward momentum, with little to no cover opportunities.

“With World of Warplanes, we discovered that aerial combat is a truly hard thing to master, as you have to fight and move in three dimensions,” reasoned Kislyi, reflecting on the comparative failure of Warplanes (next to World of Tanks) in our recent interview.

A few months prior to the release of World of Warships, during our visit to Lesta Studio in Saint Petersburg, director of global operations Ivan Moroz acknowledged that this comparative failure of Warplanes had an impact on the third game in the series, World of Warships.

“If we speak about World of Warplanes in terms of the size of the community, we can say it’s not very successful,” admitted Moroz. “But if we talk about it in terms of the experience for the company, I can say it’s a really successful project. Based on the experience of World of Warplanes we’ve made a lot of changes to World of Warships, which were really critical. The main outcome we learnt from Warplanes is that we understood we should not do Tanks on water.”

The very definition of a Kodak moment, warplanes notwithstanding



Those hoping for a crossover, hold your breath: there are no Warplanes in Warships

SAILING PAST TURBULENT WATERS

It's understandable why Wargaming wanted to replicate the World of Tanks experience for World of Warplanes and World of Warships, given the unprecedented success and positive community reception of the trailblazing title. But it's also what led to Warplanes feeling like Tanks in the skies, which meant that Warships developer Lesta Studio had to return to the drawing board after the community didn't embrace Warplanes in a way that Wargaming had hoped.

"In the beginning, Wargaming was going to have three main titles in the same [gameplay] concept: tanks, planes and ships," said Moroz. "The first prototypes and the first stages [of World of Warships development] were based on that idea, but then thanks to the experience of Warplanes, we've seen it is not the best way to build the games. Somewhere around a year and a half [into the development of Warships], there was a big change in the game mechanics and the game concept itself."

During our studio visit last year, it was clear Lesta was in no rush to release World of Warships. The developers were open about how much the game had changed over the course of development,

transforming from Tanks on water to a hardcore military simulator, which was then stripped back to enhance player accessibility.

Player accessibility is a key component of unifying the different gameplay of Tanks, Warplanes and Warships into a single series. It's also achieved visually in what Warships art director Anton Oparin describes as an aesthetic that splices realism with cinematic splashes. Given that Lesta had to return to the drawing board, development for World of Warships was the longest in the series: announced in August 2011, it wasn't publicly released until September 2015.

The extra development times appears to have paid off, though. "Recently, we launched World of Warships, and with more than six million players joining in less than six months, we can really see continual growth," said Kislyi.

MULTIPLATFORM REFORM

Given the nature of how ports are usually handled, it would be easy to dismiss the console versions of World of Tanks as mere ports. The reality is that while the core gameplay is the same, World of Tanks on console has been rebuilt from the ground up. Originally, Wargaming and Microsoft forged a timed-exclusive deal for World of

Tanks on Xbox 360, which was said to be agreed upon by Wargaming because of the 47 million users on Xbox Live at the time.

The Xbox 360 version led to an Xbox One release, both of which paved the way for the recently released PlayStation 4 version, the latter of which recorded more than 1 million downloads in its first month of release, according to Kislyi.

Nicolas mentioned that Wargaming's purchased Day One Studios (which was rebranded Wargaming Chicago-Baltimore), in order to have an experienced multiplatform developer to help the then PC-exclusive company bring World of Tanks to consoles. While certain assets are shared across PC and console development, the two core platforms are treated as separate entities.

"They really are two separate products," explained Senior Game Designer at Chicago-Baltimore Chad Steingraber. "The PC we keep taking updates from them; we're taking all of the server code and stuff, and any of the new maps and tanks. But at that point, we're talking about what we take is the assets and then we rebuild those, and then the actual numbers underneath all of that are things that we adjust to fit the console, rather than just saying, 'That's the PC; now it's like this.'"

Changes had to be made to controls, user-interface and visual fidelity to properly recreate the Tanks experience on console, specifically with larger-screen TVs in mind. "The visual fidelity [on new-gen consoles] is actually an increase from the PC version," said Steingraber. "We are taking what they have and then we are remaking those things in higher definition. The tanks were all completely remodelled and are in the highest definition across any platform out there. The maps are completely rebuilt on our own engine and are the best in the World of Tanks universe right now."

WHAT'S THE META?

World of Tanks has also bred distinct meta strategies across PC and console. While PC players have a tendency to play slower and more strategically, Wargaming has observed that console players favour aggressive tactics. "That's just the mentality of the console gamers: they want to get into the action and get fighting real fast," said Steingraber. "[It's] to their detriment, sometimes, because they're maybe playing in a tank that they shouldn't be doing that in in the first place."

This overarching mentality of the console community inspired Wargaming to introduce console-exclusive training to help newcomers understand that each tank class is designed to play a specific role on the battlefield. That said, aggressive tactics can still pay off.

"[With] the PC version, you know if you 'Rambo out', you're probably dead," said Lead Game Designer at Chicago-Baltimore Jeff Gregg. "[But] when everybody on the team does that, you can win. You're in this console game, and all of us because we're PC, you almost just get used to it. 'This is how you play. You go

this line. They're going to go to this line, and whoever moves first,' or whatever. [On console], you would have the entire enemy team rushing an open field, and you could pick off two of them, and you'd get overrun and they'd win. And you were like, 'That worked!'"

Despite an abundance of slower, tactical matches, these aggressive so-called 'YOLO tactics' were put to devastatingly effective use by Chinese pro team EL Gaming during last year's World of Tanks Pacific Rumble showdown in Tokyo on PC. "EL Gaming came up with something that I don't think they get enough credit for in the community," explained Oscar Miranda, North America eSports Manager. "They came up with this style of gameplay that looked like the way an RTS player plays all of his units together: all of them just moving in this kind of cohesion, driving right in."

WORLD OF ESPORTS

Prior to EL's successful assault at the Pacific Rumble, its aggressive tactics were countered by Hellraisers during the WGL Grand Final, and the Russian team took home the grand prize. These World of Tanks professional tournaments are attended by thousands each year and viewed by millions, but the Tanks tournament scene had much humbler beginnings.

The professional tournaments continue to evolve, as Wargaming is unafraid to make big changes to

the formula to not only keep things balanced, but also to ensure that tournaments are exciting to watch. For instance, Wargaming recently lifted the Tier VIII eSports tank restriction and allowed for Tier X tank selections.

Before this change, which was controversial among the players we talked to at the Pacific Rumble, Wargaming introduced the Attack/Defence mode in 2014 as a way to incentivise more exciting tournament matches and encourage fewer no-result stalemates.

EL Gaming's console-like YOLO tactics may not have been rewarded at last year's WGL Grand Finals, but it seems that Wargaming is subtly edging the Tanks professional community towards more aggressive tactics.

While Wargaming is paving the way for potential eSports on World of Tanks console and World of Warships on PC, specifically, it's still waiting for enough demand from the community to build the kind of professional tournaments that World of Tanks currently enjoys on PC.

"Our players are always vocal and ask whether eSports is coming to console Tanks," said Kislyi. "We added Clan functionality to Xbox for players that wanted to team up with their friends and improve their skills as a unit. Right now, we're focused on growing competitive gaming for World of Tanks on PC, but we'd never discount it coming to console if the demand is high enough." ❧

COMPETING TITLES

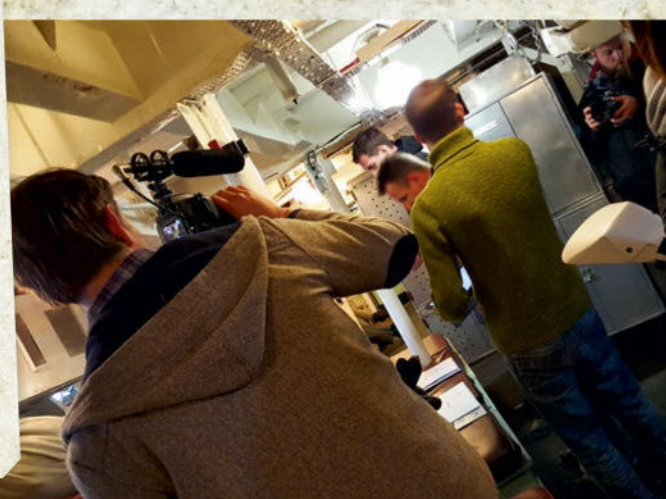
Time focused on our competitors is time when we can be making our own games better," said Kislyi. "The industry is always changing, and it can be a battle to keep up. Honestly, the biggest competitor for us was the previous patch we introduced. You should overcome yourself; you should be better than a year ago — a month ago."



DIG WE MUST

How developer Wargaming is helping preserve history, and the challenges of preserving our military past.

▀ DAVID HOLLINGWORTH ▀



Wargaming is a really interesting company. It's developed one of the biggest money-spinners in gaming in the shape of World of Tanks, and while its effort on taking that same formula into the air – World of Warplanes – may have stalled, the more recent World of Warships is just as addictive and fun as its predecessor.

We recently attended the recording of an upcoming promotional video for World of Warships, and it was a chance to see how Wargaming interfaces with museums and conservation societies in action. The company spent a weekend filming on and around the HMS Cavalier, a light cruiser that saw action in World War II, at the Chatham Historic Dockyards in the United Kingdom. The video – yet to be released – was hosted by the company's own Head of Military Relations for Europe, Richard Cutland, and BBC

documentarian Dan Snow, while the video itself was filmed via a 360-degree GoPro rig to create the virtual experience of being aboard the vessel. Incredible stuff.

Tracy Spaight Director of Special Projects was on hand for the filming, and we got a chance to sit down with him and talk about some of the company's, well... special projects! But what does that even mean, exactly?

"Well, I'm a historian by training. I went to Cornell University, and then spent a year at Cambridge doing history and philosophy science," he told us, and so working on some of the projects he's been a part of with Wargaming can be pretty exciting. "Yeah, I leap out of bed every morning!"

"Most of my time, though, I'm sitting in front of a computer and working on spreadsheets," Spaight admitted, "but every now and then we get to go out and do something really cool. We've only had the one really big archaeological dig, but I've worked with a lot of consultants, such as maritime archaeologists. We've had a few projects where it would require more expertise than anything we'd have internally in the company."

"We believe, that in each of these cases, you have to do everything to the highest professional standards, and observe all the ethical precepts that that requires. I'm not an archaeologist but I have learnt a lot in the last few years, and if you're ever involved in the recovery of artefacts from the Second World War they should be treated as, firstly, non-commercial things; they are first and foremost part of our common heritage.

"There are stories embedded in these artefacts, and around them, and the moment that you disturb the site, if you're not recording everything you're going to lose information, and you don't want to do that."

What Spaight's talking about is the field of conflict archaeology – an admittedly odd thing for a game company to concerned about.

"This is the idea that the artefacts and places of World War II are worthy of study in themselves, no different to going to dust off pottery shards at far older sites. In this case, whether it's an airfield in Burma, or a shipwreck on the bottom of the sea, you don't want to go and start disturbing things and losing their context – unless your goal is better served by making sure that

the thing you're working on is not rotting away, and could be in a museum and undergo conservation. There are contexts in which that's appropriate, and sometimes it's better to leave it there."

But why does Wargaming even get involved in digging up and conserving precious historical material? Wargaming's worked on everything from restoring tanks for the Bovington Tank Museum in the UK and the Australian Armour & Artillery Museum in Queensland. In fact, while we were writing this article Wargaming was hosting special event to unveil a pristinely restored Sentinel cruiser tank: a rare piece of military history, and the only Australian-made tank of World War II. The company's also been involved in some archaeological efforts, like trying to find buried World War II Spitfire aircraft in Burma – though that search was eventually called off, because who knew finding deliberately buried fighter planes would be so tough? A lot of the company's work, though, has focused on the Russian equipment and monuments, which is hardly a surprise.

"I think it's very much a matter of giving back. When we thought about starting Special Projects in the beginning, it came from a very genuine place in the company. This is a company filled with historical enthusiasts, or they served in the military, or they're currently in the reserve forces of different countries, so people are passionate about this stuff. Everybody's grandparents were involved in the Second World War, particularly when you're talking about Russia – it's not some remote or distant thing to them.

"So, for us, in a way we're in dialogue with our own grandparents. I think that's a big part of what we do: that we have been successful as a company is because we make games about this time period. So I think it's appropriate that we give back by helping museums conserve the tanks, or planes, or ships of World War II so that they're around for our grandkids, when nobody's alive can remember the war."

"We're going to have the artefacts, and the stories, and if we can help that process I think it's a worthy thing to support."

Given the success Wargaming has had with the free-to-play model, we're glad to see the company giving back to both the community and to lovers of history, too. ❧



FOR HONOR

▲ ALEX MANN ▲



DEVELOPER: UBISOFT
MONTREAL
PRODUCER: UBISOFT
PLATFORM: PC, PS4, XBO
RELEASE DATE: TBA

» Three of history's greatest warrior-types going at it sounds like the setting of a kid's (read: my) bedroom. Surely the only way to claim the 'Ultimate Warrior' crown is to mush the plastic bodies of action figures together until one ends up victorious? But it seems Ubisoft Montreal has found a better path, taking up the cry of, "Chronology be damned!" with an attempt to create the most historically accurate, albeit chronologically inaccurate, competitive hack and slasher, to date. Thanks to a strong focus on each faction's unique fighting style, this could be the definitive place for Vikings, Knights and Samurai to strut their stuff, creating intense individual bouts that put my epic plastic duels to shame.

CLASH OF THE TITANS

The current build doing the rounds is only showing a fraction of what's on offer, namely a multiplayer mode called Dominion. This mode pits two armies against each other: each with four players fighting to secure key points. Teams are

fuelled by AI soldiers, whose primary function is to help take and defend obstacles, while also making battles look far more epic. Main players will have no trouble hacking through the fodder — if you've ever played Dynasty Warriors then you know the type — but when confronted with a real opponent, things begin to get interesting. Players switch between three stances — high, bottom-left and bottom-right, with the goal being to read an opponent's stance to either parry an incoming attack, or brutally slice through their defences. These decisions happen in real-time, so lightning fast choices are a must, leading to bouts that can be quick and brutal if the wrong decisions are made. The other side of the coin is legendary, with evenly matched players falling into intense confrontations, seeing skilled warriors slice, roll, dodge and parry until one side is finally victorious. Points are gained from either killing opponents or by holding areas, and once a certain number is reached, the attackers enter break mode: putting the opposite team

at a permadeath disadvantage.

CHOOSE YOUR CHARACTER

Dominion won't be the only mode available, which hopefully leads to the possibility of a three army all-out war. One surprising feature is that there will be local split-screen, a true rarity these days, as well as talk of a single-player campaign. We've only been privy to one character from each faction, but each side will also have an assortment of different warriors to play with. So far we've seen a greatsword-wielding Knight known as The Warden, a sword-and-shield bearing Viking Raider, and a katana twirling Oni Assassin from the Samurai ranks. These come in both male and female models and will be fully customisable, with unique perks, once further classes are released. From what's been shown, For Honor has the potential for some of the coolest PvP going around — whether the game will be interesting enough as far as longevity's concerned is another matter entirely. «



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BATTLEBORN

ALEX MANN



DEVELOPER: GEARBOX
SOFTWARE
PRODUCER: 2K GAMES
PLATFORM: PC, PS4, XBO
RELEASE DATE: 3 MAY, 2016

Here at Hyper we have issues with being objective about Borderlands. Nothing shady is going down, it's just we love it so damn much. Editor Wilks has put more time into Borderlands 2 than anyone thought humanly possible, and I've championed Roland and Axton more than could be considered healthy — variation may be the spice of life for some but, y'know, turrets. Needless to say, we have huge expectations when it comes to Battleborn. At first, the game looked like Gearbox's own MOBA, but to pigeonhole it in such a way is not only lazy but downright wrong.

FLAVOUR CITY

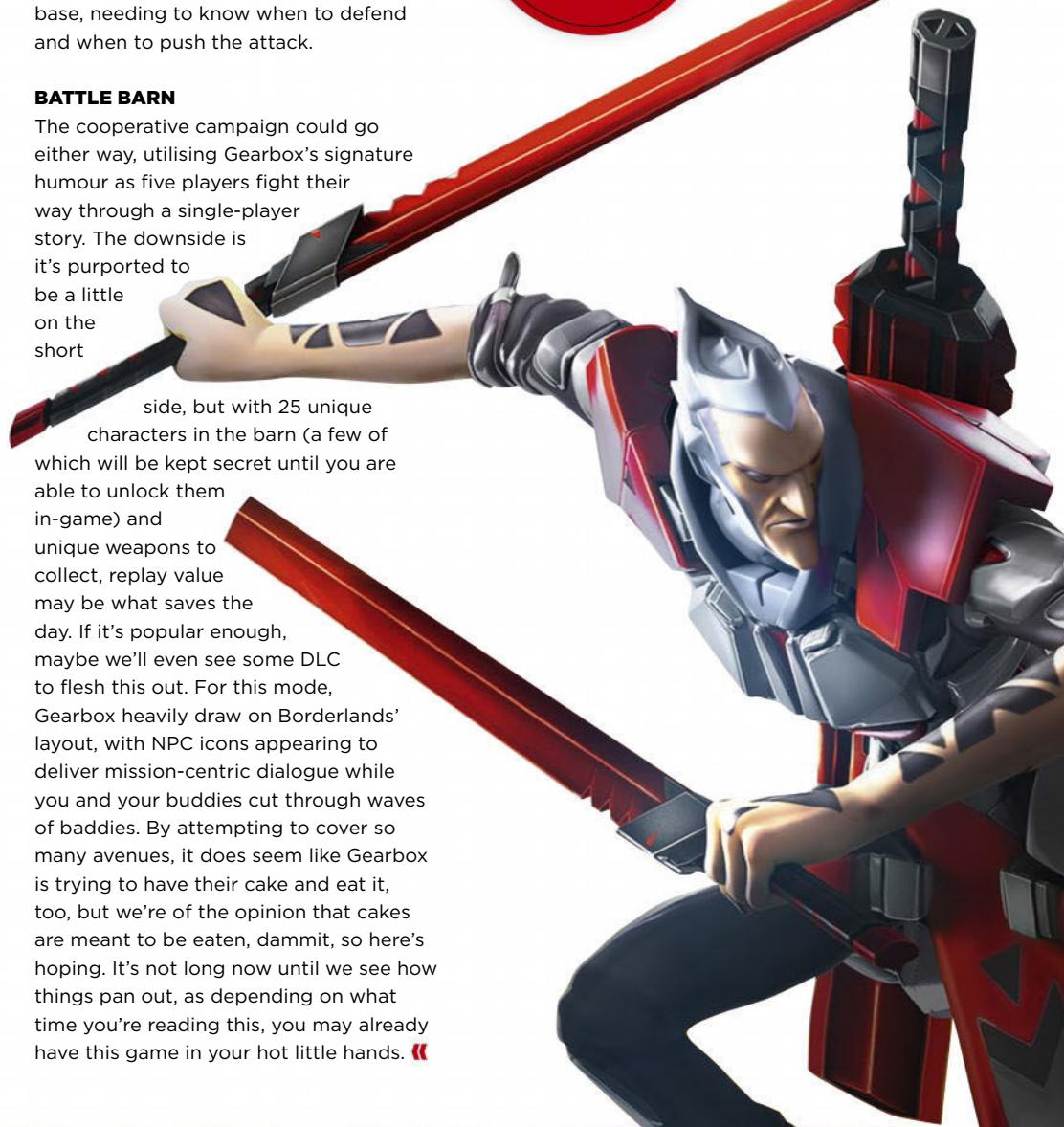
The MOBA element comes from Meltdown, one of Battleborn's three multiplayer modes. This mode sees two teams with five players on each side duke it out in an attempt to move minions from their own base to their enemy's. Minions come in three different sizes: small walkers, medium flyers and larger runners. The bigger the minion to enter an enemy's base, the more points earned. Maps are laid out in lanes, with choke points being the best place to tackle the enemy. Sound like a MOBA yet? You'd be right, if it were the only way to play the game. But this is only one of three multiplayer modes available, not to mention a co-op single-player campaign. The second is called Capture, a more standard FPS affair, being an objective-based death match, with players capturing points and racking up kills. For those less inclined to walk the PvP route, Incursion is your jam, seeing players team up against waves of AI as they attempt to defend their base. It is

essentially a horde mode, except players are also tasked with destroying the enemy base, needing to know when to defend and when to push the attack.

BATTLE BARN

The cooperative campaign could go either way, utilising Gearbox's signature humour as five players fight their way through a single-player story. The downside is it's purported to be a little on the short

side, but with 25 unique characters in the barn (a few of which will be kept secret until you are able to unlock them in-game) and unique weapons to collect, replay value may be what saves the day. If it's popular enough, maybe we'll even see some DLC to flesh this out. For this mode, Gearbox heavily draw on Borderlands' layout, with NPC icons appearing to deliver mission-centric dialogue while you and your buddies cut through waves of baddies. By attempting to cover so many avenues, it does seem like Gearbox is trying to have their cake and eat it, too, but we're of the opinion that cakes are meant to be eaten, dammit, so here's hoping. It's not long now until we see how things pan out, as depending on what time you're reading this, you may already have this game in your hot little hands. ☞



TOOTH AND TAIL

ALEX MANN



DEVELOPER:
POCKETWATCH GAMES
PRODUCER: POCKETWATCH GAMES
PLATFORM: PC, MAC, LINUX
RELEASE DATE: TBA 2016

» Sometimes real-time strategy games can be a little overwhelming. There's nothing wrong with having a hugely engrossing game to fall into, but when every game relies on how many attacks per minute, clicks per second, or macros per millisecond you're able to achieve, things can get carpal tunnel crazy. Tooth and Tail plans to simplify this, selling itself as an arcade RTS that's easy to pick up and play. All matches sit under 12 minutes, and the gameplay itself utilises only four buttons, making it just as comfortable to play on a gamepad as it is with a keyboard and mouse.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Simplifying controls doesn't mean the game is light on. While the devs have championed its party nature, they still stress the deep, creative strategy required to best your opponent. One-on-one battles see red facing off against blue, with players only having direct control of their commander character as opposed to their whole army. Instead of a cursor, this literal flag-bearing mouse prances around the battlefield capturing bases, building territories and leading

units all at once. This only works because line of sight is limited to the areas around this icon, which means in order to see what your enemy is doing, you need to expose yourself by bravely prancing into enemy territory every once in a while. The limited line of sight also sets up plenty of opportunities for surprises, with the ability to lure an unsuspecting commander into territory manned by sniper balloons, scout mines or hidden chameleon assassins. Armies themselves can only ever be made up of six units at a time, which might sound small, but means you need to choose each unit very carefully. The very crux of Tooth and Tail comes from the military term "tooth-to-tail ratio" (surprisingly not "tooth and nail"): ensuring your soldiers, aka the tooth element, have enough supply from the support, or tail element. With this in mind, the limited army size makes sense given the short matches. To sustain your army, planting farms and other backups

are essential, as not doing so runs the risk of losing the game because of starvation.

RAT-A-TAT-A-TAT

The character design may remind you of recent indie Armello, or even the hybrid characters from Brian Jacques' Redwall series. This is no coincidence, as designer Jerome Jacinto was hired after showing off his impressive folio of Redwall fan art, where mice swing broadswords and badgers wield giant maces. Tooth and Tail drums these critters in the mechanical age, seeing boars spray flamethrowers, squirrels fire pistols and ferrets launch grenades. While the concept art is detailed as hell, the actual game has opted for an old-school RTS look, channelling '90s favourites like Command & Conquer. An approachable RTS seems like a tricky feat to pull off, but if Pocketwatch is able to deliver what it promises, Tooth and Tail has the potential to be the first great gamepad real-time strategy game. ☐



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TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER

Because games with vampires don't have to suck

▀ ALEX MANN ▀



DEVELOPER:
CREATIVE ASSEMBLY
PUBLISHER: SEGA
PLATFORM: PC, MAC, LINUX
RELEASE DATE:
24 MAY, 2016



Another silly Red Shirt fell for the obvious 'free hugs' sign

From the Shogun era to Medieval England, Total War has always offered a real-world basis. Yet the latest outing is about as far in the opposite direction as you can go, bringing monsters, magic and high fantasy from Warhammer's colourful world. But that hasn't scared off the team at Creative Assembly, already having committed to two future standalone instalments alongside a flurry of additional content packs.

A HAMMY LOT

Players will be able to get behind one of four fantasy armies: the Empire, the Dwarfs (not Dwarves), the Greenskins and the Vampire Counts, with each team being led by one of eight legendary lords from Warhammer Fantasy Battles. The Greenskins, for example, can either choose to follow the Black Orc Grimgor Ironhide or the surprisingly strategic Azhag the Slaughterer. Selecting the right Lord is important, as each Lord has their own unique skills and goals that can be upgraded throughout the round, offering new strengths, alliances and passive abilities. But leaders aren't everything, as the other skill trees available focus more on your army than its leader, covering the strategic, tactical and battle prowess of your current units. To ensure each of Warhammer's varying armies feels authentic, Creative Assembly has had to make some amendments to Total War's usual approach, like offering race-

specific sequences. For the Dwarfs, this comes in the form of the Dammaz Kron, otherwise known as the Great Book of Grudges. All transgressions against fellow Dwarfs are documented here, and it falls to the current leader to set these right, at the risk of losing respect from his people. For the Greenskins, it's in the form of the less democratic "fightiness" trait, which means if units go too long without an enemy to kill, they'll all just start killing each other.

TOTALLY WAR

As always with a merging of franchises, not everyone will be happy. Those who play Total War for its historical element may be disappointed, but gameplay fans shouldn't be too quick to shy away from this joining of forces. Despite the changes, the game still very much feels like a Total War title, with familiar layouts and similar systems in place allowing for veterans to pick up the Warhammer specific nuances pretty easily. It's still a system of Generals, Admirals and Agents, only this time the Agents are known as Heroes and all three are far more hands-on in the battlefield. For those who aren't into online battles, the epic historical scenarios are instead replaced by leader-focused quests that allow you to unlock special mounts and gear for further use. While there are only four armies to start with, the Chaos Warriors will be available as DLC from the game's launch, with hopefully more coming in the future. «

GEARS OF WAR 4

ALEX MANN



DEVELOPER: THE COALITION
 PRODUCER: MICROSOFT STUDIOS
 PLATFORM: XBO
 RELEASE DATE: Q3 2016

Since the departure of lead designer Cliff "Cliffy B" Beszinski, Gears of War has sat stagnant. Gears of War: Judgment came and went, offering an experience that can only be described as "meh", with the series existing in that long exhale until E3 last year where it was announced Epic was no longer on board. The buck has now been passed to Microsoft-owned company The Coalition, putting its future in an interesting position. A new era of Gears of War is on the way, leaving a lot to speculate on and even more to anticipate. One thing's for sure: change is on the way, and what that means is anyone's guess.

WHO LOVES YA BABY?

Twenty-five years have passed since the events of Gears of War 3 and a new trio of heroes is taking the spotlight. Front and centre we have JD Fenix, a freedom fighting renegade and estranged son of Marcus Fenix. He seems far less gruff than the flavour-saving veteran we're used to, but depending on what route the new series will walk, his nature could be a nice change of pace. Beside him stands Delmont "Del" Walker, a fellow ex-soldier who fled the military alongside young Fenix after what is being described as a "mysterious incident". No doubt the game will go into this in more detail, but somehow the two escaped, finding shelter among the Outsiders, (points for originality here) being literally a community who live outside the walled cities of planet Sera. So far it sounds very Marcus and Dom, but the final character,

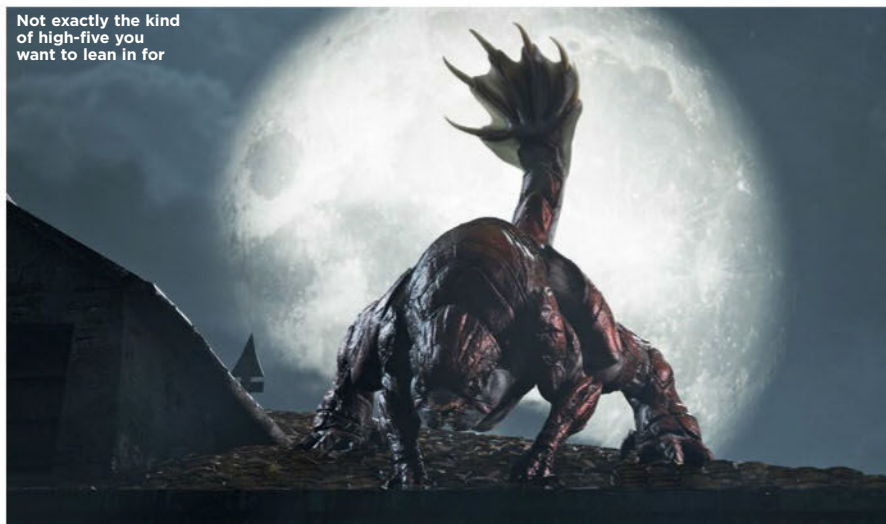
Kait Diaz, comes as a breath of fresh air. She's a survivalist who, unlike the other playable characters, is not so familiar with the life of a soldier. The E3 trailer did show both Kait and JD traipsing around in COG armour though, which means the crew must either rejoin the military effort or take up arms in stolen attire. It's obviously a turning point for Gears, as their designs alone show a change in style. No longer are the frames of these warriors bullish, lumps of muscle: they're replaced now with lithe, streamlined bodies that actually look human — they even have necks!

IT'S JUST THE WIND

The game plans to go back to the darker, horror roots that were evident in sections of the original Gears of War. A new,

unknown threat is on the rise, which could act as the perfect basis to build suspense with a number of slow reveals. But it doesn't seem like The Coalition is paring things back. In true Gears fashion, even the horror element is hitting the 'roids, with new creatures known as Pouncers on the prowl in large numbers, while violent storms toss cars through the air and blow chunks from solid brick buildings. At the moment, the official word is that the game will only be running two-player campaign co-op, cutting out the four-player mayhem of the previous two titles. If, however, you played the recently released Gears of War: Ultimate Edition, you can soon find out, given that you've been granted instant access to the upcoming beta. ☞

Not exactly the kind of high-five you want to lean in for



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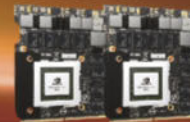


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NO. 1 IN GAMING

WARHAMMER 40,000: ETERNAL CRUSADE

ALEX MANN



HQ in early 2013, thousands of fans died. So that fans of the game in general, had thousands died with the game. The game later another early access and for fans of the grim dark early access code for two factions, Space Marines, and pits them in an MMO-based variety of classes, abilities. As it feels somewhat like a combination of a more proof of concept product. It may be an MMO, but the game is only part of the game. Released at this time, developers know how to do it. The finished game will be an action against Chaos that can affect the game and gameplay. The game will feature two factions — the Space Marines — the game with the Space Marines, it looks as if the game will be a mix of rather early access. Marines, killed from the game and Blood Marines are an worshippers of Chaos gods: a mesh. That said,

the developers have promised unit-type updates, so more unique character options may become available as the game goes on. That said, each class features unique skills, abilities and weapons, giving them a nice variation in play, from the short-range jetpacks and aerial slam attacks of Assault Marines through to the healing and debuffing psychic powers of Chaos Marine medics.

One thing that should make 40k fans very happy is how the multiplayer maps are laid out. They are huge, varied and designed in such a way that vehicles can be used as literal roadblocks to funnel enemies into fire zones. Capture points are mostly indoors, making action much tighter and giving melee based units an equal chance to shine. So far only two vehicles are available for play, the Predator tank and Rhino troop carrier, but they show real use on the battlefield both as troop carriers and area-denial weapons. When the Orks and Eldar are introduced to the game, hopefully we'll see Warbikes, Battlewagons, Fire Prisms and Wave Serpents implemented, as well.

Although Eternal Crusade isn't really showing off any actual MMO content as yet, the multiplayer battles, though rough and hampered by a very dodgy early access framerate, are showing real promise. Fingers crossed that the PvE content and expanded PvP battles will give Warhammer 40k fans the kind of action they've been looking for. There's no set release date as yet, but we should be able to get hands on with a final version of Eternal Crusade by the end of the year. ☛

DEVELOPER: BEHAVIOUR
INTERACTIVE
PUBLISHER: BANDAI NAMCO
ENTERTAINMENT
PLATFORM: PC, PS4, XBO
DATE: 2016

HEARTS OF IRON IV

ALEX MANN



It's hard to find more enthusiastic World War II nerds than Paradox. Since the early 2000s, the team has built three games that focus purely on the earth-shattering period between 1936 and 1948. Originally pegged to be released halfway through last year, their fourth instalment is almost upon us, having been pushed back a few times in order to refine the overwhelming amount of options that the new game provides. This time around, multiplayer games can house up to 32 players at a time with matches capable of running for 10+ hours in either competitive or cooperative bouts. This is because any nation involved in the conflict is now playable, from the smallest countries trying to survive to the biggest powers vying for control.

WARTIME BLUES

As is tradition with the series, the game places a huge emphasis on factual history. This means that real-world events such as the Spanish Civil War or the death of King George will activate as the dates tick over, affecting industry, alliances and worldwide tension. Each country also has its own unique skill tree, governing what choices you can make as your country progresses, to ensure you remain within that country's bounds. That said, Paradox is determined to make Hearts of Iron IV less rigid than the previous titles, with alternative histories and paths allowing for far more freedom and creativity in the way players tackle their strategy. Thanks to these branching paths, officers will now be a mixed bag of historical figures

and game-generated characters, allowing for greater variation. This means Nazi Germany can now be crushed before it even begins advancing. Conversely, it can completely decimate Great Britain with the strength of its overwhelming blitzkrieg. It's your choice.

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

For a crew so focused on the intricate details, it's surprising to see Paradox has streamlined certain decisions. No longer do you have to fiddle with the nitty-gritty details such as organising transport ships for units who need to cross oceans. Instead, you're able to instantly assigned a convoy to get them where they need to go. This puts the onus on strategy and decision-making, allowing for more complex strategy based on what resources you've chosen

to develop without the fiddly bits getting in the way. The world map itself is looking vastly improved, with a day-and-night cycle that's governed by a rotating sun and moon, which can be seen reflecting off the glistening oceans, and dynamic weather conditions come into play. Sandstorms and snowfall will now hinder aerial and ground units, forcing players to be able to adapt to their surroundings, even using it to their advantage. There are an enormous amount of new features but, as a whole, Hearts of Iron IV seems to be making things neater, cutting down on micromanagement to allow for more creative play styles. While the delay has been a bummer, it's perfectly understandable, hopefully ensuring the finished product will be a game that players can completely immerse themselves in. ❧



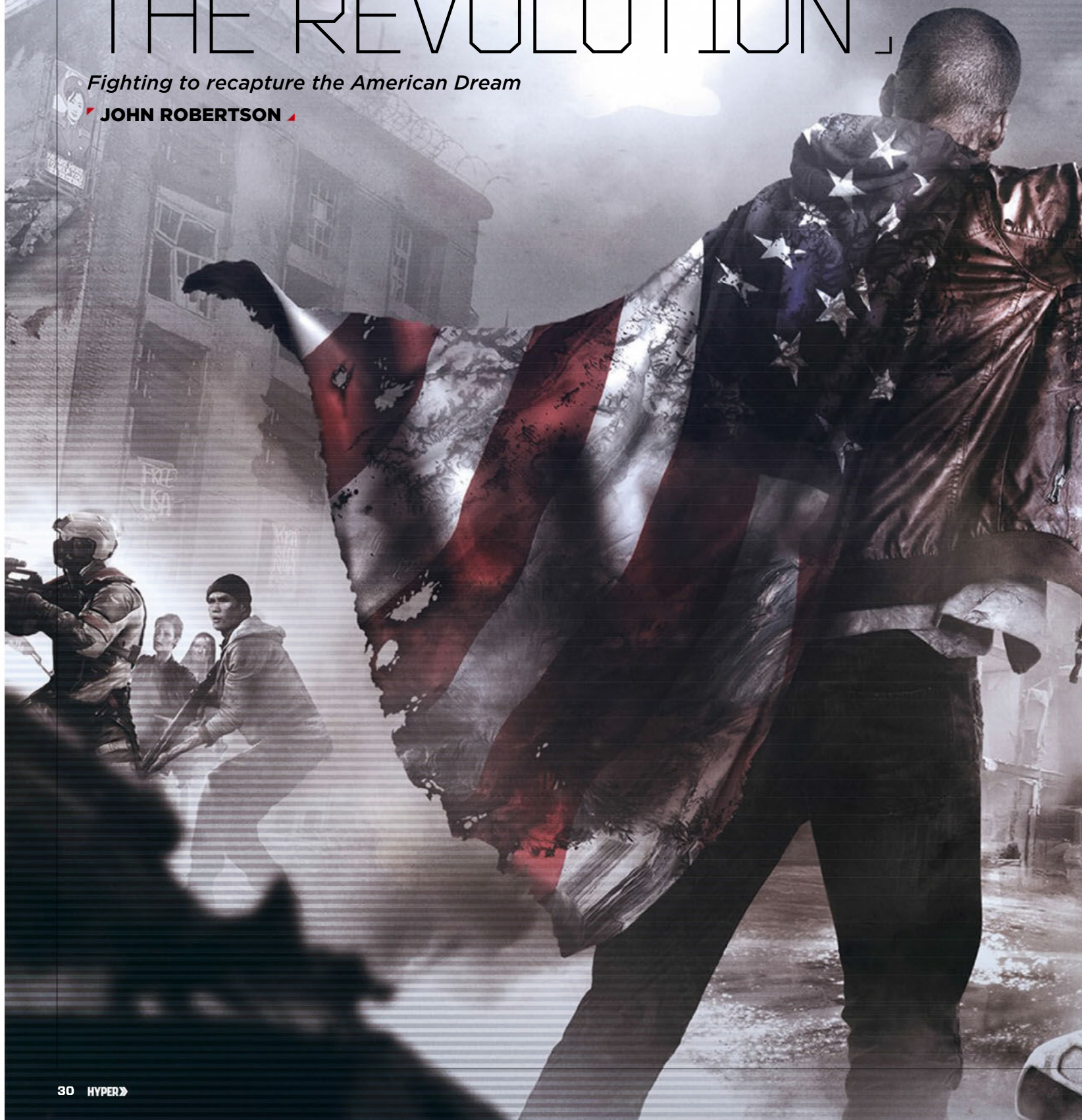
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HOMEFRONT: THE REVOLUTION

Fighting to recapture the American Dream

▶ **JOHN ROBERTSON** ◀





Very few war games present the USA as the underdog, as the side being overrun by a more powerful, more advanced and more determined military foe. Where guns and tanks are concerned, the star-spangled banner is typically found flying high and mighty above videogame battlefields as a symbol of all-conquering righteousness and invulnerability.

Whenever the flag is found languishing in the digital mud, then, it pays to take extra notice as a game that dares to present it in this way is likely one prepared to take risks. Risks don't always pay off, but when they do they can result in some of the most striking and worthwhile changes a medium could possibly enjoy. Without risks progress is fleeting. *Homefront: The Revolution* is taking such a risk, depicting a future America that is shrivelling under the boots of its attackers and occupiers. In this world, American dreams rest in tatters, replaced by the superior military strength of The Korean People's Army (KPA).

"We took a lot of inspiration for the state of [*Homefront's*] world from many sources across books, films, TV... there's bits of *Red Dawn* in there, bits of *The Man in the High Castle* in terms of the alternate history fiction. It is still our vision of what an occupied America would like look, though,"

explains Stephen Rhodes, *The Revolution's* Narrative Designer.

"We were answering questions like: what would an occupied America be like? What would an occupied Philadelphia be like? What would the resistance force look like?"

"Philadelphia is the cradle of America civilisation, so it was a big bonus for us to set it there. It has all of these metaphorical tones to it. The resistance is going through some of those same ideals and trying to make America the way that it used to be and try to give a new birth. Philadelphia carries a lot of weight in those terms."

You play a member of that resistance movement, your eventual goal being the complete removal of KPA forces and the re-establishment of the American state back into a form that would be recognised by people alive today. These goals are similar to those you were expected to achieve in 2011's *Homefront*, the game to which *The Revolution* is the successor. However, don't call it a 'sequel' unless you want to incur the

wrath of newly created, UK-based developer Dambuster Studios.

This is closer to what would typically be called a 'reboot', with wider themes, settings and narrative underpinnings remaining consistent between the two games, but the more delicate complexities of character, specific plot points and gameplay approach having been rewritten.

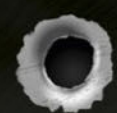
"We looked back at *Homefront* and what it did and we knew that it had made mistakes and we knew that there were narrative aspects that people weren't necessarily sold on," continues Rhodes. "But we also knew that everyone liked the overall idea of playing within an America that is occupied. That's a concept that we liked as well, particularly when you're putting the player in the shoes of a guerilla fighter trying to fight back against those occupying forces."

"Other than that, though, we basically got rid of everything else and started fresh with our own take on that concept. We developed a history that goes back to the 1950s that has alternate timelines of events that lead up to what is seen in the game. Ultimately, this is a work of fiction, obviously, but we still wanted it to make sense and we want people to believe that what they're seeing might have happened after they've understood the history we've come up with."

That history, and the guerilla warfare situation *The Revolution* sits you within, required the building of a whole new set of gameplay and interactive mechanics. The KPA is blessed with powerful tanks, armour-clad behemoth soldiers that walk towards you with miniguns, and without fear, as well as sophisticated surveillance and monitoring equipment. By contrast, your vehicles are limited to whatever you can scavenge, and your weapons are the same as those that failed to help the US Army repel the invaders.

Rather than overwhelming firepower, then, you must rely on staying agile and adaptable — being able to quickly read the state of play and react to it before the enemy can. One of the ways you can do that is by taking advantage of a weapon conversion system that allows you to alter the supplementary tools and gadgets of your guns during battle.

Where most games ask you to select a loadout before battle, and





"That's a wrap! Put it on the poster. We're done here"

NARRATIVE BRANCHES

The Revolution's two campaigns are narratively separate from one another, as Narrative Designer Stephen Rhodes explains: "They are completely separate, but chronologically they do fit together. The events of the multiplayer take place after the events of single-player. However, they're totally standalone in regards to how you decide to play them."

stick to it unless you happen to come across a new toy in the field, here you can edit your arsenal as and when you like. Scopes can be changed on an assault rifle to turn it from a medium-range proposition to something approaching a reasonable sniper rifle. Grips can be added to light-machine guns that increase their accuracy and under-barrels can be switched to provide explosive rounds to clear buildings before entering. Knowing when and why you might want to switch weapon systems is one of your primary means of catching the KPA off guard.

"The player has lots of tools and lots of options to use different weapons and conversions, but what's key is how you decide to use them," says Rhodes as he picks up on a question revolving around

how Dambuster is looking to balance two very different factions within a single narrative space. "You've got the freedom to fight this conflict however you decide to fight it. If you want to opt for long-range and fight from a distance, then you can do that by customising your options to suit. Although you always feel the pressure because



the KPA has superior technology and superior numbers than the resistance does, you still have enough tools as your disposal to fight back. You're just fighting back in a way that the KPA wouldn't."

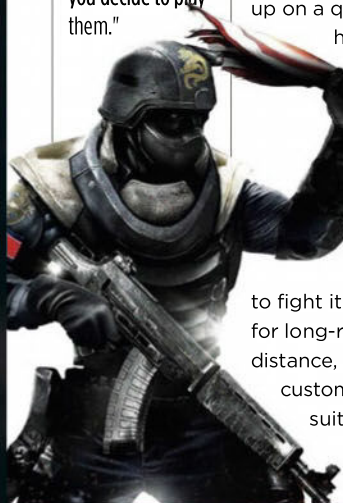
This differentiation between sides is made all the more apparent when playing in co-op, which has been given its own fully-fledged campaign that stands apart from that provided for solo players. This co-op structure is included at the expense of any PvP options, however, with The Revolution's emphasis being very much focused on teamwork and how a squad of friends can take advantage of guerilla tactics to overcome the superior strength and numbers enjoyed by the KPA.

"In co-op it definitely does feel like a thinking-man's shooter, for sure," explains Rhodes. "It's all about using your tactics, your knowledge of enemy tactics and how the

enemy units tend to operate... it's about using that knowledge to defeat a numerically superior foe.

"That same feeling is still there in single-player, but it's tweaked slightly so that it doesn't feel oppressive. We want you to go in and have fun; that's always the key. We don't want it feel too challenging. However, when it comes to co-op, we want there to be a level of challenge that you can strive for. If you try the harder missions, you'll see that they're incredibly challenging even for a team of four well-equipped players."

A significant part of that challenge is derived from an AI system that influences the behaviour of enemies you come up against in order to make sure that repeat play-throughs of the same level provide a different experience. This means numbers of enemies, where they approach you from, what units are included in their





THE PATH MOST TRAVELLED

Maps are semi-open-world in that you're free to traverse them in whatever way you like (depending on how much KPA resistance you come up against), although there are key areas that you must travel to and engage with in order to complete your mission/s. Exploring to locate the safest path is generally a good idea.



attack and how likely they are to be reinforced can change each time you play, preventing veteran players from being able to safely guide newcomers through a map in the shortest time possible.

It's this element that will be one of the most decisive in determining whether or not The Revolution can manage to sustain long-term appeal in the face of a lack of competitive multiplayer modes. On the one hand, it's pleasing to see a major release prepared to go against the grain and not include game modes simply because they're fashionable, but on the other, any replacement elements must be of sufficient quality to convince that such omissions are not lamented.

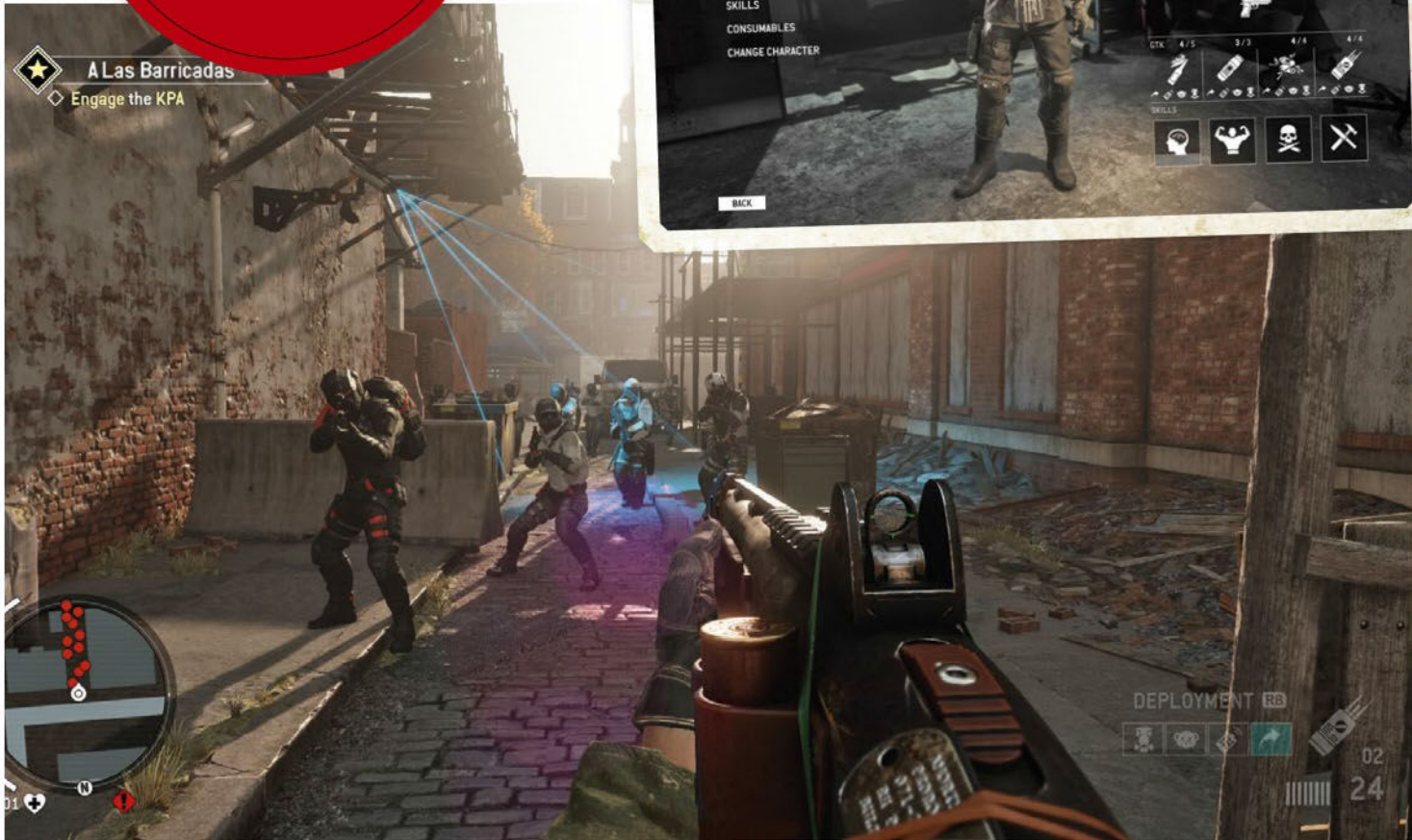
"We wanted to create a multiplayer experience that mirrored the single-player in terms of

themes," Rhodes tells us when asked about whether leaving out PvP is a risk. "We still wanted the multiplayer to make you feel as though you're a part of a group of resistance fighters taking part in a guerilla war against a much more powerful foe. You can't achieve that if you build something designed to be competitive, because that has to be balanced. Everything has to work along a set of parallels if you make it competitive.

"In single-player you're a lone member of a resistance team in Philadelphia. In multiplayer you're part of team of brand new fighters that have just joined the resistance. That experience sits well with the single-player side and makes the whole game feel cohesive." Success in war is, after all, about teamwork more than it is about constant aggression. <<

So this is where rejected Punisher logo ideas go to die

WE WANTED TO CREATE A MULTIPLAYER EXPERIENCE THAT MIRRORED THE SINGLE-PLAYER IN TERMS OF THEMES





WAR
WHAT IS
[IT GOOD]
FOR?

Actually? Maybe something

▸ **PATRICK STAFFORD** ◀



**EVEN THE
INDUSTRY'S NON-
VIOLENT EXAMPLES
ARE ABOUT PITTING
YOURSELF AGAINST
AN ENEMY AND
CONQUERING THEM**

» If we want to get biblical about it, war — or at least, violence — has been around since Cain and Abel. The first actual war occurs shortly afterwards, when the Bible says an alliance of kings including Amraphel, Arioch, Chedorlaomer and Tidal waged war against Bera, Birsha, Shinab and a chap called Shemeber.

If you believe the names, at least.

Just stories, of course, but battle has been a part of the human experience since we stepped out of the primordial ooze. Survival of the fittest, and all that. Archaeologists have found examples of prehistoric warfare between hunter-gatherer groups from 10,000 years ago — including a rock painting in northern Australia depicting inter-group conflict.

We love to fight each other. Philosopher Thomas Hobbes, way back in the 1600s, wrote about how the state of men without civil society “is nothing else but a mere war of all against all; and in that war all men have equal right unto all things.”

Like we need to be reminded. Since the dawn of men, there has always been war. In some part of the world, a group of men and women are fighting against others for a multitude of reasons, usually involving land. Sometimes someone got their feelings hurt. Greed and fear — like the stock market — are usually involved.

Is it any surprise, then, that videogames have reflected this perpetual conflict?

An innocent tennis game may have been one of the first popular videogames, but violent conflict is the medium's true bread and butter. Missile Command, Doom, Street Fighter, Quake and Wolfenstein are what gave videogames their mainstream recognition. But even in the industry's non-violent examples, Super Mario, Zelda and hell, Pacman, are about pitting yourself against an enemy and conquering them. So, war, in a sense.

But in the past few years, at least, the scope of war games has changed to focus less on the conflict, and more on how the conflict affects others. Games like Spec Ops: The Line and This War of Mine examine the psychological toll warfare can have on both its participants and those unfortunately caught in its grasp.

Could the change in this perspective be partly due to the

overall decline of war during the last century? Perhaps. Or maybe it's because games, like other mediums, have done some growing up in the past few years.

In any case, Call of Duty still dominates the charts, so we owe it to ourselves to ask some questions. What drives us to make these games, what drives us to play them, and above all else — what has driven us lately to play games that go beyond that typical war experience into something more captivating, sympathetic and perhaps, even more radical?

TALKING FROM THE TECHNICAL PERSPECTIVE

Let's go back a ways.

At its most basic, war is an extension of the human psyche — and is connected to the very primal feelings we have when someone makes us feel unequal. We are a social species, and this is why we have created cities and thrived. It is also why we fight; societies which trade more often with each are more likely to fight wars.

That little titbit comes from a 1996 book called War Before Civilization, written by Lawrence H. Keeley, an archaeology professor at the University of Illinois in Chicago. His book, which was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for History, investigated the relationship between war and pre-civilization society.

His conclusion? Peaceful societies are the exception, not the rule, and about 90% of societies take part in war or war-like activities. (He also found, perhaps unsurprisingly, that early warfare was much more horrific, violent and had a higher casualty rate than modern war.)

Dr Steve Taylor, a senior lecturer in psychology at Leeds Metropolitan University, says the spread of warfare boils down to humans' need to enhance either their status, safety, or their wealth.

“Individually, humans have a general need to enhance their status, or their possessions. We have a desire for accumulation,” he says. “On a group level, that moves into a desire to gain more territory, to gain other people's land, and to claim other people's wealth and resources.”

“I mean, it's obvious geographically with the rise of empires throughout history.”

So, wars are real estate deals gone wrong, then. Fine. But that doesn't explain why so many



This is why Nazis aren't allowed to have nice things

people are too eager to leave the comfort of their own homes and sign up for battle. As Taylor explains, individuals subscribe to warfare on a human level.

"It has a lot to do with the glory, and the kind of sense of intensity which warfare can bring," he says.

This isn't new — it's the same message told in a different way over a hundred years. In 1914, young Australian men were convinced they were off on a wild adventure. Twenty-five years later, it was about glory and duty to stop Hitler from advancing his armies across the world. And today? Well, you only need to watch a "join the Navy" television ad to see the armed services playing off the need for men and women to have a sense of purpose in life.

Of course, nationalism and

imperialism play a part, here. (One only needs to visit the United States to see just how much free stuff is given to its military — free stuff that in any other country would be a basic human right afforded to absolutely everyone.)

But Taylor is right — there is a yearning inside people to prove themselves. In 1910, the psychologist William James, one of the most cited psychologists of the 20th century, wrote an essay called *The Moral Equivalent of War*, in which he explored the relationship between humanity and warfare.

His finding was pretty simple: warfare makes people feel exaggerated emotions, and lifts people to "a higher plane of power". Discipline, courage, and heroism — these

are all things that make us feel good. And not just for soldiers, Williams argued. If you're a civilian, you're called to a sense of purpose and duty. (If you've seen the first *Marvel Captain America* film, you would have seen this played out during Cap's tour for war bonds — "Each bond you buy is a bullet in your best man's gun!")

"War is an enticing elixir. It gives us resolve, a cause. It allows us to be noble," Williams writes.

Williams, of course, says war is obviously not the greatest means to this good end. And so he argues for what he calls a "moral equivalent". He argues for something that makes us feel the same positive effects of warfare, but doesn't involve the reality of violence and wanton destruction.

Sound familiar?

ALL YOU LYING ZOMBIES ▾

Although videogames tend to show war as being horrible, and television shows like *The Walking Dead* revel in showing societies collapse, Lewis-Evans says the opposite is true. "The research shows people tend to come over more than not," he says. Bring on the zombies, then!





TALKING ABOUT GAMES

Videogames and war have had a close and often beneficial relationship. Not only have games, from their earliest days, sought to put players in the midst of conflict, the fetishism of war within these games has no doubt helped bring new recruits.

Indeed, Baruch College professor Corey Read reported as much in his 2013 book *War Play*, which examined the relationship between the US military and videogames. He writes that as early as 1960 “the armed forces took the lead in financing, sponsoring, and inventing the specific technology used in videogames.” The book claims that *Spacewar!*, which many historians believe to be the first videogame ever made, was produced by MIT students with direct funding from

the Pentagon.

America’s Army, released in 2002, was deliberately created as a recruitment tool for the United States Army. This is hardly a conspiracy theory, but it helps view the current range of military games in a new light. *Battlefield*, *Call of Duty*, even a title as pulpy as *Wolfenstein*: these games are built on the idea that combat and war are something to be admired, or at least, a medium through which to feel alive. (William James would be rather proud.)

Ben Lewis-Evans is a UX Researcher at Epic Games. Previously, he worked at Player Research, a company which conducted user testing for developers and gave recommendations based on how people reacted to their games.

There are plenty of psychological reasons games are obsessed with conflict, says Evans — but it’s important to note videogames aren’t a special medium.

“Violence, sex and love are universal elements we love to talk about,” he says. “War being a popular setting is not limited to games — it’s been popular in every type of media, including movies, books, stories and plays.”

And games were obsessed with combat before videogames came along. Chess, Lewis-Evans points out, is a war game.

“It’s such a good feedback loop,” he says. “You make an action, and you get a response.”

“In usability, this feedback loop has plenty of what we could call “affordances”. Basically, you can always know who the sides are, what the stakes are, if someone is trying to take over something. It’s relatable on lots of levels, including an emotional level.”

Even something as simple as checkers, he says, simulates combat.

“Taking territory is something simple and understandable to anyone. We all understand what conflict is, and we understand it has a lot of psychological levels. At its very basic, it’s an understandable feedback loop.”

“We’re easily drawn to the idea of ‘us vs them,’” says Lewis-Evans. He points to the infamous Stanford Prison Experiment, which found that people, when divided into two separate groups, will tend to work against each other even when they have no reason to. (Lewis-Evans says the experiment has been questioned in recent years.)

But the point remains. “War is a situation that can very strongly take advantage of those things,” he says.

Consider a title like *Call of Duty*. Players get to run around and shoot guns, which isn’t something they get to do every day. They shoot

ROOKING ▽
Videogames are violent and obsessed with war? Sure, but you might want to mention chess in the same breath. And not only did the game portray war, it also spread in popularity due to war itself when the Arab empire spread across Asia, the Middle-East and southern Europe.





PRIMAL ▾ Videogames recognise that warfare has played out through humanity's past. Far Cry Primal, released just this year, shows the medium's obsession with combat extends as far back as pre-civilization.



bullets, they take down enemies, and positive feedback loops ensure that as they kill more, they get more powerful. It's a pretty simple formula. And it's a formula that works, given the FPS has been one of the most dominant forms of play for decades.

The only problem with this is that games, naturally, aren't able to replicate the horrors of war very well. Or at least, they can't do it intuitively. By the nature of a first-person shooter, players need to be given positive feedback or they won't continue playing. This naturally creates a problem — players of videogames aren't able to experience anything other than a heightened sense of euphoria after playing a game like Call of Duty, no matter how many sombre cutscenes developers can throw in discussing the horrors of war.

Call of Duty tried to do this originally by inserting quotes about the horror of war when players die. They don't do this anymore.

"The problem with a game situation is that it sets up rewards and punishments that aren't real life behaviour," says Lewis-Evans.

But this point actually goes further. Dr Nina Huntemann, Director of Academics and Research at edX, wrote

on Kotaku in 2012 that action-packed blockbusters "reduce the complex world of counter-terrorism to an array of advanced weapons systems and precision-guided munitions in a lock-and-load shoot-fest."

"Blind faith is placed in the technologies of war, and the photo-realistic graphics capabilities of contemporary videogame consoles create breathtaking, heart-pumping explosions," she says.

"However, the cost and consequences of these shock-and-awe machines are largely missing."

That's exactly what developers, over the last few years, have been trying to change.

TALKING ABOUT THE SHIFT OF GAMES TOWARDS OTHER SUBJECTS

Between 2007 and 2012, the FPS was dominating the conversation in the games industry. It was also dominating criticism — after EA decided to release a game with the actual title Medal of Honor: Warfighter, it seemed the genre may have reached peak ludicrousness.

But the backlash to the traditional understanding of war in videogames has generated

genuinely moving experiences. The first of these to dominate the popular conversation was Spec Ops: The Line, a game in which you play a soldier suffering the horrific consequences of PTSD.

More recently, one title transforming the idea of a "war game" is This War of Mine. Set during the siege of Bosnia, the player is put in the shoes of a civilian, not a soldier, and tasked with surviving. Difficult choices are truly heartbreaking — do you turn away other civilians who ask for medicine, because you need it for your own family? Depression, PTSD and suicide are all dealt with.

"Showing one perspective leads to an extreme," says Pawel Miechowski, the game's Senior Writer. The key, he says, is different perspectives.

"I'm just looking for a different perspective," Miechowski says. "Even a game like Papers, Please, which shows how trivial life could be for a customs officer and showing how brutal it can be."

The rise of games such as That Dragon, Cancer, about two parents' experience in helping their four-year-old son deal with terminal illness, and indeed, games such as Papers,





A beautiful piece of art depicting a horrific World War

Please, or the text adventure *Depression Quest*, explore complex, emotional stories. There is no reason, Miechowski says, games about war can't do this also.

While not specifically about war, games such as *This War of Mine* and *Valiant Hearts* aim to demonstrate humanity at the centre of war. The message is simple, but new for videogames: the person you're shooting is another human.

But the real goal, Miechowski argues, is not just creating a good in-game experience; it's about changing people's real-world perspectives.

"The major feedback we've had from the game is that it's an eye-opening experience," he says. "It brings you closer to what people would have went through during the

ATHLETIC WARRIORS

Although William James doesn't quite identify what people should use as a replacement for the intoxicating emotions of war, Steve Taylor has his own idea — "sport". "The rise of professional sport comes along with the decline of war," he says. Australia's love for AFL should be proof enough of this.



war, and it shows you the suffering people went through."

"It's much easier for you to understand. It could almost be considered an anti-war manifest."

There will always be war. It is part of our nature and cannot be escaped. Yet during the last 100 years, the number of wars has continued to decline and we are now experiencing one of the most peaceful times in human history.

Could we be heading for a future in which war is abolished? Perhaps. But as Miechowski explains, until we get there, we should ensure stories

about war are told which don't just honour the bravery and courage of soldiers, but the humanity, consequence and impact on the rest of humanity. Playing *Battlefield* may make you feel like a soldier — but in reality, if war ever came to our shores, we'd be much more likely to haggle over the price of medicine.

"I'm open to covering every type of story," says Miechowski. "And I think we're on the verge of this golden age of games."

"If *Call of Duty* is number one? I'm fine with it. But I'm not fine with *Call of Duty* being the only perspective." ❧





THE REICH STUFF

Insanity fused with a blank-cheque mentality

▀ JAMES COTTEE ▀

Perhaps you have seen one of the many documentaries about the astonishing super-weapons that the Germans hoped would help them win World War II. The Third Reich boasted an incredible string of high-tech firsts: jet fighters, stealth fighters, wire-guided missiles, cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, and mega-tanks galore. They were even trying to make nukes. Historians are still figuring out just how advanced the Nazi nuclear program was, but there are multiple sources claiming they conducted at least two atomic tests.

So why didn't any of these wunderbar Wonder Weapons help the Germans? Because with maybe one or two exceptions they all cost far more than they were worth in terms of R&D time, manufacturing capacity, raw materials, and opportunity cost. V2 rockets were technological marvels, but as a practical means of dropping explosives on the English they were ludicrously expensive. The fact that the 188-tonne Maus super-heavy tank could move under its own power was a testament to the engineering genius of Ferdinand Porsche, but it would've been a logistical nightmare to deploy.

Every skerrick of effort expended on these fancies accelerated the Reich's downfall. Even relatively innocuous vehicles like the the VK 16.02 Leopard and the Aufklärungspanzer would've been burdens on the Teutonic war effort had they ever entered production. They're pretty sweet rides in World of Tanks, but they would've been ripped to pieces by late war Soviet armour, and the factories dedicated to making them wouldn't have been available to make much-needed spares for vehicles that did their jobs properly like the Panzer IV.


To be fair, the Germans came up with some pretty sweet ideas during the course of the war. The Sturmgewehr 44 set the standard for assault rifle design, Panzerfaust anti-tank rockets were cheap and effective, and Panther tanks equipped with IR gear devastated the commies in night battles.

But the very fact that ultra-tanks weighing over 1000 tonnes like the Landkreuzer P. 1000 Ratte and the Landkreuzer P. 1500 Monster were ever seriously considered as viable, feasible war machines is enough to confirm that Hitler had a degree of power over the will of his subordinates totally out of proportion with his grip on reality.

In practice, the Wonder Weapons sucked. Yet it is the total psychological delusion surrounding them that makes Nazi Germany such a compelling enemy in games and movies. Sure, the regime was 'evil'. The Soviets were evil. The Nazis were insane. With the plausible and the preposterous working side by side, their entire operation took on a dream-like quality. The vast, turreted Atlantic Wall was like something out of Command & Conquer. Hitler's fascination with the occult blends seamlessly with Castle Wolfenstein.

No sci-fi idea is too crazy for a game with Nazis in it, because there's a good chance they would've tried it. Hell, they probably did! To this day historians are still finding new evidence of Hitler's superlative lunacy.

Yes, Ol' Uncle Adolf lost the war on this boring plane we call reality. But in a way, he did get his Final Victory – over our imaginations.

They will be making games about the Nazis and their diabolical death machines for centuries to come... 



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COLD WAR

「KIDS...」

*Or how the threat of a destructive nuclear war
influenced a generation of videogames*

◀ MIKOLAI ▶



Books, films, and videogames are a reflection of the world around us. They can capture the mood of an era, and reflect both its darkest fears and greatest aspirations.

Glance back to the early '80s, and the mood was decidedly nervous. The biggest story in town was the renewed Cold War animosity between the Soviet Union and the USA, and the very real fear that we were one button press away from nuclear war.

This international rivalry inspired and influenced a generation of games, providing the narrative for titles like *Missile Command*, *Raid Over Moscow*, *Rush'n Attack*, and countless others. In the process, it offered impressionable kids a not very subtle lesson in geopolitics and the grand theory of Mutually Assured Destruction.

The Soviet Union may be long

gone, but the era and the games it produced continues to cast a shadow over the games industry, and the complex relationship between politics, the military, and technology.

A QUICK HISTORY LESSON

The Cold War was a military stand-off between the USA and the Soviet Union (aka, the Russians), which lasted from approximately 1947 to 1991. It saw the two rival superpowers vying for control of the world via satellite states and proxy wars.

Since both sides had nuclear arsenals, any sort of direct conflict was out of the question, as it could easily spiral into Armageddon. Instead, they provided money, military equipment, and aid to their global partners, fanning the flames of war in Korea, Vietnam, and various other conflicts.

Tensions between the two superpowers rose and resounded throughout the decades, but armed conflict was very much back on the agenda when Ronald Reagan took power in 1981 and referred to the Soviets as an "Evil Empire".

Missile Command appeared in arcades around the same time, and its vision of nuclear warheads raining down on cities reflects the international political climate. But the connection between videogames and the Cold War goes all the way back to the 1958, when the world's first electronic game — *Tennis for Two* — was created on military hardware.

Tennis for Two was programmed by American physicist William Higinbotham on a primitive analogue computer at a New York military lab. While the computer was designed to simulate missile trajectories, he realised those same algorithms could be used for tennis balls, and created a crude tennis simulator in which you could adjust the angle of a shot by simply turning a knob.

These unofficial experiments continued behind the scenes, eventually giving rise to *Spacewar* in 1962 — generally considered the first videogame in history.

DEFINING THE COLD WAR

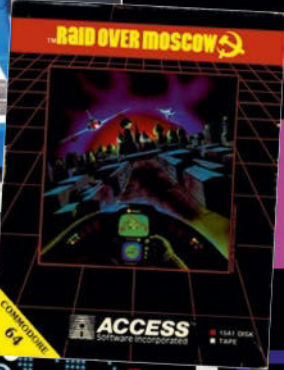
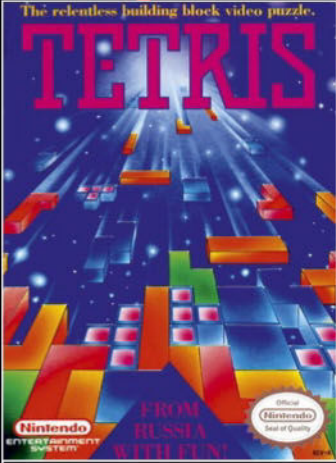
This is actually pretty straightforward. When two enemies engage each other with bullets, missiles, sticks or whatever it's a hot war, i.e. physical hostilities. Since the US and Soviets never directly attacked each other, and the entire conflict was fought via proxy wars and spheres of influence, it was referred to as a 'Cold War', a term first coined by writer George Orwell, incidentally.



Service. Call! Trajectory for a nuclear missile, and a side of tennis



Blue sure makes this particular Enigma machine look a whole lot cuter



TETRIS – FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

The story of Tetris, and how it went from a Russian research lab to the world's best-known puzzle game is also the story of thawing relations between East and West. Designed by Alexey Pajitnov, an artificial intelligence researcher working for the Soviet Academy of Sciences, it was originally released in 1984. When it made the jump to western computers in 1987, it was the first Russian game to be exported overseas, something that was only made possible when Pajitnov signed over the game's rights to the government.

Programmed on military hardware at an MIT lab, the game consisted of two overhead-viewed spaceships facing off against each other. While obviously simple by today's standards, it showed the potential for computers to do more than just crunch numbers.

That same year US President John F. Kennedy made his famous "man on the moon" speech, promising to send mankind beyond the Earth's orbit by decades close. Intended to counteract the Soviet's growing lead in the space race, the announcement saw the US government investing heavily in computers and a nascent military / scientific industry. Staffed by the first generation of programmers, these institutions were supposed to create breakthroughs that would give the US government a technological edge. In the process, they invented videogames.

As David Hussey writes in his essay, *Cold War Kids: The Space Race, Cold War and Video Games*, "Video games were born in the late 50s. This new media was a child of the space race and the Cold War. The intimate relationship between the Cold War and videogames can be seen with the different types of games that come out during the highs and lows of Soviet American relations."

The rapid acceleration of computer power throughout the

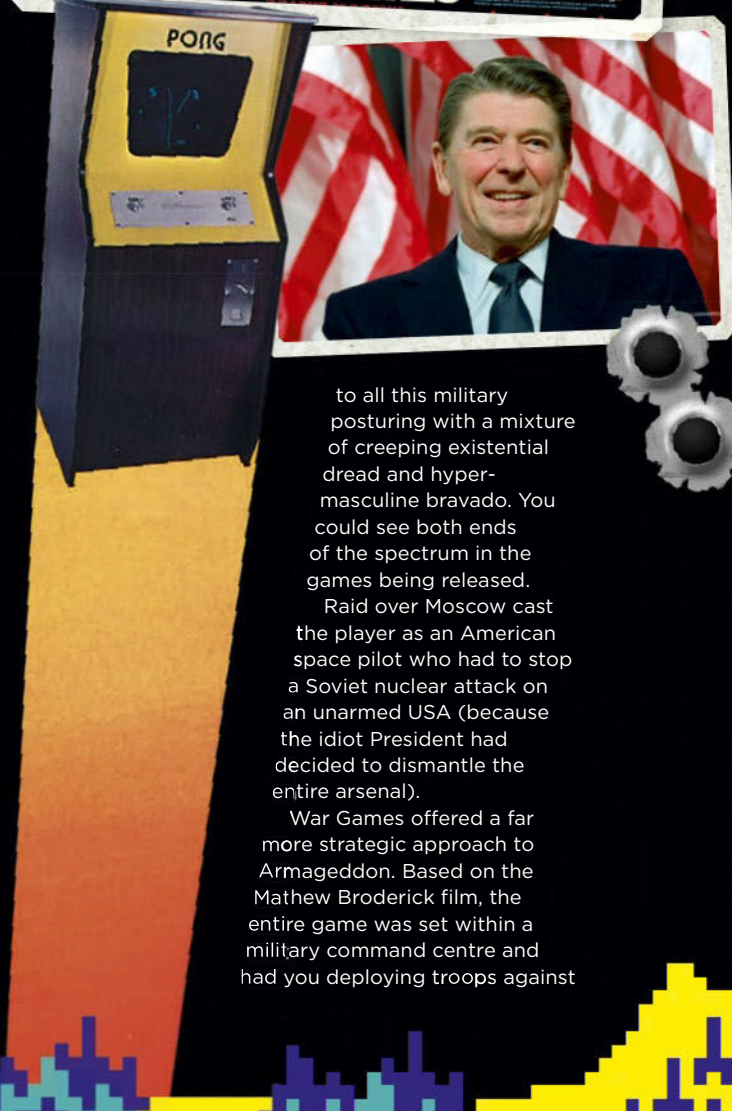
'50s, '60s, and '70s was a direct result of military investment, and as is always the case, the technology gradually began to filter out into the real world. It found a mainstream audience in 1972 with the release of Pong — the first commercially successful videogame. Developed by Nolan Bushel, the game provided the funds to launch Atari, and five years later the Atari 2600 home console appeared on store shelves.

HERE COME THE '80S

As Stuart Brown explains in his YouTube documentary, *Nuclear Fruit: How the Cold War Shaped Video Games*, "Many of us have grown up with videogames, but videogames grew up during the Cold War."

By the time Ronald Reagan came to power in the early '80s, the military experiments and Pong replicas had made way for a rapidly growing home computer market, and the mainstream success of the Atari 2600. Whatever optimism this new technology offered, it was tempered by a US President obsessed with nukes in space (aka, the 'Star Wars program'), and the recent Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Basically, the world looked a lot like the plot of *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*.

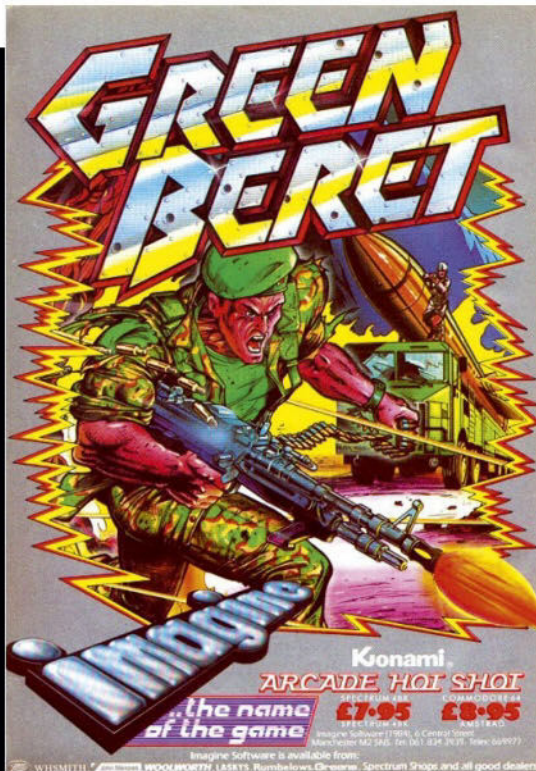
Since this was the 1980s and things like 'safe spaces', 'trigger warnings', and suchlike had yet to be invented, the world responded



to all this military posturing with a mixture of creeping existential dread and hyper-masculine bravado. You could see both ends of the spectrum in the games being released.

Raid over Moscow cast the player as an American space pilot who had to stop a Soviet nuclear attack on an unarmed USA (because the idiot President had decided to dismantle the entire arsenal).

War Games offered a far more strategic approach to *Armageddon*. Based on the Mathew Broderick film, the entire game was set within a military command centre and had you deploying troops against



a Soviet invasion of the US. If too much of the country fell into Soviet hands, a nuclear strike was launched and everyone died.

Balance of Power was released in 1985 and is well regarded for its strategic approach to Mutual Assured Destruction. A turn-based strategy game, it tasked you with improving the USA's international standing while holding firm against the Soviets and avoiding a nuclear war.

The flip side to all this was schoolyard level antagonism. Nintendo's original arcade version of Punch-Out! featured a Russian character named Vodka Drunkenski (later changed to Soda Popinski), and Konami's Rush'n Attack made very thinly veiled analogies to stabbing a bunch of Soviets while running around Siberia.

Making up the numbers were titles like Strider (future Russia has robot apes), SDI (here come the nukes), and Red Storm Rising (because submarines can also launch nukes).

IT'S THE '90S, IT'S HAMMER TIME...

What the public didn't fully comprehend during all this sabre rattling was that the Soviet Union was slowly crumbling internally. By the time Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, the economy was collapsing and the Soviet Union could no longer afford to maintain its 'superpower' status. Before the decade was over it would all come crashing down, and in 1991 the Soviet Union was formally dissolved.

While the world celebrated, the US military faced a unique problem. Where exactly should they point their nuclear arsenal? And what about all the money that was being funnelled into the myriad military

research labs? With no enemy to fight, it was suddenly very hard to justify the spend.

As Corey Mead

explains in his book, War Play: Video Games and the Future of Armed Conflict, "Beginning in 1960 and ending in the 1990s, the armed forces took the lead in financing, sponsoring, and inventing the specific technology used in videogames."

This collaboration

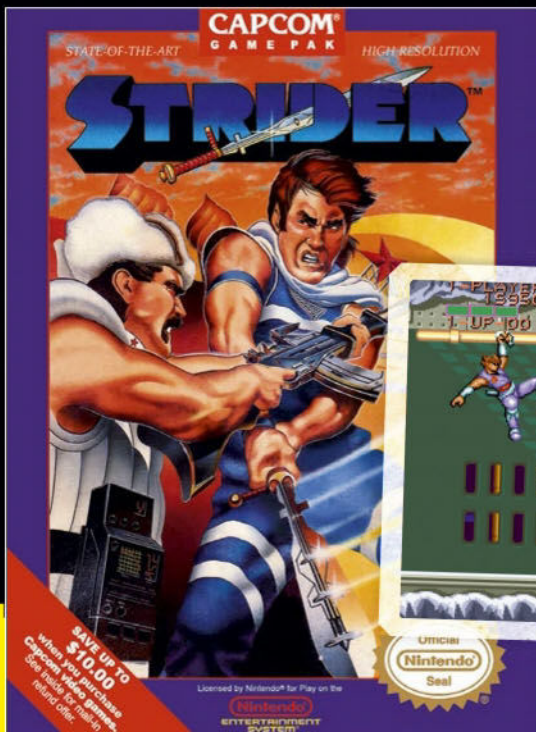
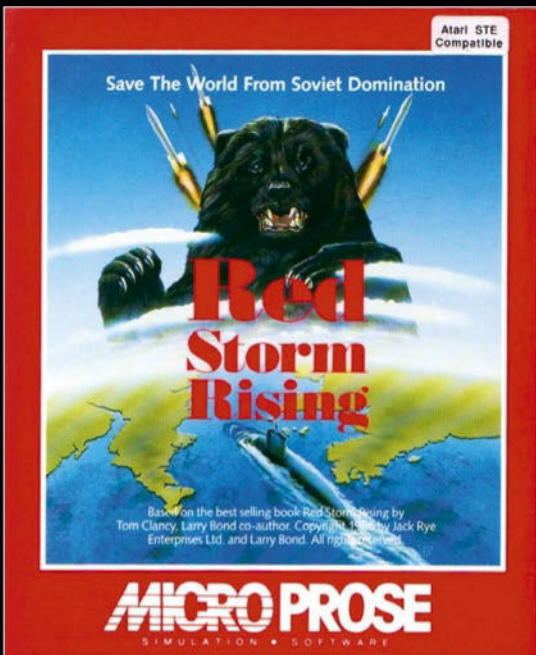
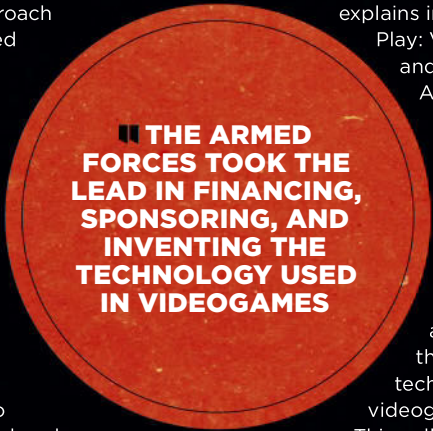
between the US government and the games industry has been referred to as the 'military entertainment complex', and when the Soviet Union disappeared so too did the flow of money, and the sort of games that it inspired.

This left the door open for a new global outlook and a new generation of games.

Arriving to take up the mantle was Nintendo and its family friendly, bright and breezy mascots. And as the '80s started to slip over the horizon, the micro-computers that had defined the decade took a back seat to Mario and a far brighter vision of the future.

As David Hussey points out, "With the end of the Cold War in sight, videogames took notice. Mario and Link took the industry in a completely different direction ... videogames became cartoony and fun."

That's a whole lot of military entertainment complex going on



THE MILITARY ENTERTAINMENT COMPLEX

The new millennium was scheduled for 1 January, 2000, but you could also argue that it kicked off for real on 11 September, 2001 – the day the twin towers fell.

The events that transpired that Autumn morning would leave permanent scars on the American psyche. They would also rouse the country's military entertainment complex from its decade long slumber, and give it a renewed sense of purpose.

Forgoing the old 'us vs them', 'two armies on a battlefield' approach to warfare, the new millennium brought creeping paranoia about terrorist sleeper cells, nukes in suitcase, and ill-fated adventures in the Middle East.

This new threat was far more nuanced than drunken Russians accidentally pressing 'the button', and the videogames that arrived in its wake spun a new story for kids too young to remember the Soviets. All of a sudden historic World War II scenarios and arena shooters went out the window, replaced with contemporary political settings, modern warfare, and a new generation of consoles with the processing power to recreate these conflicts in detail.

None of this was a coincidence, or some sort of happy accident. After all, videogames reflect the era in which they're created, and the 'War on Terror' has become the defining struggle of the new millennium. Plus there's all the money that the US military was pumping into the games industry.

Writing for The Atlantic, Hamza Shaban argued that, "The military has used videogames at every organisational level for a broad array of purposes. It's had three big aims in this: to recruit soldiers, to train them, and to treat their psychological disorders." His article, *Playing War: How the Military Uses Video Games*, continued, "The military offers funding and technical expertise to game and computer

THE MILITARY HAS USED VIDEOGAMES AT EVERY ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL FOR A BROAD ARRAY OF PURPOSES



developers and, in exchange, they give it proprietary technology and technical consulting."

This was first realised on a commercial scale with the release of America's Army in 2002. A military training simulator that blurs the lines between entertainment and indoctrination, it has been played by over 13 million people across various incarnations and content updates.

Building on that crossover potential, Full Spectrum Warrior became a poster child for the renewed links between the military and entertainment industry

when it was released in 2004. A partnership between the US Army's Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT) and Sony Imageworks / Pandemic Games, the game grew out of a research topic first instigated by the military in the late '90s – "Could commercial gaming platforms be leveraged for training?"

Originally a military training simulator in which players had to position two squads in military zones, it was overhauled and reworked for a commercial release on PS2, Xbox, and PC. Ignoring typical videogame conventions, you're never actually in control of

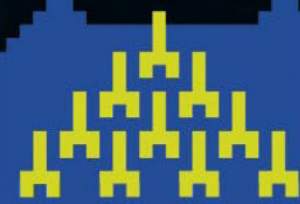


It's not quite Bad Boys-style back-to-back shooting, but it's pretty close

a firearm, the most you can do is issue an 'engagement' command to your squad.

The flip side to that coin was Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, which adopted a far more bombastic take on war in the new millennium. In doing so it introduced a generation of gamers to the new geopolitical reality – covert black ops, undefined enemies, terrorist cells, and little regard for national sovereignty, or traditional rules of engagement.

While it's easy to dismiss all this as mere entertainment, Marcus Schulzke believes it has deeper implications. In his essay, *Video Games and the Simulation of International Conflict*, he writes





that, "Audience participation in [films, books, music] is usually limited... By contrast, videogames force players to become participants in simulated events. Players of war games become virtual members of armed forces engaged in simulated combat, and they progress through games by securing victory for their side. This tends to embed players firmly in a particular perspective, thereby privileging that perspective over others."

It's a belief shared by Nikolay Murashkin, a Russian scholar of international relations. "Kids are shaped by stereotypes and preconceived notions. In the worst case, the opponent becomes dehumanised, which encourages a machine-like thinking where the shock of killing a person is softened by weasel words like 'termination'."

WELCOME TO MODERN WARFARE

While first-person shooters remain the preferred means of selling military engagement, modern warfare is increasingly blurring the lines between videogames and reality. In 2016, Iranian TV mistakenly broadcast Medal of Honor in-game footage as the real thing. Both Russia and Egypt did the same in 2015.

This shouldn't come as a huge

shock, since war itself is starting to resemble a videogame. As Shaban notes in his article for The Atlantic, "Predator drones are piloted by soldiers using monitors and computer controls. As war itself turns to simulation, when buttons replace triggers and blades, who is morally responsible for wrongful death or even 'successful targeted strikes?'"

There are no easy answers to those questions, and few games have acknowledged them. But as Stuart Brown summarises, "Technology and war are inseparably entwined. The information age was built on Cold War technology..."

Those Cold War kids have grown up now. But so has the military technology being used in covert operations around the world. And where we once had Raid over Moscow and Rush'n Attack, there's now Call of Duty, Battlefield, and Spec Ops to shape, reinforce, and narrate the global political sphere to a new generation of armchair hooah soldiers.

How we ultimately look back on this era and these games remains to be seen. But just like their 1980s counterparts, today's war games provide a unique snapshot of the times, alongside our collective hopes and fears. «

COLD WAR COMEDOWN BLUES

The Cold War may have ended in 1991, but that hasn't stopped a host of games looking back on it for inspiration. Some of the more prominent games to derive inspiration from the conflict include:

Command & Conquer: Red Alert (1996) – Real-time strategy set during an alternative 1940s/50s conflict between the US and the Soviets.

Defcon (2006) – Stripped back real-time strategy played on one of those 'nuclear big boards' made famous in films like Dr. Strangelove and WarGames.

Metal Gear 3: Snake Eater (2004) – When terrorist sets off a nuclear bomb in Soviet Russia circa 1964 Snake gets sent in to clean things up.

Call of Duty: Black Ops (2012) – It's flashback time, as we head to Vietnam in order to thwart a Soviet conspiracy involving a deadly nerve gas.

Fallout 3 (2008) – Fallout's whole background story is framed by the post-war culture of 1950s US, and the combination of fear and hope that the nuclear age ushered in.





KILL OR BE KILLED

The sterile mathematics of war

CHRISTIAN READ

» 'War is hell', said William Tecumseh Sherman. Who was kind of a madman but he killed a lot of slavers so that's ok.

But the thing is, unless war is affecting you, it's not hell. It's actually really, really interesting. They're fiendishly complex beasts, wars. You're organising thousands, millions, of people. You're feeding them, clothing them, arming them, moving them. And then, you're killing them. Sad trombone...

In the real world, such logistics are boring. A constant, endless stream of 'If a train comes from Canberra at 100 KPH how soon until it meets a train coming from Sydney at 200 KPH' mixed with a mum's dispiriting shopping list. I dunno. Maybe that's fun for you. But you should leave the house, maybe meet someone.

Within the context of a game, these careful decisions are a way to think in formal manners that not many of us get to in our personal or professional lives.

I love RTS games. Part of why is because I like to win before the battles have begun. I like the challenge of figuring out optimal build orders to create an orderly and effective battle force, while the other guy is spamming lumberjacks or space miners or some damn thing. I like orderly chains of logic and theory stretching out in front of me. I like being able to think purely in terms of stark mathematics. 'If the Space Brothel costs 12 X-dollars to make and I start with 220 but if I can wait 3.5

minutes I can double my X-dollars and invest in 9 Slaughter Bastards which are the best troops I can hope for in early game.' I like when the units acknowledge commands. My commands.

This sounds like a sterile way to play a game and, indeed, it is. Because games, good games, are rarely so predictable. It's been a long time since, yawning, I elbowed my way to victory in Double Dragon.

So careful experimentation/drunken improvisation also plays a part in the careful marshalling of resources. Because the human brainmeats are not optimised and enjoy no factory setting, what works on paper may not work for you. I tend to do my best work when I can think about one thing, very hard, for a very long time.

And I like to be a ruthless bastard.

So in a war game, I'm looking to run as lean as I can. I want a small defence profile. I want a small number of great units, and I want to hit quickly and mercilessly. But this isn't always the best, mathematically speaking, way to play. 30 scouts might beat two Shinsmashing Meatbots every time, but too much movement and my attention spread too thin causes me to punch my monitor and scream.

Finding the middle-way, between the optimised numbers game and my own aptitudes and preferences, that's interesting. War might be hell, but it's also kind of fun. **W**

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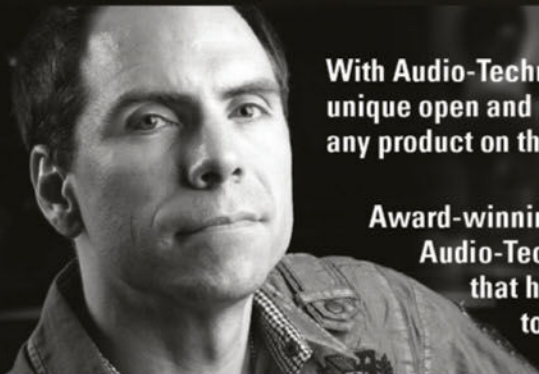
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WAR NEVER CHANGES

Not in reality. Not in Fallout. Not ever

LUKE GRIMISH

» War. War never changes. It's the phrase we expect to hear uttered by the inimitably smooth Ron Perlman with every new instalment in the Fallout franchise. But how often is this simple platitude ever truly explored by the series? I felt like the recent Fallout 4 used the line somewhat insincerely; just something there for brand recognition. Certainly, its Taken-esque, tried-and-true plot about the quest for a missing child with some of the same rusty old Asimovian questions about artificial intelligence thrown in did nothing to explore the game's by-now famous opening statement.

New Vegas, however, is another story entirely.

New Vegas takes place in the Mojave desert, where a battle for control of the Hoover Dam, and therefor Vegas itself, is taking place between the New California Republic, a government that upholds old pre-war values like capitalism, gender equality and democracy, and Caesar's Legion, a terrifying totalitarian amalgamation of many tribes who look to the ancient past for the tools of leadership and order. You find yourself caught up in the intrigue surrounding the coveted dam

when Mr House, enigmatic ruler of New Vegas, hires you to deliver a Platinum Chip. A fourth player, with designs on the top job, shoots you in the head, takes the chip, and leaves you for dead.

New Vegas does away with the Star Wars narrative of Fallout; the Brotherhood of Steel don't play the role of knightly paragons, but are instead jealous xenophobes, and mutants aren't jackbooted orcs, but complex, wounded outcasts who are often simply trying to live in their shattered communities as best they can. It's the first game where I truly understood Fallout. I'd only dabbled in 1 and 2, and found 3 to be an uninspiring game, replete with the same flaws and draws as the Elder Scrolls series. But New Vegas took me somewhere I'd never been before. It took me inside the mythos of American conflict. The first time I finished it, I realised I understood the franchise.

By the second time (this time with all of the DLC installed) I realised I understood America.

Fallout will always transcend the dime-a-dozen post-apocalyptic settings that gaming is awash with right now as long as it looks to America's past, rather than simply sticking to some doom-and-gloom vision of the future.





Concept art makes it look pretty, but this game world is anything but

THE FRONTIER

Fallout is a Western. It's a part of the series that is often overlooked, and one of the reasons why Fallout 3, with its East Coast, metropolitan setting felt so tone-deaf to many fans. Fallout isn't really about ruined cities and power armor; it is about the frontier, that wild place, the 'empty' spaces on the map that Americans struggled so fiercely to fill. The American Film Institute defines a Western as any story that is set in the American West and embodies "the spirit, the struggle and the demise of the new frontier." I'm inclined to think that if you take away the ghouls and robots, that's what you have left. The nukes made a new frontier out of the West that was so hard-won centuries before. They pressed the reset button on American and, once again, settlers, wagoners, cowboys and missionaries are struggling on the edges of civilisation. The game's opening quest, 'Ghost Town Gunfight', sets this tone perfectly for the rest of the game. Just like Red Dead Redemption, it explores the death of cowboy freedom and the frontier ideal: the NCR brings with it law, modernisation and a

net that drags these small towns of prospectors and trappers into a bigger, more complex world. And you, the wanderer without a name and vengeance in their heart, is at the centre of it all.

But none of this change, of course, can occur without great destruction. America's obsession with its Western expansion cost the lives and cultures of thousands of indigenous peoples. The brief but brilliant DLC, Honest Hearts, puts the player in the midst of a conflict between three 'native' tribes who control a former national park. Paralleling the so-called Indian Wars of the 19th century,

the player is forced to make the agonising decision: drag one tribe out of its blissful isolation, or push another into a position of violence and authority it is not equipped to deal with. Both options mean the destruction of entire ways of life. It seems that even mushroom clouds and the benefit of hindsight couldn't stop America from repeating the mistakes of its past. In the US census of 1890, the frontier was recorded as officially closed. That same year, the US Army participated in the 'battle', now rightly called a massacre, at Wounded Knee. The soldiers who mowed down men women and

DES-TIN-Y

Manifest destiny: The belief that providence dictated that Anglo-Saxon Americans spread their civilisation across the American continent. Coined by editor John L. O'Sullivan in 1845.





children with early machine guns were awarded congressional medals. The era of 'cowboys and Indians' was at an end. There was no America left to conquer. How was the American pioneering spirit to manifest itself in this new world? New Vegas is a game that deals with what happens when the frontier shrinks. The wild wasteland is a little less wild than when last you saw it in *Fallout 2*, thanks to the NCR. But that brings its own kind of strife.

A NEW GLOBAL POWER

America found its chance only eight years after the closing of its frontiers. Since 1895, Cubans had been fighting to free themselves of the colonial Spanish government. The Spanish government fought a bitter war against the rebels, rounding up the civilian population and placing them into concentration camps where they usually starved to death. Sensationalist American newspapers did their best to portray the Spanish government as old-world barbarians of the lowest kind. The old national myths of the fight for liberty and freedom against the powers of the Old World turned American popular opinion towards war. Jingoism gripped the nation. When the USS *Maine*, an American ship moored in Cuba, was destroyed (probably by

accident), the national appetite for war turned ravenous. In just 10 weeks, the United States forces defeated the Spanish in both Cuba and the Philippines. America was no longer seen as a second-rate regional power, but as a global one. Theodore Roosevelt would describe the conflict as a 'splendid little war'. It was just what the American public wanted: it was brief, easy, asserted American power and, in their minds, made the world a little freer. Ownership of the Philippines was transferred into US hands. This came with its own set of problems.

The NCR of New Vegas faces a similar situation. Now that the tribals and raiders of *Fallout 2*

have been absorbed or defeated, the NCR, now a strong nation occupying roughly the same area as the former state, is looking for 'foreign' acquisitions. Before your ill-fated entry into the Mojave, the NCR had sent scouts into the Mojave in search of land and water to support its flourishing population. There they encounter their old enemy, the Great Khans. After an unsuccessful campaign to annex the local tribes, the Khans began to raid NCR settlements. The NCR retaliated. The war, like the Spanish-American conflict, was brief, and ended with NCR victory at Bitter Springs.

America was now the colonial masters of the Philippines, but many

VAN DAMN ▲
Caesar's Legion was originally slated to appear in the cancelled *Fallout 3* (Project: Van Buren), but was repurposed for New Vegas.



Mutants are one thing, but dancing robots? Nope, I'm out!





And to think, it used to be such a damn nice play to visit...

natives were not happy to submit to yet another foreign oppressor. Where the Cuban conflict had been swift, the war with the native Filipinos was drawn out, expensive and horrifying. Like most indigenous peoples when faced with a modern colonial army, they resorted to guerilla warfare: trapping, burning and mutilating Americans in a bitter, drawn-out death of a thousand tiny cuts. The Americans, exhausted, angry, diseased and accosted, started to snap. Reports of American brutalities against the Filipinos began to make their way into the same newspapers that had drummed up so much support for this war. After the First Battle of Bud Dajo, where Filipinos were slaughtered while taking refuge in an extinct volcano, the 11 March, 1906 New York Times headlines read, "WOMEN AND CHILDREN KILLED IN MORO BATTLE; Mingled with Warriors and Fell in Hail of Shot. FOUR DAYS OF FIGHTING Nine Hundred Persons Killed or Wounded — President Wires

Congratulations to the Troops." America's shining crusade for freedom and liberty started to lose its sheen.

I really don't want to spoil anything from here on out. New Vegas is so sprawling a game that even if you've finished the main narrative twice, you may have missed this bit completely. You may have even found Bitter Springs on one of your jaunts into the Mojave without uncovering its true tale. If you hang around the NCR troops long enough, you'll hear whispers of this place. Some will express anger. Others, pride. But if you gain enough approval with the former NCR sniper, Boone (the only way to do this, by the way, is by killing Legion soldiers) and take him to Bitter Springs, he'll tell you the entire harrowing tale of how the New California Republic's war in the Mojave took a dark turn, at a point in the narrative where you are convinced that this faction is the 'good' one. It is an immersive and brilliant narrative moment.

AN AMERICAN CENTURY

The United States had had the moment of national greatness on the world stage that guys like Teddy Roosevelt had been rooting for. It wasn't long before they would get the same chance again. With World War I, the at-first-reluctant President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war with one of the most famous speeches in world history: "The world must be made safe for democracy ... We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion ... We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them."

This is really the beginning of the American mythmaking that is so deeply entrenched within Western popular culture. It's the 'Captain America' America we all groan and roll our eyes about these days. The United States came out of World War I looking better than anyone else; they were absolved of the colonial and militaristic shenanigans that the European powers had been involved in, they'd tried to give Germany a better deal than anyone else, they'd suffered the



IN A MIRROR, DARKLY

Lonesome Road: the final DLC for New Vegas is where all the mythmaking and themes meet. Criticised for its linearity by people who clearly didn't see the significance, it forces the player to deal with the inevitability of the confrontation that their own actions have had on history.



least casualties, lost no land and, as principle lenders to the UK and France, were filthy rich. The depression came and went and once again they found themselves playing leader of the free world during World War II. It begs the question: why do we look on the US so favorably during this conflict, and so critically in all others? After all, it was war, just like any other. There were war crimes perpetrated by the Allies and the US in that war just like in any other. For instance, why do we not view the nuclear horror of Hiroshima in the same light we do the Holocaust?

Easy. Because America's enemies at this time were so damn brutal, so evil, so vile in every way that we can forgive some of the measures used to defeat them. What human being in our history is more satanic than Hitler? We're programmed to see him in Emperor Palpatine, in Sauron and in Lord Voldemort.

And in New Vegas, we see him in Caesar. He's Tojo, Hitler, Stalin, Hussein and bin Laden all in one. I've yet to meet anyone who sided with Caesar's Legion in New Vegas. When you first meet them in Nipton, they've torched the town and lined the main avenue with crucified townsfolk, who still groan and writhe on their crosses. That's usually enough to herd any player into the arms of the NCR or Mr House. Like Hitler and Mussolini, Caesar took his cue from the ancient empires of the past. Caesar is the boogeyman who haunts you the entire way through the game, and makes those guys on the right side of the Colorado, despite their greed, ineffectuality, and dishonesty look pretty damn good.

A POST-NUCLEAR WORLD

It would be easy for *Fallout: New Vegas*, with its 2010 release date, to make some trite comment on the war in Afghanistan. It's all there: the desert setting, the long and bitter occupation, the vicious enemies, the war crimes, the inept government. But it doesn't. It manages to do something greater. It transcends direct allegories and explores America's conflicts as a whole. Most importantly, it explores America's conflict with its two ideological halves: the half that is good, pure, idealistic, a beacon for freedom everywhere, and the half that just wants stuff, and will do anything to get it. Even as I'm writing this I wonder how this myth will evolve in a post-Arab Spring world. A renewed interest in *Star Wars*, thanks to *The Force Awakens*, has reignited in us that myth of the rebel liberator. In a world where *Star Wars* dominates our popular culture, we're programmed to see Assad as the evil dictator and the rebels who defy him as the plucky underdog heroes. The myth is perpetuated. It seems crystal clear what America must do in such times; but then we watch a Syrian rebel cut out and bite a human heart on the evening news. Then, worse, we get ISIS, who bring anachronistic violence and ancient power structures into the modern day. Our very own Caesar's Legion. *Star Wars* simply can't do for our Western psyche what *Fallout* can. Apocalyptic settings have a charm all their own: a desire to 'reset' that we seldom talk about openly. Ever since the West's

adoption of Christianity, with its apocalyptic predictions of Christ's return, we have been waiting patiently for the end to come. Nuclear power pushed us one step closer to that end. Think about it; even if you're as young as 20 or 25, how many doomsday predictions have you already lived through? Y2K. 2012. The solar flare panic. Why is Western culture so obsessed with the end?

The truth, sadly, is that it's easier. It is easier to hope for things to be wiped clean than to look at the problems faced by our planet today and to fix them. That's New Vegas' genius. Even after the world ends, humans have to take responsibility for their actions and for their history. *Fallout* is at its best when it looks behind, not forward. Just like the mysterious courier who waits for you in the Divide, at the end of the Lonesome Road DLC, New Vegas asks of its players: "Who are you, that do not know your history?"

SCRAPPED  Chris Avellone was forced to scrap the only joinable companion who actually favours the Legion, but he made his way into the DLC in a satisfying way later down the track.



The use of sandbags is evocative of war of a bygone era, despite the year



THE WAR LORDS

JAMES COTTEE recently caught up with Roger Keating and Gregor Whiley, the two field marshals of SSG, to chat about the past, present, and future of war gaming...



two sides to that equation. And in that collaboration, we got games that were exciting, challenging, and yet which the AI could play.”

Building on that foundation, Roger then created a system for giving each AI distinct personalities. “When Ian suggested for the second game to do a game called Carriers at War, I wasn’t overly enthusiastic, but we carried it out under the same scheme that Gregor mentioned. Very powerful AI. We actually introduced, then, a scripting system, which some modern games also do; but, at that stage, no-one had ever, to my knowledge, carried it out. Which meant that you could basically tell the computer Japanese player how the Japanese player would respond to events. You could also tell the Americans how they would respond to events. And they were fundamentally different.



“So you had players with equal forces, but they would actually behave quite differently. They would behave very nationalistically in what they would do.”

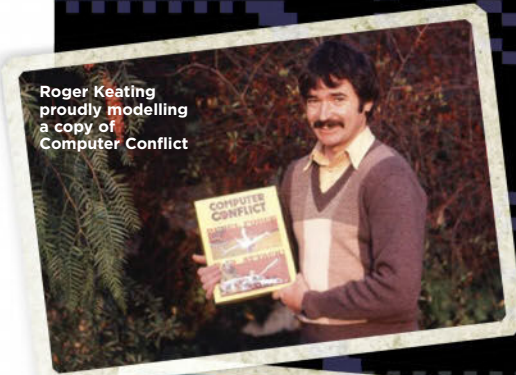
Gregor stressed that from the very beginning, SSG was built on the foundation of one fundamental insight: “Computers are not humans. They don’t think like humans. You can’t ask them to think like humans. Even today, we cannot make a computer that actually thinks like a human. They’re all faking it.

“It follows then that when you ask the AI to make a decision, you’ve got to make that question something that AI routines can answer. Aside from the most trivial of things, you just cannot brute force it. So you have to design that into the game from the

start and make sure that whatever features you put in the game, and however the game is going to respond to events, it’s got to be simple enough for the AI to answer that question. And it also has to be simple enough for the humans who are programming the AI to understand what decisions the AI is making. Because if it gets it wrong, you have to be able to understand how it got it wrong, otherwise you can’t fix it. If it’s some fancy neural network and it gets the wrong answer, your only recourse is to run it another two trillion times and hope it verges on the right answer. Well, I haven’t got time for that.

“This is at the heart of the AI question that I think SSG got right better than anybody else.”

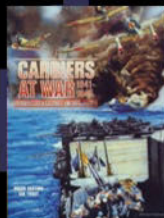
Roger pointed out that this holistic attitude to AI and game design is a concept not universally understood. “Most American companies would actually wait until well through the project, at least after halfway, and then they would introduce the AI. And they never understood why it was so hard.



Roger Keating proudly modelling a copy of Computer Conflict



Jack Greene and Gregor Whiley



Carriers at War 1941-1945: Fleet Carrier Operations in the Pacific (1984)



Battlefront (1986)

"I was once asked by an American company to give them a generic AI program. I spent one hour explaining to the CEO of that company, personally, why it would not work. So he got another programmer to do it for him. And I suddenly realised that I'd just missed out on a lot of money!"

Gregor noted that the Americans didn't get what they wanted: "It didn't work, of course."

"For exactly the reasons that I had outlined."

"Had you been able to make it work, Roger, you would now be a trillionaire! So that's another missed opportunity. Frankly."

"Look, it wasn't going to work! There was no way."

"You could've faked it and taken the money. Come on."

"I realise that. I could've taken the money. And it would've been almost passable. But I mean... What they wanted was just... And this showed me, also, that the CEO of a major company..."

"They didn't understand."

"You *could not* explain it to them!"

BATTLEFRONT

Gregor joined SSG in 1986, and the first game he was involved in from start to finish was Battlefront. "The innovation in Battlefront was that our AI was good enough to take direct control away from the player.

"You didn't just sit there and move units. You gave high-level orders and the units carried them out according to a set of rules. They were much more autonomous. We took away some of the god-like powers that you always had before in wargaming. You were always able to move anything anywhere, within the rules. And the idea that things wouldn't do exactly what you thought was a bit confronting for some people. Of course, it's closer to the reality of actual warfare, where things go wrong, messages get lost, the enemy doesn't always oblige and let you do stuff that you wanted to do. That was a big step in a lot of ways. It met some resistance. But a lot of people appreciated that this was closer in actual experience to real warfare. You couldn't just meta-game it and work out a perfect solution to a tactical problem."

But just because you could order your troops to move forward, victory was by no means automatic. "You had to think about the condition of your troops, and you had to take troops out of the front line, and you couldn't attack every single turn with the same guys. It was pretty advanced stuff for the war game scene back then. But again, a much closer approximation of reality. It gave you constraints that you had to deal with."



Ian Trout

KORSUN POCKET

Over the years each new SSG game built on the insights of the last. One of their more acclaimed titles of recent years was Korsun Pocket, a recreation of a pivotal Eastern Front battle of 1944. As Roger put it, it was SSG's attempt to make the ultimate operational battle. "You've got Tactical, Operational, and Strategic. There are levels of warfare that you could look at. It was a very interesting battle. Where both sides have a lot to gain. They're both attacking, and both defending. It seemed to us to be, if there's ever such a thing, an equal battle. It's a very exciting one, and it took a lot of skill to win. We introduced, again, the concept of scripting, to govern a lot of the AI movement. The AI was very good, and on a very detailed, effectively tactical map, the units are moving around in a really low-level way, a bit like chess in a sense. It's very hard to get the AI to be right. Because the AI doesn't understand the concept of a front line."

Gregor elaborated: "It has no idea what a pocket is, either. It's hard to explain to people just how



Gregor and Ian playing a war board game



Decisive Battles of WWII Vol 2: Korsun Pocket (2003)

RUN 5

Available in print or on floppy disk, Run 5 magazine supplied a wealth of alternative scenarios to its subscribers, serving essentially as an early form of DLC. As Roger Keating recalls, it was also, on occasion, a magnet for controversy. "I always remember Prime Minister Keating making a comment about the British behaviour in Singapore in World War II, which the British government really hammered. And that caused us to write an article outlining what we believed was the historical truth of that situation, which tended more towards Mr Keating's line than the British Government's line. [laughs] Those were always fun times. We found that certain British members who were buying the magazine differed with us a bit about that particular article."



INTERVIEW

Joel Billings at Origins 1985

Roger with his first 10 games

Decisive Battles of WWII: Across the Dnepr

Carriers at War 2

Decisive Battles of WWII: Ardennes Offensive



Carriers at War II (1993)



Decisive Battles of World War II: Battles in Normandy (2004)

dumb an AI is. The analogy I like is, imagine you're sitting in a room, and you've got an old-fashioned calculator. And some numbers come to you. And a set of rules for those numbers, and you add them up, or divide them, whatever the rules say. And then you put them into the old-fashioned delivery tube, and it goes away somewhere. Numbers come in, stuff happens to numbers, numbers go out. That's the AI! It doesn't see 'map'. It doesn't see 'north'. It doesn't see 'pocket'. It doesn't see 'front'. It doesn't see 'back'. And at any one point in time it doesn't know what it's doing. It doesn't know that it's moving a unit. It doesn't know that it's conducting combat. It just does stuff to numbers. That's all it does, and all it can do, and yet it has to fake these human-like concepts. It has to fake the fabulous human decision-making processes that we have. It's not easy. But we'd been doing it for a while by then, so we were pretty good by Korsun Pocket."

AREAS OF OPERATIONS

Gregor went on to tell us about how SSG's games have moved more and more in the direction of shaping player choices based on realistic models of how military units actually function. "I think people who don't know much about warfare imagine that it's all about guys with rifles shooting each other. And, in fact, they are really only the tip of the spear. Behind them are vast numbers of men in uniform, or out of uniform, doing logistic work, doing all of the intelligence, the communications, all of the myriad tasks that are needed to support the guys up the pointy end, who are doing most of the fighting and dying. But that distinction is lost on a lot of people. And it's hard to model that in a game.

"That's something that we've done more and more. It was pretty good in Korsun Pocket, but by Karkov we also had a thing called Areas of Operations. That's where you can set a region, and tell a formation that it's only allowed in

that region. Now that region might expand as the game goes on. If they conquer certain objectives, they'll be allowed to move out into an expanded region. But what they absolutely cannot do if, say, they're at the north of a map, is travel 150 miles across all those lines of communications and pop up in the south and fight. Because that never, ever, ever happens."

Gregor gave a historical example of just how unwieldy large armies can be. "When Patton turns his corps around in the Battle of the Bulge, only 90 degrees, and in only three days, that is a miracle of modern warfare. Only someone like him could have done it. Everybody else would've taken at least a week. And Montgomery would've simply asked for more time, and everybody's troops.

"With the Areas of Operations, not only is it more accurate, as a representation of what actually happens in military operations, but it *really* helps the AI. Because now, it just can't do anything stupid. It is much more easy to control it, because you know it's got to be within this area. It can't ever get out of it. Unless the rules associated with that zone say, 'Now you're allowed these extra hexes.' But even there, it can't go outside its expanded area! It has to remain where it would have historically and do its mission that

OLD BATTLES ONLY

When choosing what historical battles to simulate, Roger Keating has one iron-clad rule: Wait until the dust has settled. "You really have to go back about 20 years. Vietnam is about the most modern battle you can really look at. It's always been regarded that you shouldn't take a battle that's, say, five or six years old, so Iraq and Syria and all those particular battles... they're too sensitive. You have to go back to historical environments. Once you do that, then the world is wide open to you."



was allocated to it, which is, 'Take this town', 'Achieve this objective,' or whatever."

WARLORDS

The war gaming genre that SSG helped to create is quite mature now, but Gregor conceded that their games will probably forever be niche products, if only because of popular opinion. "People think that war games are hard. Because they think about history, and they think: 'Oh, this is going to be *hard*.' There's real things there, or representations of real things, so therefore it's *hard*. And these are the same people, mind you, who often have the first 30 minutes of their build tree for StarCraft memorised. But they think that our game is *hard*. You can't get away from the fact that the presentation of stuff alters people's responses. I doubt that there was one customer in a thousand who would've thought of Warlords as war game.

"No! There are orcs and dragons! That can't be *hard*; can it? It's going to be fun! It's going to be easy, and fabulous to play! And it was all those things. But we certainly weren't going to tell them that it was a war game. Because if we had, they might've thought it was hard. And there's just no way around that issue. With our war games, we're not going to try. We're going to make war games for people who want to play war games, and you can't get away from that."

THE FUTURE

The pace of work at SSG has slowed down in recent years, and both Roger and Gregor have teaching gigs at AIE, training new generations of game designers. Gregor hinted that new games based on D-Day and the Battle of the Bulge could be on the cards — and they might even try to simulate one of the greatest 'what if?' scenarios of all time. "I would like to, personally, some day, do a Sea Lion game: the invasion of England; the planned, but never-implemented, invasion of England. Even though it's, in military terms, almost pure fantasy, to think that the Germans could somehow defeat the RAF *and* the Royal Navy *and* get their troops across in sufficient numbers to actually do anything. But — I still want to do it! Because I want to see fighting in Kent, and the last-ditch defence of London, and stuff like that.

MIND GAMES

Gregor Whitley told us how SSG usually tries to simulate battles where the opposing forces are fairly evenly matched. There are some notable exceptions, like *Across the Dnieper*, a game where the Russians are mostly running for their lives. "That was great fun, because their job was to tempt the Germans into pushing it just that little bit too hard, and then you could send some comrades in. And of course all the comrades would die, but they'd take a few Germans with them. That would really hurt the German offensive. It certainly hurt their Victory Points."



"If you look at it sensibly, it probably never would've happened. But you can always make a case. No invasion of Russia, and complete peace on the continent. Hitler losing his patience with those stubborn, but annoying English people. A more isolationist America. And then maybe, it could've happened. It's certainly fertile ground for novelists. So why can't we do it in the war game industry, too?"

In parting, Roger assured us that SSG wasn't going away any time soon.

"I don't want to get a real job yet."

"Apart from the real job that you already have", Gregor replied.

"Yes. [laughs]"

"We're still battling on and, no, you haven't heard the last of us!"



Warlords (1990)



Warlords II (1993)



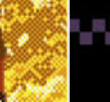
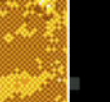
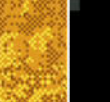
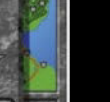
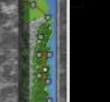
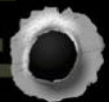
Warlords III: Reign of Heroes (1997)



PEOPLE THINK THAT WAR GAMES ARE HARD. BECAUSE THEY THINK ABOUT HISTORY, AND THEY THINK: 'OH, THIS IS GOING TO BE HARD!'



Warlords II





THE SPECIAL RIDICULOUSNESS OF

CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS III

It may be back in black, but it should be wrapped up in white

▀ JAMES O'CONNOR ▸

Not enough has been made of how bizarre the plot of Black Ops III is. The game came out, reviewers and fans noted that the story was confusing and that the writing was bad, and everyone moved on. But Black Ops III isn't just a poorly written game — it's baffling to the point of actually being scary. If you keep in mind as you play that this all came out of human brains, and made it into the biggest game release of the year, it's terrifying... but terrifying in a wonderful sort of way.

Calls of Duty plots have bounced all over the place since Modern Warfare's genuinely thoughtful pastiche of recent global conflicts, but Black Ops III is perhaps the most ambitious game in the series, story-wise. It tries to address the ethics of transhumanism, the human cost of the military-industrial complex, how impersonal modern and future warfare will be... but wow, is the script ever a weird, wonderful failure.

Here's my understanding of the plot — after your character (named "Player") gets their arms ripped off by a robot, they get turned into an android who can hack into people's memories, and thoughts, although doing so carries a terrible cost for both host and hacker. You kill a whole bunch of people in Singapore, take part in a Deus Ex boss fight, and eventually start jumping around between people's minds. Everyone betrays everyone else, and you start to see weird things, possibly because other people's minds are bleeding into yours. Things keep exploding into flocks of ravens, one section is set during World War II, and the last mission, in which you hunt down and destroy giant hearts, is set

inside a metaphor. No, really.

I just checked Wikipedia and... I'm way off. The actual plot is, somehow, even more existential, and isn't conveyed adequately within the game at all. They've taken the most popular modern videogame franchise and written a script that resembles what a fifth Matrix film would have looked like had the Wachowskis maintained a consistent downward spiral... and if you ask me, that's awesome.

Black Ops III (which is, just quickly, also the most enjoyable Black Ops campaign by a mile) is the sort of release that I'm surprised was allowed to happen by Activision, which seems to actively shun inventiveness these days. The franchise's identity has shifted over time, and the games have long resembled Michael Bay films — enjoyable (sometimes), a bit difficult to follow, but dedicated to bombast above all else. Not so here. Plenty of things explode in Black Ops III, but it's got bigger things on its mind... and it wants you to process them the same way you might process a kaleidoscope on an acid trip. It's like if The Force Awakens had been directed by Terrence Malick, and was set within the dying thoughts of Darth Vader. It's bonkers.

Although it totally fails, I love that Treyarch tried something so strange with Black Ops III's plot. They crafted an experience that most players can't hope to understand, which no critic I spoke to while I was reviewing the game could even come close to unravelling — but it's exciting seeing Call of Duty being experimented with, even when it fails so utterly. ☹



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HERE COME THE **PEACENIKS**

Peace? I love the word. As I love farms, all Marios, and thee

▸ MIKOLAI ◀

» The videogame industry isn't what it used to be. After 40 years of running, jumping, shooting, and dying, it's starting to exhibit telltale signs of ageing. The reflexes are slowing, the joints are getting a little creaky, and the allure of guns and ammo is starting to make way for more age appropriate pursuits.

Whether that's a leisurely walk through the countryside, a spot of gardening, or a sudden interest in home mortgages from shady racoons, there's a growing market for games that eschew violence in favour of more relaxed pastimes.

SPACE INVADERS TO THE SUBURBS

When videogames first emerged in the late '70s they were an abstraction — all simple shapes and repetitive patterns on a monochrome screen. As the medium grew and prospered, more vivid and complex worlds began to take shape.

Space Invaders eventually gave rise to Mario and Sonic running across a technicolour, parallax-scrolling landscape. Then 3D appeared in the mid-'90s, and by the time the PS2 and Xbox appeared on the scene, Sega's once-blue skies were being phased out by murky browns and military operations in far-flung approximations of the real world.

That being said, you can only shoot a person so many times before they're dead.

Eventually, the novelty wears thin, the body stops twitching, and you find yourself looking for something a little more sophisticated, laidback, or cerebral.

According to the Entertainment Software Association, the average age of a gamer in 2014 was 31 years old. At the same time, they found that there were more gamers aged 36 and over than there were between the ages of 18 to 35 or under the age of 18.

In other words, the industry is ageing. The first generation of kids to grow up with videogames is settling into their 40s, raising families, and knuckling down to reality. And while they're still playing games, the types of games they're interested in, and the free time they have to enjoy them is changing.

This has provided the videogame industry with both a unique opportunity, and a potentially huge market. Bolstered by digital distribution and a vibrant indie culture, it's allowed developers



and players to explore alternative ideas and landscapes that aren't hamstrung by traditional tropes such as enemies, bosses, levels, or princesses in distress.

WE HAVE A LOT OF EMOTIONS

Writing for Motherjones.com about the changing nature of videogames, Maggie Caldwell noted that, "Games can be emotionally moving, intellectually challenging, deeply political, and straight-up good quirky fun... They can be Kill Bill or Amelia [and everything in between]."

They can also be grounded in the mundane. A genre that's only popped up in the last few years is the 'walking simulator'. As the name suggests, these games forgo traditional action in favour of a slower pace, a lot of first-

person exploring, and a slow-burn approach to storytelling.

Made possible thanks to a combination of digital distribution, crowdfunding, and burnt-out developers launching their own indie studios, it's seen titles like *Gone Home*, *The Stanley Parable*, and *The Vanishing of Ethan Carter* create their own niche.

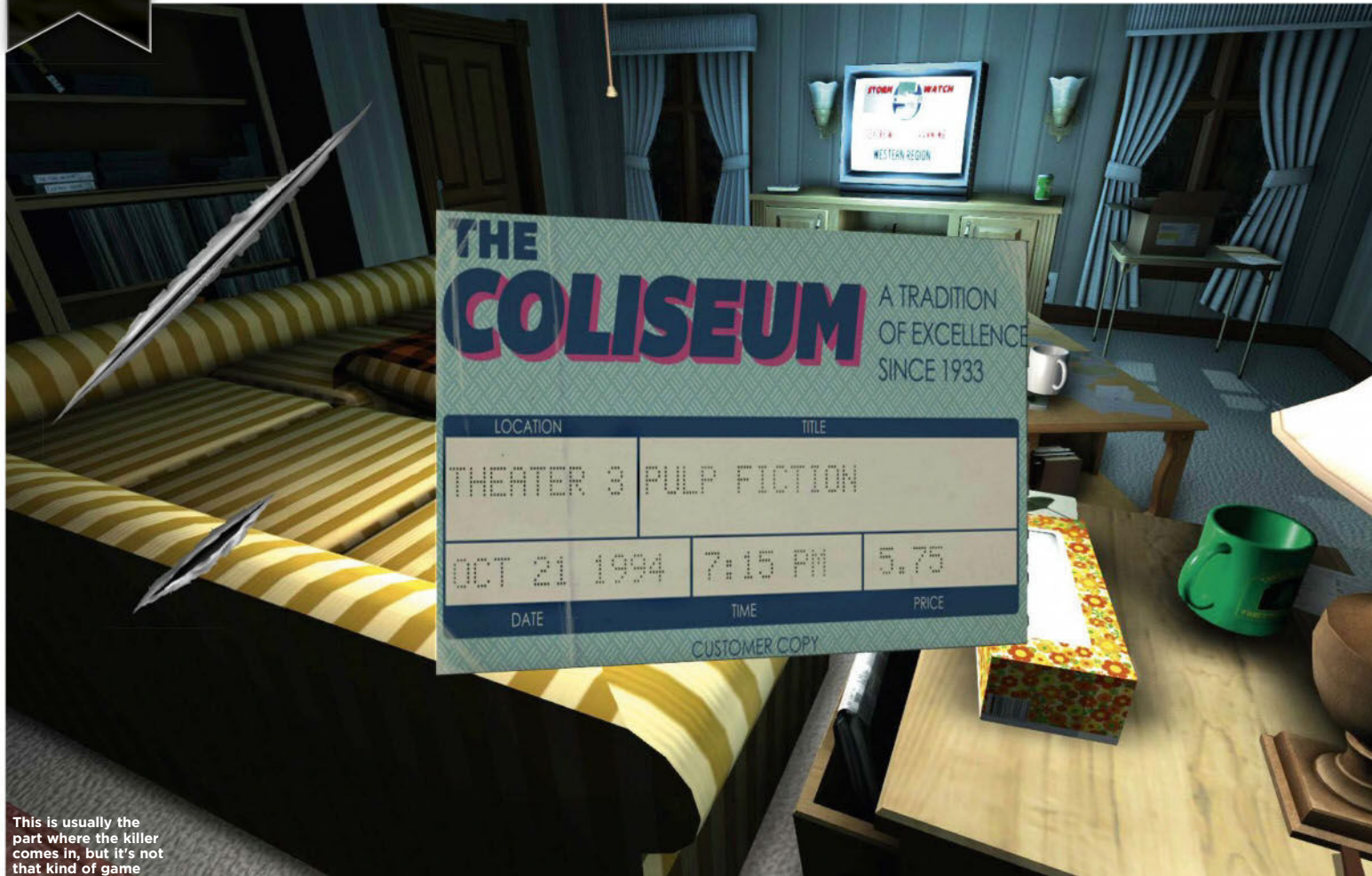
Not everyone is a fan, and even the name 'walking simulators' is heavy with self-deprecation. But the fact these videogames have found an audience says a lot about the broadening definition of gameplay.

It's the above coupled with the fact you no longer need a traditional adversary, boss battles, or even a challenge to overcome.

A HAPPY VALLEY

Since making its debut on the Super Nintendo in 1996, the *Harvest Moon* series has carved out a small but dedicated following. The simple joys of animal husbandry, farming, and small-town dating has seen 25 titles released across multiple platforms and a further 14 offshoots. Since 2015, the official titles have been released under the *Story of Seasons* name (due to boring legal reasons).





This is usually the part where the killer comes in, but it's not that kind of game

KID BETTER HAVE MY MONEY

'Alternative games' aren't a new concept, and it's easy to forget just how groundbreaking Sim City was when it launched in 1989. Or that the Harvest Moon series has been with us since the Super Nintendo era.

Fact is, we've always had videogames that champion the ordinary, everyday scenarios we rarely contemplate. Lemonade Stand was available on home computers back in 1979. Difference being, these games have grown exponentially in recent years, and they've found a commercial-size audience to support them. Animal Crossing is a licence to print money in 2016, but there were real questions about its Western viability, and whether there was a market for it back in the GameCube era. Fast-forward a couple of generations (and a jump to handhelds), and this quirky little game about mortgages, home wares, and being bullied by a Raccoon is selling millions of units.

This isn't an isolated example. Harvest Moon has now splintered off into two completely separate titles, with Story of Seasons

competing against its former namesake. The Sims has sold 175-million copies around the world and for a brief moment in time, FarmVille was being played by 80-million Facebook users a month.

Talking to VentureBeat about the appeal of these games, David Grund, the developer behind World's Dawn (a Harvest Moon-inspired farming sim), noted that, "The stakes really aren't that high... Shipping a certain number of crops by next week's market is a pleasant alternative to the familiar 'save the world' objective you've seen a million times before."

And there's the rub — unlike traditional videogames, titles like The Sims, Animal Crossing, and the various Harvest Moon offshoots are light on storylines and objectives. Instead, the narrative is player-driven and emergent, forgoing any traditional enemies and bosses for the simple joys of a bumper crop, or a productive day.

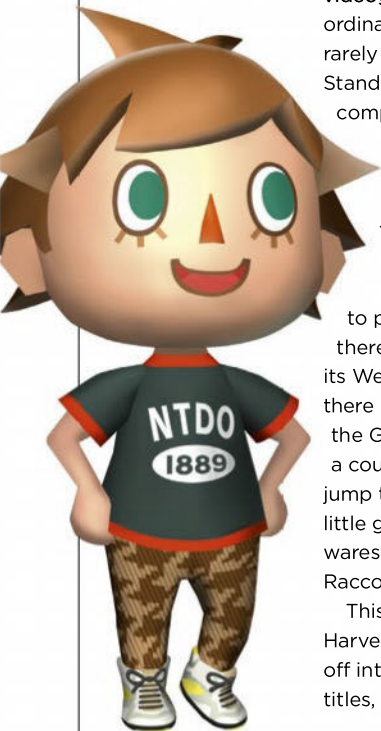
As Grund summarises, "Today, there are more types of games out there than ever, but it's still a little depressing how many of them rely on what boils down to killing stuff as a central mechanic. Sometimes you're just not in the mood for that, and games like Harvest Moon offer an important alternative."

PACIFISM IN A VIOLENT WORLD

While some games start out all happy valleys and apple trees, others offer a pacifist route through a violent world. Traditionally, this has been the realm of stealth games, but more dedicated players have stretched that concept to breaking point in games where you're actively encouraged to shoot first and ask questions later. Kyle Hinckley

achieved his 15 minutes of fame when he completed Fallout 4 with zero kills. Utilising a variety of exploits and some painstaking trial and error, he let the NPCs and game environment

IT'S STILL A LITTLE DEPRESSING HOW MANY [GAMES] RELY ON WHAT BOILS DOWN TO KILLING STUFF AS A CENTRAL MECHANIC





administer justice on his behalf. Dig around online and you'll find whole communities of people dedicated to pacifist gameplay runs through violent videogames.

As Hinckley told the Guardian, "It's not about whether or not I'm against violence ... all that matters is that the game doesn't count any kills... That's what we want. That's all we want. If we can do that, that's a pretty crazy achievement. That's something that most people have already dismissed as being impossible."

Impossible, perhaps, but not completely unforeseen. Finish the notoriously violent *Postal 2* without taking a life and the developers will reward you with the ceremonial title of 'Jesus'. If your brain is mush from killing neon-lit enemies in *Geometry Wars 2*, you can try Pacifist mode — where your only goal is to stay alive.

ABSTRACTION IS AN ART FORM

Film critic Roger Ebert famously dismissed the concept of videogames as art. His argument was that videogames, unlike books or films, require you to overcome adversary and 'win'. Art, he argued, cannot be won.

But there is an alternative, and

it's gaining ground. Titles such as *Flower*, *Proteus*, *Hohokum*, and *Journey* skirt the edges, leaving traditional videogame concepts like adversaries and 'winning' on the cutting room floor. They're replaced by the simple pleasure of exploring a world and making a connection.

Speaking to *Gamasutra*, *Journey* developer Jenova Chen explained that, "The goal was to create a game where people felt they are connected with each other, to show the positive side of humanity in them. A lot of games today have a list of quests, places to go, items to collect and rewards to receive... We just ignore each other. So in order to make players care about each other, we have to remove their power, and remove their tasks."

As it turns out, stripping a game back to remove weapons, adversaries, and objectives can be quite liberating. With no fear of death, no real fail states, and no fetch quests, games can transcend their binary us vs them origins and become something other. They can become an experience.

While *Journey* remains an outlier in an industry that likes to throw guns and explosions around with wild abandon, it also showcases a

PACIFIST RUN ▾

The Pacifist Run is all about completing a (violent) videogame without taking any lives. There's a whole online community dedicated to these zero-kill runs. Here are some of the more impressive completions:

- *Fallout 4*
- *Postal 2*
- *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*
- *Ikaruga*
- *Metal Gear Solid 4*

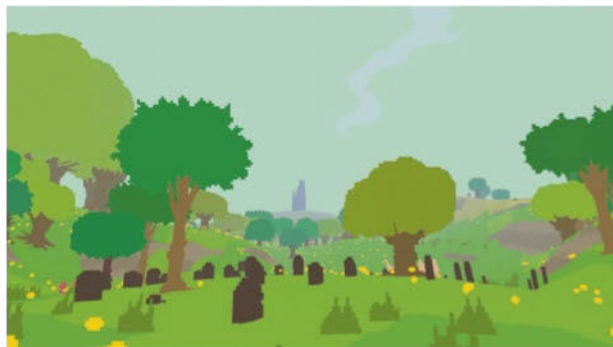


growing maturity. Forty years since the first arcade machines started hoovering up coins, the industry has reached middle age. Just like the developers and fans that were there from the get-go, it's a lot more comfortable in its own skin.

That sense of freedom has allowed the industry to explore new ideas and gameplay dynamics without relying on old crutches. While it hasn't put the guns and ammo away, it's cut back on the Doritos and Mountain Dew in favour of single malt and a good book.

Or, rather, to paraphrase an old biblical quote, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became an adult, I put away childish things." ❧

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DECONSTRUCTING MODERN WARFARE 2

A tipping point for the series with a deliberate escalation of controversy

▶ JAMES O'CONNOR ◀

In March 2010, word got out that Vince Zampella and Jason West, two of the three co-founders of Infinity Ward, had been fired from the high-profile developer. The previous November, the team had released Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 to incredible reviews and sales. It sold 4.7-million copies in its first 24 hours in the US and UK alone, bringing in \$310 million and cementing it as the biggest entertainment launch of all time (it would be overtaken by the first CoD: Black Ops game the very next year).

Even in the increasing tumultuous world of AAA development, this struck people as unusual. The official word was that they had been shown the door for “breaches of contract and insubordination”. Essentially, it would eventually come out, there was a dispute over what Zampella and West would work on next: their contract allowed them to work on any project they wanted, but Activision wanted them focused on Modern Warfare 3. This eventually spiralled out into a lengthy legal battle, the details of which remain somewhat nebulous (in an interview with Game Informer right before a settlement was reached in May 2012, West admitted that he wasn’t entirely clear what, exactly, Activision was pursuing them for). Bobby Kotick, CEO and president of Activision, wasn’t well liked by any stretch before all of this; afterwards, he was the most hated man in gaming.

The behind-the-scenes controversy is the main thing people remember about it now, but Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 was a turning point for the franchise in many ways. It was the last game in the series to manage a Metacritic score over 90, but it was also the game that caused a large portion of the fan base to turn on the franchise. Despite featuring some very clever pieces of level design, much tighter mechanics and some amazing set pieces, it hasn’t been remembered fondly in the same way the first Modern Warfare has been remembered.

MOVE OUT

MW2 released worldwide on 10 November, 2009, two years after its predecessor. The plot followed on from the original and was largely incomprehensible, albeit not as outright crazy as later games.

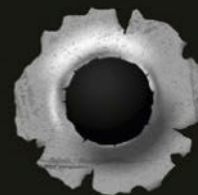
With Zakhaev killed at the end of MW1, the world was now being terrorised by his cartoonishly evil right-hand man, Makarov. Across the campaign, you jumped between five characters before ending back in control of MW1’s Soap for the final missions, because every other character died. The Call of Duty series has tried to recapture the fire of the first Modern Warfare a few times, but never managed to recreate the gut-punch first-person deaths in that game — the public execution of Al Fulani and the iconic ‘nuke’ scene have remained series high points.

In many other ways, of course, Modern Warfare 2 was a huge improvement over its immediate predecessor. Chief among these improvements was the fact that enemies no longer spawned endlessly until you pushed far

Duty is a blockbuster experience, essentially, but Modern Warfare 2 doesn’t go quite as over the top as future titles (by the time Modern Warfare 3 arrived, we were blowing up the Eiffel Tower for little discernible reason). It was still a game, though, of ridiculous snowmobile jumps, exploding gulags, nukes going off in space and one too many of those patented Call of Duty moments where an explosion knocks you down and everything goes blurry for a moment. For some players, it was too much.

REMEMBER, NO RUSSIAN

It’s impossible to talk about Modern Warfare 2 without discussing the ‘No Russian’ mission, the game’s central talking piece, which Infinity Ward infamously allowed players to skip if they did



And you think you've encountered strict pool rules before



enough forward — there was now a finite number of enemies in the vast majority of skirmishes, and once they were all killed you were free to move forward without needing to worry about getting shot. The game was, consequentially, quite a bit easier than previous titles, but also much more fair (kudos to anyone who actually managed to pass Modern Warfare’s ridiculous ‘One Shot, One Kill’ mission on Veteran, you legends).

The game’s engine was only tweaked slightly from Modern Warfare, with slightly improved texture streaming and stronger AI: Infinity Ward’s engine was run into the ground somewhat over successive years but, at launch, Modern Warfare 2 was quite visually distinctive. Call of

RADIO SILENCE

Here’s some journalistic disclosure: I reached out in a few directions to try to get interviews for this piece, but nothing eventuated. Infinity Ward never replied, nor did anyone I reached out to personally. I got a reply from someone at Respawn (which West and Zampella formed after leaving Infinity Ward), though: “Thanks for your interest. I appreciate you reaching out to include us in the piece, but we unfortunately have to decline.”



WHEN DUTY DOESN'T CALL

Interesting fact — CoD: MW2 almost dropped the Call of Duty branding. In mid-2009, Activision rebranded the game as 'Modern Warfare 2', seemingly trying to spin off a new brand. They soon realised what a huge mistake this was, as brand awareness for the newly titled game dropped considerably, and 'Call of Duty' was on the final box (albeit in smaller writing).



not think they would be able to handle it. No Russian puts you in the boots of Joseph Allen, a soldier in ludicrously deep cover, as he partakes in a massacre with Makarov and his men at a Russian airport filled with civilians.

In a 2012 interview with Matthew S. Burns on his website Magical Wasteland, Mohammad Alavi, the designer behind the No Russian level, said that he felt the mission achieved the storytelling goals he hoped it would. "In the sea of endless bullets you fire off at countless enemies without a moment's hesitation or afterthought, the fact that I got the player to hesitate even for a split second and actually consider his actions before he pulled that trigger — that makes me feel very accomplished".

It remains, on a replay, potent and disturbing. The screams of the crowds, the way lights and fixtures break, the sheer quantity of corpses that build up as you slowly work your way through the airport, methodically killing everyone — it's genuinely upsetting. You can choose not to fire at all, if you want, until security and eventually police fire back at you, but it would be fair to assume that on that first play most of us followed orders and fired at least a few bullets into the crowds of people.

The problem is that, plot-wise, none of this really makes sense (which has become something of a running theme for Call of Duty since). Makarov shoots Allen at the end of the mission, having realised that he's a double agent... and subsequently, when a dead American body is found on the scene with a point-blank gunshot in the head, the USA gets blamed for the attack, despite the fact that well-known international terrorist Makarov would have been clearly visible in security footage. It somewhat detracts from the gravity of the scene when the mission exists to service a nonsensical plot twist.

The 'message' of No Russian isn't as clear as the message behind MW1's nuke moment, or its AC-130 gunship mission, both of which are powerful examples of how impersonal the destruction of human lives can be during warfare. It's another example of massive, horrific violence against people who can't defend themselves, but if the level's message is, 'Violence is actually awful', or, 'Killing isn't always fun', well... yeah, that's well-established.

MULTI MAGIC

Of course, a lot of people play Call of Duty exclusively for the multiplayer. Modern Warfare 2 introduced quite a few tweaks, changes and cool new pieces of equipment to the formula, and proved extremely popular, as these games typically do. It added in riot shields, customisable perks (including a mercy-kill nuke that could be used to end the round if you managed a 25-kill streak), and expanded on the original game's persistent ranking/unlock model, which has since become so commonplace that a similar system is all but expected in any good online shooter.

But the game also had real balance issues. Pick the right perks and weapons — the Tactical Knife Lightweight Pro, Marathon Pro, and Commando Pro — and you could play a class that many players called the 'knife witch'. This combination allowed players to run around the map, sneaking up on other players and one-hit killing them with their combat knives: a ridiculously irritating way to die. Melee attacks

**"I GOT THE
PLAYER TO
HESITATE EVEN FOR
A SPLIT SECOND AND
ACTUALLY CONSIDER
HIS ACTIONS BEFORE
HE PULLED THAT
TRIGGER**



This is commonly referred to as the 'Spec Ops in the grass' move



GHOSTING Storm Productions put out a six-part comic tie-in for MW2, focusing on the character of 'Ghost', who wears a face-masking balaclava in the game and has the same voice actor as Gaz from the previous MW game. Unfortunately, no-one really gave a damn about Ghost's origin story — reviews were not kind.



have been noticeably nerfed in several Call of Duty games since. In Australia, the matchmaking could be a bit rubbish, too — while Treyarch's first game, *World at War*, had allowed players to search for games by region, Infinity Ward's insistence that we reach out into the wider world backfired somewhat, to put it lightly.

Over six years later, the community's not quite dead yet. Currently, around 2000 players still jump into the game's multiplayer lobbies on Steam each day, although console players complain

of servers being filled with hackers. Some fans fervently believe that MW2's multiplayer was the best in the series: a petition on Change.org for a modern remastering of *Modern Warfare 2* has, as of writing, attracted over 220,000 signatures. These petitions exist for just about every game in the Call of Duty back catalogue, but this is the only one that has gained any real traction from fans.

IN COD-CLUSION

Modern Warfare 2, then, sits at various intersections — it's arguably

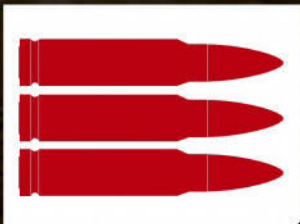
the final game made when Infinity Ward was recognised as the 'A' studio for Call of Duty. It's the game responsible for the vitriol against Activision hitting a fever pitch: the point where Call of Duty was most critically successful, but also the real starting point of the ongoing backlash against the series. It's a fascinating follow-up to the original *Modern Warfare*, a game that changed the FPS genre in real, tangible ways... but nobody could have predicted all the turmoil the sequel caused. Whether *Modern Warfare 2* was a series high point or the game that set a path towards ruination is down to personal opinion and taste. It remains, in any case, a fascinating sequel in a series that has dominated videogames for the past eight years. A critical darling. A PR disaster. A controversial work of dumb genius. ❧



According to damning reviews, Ghost's backstory should have stayed hidden

THE MAGIC BULLET

Here's a weird little issue with the No Russian mission — if you just completely disobey Makarov at the end, turn and walk around a corner, he'll somehow still shoot you and leave you for dead without you needing to walk up to him. His bullet curves around the wall. Somehow.





THE ART OF WAR GAMING

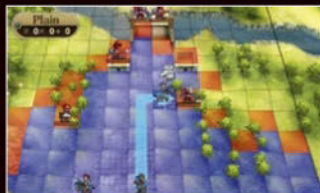
All men can see the tactics whereby
ALEX MANN conquers, but few
can see his strategy

» Strategy is a prominent part of our gaming lives. Whether violent, jovial or downright silly, most games we play require some form of planning. With so many games dropping in today's climate, sometimes it's hard to stay on top of all the different ways to win. Luckily the old masters have our backs, and Chinese war genius Sun Tzu opted to share his pearls of wisdom rather than shout hurtful abuse down the mic. The thirteen chapters of The Art of War aim to help you better understand yourself and your enemy, but in order to implement each step you need to have a clear understanding of where they apply. To help, we've paired each chapter with an appropriate game — but don't get ahead of yourself — Master Sun would still have kicked your butt in all of these.

始計 MAKING OF PLANS: Fire Emblem Awakening

MASTER SUN SAID: Victory belongs to the side that scores most in the temple calculations before battle.

» Throughout The Art of War, Sun Tzu constantly refers to the importance of preparation. To him, battles were won not on the battlefield but decided beforehand with well-laid plans. By placing us in the shoes of The Shepherds' genius tactician, Fire Emblem Awakening sees characters relying on us to govern their every move, be it in training, combat and also, uh, their romantic encounters. The gravity of this responsibility comes from the game's permadeath mechanic, where a warrior who dies is gone for good. To avoid walking around like a pitiful sack of guilt,



players must plan ahead before entering the battlefield. Which units will best navigate the terrain? What weapons do the enemies have? Is it safer to split up or stay together? All these questions need to be addressed before initiating an encounter, which can be time-consuming but oh so worth it. Recklessness will only lead to great loss... and, yeah, a bad case of the guilts.



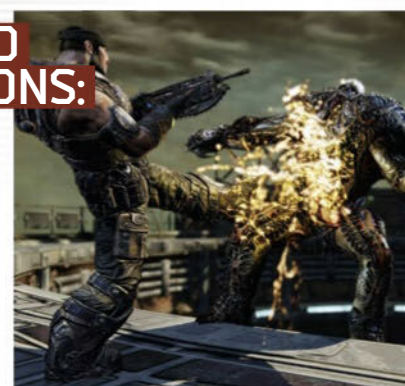


作戰 WAGING OF WAR:

» Eve Online

MASTER SUN SAID: *In war, victory should be swift.*

» EVE Online may not focus around combat, but it certainly isn't devoid of it, either. The statistics-based world is governed by fragile alliances and a shifting economy (think Game of Thrones in space) in which both political and physical confrontations are bound to break out. It's this slow build that makes war and combat so damn dangerous, which is why it's important to be aware of the expenses involved. Master Sun sees war as a battle of time versus money, where the longer a war rages, the higher toll it takes on its people and their finances. In EVE, some fleets take actual years to build and, once a conflict breaks, drawing things out can put a strain on valuable resources. Elongated affairs also run the risk of fatiguing allies, causing them to question their allegiances and a) cutting and running, or b) switching sides. Waging war is always risky, but minimising this risk by being aware of the cost is a sure way to have an advantage over your enemy.



aren't working like a well-oiled machine. While Master Sun gives merit to the old saying, "The best defence is a good offence", for taking away an enemy's ability to attack is always fortuitous, being impregnable before pushing forward is of the utmost importance. Sure, running out and destroying baddies is always a hoot, but with nothing to fall back on, you're gonna end up, "NOTHIN' BUT—" yeah, you get it.

謀攻 STRATEGIC OFFENSIVE:

» Pokémon

MASTER SUN SAID:

The highest form of warfare is to attack strategy itself.

» It may not be the first game that 'war' brings to mind, but battle governs a pocket monster's life far more than most will admit. Trainers call the strategic shots, which can be as simple as 'water beats fire' and 'fire beats grass', but the more intense battles usually require a bit more brain power. Sometimes a critter trained against their weakness can actually be the best way to go, lulling an enemy into a false sense of security. Whatever the play, it all comes down to strategy. Know your enemy's plan before they know yours. When a trainer is stacking stat boosts, laying down Haze can undo their hard work. Yet if your opponent has already accounted for this, make sure to have a similar move like Roar ready, sending that Pokémon back to their uncomfortable circular home before they can land a killing blow. By keeping one step ahead of the enemy, you echo Master Sun when he states, "Know the enemy, know yourself, and victory is never in doubt."



軍形 FORMS AND DISPOSITIONS:

» Gears of War 3

MASTER SUN SAID:

Invulnerability rests with self; vulnerability, with the enemy.

» Gears of War is most famous for its brainless bros sticking chainsaws into aliens, shouting something along the lines of, "NOTHIN' BUT BITS!" But what it lacks in depth, it more than makes up for in fun, especially in Horde Mode. This plays out like violent tower defence, where waves of enemies break themselves against fortifications that you and three other meat-heads have upgraded; all while getting chainsawed in the guts to the shouts of, "NOTHIN' BUT BITS!" Fortifications become essential as the difficulty rises, yet amount to nothing if you and your pals



兵勢 POTENTIAL ENERGY:

» CoD: Black Ops II

MASTER SUN SAID: *The warrior skilled at stirring the enemy provides a visible form, and the enemy is sure to come.*

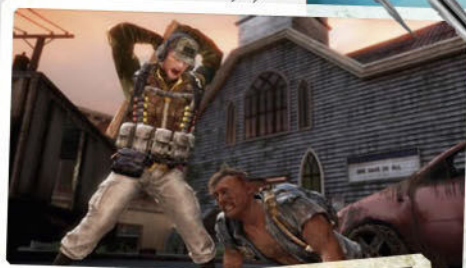
» Everyone has rage-quit at some point. Whether a section of a game is too hard or an enemy is giving you the shits, sometimes throwing your controller across the room simply can't be helped. To Master Sun, this all comes down to mental warfare. Wearing your opponent down mentally affects their physical performance. If you're a CoD player, the most infuriating moments have most likely come from either abuse or campers, those sneaky arsehats who plant themselves around corners to catch you off guard. The most effective campers have a method, moving around so they're never waiting in the same place twice, baiting a stubborn enemy into their trap over and over again. Master Sun identifies this as potential energy: an ember just waiting to be sparked into a flame. Sure, it can be cheap, but if Sun-Tzu himself dropped into Black Ops II, you can bet he would be pwning NOOBS from the safety of their blind spot.

軍爭 THE FRAY:

» The Last of Us

MASTER SUN SAID: *The difficulty of the fray lies in making the crooked straight.*

» With direct conflict comes danger, and losing an individual conflict in The Last of Us online sees you facing one of the messiest, most brutal endings going around. To survive, you need to tread quietly and stay with your crew. Know when to fight and when not to, when to stay and to run. The biggest mistake people make is getting greedy, downing an enemy with a few shots and then rushing over to perform a brutal execution. The smart player is callous. They use a downed enemy as bait to draw opponents, picking off anyone stupid enough to leave cover. The same can be said for their own teammates. If they go down, the callous player waits to take out that overeager executioner, only reviving a friend once they are unquestionably in the clear. The Fray is chaotic, but the smart player controls that chaos. By creating opportunity out of misfortune, a clever player makes the crooked straight.



虛實 EMPTY AND FULL:

» StarCraft II

MASTER SUN SAID: *War has no constant dynamic; water has no constant form.*

» War is ever-changing, and tactics used in one situation might be completely useless in another. With pros training around the clock (thanks to the incentive of cash moneys), StarCraft II couldn't be more indicative of this. While it's important to prepare and have a plan, it's also important to know your enemy, read their weaknesses and act accordingly. At risk of sounding like a self-help book, you are a unique individual, you are special (maybe), but so is your adversary. You may be trying to outsmart your enemy, but they are also trying to outsmart you.



Master Sun speaks in opposites here: exhaust a fresh enemy, starve a well-fed enemy, and unsettle a settled enemy. Your opponent may not always stick to their plan, so prepare to alter yours. Whether this be Zerg rushing an opponent in early moments or dropping some surprise Terran nukes in the later stages, keep it fresh. Being a malleable player and exploiting your enemy's missteps are a must for any diehard strategist.





九變 THE NINE CHANGES:

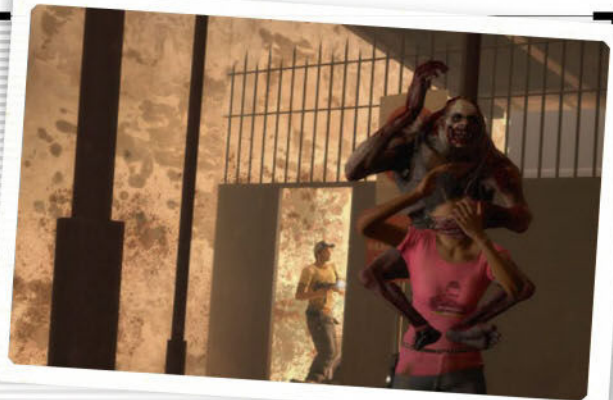
» Civilization V

MASTER SUN SAID: *The wise leader in his deliberations always blends consideration of gain and harm.*



» The best leader is a balanced leader, one who is not drawn too heavily to a particular cause or emotion. By doing so, a leader leaves themselves open to opportunities. In Civilization V this can be hard, as leaders are generally paired with a particular style. Gandhi is great for someone attempting a cultural victory, for example, but is vulnerable early on to aggressive expansionists. Attempting to avoid war may be noble, but it can also

end in disaster. At the same time, it can be just as damaging to instigate war when doing so will irritate other nations. As Master Sun says, "There are roads not to take, there are armies not to attack, there are terrains not to contest, there are orders not to obey." It's always a case of harm versus gain, and while most decisions will have a fair share of both, observing the changes and



行軍 ON THE MARCH:

» Left 4 Dead 2

MASTER SUN SAID: *Rashly underestimate your enemy, and you will surely be taken captive.*



» When on the march it is important to be able to read the signs of battle. If an enemy catches you off guard, you are already at a disadvantage. In Left 4 Dead 2, one needs to utilise all their available senses, as watching and listening for conflict is crucial. Special infected are heralded by a unique chime, and pairing that chime with the right gross ghoully will put you at an advantage. Being prepared for a Smoker's stank-as-hell tongue to shoot out or a twisted little Jockey to try and joy-ride your face will allow you to shut down the threat before it gets out of hand. It also saves time, ammo and first aid kits. These are things that can't necessarily be planned ahead, as the random spawn structure means no play-through is quite the same, but they can be avoided if you read the signs correctly. On the march you need to adapt to your enemy's movements or die.

地形 FORMS OF TERRAIN:

» Armello

MASTER SUN SAID: *The form of the terrain is the sold best ally.*

» It doesn't take an ancient master to realise that different terrain affects the way you fight, but it does take a smart player to utilise that terrain correctly. In Armello, the world is broken into hex shapes, each containing a different terrain type. At first, areas like the forest are harmless, but at night these mask their opponents, allowing for a big ambush. Swamps, on the other hand, are poisonous to start, sucking one health from any character who attempts to cross, but the skilled player knows how to take advantage of this. Moving around swamps, taking a longer route in order to retain their precious health, or using a forest, a player can ambush this wanderer, taking the majority of the force them back onto the perilous terrain. The land can be your ally or your enemy; it's all about how you use it.



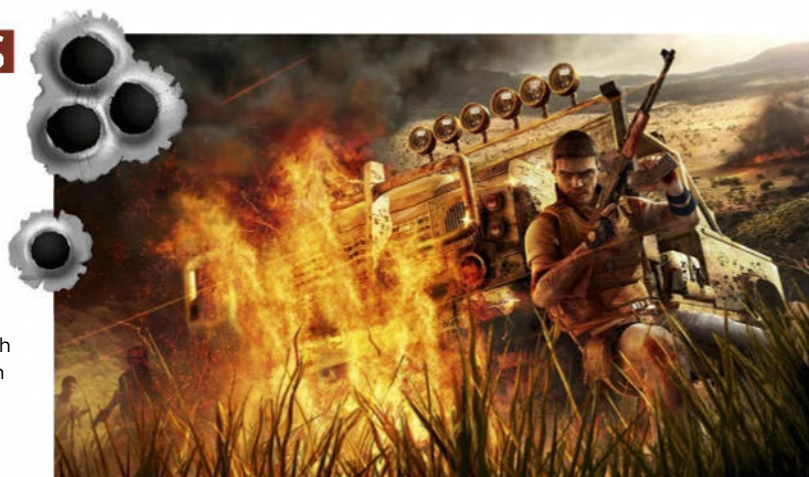
Our King creeps closer to death.
All heroes have received down income.
The race for the throne has begun.

九地 THE NINE KINDS OF GROUNDS:

>> Worms Armageddon

MASTER SUN SAID: Strong and weak, both can serve, thanks to the principle of ground.

Understanding different types of terrain is essential, but reading your enemy's moves on each is just as important. Worms Armageddon pits players in some crazy settings: from a used car lot to outer space — yet each terrain holds strategic positions. You may start scattered, but quickly finding a good spot, and exploiting an enemy's poor positioning, is the key to battle. An enemy on a precarious edge or with their back to the water is never far away from the shrill, mousy screams of death. A worm who's blocked up in a cave might seem useless, but as soon as they start calling in airstrikes can become a major threat. Being dug in gives them plenty of time to see you coming so throwing their expectations is crucial. Use one worm as bait, and Ninja Rope another to a better position. Most importantly, never write off a soldier, as even the weakest slithering warrior can be effective, especially considering their explosive little deaths.



火攻 ATTACK BY FIRE: >> Far Cry 2

MASTER SUN SAID: When starting a fire, be upwind; never attack from downwind.

Not many games can boast a fire mechanic as strong as the one seen in Far Cry 2. Instead of being purely visual, fire moves with the wind, eating up anything flammable in its path. When attacking camps, it can be your best friend — and it can also be used to distract or distance yourself from enemies who will keep their distance or shy away entirely. But death by fire is just one element of what Master Sun is really trying to say with this chapter. When scouting a camp it's important to see what's available to you before rushing in. What structures are in place? Are weapon crates or explosives in helpful spots? Can you lure an enemy closer to a vehicle? The main focus here is how to maximise the use of your environment. It's something the Far Cry series has always done well and continues to do so, for your surroundings are a weapon just waiting to be used.



用間 ESPIONAGE: >> Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain

MASTER SUN SAID: Spies are a key element in warfare. On them depends an army's every move.

Metal Gear may go about things in a crazy way, like ballooning objects (including, crates, sheep and downed enemies) out of combat to add to your own supplies, but one of its stronger military roots lies in its use of spies. According to Master Sun, there are five different kinds of spies: Local, Internal, Double, Dead, and Live — each of these playing a part in Snake's latest mission (even if most of their work happens off screen). When enemies are taken, they can be converted into intel units of varying skill. These units allow

Snake access to crucial information, such as the location of enemy routes or certain encampments, giving dem Diamond Dogs a significant planning advantage. Master Sun stresses that a general who utilises all types of spies correctly has the ultimate upper hand, and in the Phantom Pain, this can often spell the difference between a smooth S rank and a not-so-smooth chicken hat. ◀◀



FEATURE



THE CONSOLE WAR DIARIES

1997-2002



A true survivor's tale

▀ **JAMES O'CONNOR** ▸

» Console wars don't carry as much meaning as they used to. Exclusives still exist, but most of the massive third-party releases are made available across systems. These days opting for one console over another might mean that you get Tomb Raider a bit earlier, or that Activision will give you those Call of Duty maps you already paid for a little sooner. Nintendo's off running their own race, and no one puts as much effort into slagging the competition off as they used to.

But the console wars of my childhood were a different matter. They were brutal, dirty affairs. Franchises were

torn away from their home consoles. Polygon counts were argued over. Local propaganda rags (agnostic Hyper notwithstanding) churned us all up. Shit got real, friends.

I've recently recovered my war diaries from this period, picked out a few of the important entries, tidied up the language a bit to suit an adult audience, and...okay, yes, maybe fabricated a few entries here and there. What follows is a more-or-less authentic portrayal of how important the war between the Nintendo 64 and PlayStation was for the kids of that era. «



DECEMBER 25, 1997

NINTENDO SIXTY-FOOOOOOUR! OH MY GOD!

As of today, I'm officially enlisted in the console wars. I'll be checking into the nearest newsagent soon to grab our side's official newsletter (N64 Gamer). I'm already excited about school starting back so I can tell all my friends that I've been playing Turok: Dinosaur Hunter and Lylat Wars over the break. Right now, my mind is too blown by the graphics on this thing to even think about the PlayStation. The future is amazing.

I also got this diary today, to 'encourage my writing'. I suppose I should introduce myself, so that future generations can know more about me when I sell the rights to my back catalogue as an adult. Hello! My name is James. I'm 10 years old, and I've loved Nintendo ever since I got my Super Nintendo a few Christmases back. My favourite games are Donkey Kong Country 2, Super Mario World and Super Punch Out. I like writing, playing games, and the movie Bio-Dome. I'm a proud soldier in the war for console supremacy. I will gladly lay my life down for this cause. My favourite colour is orange.

AUGUST 6, 1998

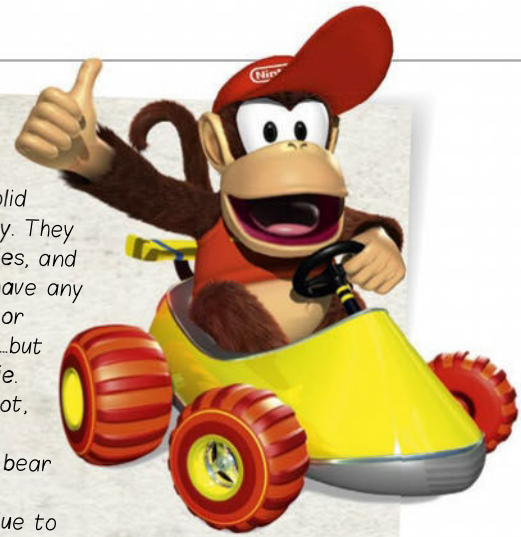
I got the chance to play Final Fantasy VII last night. I put ten minutes into the game, and urgh. How can PlayStation gamers put up with these blurry graphics? What are you even meant to do in a game like this? Why did I have to use a D-Pad to move? I've never had the chance to play the first six Final Fantasy games, but were they all this crap? Why were the nerds in Hyper magazine so excited about this game? I swear, this game just made me even more certain that I picked the right side when I begged my parents to buy me an N64 for Christmas.

JULY 17, 1998

Nintendo struck a solid blow in the war today. They may be behind on sales, and the system doesn't have any good fighting games, or RPGs, or racing sims...but we have Banjo-Kazooie. Screw Crash Bandicoot, to hell with Gex the Gecko, we've got the bear and the bird, baby.

This is, of course, due to Nintendo's incredible relationship with Rare. Rare absolutely embodies that Nintendo spirit, even with their more violent games - I'm saving up my pocket money for a copy of Goldeneye right now, which looks MILES ahead of anything those PlayStation idiots are playing. I played Diddy Kong Racing at a friend's place the other day, and let me tell you...Gran Turismo's got nothing on this monkey. Why would you want to play a meticulously detailed, finely tuned simulation when you can make a badger fly a plane?

I'm so glad that Rare and Nintendo are allied forces in this bitter war. They're absolutely intertwined. Even as a hardened fan I can see what a disaster it would be to lose them.



Sales Figures

Notable sales figures from the Sony/Nintendo console war:

N64 lifetime console sales: 32.93 million

PlayStation lifetime console sales: 102.49 million

N64 lifetime software sales: 224.97 million

N64 attach rate: 6.83

PlayStation attach rate: Unclear

PlayStation lifetime software sales: 962 million (shipped; sales numbers not clear)

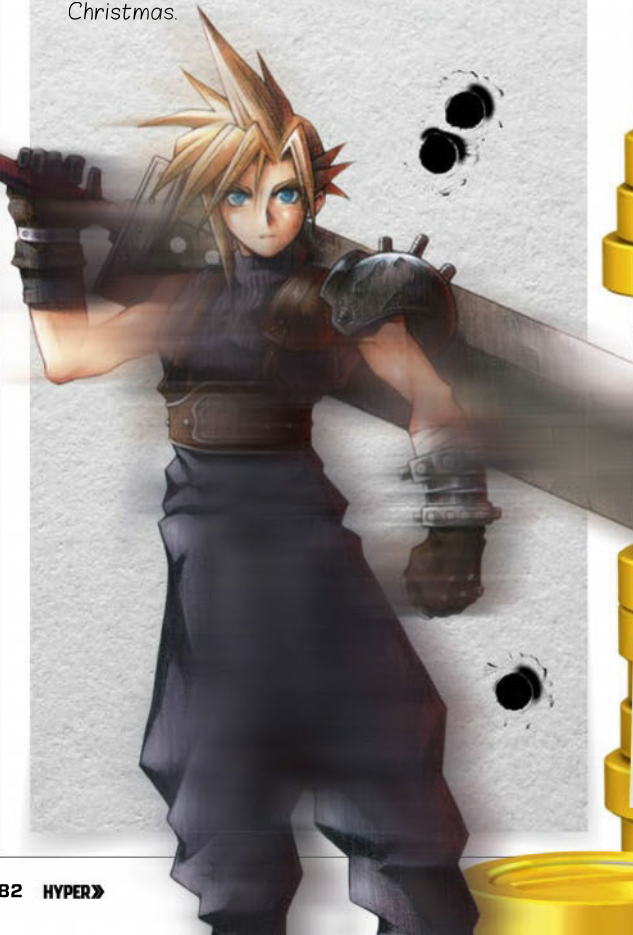
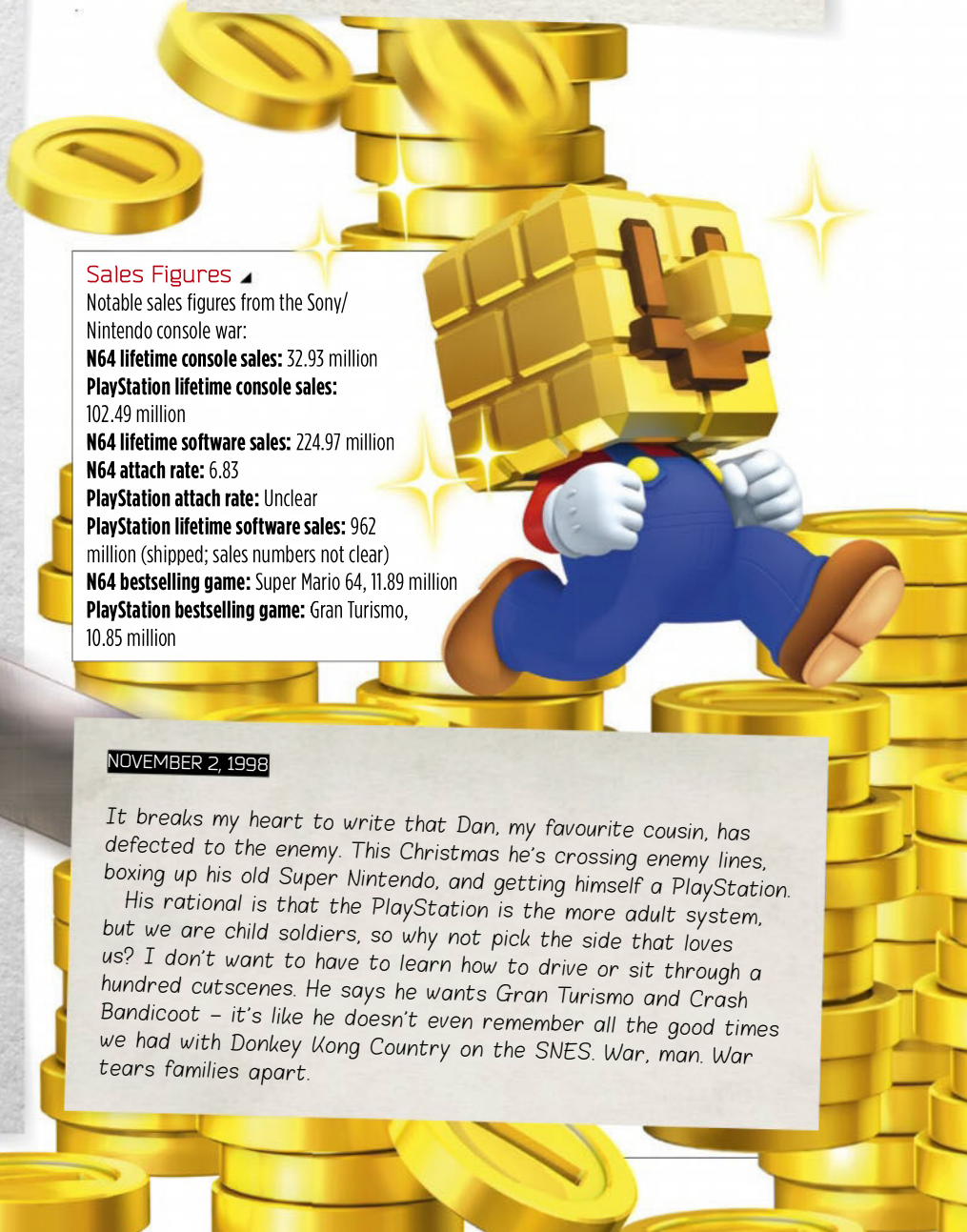
N64 bestselling game: Super Mario 64, 11.89 million

PlayStation bestselling game: Gran Turismo, 10.85 million

NOVEMBER 2, 1998

It breaks my heart to write that Dan, my favourite cousin, has defected to the enemy. This Christmas he's crossing enemy lines, boxing up his old Super Nintendo, and getting himself a PlayStation.

His rationale is that the PlayStation is the more adult system, but we are child soldiers, so why not pick the side that loves us? I don't want to have to learn how to drive or sit through a hundred cutscenes. He says he wants Gran Turismo and Crash Bandicoot - it's like he doesn't even remember all the good times we had with Donkey Kong Country on the SNES. War, man. War tears families apart.



DECEMBER 3, 1998

I turned 11 today, and I got the one present I really wanted - Pokémon Red. If there's one thing I've learned fighting in the console wars, it's that you really need to devote yourself slavishly to your chosen master, which means building up a Game Boy library. In that sense, Pokemon's a bit like a metaphor for this battle we're waging: there's two versions, but one is CLEARLY better (it has Charizard on the front). That's how metaphors work, right? In any case, the whole school's talking about this game - it's a massive win for Nintendo.

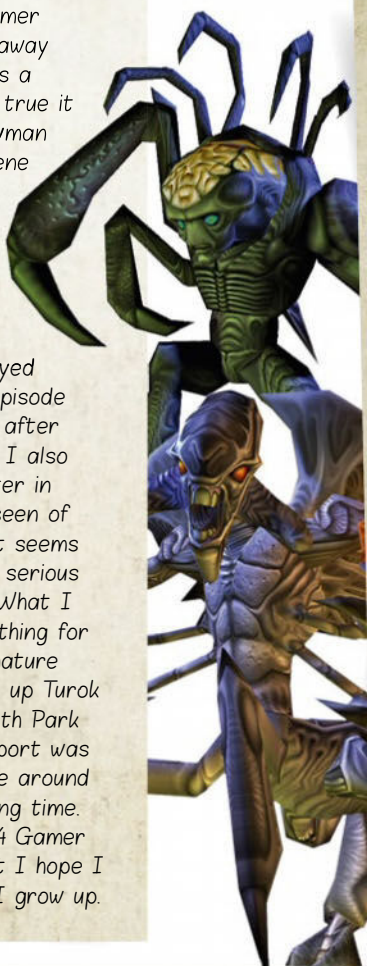


MARCH 20, 1999

The latest issue of gaming bible N64 Gamer claims that there's a nude code hidden away somewhere in Goldeneye 007. I think it's a joke, but honestly if it turned out to be true it wouldn't surprise me - I rented Shadowman the other day and in the opening cutscene the main character says 'shit', which is a really big deal.

Honestly, I think this is one of the most important battlegrounds for the war we're waging - whether Nintendo is suitable for adults or not. I think I'm pretty mature for my age - once I stayed up until 9:30pm because there was an episode of The Simpsons they could only screen after 8:30pm and I wanted to watch it - but I also think that you need some joy and laughter in your life, and based on what little I've seen of Final Fantasy 7 and Metal Gear Solid, it seems fair to assume that they're both deadly serious affairs with little in the way of humour. What I love about the N64 is that there's something for everyone - if I want something really mature and smart and a bit extreme I can fire up Turok 2: Seeds of Evil. Hell, there's even a South Park game, and I hear that the PlayStation port was total crap! I think Acclaim is going to be around and working with Nintendo for a long, long time.

Sidenote: Those game reviewers in N64 Gamer are real dorks. I love their magazine, but I hope I don't end up writing about games when I grow up.



DECEMBER 24, 1998

There's a copy of Ocarina of Time under the tree for me. Like most of the other kids at school I've developed a taste for war poetry, and I've been inspired by Nintendo's decisive Christmas victory to try my hand at a rhyme:

Their Turismos are Gran,
Their Fantasies Final,
The PlayStation fan,
My lacklustre rival.

They think they know best,
With their 32 bits,
But I can attest:
64's the tits.

And now that we've Zelda,
I'm a believer, I reckon,
In their long-standing mantra,
'Leave Luck To Heaven'.

It's not quite as good as Dulce et
Decorum Est, but honestly, I think Wilfred
Owen would be proud.

SEPTEMBER 22, 1999

Things are really starting to heat up. There are rumours that Sony has put on a show of strength in Tokyo, exhibiting something called the 'PlayStation 2' at an annual game show. Of course I have to rely mostly on magazines to keep me up to date, and the Nintendo mags don't really talk about the PlayStation too much, but from what I can gather from the propaganda I've seen it's going to be both awful and a failure. Nintendo needn't worry - they've been amassing their forces for this next assault, and I'm sure they're not going to go in half-cocked when the big battle starts.

CRITICAL SUCCESS

The top 10 games for each console, according to Gamerankings' compiled reviews:

N64

- The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (97.54%)
- Super Mario 64 (96.41%)
- GoldenEye 007 (94.70%)
- Perfect Dark (94.55%)
- The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask (91.95%)

PlayStation

- Tekken 3 (95.80%)
- Gran Turismo (94.95%)
- Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 (94.75%)
- Tony Hawk's Pro Skater (93.67%)
- Metal Gear Solid (93.24%)

- 1080 Snowboarding (89.60%)
- Conker's Bad Fur Day (89.28%)
- Excitebike 64 (89.07%)
- Turok 2: Seeds of Evil (88.96%)
- Paper Mario (88.81%)

- Resident Evil 2 (93.13%)
- Final Fantasy IX (92.72%)
- Gran Turismo 2 (92.42%)
- Final Fantasy VII (92.35%)
- Chrono Cross (92.28%)



NOVEMBER 30, 1999

Quick update: Jet Force Gemini is the best game I've ever played. A real, mature shooter for adults, on a Nintendo system! It's been such a long time since the Nintendo faithful have received a much-needed supply drop from Rare - now we've had this and Donkey Kong 64 at the same time! May they live forever.



MARCH, 2000

I played a Dreamcast at the shops today. There are innocent victims in any war, and I have a feeling that weird controller is going to stop Sega's troops from even marching.

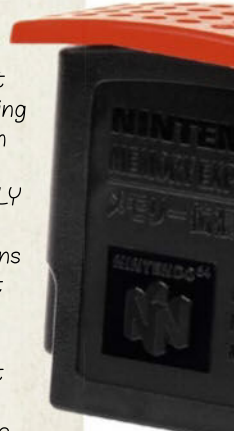
Mum had a bit of a chat with me today, and asked me if I could please stop talking in military terms when I talked about games, because, in her words, 'it creeps me out, and your inaccuracies annoy your father'. I told her I'd think about it, but like most parents she'll never really understand the battles I'm facing. She only ever had 'some Atari' as a kid; we fight a different war. For instance, the other day a kid at my school told me that the Nintendo 64 'sucks', because it 'doesn't have Gran Turismo 2', and it took me a solid twenty minutes of talking up Top Gear Rally and F-1 World Grand Prix before he finally said 'fine, you win, I don't care, just please stop'. Mum will never understand the sort of moral fortitude an argument like that requires, especially when you've never actually played Gran Turismo 2.



MAY 25, 2000

Hey diary, things have better a little quiet (I've been spending most of my time playing Donkey Kong 64 and coming to terms with my impending adolescence), but I wanted to let you know that Perfect Dark FINALLY came out!!! With the 4MB Expansion Pack plugged in, Rare's latest masterpiece opens up possibilities I never would have thought possible - multiplayer for up to twelve characters (including bots), voice acting all over the place, guns that can see right through the friggin' walls - it's like every dream I've ever had come true all at once.

Look, some of my friends at school might scoff and tell me that the PC is where the real shooters are, but we'll see what stands the test of time between Perfect Dark and Quake III: Arena, won't we?



JANUARY 2, 2001

I've got to say, I'm enjoying this Majora's Mask way more than I enjoyed Ocarina of Time. In fact...I know it's been a while, but I had another crack at a war poem. Well, I mean, this one's not quite as 'war' heavy as the other one I wrote, maybe? And it's certainly not as heavy as that one I wrote on the back page of my maths book, which I'm a little embarrassed about, actually, because Emma definitely thought I was a bit weird when I read it out to her. She's really pretty, you know? Things are changing for ol' James, it's scary. Ahem, anyway, here's my poem:

Goodnight, moon
 Goodnight, Link,
 Goodnight, Majora's Mask, which is
 pretty good, I think
 Goodnight, Sony
 Goodnight, Phonies
 Goodnight, to anyone who says Nintendo's
 not the one and only
 Goodnight, Mario
 Goodnight, Miyamoto
 Goodnight forever, LAMEStation, hope you
 got a nice photo
 Of yourself, before you died

Not many good words rhyme with 'Miyamoto'. Honestly, I don't think it's as good as the one I wrote about Ocarina. I still think about that poem sometimes.



AUGUST 25, 2000

I went on IGN in the school's computer room at lunch time today and found out that Nintendo have shown off the 'Dolphin' at E3 - but it's called the GameCube now, and it's going to absolutely, definitely destroy the PlayStation 2 (and whatever the heck Microsoft is working on, urgh).

I wrote a haiku about it:

GameCube on the way,
 Enemies smell death coming,
 PlayStation 2 sucks

I showed it to my mum, who said that she was worried about me. Whatever.

Historically Accurate Console War Slang That I Didn't Make Up, Circa 2000 Or So

- 'Scopin' out that Zee-Zee' = 'Checking out the new Zelda'
- 'Loose sticks cause slips' = 'Your N64 analogue stick is fucked, dude.'
- 'Beating my thumbs on that Zee-Zee' = 'I'm playing a lot of Zelda.'
- 'He's a LAMEStation Player' = 'This person owns a PlayStation, and I disrespect them for it.'
- 'Tomb Raider? More like (Gendered Slur)' = 'I am a piece of shit.'

MARCH 11, 2001

I think our campaign for console supremacy has hit a genuine roadblock. I've just spent the weekend at my cousin's place, and we spent most of Saturday night playing Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2. It's better than the original, and possibly also better than everything else made so far by humankind. I don't quite know what to make of this. It has rattled me. I can't afford a PlayStation. I have all my hopes and dreams invested into Nintendo's little machine and it's just now hitting me that maybe the whole concept of a console war is nothing more than an economic imperative brought about by limited capital and a need to invest oneself into the notion that the causes you're fighting for are worthwhile in some genuinely tangible manner. Oh god, I'm a teenager now, what am I doing with my life?



MARCH 13, 2001

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 has been announced for the Nintendo 64. Crisis over, PlayStation sucks one million dicks.

FEBRUARY 2, 2002

I'll admit, things are looking a little grim. It has been months since a new game launched on the N64, and while the GameCube is out in the USA and Japan, we're still working our way through Paper Mario (the last N64 game that will ever get released here, apparently).

The fighting has calmed down. I'm 14 now - practically a man - and I know that Nintendo lost the battle...but not the war. I feel compelled to keep fighting. The folks writing for Nintendo Gamer continue to demand that the Nintendo faithful invest heavily in Nintendo products. It's the only way for us to win, you see, and prove ourselves the more prudent console buyers. At school, I learned about the sunk-cost fallacy - the idea that the more time or effort or money you put into something, the more invested you get, and the less likely you are to see that you should back out. Well, this is, like, the opposite of that. I think?

MAY 15, 2002

Hey diary. Long time, no entry.

Tomorrow, the GameCube comes out. I've spent months putting every spare dollar I have into a GameCube shaped money box that came with an issue of N64 Magazine (which is, potential future reader, very much a real thing that actually existed).

A few days ago, my mum sat me down and asked 'James, do you really think you're fighting a war? Do you not realise that you're just one of many pawns caught up in a model of consumer investment that ultimately doesn't benefit anyone? Do you not realise that videogame consoles, despite sporting clear differences in form, make and intent, all fulfil the same basic purposes within people's lives? Has it not become clear to you over the years that emotional investment in corporate interests, to the point where you declare war on the companies that you choose not to invest time and money into, is crazy?'

It was weird to hear my mum sounding so irrational. I can't wait for the GameCube to absolutely crush and destroy the competition.



History Is Written By The Victors

In December 2004, I picked up an Xbox for \$199. In 2008, I traded it in for an Xbox 360. It wasn't until 2010 that I picked up a PS3 (which became a work necessity around then), and it's only really in the last year that I've come around to the PlayStation 4 being The Best (unless I'm in a Wii U mood). Console war scars run deep, I guess.



DEEP IN THE TRENCHES AT

FORMOSA LAN

Finding the 'work' in 'teamwork'

MIKOLAI

» The Formosa LAN centre was a hive of villainy and headshots. Located on Brisbane's south side, in one the city's more ethnically diverse neighbourhoods, it was part of a shopping strip that did a passable impression of downtown Taipei.

In a world of white picket fences and boring neighbourhoods that turned the lights out at 9pm, this neon-lit outpost provided an escape from the mundane. A place where you could drink \$5 bottles of Passion Pop and watch the world through a cloud of smoke, while perched outside the all-night pool hall.

And if there was nothing else going on you could always head up to Formosa LAN, pay your money, and have access to virtually any game under the sun (copyright laws be damned).

The first time I was introduced to the place, it was late at night, midweek, and we were all a little worse for wear after a trip to the bottle shop, and a little Harold and Kumar. As I slumped down in my chair, someone in our group suggested Counter-Strike,* a game I wasn't familiar with, but which everyone else in the room seemed to be playing.

What happened next is a bit of a blur, but I remember the game starting, I remember the gun in my hand, and I remember seeing people in front of me. Panicked, I sprayed them with bullets. They died. Then I died...

This continued for several hours, or maybe it was just a couple of minutes. But every time it happened I would hear outraged yelling from the far corner of the room, in a language I didn't really understand.

Eventually, a friend spun their chair in my direction and demanded to know what I was doing. I said something like, "I literally have no idea," and as the new map sprang to life I started shooting at whoever crossed my line of sight.

It was at this point that someone kicked over a chair in far the corner of the room, flung a keyboard, and started yelling in a very animated manner.

A friend grabbed me by the collar, said, "We have to go!" and bundled me out the door, around the corner, and down the street. When we stopped running I turned and asked what the hell was going on.

That's when he pointed out that I'd been inadvertently shooting members of my own team the whole time, and half the LAN was about to kick my arse.

War is hell. But it helps if you know who your enemy is. «

**I'm assuming it was Counter-Strike, or whatever squad-based shooter was big around the turn of the millennium. It's all a little hazy.*

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14

WEIRD WARS

No more Nazis

CHRISTIAN READ

The world has been in a near constant state of war since time immemorial. As long as there have been social groups there have been struggles over territory, resources, ideology, and myriad other things. Despite this, there are only a handful of wars that serve as tentpoles for gaming, forming the framework of numerous titles. World War II, of course, rules the roost, with hundreds of titles based around its many battles and campaigns, but the American Civil War and Roman conquests also have their fair share of games. Isn't it time we looked further afield? Sure, shooting Nazis in the face never really gets old, but wouldn't you rather explore a new conflict, a new era, or new world? Don't you want to go to interesting new places, meet interesting new people and shoot them? We certainly do. ☞



The Football War

GENRE: GRITTY SPEEDBALL REBOOT



Soccer, or football. Humans like the game of kicking thing run run. Everyone knows football funds FIFA, who are, well, bad people, shall we say. But Futbol has even caused countries to war, still a mere ambition to FIFA.

1969 and Honduras and El Salvador are two neighbouring South American countries. Honduras is bigger and richer than Salvador so lots of people, legally and illegally, were crossing the border for work. The problem? Rich Hondurans didn't like this. American companies that owned land didn't like it. Thousands of Salvadorians were kicked out, stripped of any land they owned. Even marriages between the two nationals was in danger. And people died in the deportations.

End of that year, the two countries met in a World Cup qualifier. El Salvador won the third game in extra time. That day, clearly on a roll, El Salvador claimed Honduras was basically genociding their citizens. Then they blacked out their cities, strapped explosives to the side of passenger planes and bombed the Honduran airport. Then they drove their armies up the main highways.

Honduras attacked back but the Salvadorian armies had come far and fast. It took pressure from other South American states to get them out. But by then, hundreds of thousands were displaced from their homes, and the Salvadorian armies became more politically powerful, setting the scene for a bloody civil war in the 80s.

So not quite caused by football, but it goes to show, anything is worth fighting about to some people.

Mormon War

GENRE: EVANGELICAL FANTASY RTS



Ah, Mormons. Now, they're just spotty faced weirdoes called Elder, homophobes and fantasy writers. But in the 1830s, they were kind of badass. So much so there's actually three Mormon Wars. But we're talking about the Missouri Mormon War.

The thing you've got to remember is that the founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith, was a dodgy chap. (Mormons, if you're offended, take pleasure in knowing I won't get my own planet when I die.) No one liked em and when they tried to move into a town called DeWitt, they were resisted. By armed groups of men. There were deaths.

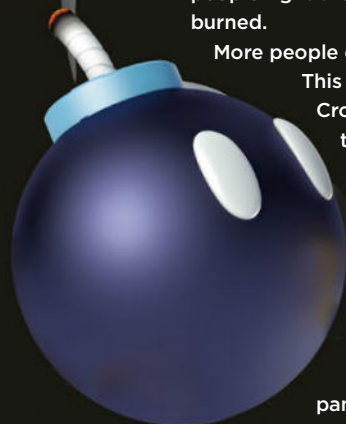
When Smith got involved, he and his Dainite tough guy crew, fought back. And they started evicting people right the hell back. Houses and shops were burned.

More people died.

This came to a head in the Battle of Crooked River. A few hundred men fought, the Mormons eventually won when a 'Captain Fearnought' led a sword charge. At cowboys.

Sadly, all this did was massively escalate the War and the majority of Mormon leadership was captured and Mormonism was driven out of Missouri.

And presumably, no one got weird pamphlets for a while.



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If you want daily news and reviews about the best of gaming, point your browser our way, read some stories, and sign up for the forums to hang out with like minded gamers.

Muad'Dib's Jihad

GENRE: FUTILE GOD SIMULATOR



After the Atreides House was given stewardship of the treasured planet Arrakis, they were soon betrayed and all but destroyed. Except for young Paul. Trained by his mother in the ways of the Bene Gesserit sisterhood, Paul found and became the messianic leader of the Fremen. The Fremen, fanatical natives of Arrakis, swore to serve Paul as he was the fulfilment of prophecy.

Paul, convinced he could see the future, had a few needs. The first was to strip the Nobles of space of their power. To do this, he remade all religion as worship of him personally. He believed humanity had become stagnant, feeble. The war to destroy all his enemies, on thousands of planets, not only ensured his own apotheosis and Empire, it created conflict and dynamism and woke people up.

The Jihad, waged in his name, was an impossible success. A hundred planets are wiped of all life. Some sixty billion were killed. Opposing religions destroyed. Hundreds more planets crippled.

And, as Muad'Dib learned, a mistake. Soon, his lessons were distorted by priests, his teachings twisted.

In the end, the Emperor and God of all human space had failed. His son was left to create futures for humanity.

Regulator-Moderator War

GENRE: THIRD PERSON BADASSERY



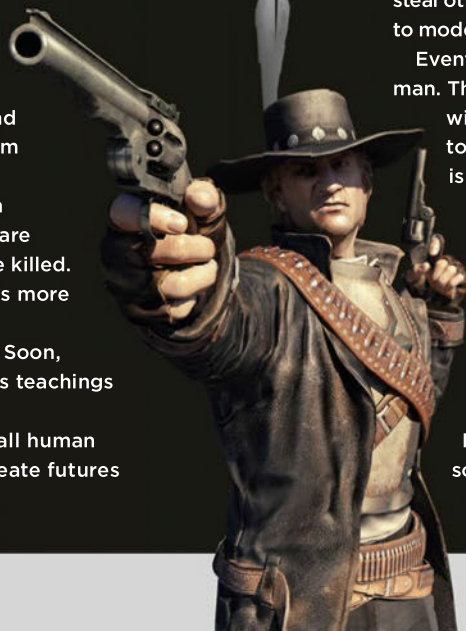
1830 and between Texas and the Mexican border, there was nothing. Legally speaking. So, naturally, crimes happened regularly because God couldn't see. Cow stealing, called rustling, was a big deal, as were faked land claims and violence. Everyone hated everyone and was looking for a buck.

In 1840, a man was killed and shit started getting real.

In response to the murder, a posse called the Regulators formed, to oppose rustling of their cattle, but also, probably, just to more effectively steal other people's cows. Their targets banded together to moderate their ambitions. These were the Moderators.

Eventually, one of the Regulators shot and killed a man. The only problem, the judge was good mates with the Moderators. So the Regulators came out to intimidate everyone because that's how justice is done, with a dodgy judge and gang violence...

To everyone's total shock, violence kicked off. Men were killed, property burned, and the next three years saw parts of Texas riven by murder, lynching and arson. It was only when fierce and smart Sam Houston, President of Texas (yep, Texas was briefly a country) came to town with five hundred heavily armed men, the whole thing settled down. Even then it only worked when he gave Texas something bigger to keep them occupied: the Mexican American War.



The War of the Whiskers

GENRE: POLITICAL MAKEOVER SANDBOX

War of Jenkin's Ear

GENRE: REAL TIME NAVAL DICKERY



Late in the 1140s, the King of France Louis VII, did what all the cool kids were doing - he went to Syria to fight a Crusade. When he came back, he'd had a change in personal style. He'd grown his hair long and had a big beard. A beard responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths.

He was married at the time to Eleanor of Aquitaine. She was a very fancy lady, who would go on to have a rather amazing career as pretty much the ruler of England and mother to renowned fighting king, Richard the Lionheart. But when Louis came back like a hippie she said, 'lose the beard or it's welcome to Single City, where you are mayor.' She also had the Pope, who hated hubby, send out sharp letters about how God had firm opinions on men's facial hair fashion...

She also hated him and was related to his political enemies, but the beard was a good excuse.

Then, Eleanor up and got married to powerful Frenchman Duke Henry. Who, because history is weird, ended up as the King of France. Suddenly all about England, Henry begins a series of conflicts with the French that would last over 300 years. All because of a beard. And massive political events. But mainly the beard.



By 1730, England and Spain had been fighting each other for over a century, with occasional breaks for oranges. They were both looking for an excuse to kick off again. In 1731, Spain still had chunks of America as colonies, namely Florida. Tensions between the two countries was high when a British ship was stopped by a Spanish Patrol boat. The captain of the Spanish ship accused Captain Jenkins of smuggling. Which, of course, he was. The Spanish tortured a few of the sailors and tied Jenkins to the mast. Then sliced off his ear, suggesting the King of Britain could expect the same if he came to Florida and smuggled.

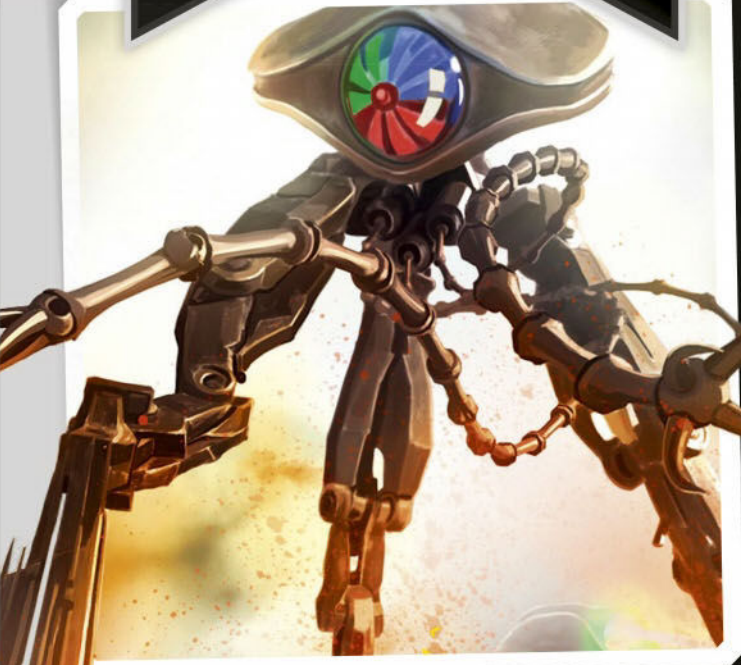
Jenkins and crew made it back to England and petitioned the King. He showed His Majesty both his scar and his preserved, pickled ear. The whistle blew and war was back on.

First, the English tried to dress up as Spanish and sneak into the town of Antigua in the West Indies. The Spanish noticed them and... no dice! A Captain Vernon captured a silver mining town in Panama. To celebrate, 'Rule Britannia' was played for the first time. Vernon played merry hell all up and down the South American coasts and back into the West Indies. When Vernon got sick, they sent out another Captain. After 20 years of the Brits harassing Spanish towns and forts, they were pretty much winning the war.

Ultimately the only reason this war ended 20 years on was that it was costing people money and there were more profitable ones to fight.

War of the Worlds

GENRE: IMPOSSIBLE BOSS RUSH



Yet across the gulf of space, minds that are to our minds as ours are to those of the beasts that perish, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic, regarded this earth with envious eyes, and slowly and surely drew their plans against us.

No one knew what was coming that evening in England of 1894. Yes, weird lights had been spotted on Mars but who could have imagined they were connected to the sudden explosion in Surrey?

Not that human belief or disbelief mattered much to the Martians, who had come to destroy humanity, feed from their bodies and colonise their world.

The technology of the invaders made resistance laughable. Tripod fighting machines wielding Black Smoke, a chemical attack and the annihilating Heat Rays saw the British defeated in every single battle. The closest the British came a victory was the pyrrhic victory of the ironclad Thunder Child, that destroyed two tripods but was lost.

It was only through the presence of Earth bacteria that humanity survived. But it was no victory. Britain was ruined, a victim of the only imperialism more ruthless than their own.

The Gothic War

GENRE: TURN BASED BAD IDEA



The Emperor Valens had problems. All around the Roman Empire were Barbarian tribes. They hadn't been a problem for centuries but Rome in 370 AD wasn't the monster it was in 50BC. When the Huns attacked, various European Barbarians had to move or die. Among these were the Visigoths.

The Romans and the Visigoths were both Christians, so Emperor Valens decided to help them and let them into the Empire. The only problem was, Valens wanted to let in just a few. The Visigoths, facing pretty severe Hunnery, said 'bugger that' and swarmed the borders. Romans pretty quickly started attacking Visigoths, which proved to be a mistake.

Valens wanted to punish the Goths himself. His nephew, the capable Gratians said, 'wait, we'll do it together. The Goths are hardcore.'

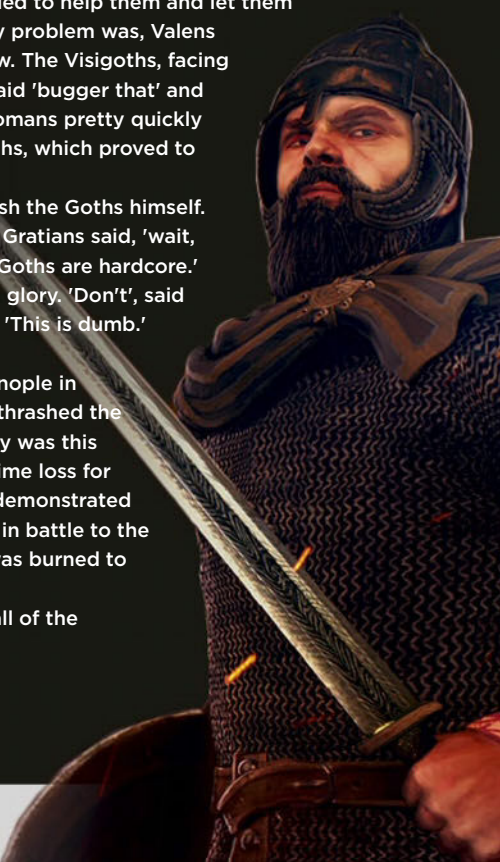
But Valens wanted the glory. 'Don't', said everyone always forever. 'This is dumb.'

And so it was.

At the Battle of Adrianople in Turkey, the Visigoths thrashed the Romans. Not only was this a historical all-time loss for the Romans, it demonstrated Gothic superiority in battle to the world, and Valens was burned to death in the combat!

It also locked in the Fall of the Roman Empire.

Valens = Omnishambles.



The War of Pork and Beans

GENRE: BEARDED SKIRMISH



July 4th, 1776. Independence Day, when America becomes the second most annoying pack of patriotic idiots. We're first. That was when America got it's impudence from England and shortly after, became Best Friends again. Right? No. First there's be the War of Pork and Beans. More boringly known as the Aroostook War.

By 1783, the American Revolutionary War was officially over. Great Britain was still in Canada, though and the borders were all a bit unclear, and the War of 1812, as well as growing tensions had shown relations were far from warm.

British Canada thought some of the Northern States were legally theirs. Seasonal workers, mainly lumberjacks, went over the border and back again. Some Arcadians, descendants of the French settlers in Canada, were subsumed by America. Some Americans were caught in Canada. Everyone was grumbling.

All along the border, rumour swirled. The Brits were coming back. The Mohawks and the Arcadians had teamed up. Then local citizens formed militia groups. Huge running fights broke out between lumberjack gangs. Pork and beans was what they ate and that's how the war was remembered.

When it looked like England and America were going to throw down for a third time... negotiators realised something very important. "The whole territory we were wrangling about was worth nothing."

Victory of peace through not being bothered.

The Sabbat Crusade

GENRE: GRIMDARK GRIMDARKNESS



By 600 M.41 and the forces of Chaos have persecuted the Sabbat Worlds; a hundred or so star systems. What was at first considered a fairly routine conflict soon became a hugely dangerous invasion. Under the command of super spacebastard Nadzybar, Chaos took world after world, committing atrocity after blasphemy, sacrificing planets for the amusement of his effed up religion.

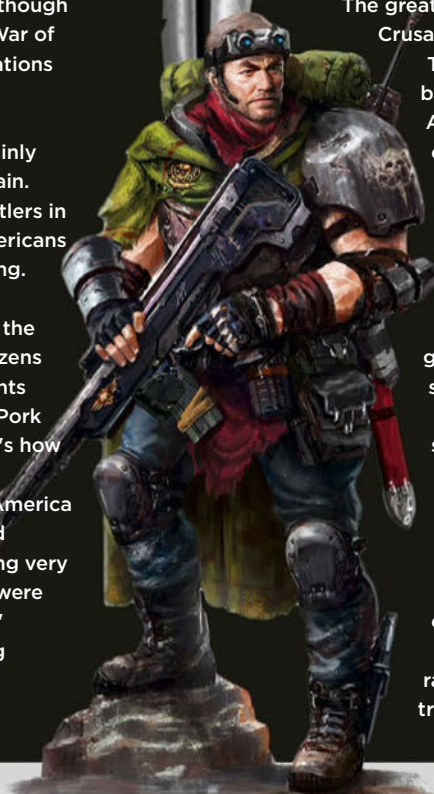
The great general Slaydo was made Warmaster and a Crusade to reclaim the systems was launched.

The Sabbat Crusade numbered almost a billion Imperial Guardsmen. Six chapters of the Adeptus Astartes Angels of Death. Millions of the tech-adepts of the Cultus Mechanicus and even Titans, the God-Machines. Epic wars raged across the Imperium.

The first stage of the Crusade ended when Slaydo and Nadzybar met on the world of Balhaut in an epic duel. The Chaos Archon would fall but the Warmaster, gutted, survived him by only minutes. Both sides retreated to lick their wounds.

The new Warmaster Macaroth preferred small engagements on multiple theatres and the Crusade fractured into thousands of battlefields. All seemed well for the Imperium until Urlock Gaur, traitor Marine and servant of the Dark Powers wrestled command of Chaos and made a devastating counter-offensive.

170 years on, the Sabbat Crusade still rages. St. Sabbat has reincarnated and treachery abounds.



A Colder War

GENRE: LOVECRAFTIAN MUTUALLY
ASSURED DESTRUCTION



Project: KOSCHEI was, make no mistake, an abomination.

Ever since the world had become aware of the dreadful plateau of Leng in the Antarctic, all nations, even Nazi Germany, had agreed to ignore the supernatural world.

Until now.

American research, especially on the eerie Burgess Shale 'experimental' fossils, had show that any race that got involved with the supernatural entities were doomed. And so, using the new sciences ancient man had called sorcery, the leaders of that country were prepared to leave Earth entirely by magic gate.

One day, Ronald Reagan famously joked on air that nuclear war had begun. Unfortunately, the Russians didn't know it was a joke. They prepared for war. But Russia wasn't the only opportunist. Saddam Hussein had long wanted to destroy all political opposition to his Baathist party. When he figured out a way to use the Gate of Yog-Sothoth, he easily achieved his wishes.

The only problem, the Gate was a monstrous thing and both Iran and Russia, already itching to fight, reacted in what was maybe the only sane fashion. They both nuked Iraq, but Russia considered this insufficient and fragged the entire Middle East. Which had the side effect of waking up Project Koschei. The Eater of Souls. Cthulhu.

The Pastry War

GENRE: APATHETIC FOOD FIGHT



In 1828, Mexico hadn't been independent from Spain for long. When they decided to kick out all Spanish born men, things got tense. With this decision, combined with fierce political infighting, was in any wonder Mexico City broke out into riots?

The French Chef, Remontel, lost his pastry shop in the riots. When the Government wouldn't compensate him, Remontel wrote letters to the King of France. (They had a monarchy again after La Revolution.) Nothing happened for a few years until the King was angry at Mexico for not repaying war loans. He called the whole debt in and Mexico said 'sod off.'

Someone remembered the letter the little chef had sent and suddenly, there was an excuse to go in to war in a way no one could complain about: protecting a foreign national! 'You have denied our countryman what was his! Now you will pay!'

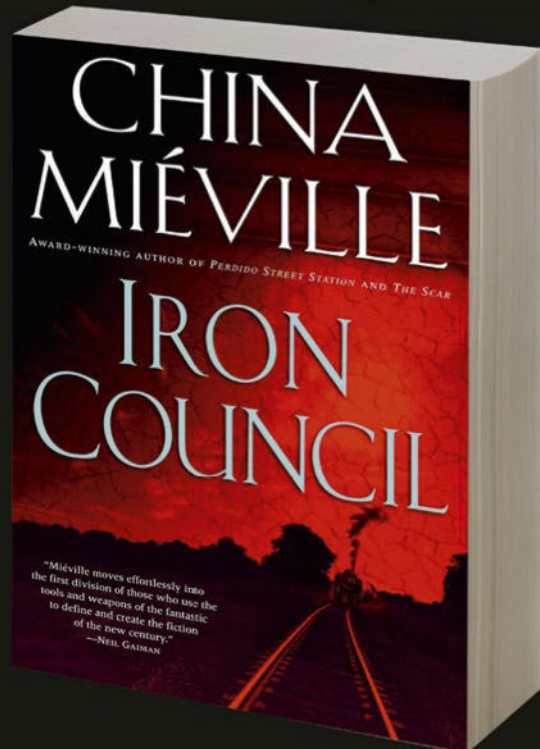
If that sounds like bollocks, it's because it is. But that was the official reason for the war: To protect pasty interests abroad.

It wasn't a big war. France blockaded some ports, shot some cannons, and got some help from the US. Legendary general Santa

Anna came out of retirement, lost his leg and had it buried with honours. And Mexico paid off the debt.

New Crobuzon - Tesh War

GENRE: BIZARRO RPG



For decades, New Crobuzon had dominated it's region of Bas-Lag, even going so far as to colonise the distant continent of Nova Esperium. The city-state had achieved such ruthless power through a combination of military, technology and sorcerous might. Warships, robots, vicious use of the Elementaari and blood-thaumaturgy had seen dozens of cultures and nations fall into line with New Crobuzon's agenda.

Until the war with Tesh.

The City of Crawling Liquid was, apparently, mostly human. But this did not aid in communications or diplomacy. Tesh had an embassy in the city but it was empty, the ambassador a homeless vagrant.

Tesh and New Crobuzon would go to war over access to the Fire Water Straits. Dreadful thaumaturgical weapons were used. The colourbombs. The toothbombs, Golemetry and the dreadful entities of the Cacotopic Stain were all involved in the conflict.

It would only come to an end during a period of civil unrest in the City-State as the mythical Iron Council inspired the working classes, and when the horrifying Urbanomach murder spirit, a living apocalypse, was thwarted in it's horrifying assault on New Crobuzon.

The Cod Wars

GENRE: TACTICAL TURN BASED FISHING

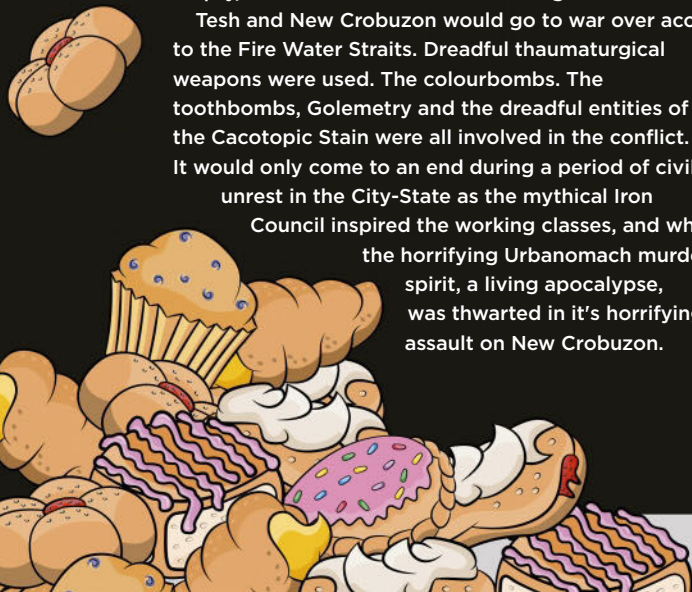


No, not Call of Duty - we're talking about actual fish, and the three actual conflicts fought over them. So, that's a pretty amazing thing right there, but the two combatants could not be more mismatched, nor the outcome more unlikely.

The Proto Cod War (hmm, proto-cod - sounds scary) began in 1952. The First Cod War in 1958, the Second in 1972, and Third and so far final in 1975, all fought between the United Kingdom and Iceland. In all that time, the war had only one fatality - Halldór Hallfreðsson, an engineer on Icelandic Coast Guard vessel ICGV Ægir.

The wars were the result of Iceland's continuing expansion of its fishing grounds into North Atlantic territory claimed by the UK. It was a conflict of chasing ships, of cutting nets, and of generally making life hard for British trawlers. And despite the UK at one time deploying Royal Navy frigates and fighter jets, it was Iceland that came out on top each time. The Third War was won when Iceland threatened to pull out of NATO - given the importance of the NATO base at Keflavík, NATO helped negotiate a very generous settlement in Iceland's favour.

The lesson learned - NEVER take on the descendants of Vikings in a naval conflict.



NEXT ISSUE





PHANTOM-S

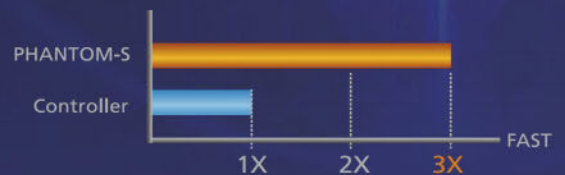
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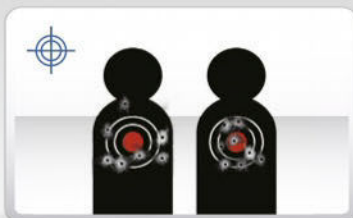
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