

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: 1C: Maddox Games/RRG Studios GENRE: Flight Simulation AVAILABILITY: Retail, E-tail (www.direct2drive.com) ESRB RATING: Teen
MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 16Hz CPU, 512MB RAM, 1.16B hard drive space (flight stick recommended) MULTIPLAYER: 2-128 players VERSION REVIEWED: Gold Master

REVIEW



Call it a videogame if you dare: Oleg Maddox's IL-2 series may be the most scrupulous survey of

be the most scrupulous survey of World War II planes in the history of the genre. If it's aeronautical fidelity you're after, IL-2's the armchair aviator's Cadillac. Rip one of these puppies open and you can

almost smell the burnt varnish off a hobbled German Focke-Wulf or catch the acrid tang of cordite bleeding through the dash of a bullets-spent P-51 Mustang. Think of 1946 as the mother lode. It wrestles everything from the original IL-2 Sturmovik through 2004's Pacific Fighters and 2006's Pe-2 into one installation on a single DVD, then adds two brand-new expansions...all for an obscenely bargain-basement price of \$30.

HYPOTHETICAL RUMBLE

The 1946 expansion asks: "What if the Allies botched Normandy, and the Soviets and Germans fought on?" Answer: a proper successor to LucasArts' 1990 game Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe. With 1946, you basically get jets-and not just those that actually flew trivial endgame sorties. In addition to your German Me-262s, Arado Ar-234s (the world's first jet bomber), and He-162s, or Russian MiG-9s, MiG-13s, and Yak-15s, developer RRG pulled a few exotic "wonder weapons" off the table. Take the Heinkel Lerche II, a vertical takeoff and landing fighter/interceptor that looks like a finned rocket stuck through a giant fan. Or try the Horten Ho-IX, a batwing jetglider that eerily resembles the U.S. B-2 stealth bomber and could tag speeds just shy of Mach 1. Oh yeah, ever wanted to strap wire-guided X-4 rockets on a 596-mph German Ta-183? Here's your chance.

The new campaigns force you to slog through a few too many traditional planes before graduating to the palm-rubbing speed demons, but the missions extrapolate from history logically and only stutter a bit in the Soviet VVS 46 campaign with a few noncombat A-to-Z yawners. Jets aren't prop planes, and turn-turn-turn aces will have to adjust to 1946's aerial jousting, but having these fascinating planes shoehorned in with 1C's trademark photo-real finishes cinches 1946's price, anthology or no.

OPERATION "AUGUST STORM"

Sturmoviks Over Manchuria, the other debut add-in, trots out the 1945 Russian IL-10, a bomb-toting, 2,000-horsepower beast of a ground-puncher that topped out 87 mph faster than the original IL-2 warhorse. After assisting in the final assault on Berlin—running recon dogfights and bombing artillery dugouts—you'll slingshot east to test this powerful Soviet hybrid against Japan's best in a harrowing campaign over northern China.

You also get a host of new Japanese planes like the speedy short-range Mitsubishi J2M5 "Raiden," four Nakajima Ki-series variants, and the Kawanishi N1K2-J "George" fighter-bomber with its automatic force-triggered flaps. The Japanese campaign leads off battling Hellcats over Iwo Jima and culminates in hair-raising defense runs scuppering U.S. B-29 raids over Japan.

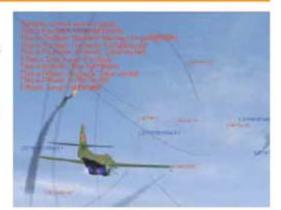
1946 might as well be the holy grail of WWII flight sims, a platinum anthology of everything good about no-frills airborne scrimmaging. The new material's a deal, whether you own the earlier games or not. And if you don't, 30 bucks nets you something that—six years on—still outclasses everything else. • Matt Peckham

VERDICT

☐ The entire *IL-2* saga on one DVD (plus two brand-new expansions)—dirt cheap.

No cons at all.









 Words can't describe the Heinkel Lerche II, but it's certainly wild pitching a couple squadrons of these VTOLs bristling with X-4s at just about anything.

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