



• *World in Conflict* offers a compelling "what if the other guys won?" scenario.



• Heavy artillery is thin-skinned, but if you pair it with forward observers...



• ...artillery can turn even the most fortified position into overcooked borscht.



• Terrain plays a big role in combat, affecting both the speed and range of ground units. With my advantageous position on this knoll, I've got those Commie bastards on the run.

WORLD IN CONFLICT

Shall we play a game?

PUBLISHER: Vivendi Games DEVELOPER: Massive Entertainment GENRE: Real-Time Strategy AVAILABILITY: Retail ESRB RATING: Teen MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 2GHz CPU (2.2GHz in Windows Vista), 512MB RAM (1GB in Windows Vista), 9GB hard drive space, 128MB videocard MULTIPLAYER: 2-16 players VERSION REVIEWED: Near-Final Reviewable

REVIEW

Of the many grand “what if?” scenarios of history, perhaps none captures the popular consciousness more than “what if socialism hadn’t failed?” Two of the most enduringly popular alternate-history fantasies (or nightmares, depending) are those in which either national or just plain ol’ socialism continues to exist and thrive. Philip K. Dick’s novel *The Man in the High Castle* is the most interesting take on the “Nazis win” version. But it may surprise some people to find that a computer game—namely Massive Entertainment’s new *World in Conflict*—features the most compelling exploration of the “Commiss win” (or, more accurately, “Commiss-don’t-go-down-without-a-fight”) scenario.

WOLVERINES!

Like any good epic, *WIC* starts *in medias res*—circa 1989. Rather than allow perestroika to turn it into a capitalist society, the U.S.S.R. decides not to go gently into that good market economy. Without warning, a Red Army blitzkrieg (into Germany, appropriately) sends Europe reeling like it hooked a 20-pound bass. U.S. forces scramble to help, but no sooner do they secure the European front than the Russians get all Pearl Harbor on downtown Seattle. Lt. Parker—your alter ego—straps on his M4 Carbine and jumps into the defense of the Pacific Northwest.

Of course, it’s not called *World in Conflict* for nothing. Once you’re done making sure the grunge movement goes off without a hitch, the game transports you to France, Germany, Russia, and finally New York City. Along for the ride is a cast of eminently relatable (if a tad clichéd) supporting characters...and a surprisingly compelling, John Milius-worthy plot. Pair strong storytelling with topographically realistic terrain, destructible buildings, and weather and weapon effects worthy of ILM, and you’ve got yourself an honest-to-goodness cinematic experience.



• You frequently receive secondary objectives in addition to your main mission. In this instance, I’m supposed to recapture a French village without damaging this 12th-century church—which has, of course, already surrendered.



WORLD IN CONFLICT IS LESS “REAL-TIME STRATEGY” THAN “REAL-TIME LOGISTICS.”

GLOBAL THERMONUCLEAR WAR

Still, all the nifty graphical effects in the world won’t get a game anywhere without compelling gameplay, and *WIC*’s got one of the most innovative RTS models since *M.U.L.E.*

Evolved from the highly regarded *Ground Control* series, *WIC* does away with the standard whip-the-peons resource accrual regime, instead providing you with an ever-recharging pool of logistical “points” with which you simply buy units. If your boys get pureed, you get their initial cost reimbursed to your pool. No tech tree, no production cycles, no rock-paper-scissors unit breakdowns—you just buy what you think you need and go at it.

The trick is that your resource pool isn’t available whenever you want, with some lag between when you get points and when you can actually buy units with them. This aspect is critical, because every game’s about one thing: occupying locations on the map with ground units. Lose too much of your army too quickly, and the enemy may hunker down before you can scrape together a counterattack. On the flip side, every kill nets you “tactical aid” points. Accumulate enough of these and you can call in off-map support ranging from whirlbird scouts to nuclear strikes.

The upshot of this gameplay model is that *World in Conflict* is less “real-time strategy” than “real-time logistics.” How well you manage your supplies (and interfere with your enemy’s ability to manage his) is far more important than how quick you are on the hotkeys or whether you’ve got a surefire rush tactic planned for each map. This sort of meaningful change to the typical RTS model is welcome, especially when it comes to multiplayer.

TOE-TO-TOE WITH THE RUSSKIES

Of course, change is sometimes scary—and *WIC* packs a vertiginous learning curve. Even with a dozen or so games under my sexy cummerbund, I felt like my choices were far too random. Multiplayer is especially exacting, requiring impeccable teamwork and constant communication to keep matches from capsizing into total pandemonium. Add some unit balance issues—antitank troops and helicopters are too strong, APCs are too weak—and acolytes are sure to flee quickly.



• A couple of NATO Mangustas take on...the entire Russian 3rd Armored Division.

But in spite of its problems, *WIC* undoubtedly has that ineffable “it” that makes an enjoyable game. In a market glutted with RTS games that are little more than reskins of one another, Massive deserves credit for trying something genuinely new. Sure, it’s risky to rock the boat, but that’s what capitalism’s all about—you don’t see North Korea coming up with new RTS ideas, do you? • Eric Neigher

VERDICT

• Innovative gameplay; entertaining plot and characters; face-melting graphics.

• More “controlled chaos” than “strategy”; A.I. ain’t Rhodes scholar material.

8/10

GOOD

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