THREADSPACE: HYPERBOL

No, the title never makes sense

PUBLISHER: Atari DEVELOPER: locaine Studios GENRE: Action/Strategy AVAILABILITY: E-tail (www.atari.com or www.steampowered.com) ESRB RATING: Everyone 10+ MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 1GHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space, Internet connection MULTIPLAYER: 2-16 players VERSION REVIEWED: Final Downloadable

REVIEW

If creativity is the hallmark of a successful indie game, *ThreadSpace: Hyperbol* secures locaine Studios' credentials: Think real-time, multiplayer-only *Worms* on the z-axis, and you've scratched the surface. *Hyperbol*'s spaceship-to-spaceship combat employs pool-table ballistics—where curve, spin, and projectile speed define trajectory. It's great fun, hamstrung by a few bad decisions.

Hyperbol's tit-for-tat is more tennis match than rock-paper-scissors. Every bolt and bomb has a countermeasure, from shot-reflecting Repulsors to matter-gorging Singularities...and most every weapon can multitask or combine to create new effects. Experimentation under fire constantly reveals enough new armament alchemy to make combat consistently engaging, despite an all-but-vertical learning curve.

Know-how and a quick trigger finger aren't the only requirements for effective play, unfortunately. Poor implementation of character leveling and ship upgrades make multiplayer excruciating for middling players—and impenetrable for newbies. Ranktiered servers lock "Trainees" in experience-point purgatory. Competition of similar skill level and with comparably powered ships rarely, if ever, arrives. Once free from the grip of low-rank servers, players begin an arduous grind to "Pro" viability—stock ships simply don't have enough staying power to fend off the upgraded rigs of dedicated veterans.

Competitive difficulty is one thing, but it's hard to stress how badly these ill-conceived systems cripple what is otherwise an excellent multiplayer experience. If locaine doesn't hammer out a more inviting atmosphere for new converts, all the clever balancing and solid concepts in the world can't save *Hyperbol* from LAN-only obscurity. • Rory Manion



Showdown at the Confusingly Busy Corral.

VERDICT

- Excellent concept with good execution...
- ...broken by a punishing leveling system.





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