

GAME ON!

Become an assassin in Renaissance Italy, wage war over the Pacific and survive the zombie apocalypse in the latest and greatest games for the Mac and iOS.





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This has already been a great year for Mac games, largely due to the arrival of Steam, Valve's download service that lets you get your hands on titles as soon as they're available. It has already brought a wealth of great games to the Mac. As we prepared this issue, it was offering 100 games, available at a tap of a trackpad. Not that Steam is the only place to get your hands on Mac games. In fact, if you only look at its catalogue, you'll miss out on several of the highlights that we've picked out for you over these pages.

With so many games hitting the Mac this year, why not forget the same old seasonal treats on the TV and sit down to some amazing adventures with your Mac? We've rounded up seven of the best games and three brilliant iOS titles with which you can while away the hours. In fact, some of them will keep you occupied through many more long, cold winter nights, too.

Better still, this is just the start of a rush of new games. There are more coming in 2011. Look forward to tearing up the streets of San Francisco in the latest Driver game, stealthily taking down terrorists as Sam Fisher in Splinter Cell: Conviction and shooting up a post-apocalyptic world in Rage, from the makers of Doom. Coming up soon is Portal 2, the sequel to one of the best Mac games in recent memory (see page 62), which is due out in April.

In the meantime, read on to find out about some of the most thrilling software you can get for your Mac right now. ▶

Battlestations: Pacific

Mac game



Price £34.95 (£29.75 ex VAT)

Contact Feral Interactive
+ feralinteractive.com

Needs Mac OS X 10.5.8 or later + 2GB
Ram + 256MB graphics card

Pros Highly absorbing gameplay +
Great variety of missions + Improved
graphics + A number of different units
to command

Cons Difficult to control the planes
+ Repetitive dialogue

Verdict A nice balance of strategy and
action gameplay. The wide variety of
missions means it will be a long time
before you tire of this game.



▲ The cutscenes are very detailed with a grainy effect reminiscent of old movie footage.

Sweeping low over mountains, the A6M Zero, one of the most effective fighters in the Imperial Japanese Navy, banks sharply to the right. You have just a moment to survey the landscape that lies before you. The sun is rising, its rays shimmering on the sea as you seek out your destination – Pearl Harbor.

You check that your wingmen are in position as you push the nose down and start your attack run. Your targets are the P-40 Warhawks and B-17 Flying Fortresses parked on the taxiway at the harbour's airbase. It's 7 December 1941, and you're part of the surprise attack on the US Pacific Fleet that will end America's isolation and thrust the country into the Second World War.

So starts the Japanese campaign in Battlestations: Pacific, the compelling strategy

and real-time action sequel to Battlestations: Midway (see *MacUser*, 12 September 2008, p36), and it's this ability to play the role of the Japanese as well as the US forces that's the primary addition in this much-expanded edition. The object in single-player mode, however, remains exactly the same – to complete the assigned missions using the available military units.

You do this by directing your forces on a map and giving them orders, such as attack a specific target or patrol a certain area. Clicking on the unit enables you to watch it carry out your orders, or move your mouse to take command of the unit, allowing you to react to developments as they unfold.

Depending on the mission – and there are 28 in total, 14 for each of the two campaigns – the amount of time spent on the map can vary. With a mission where you command just a few units, you can spend

more time controlling them and playing the arcade-style battles. When you have more units at your disposal, you'll be immersed in the map as the battles rage around you. The variety of missions ranges from Battle of Cape Esperance and Invading Iwo Jima for the US, to Seizing the Fiji's and Attack on Sydney Harbour, where you have to sneak a Type 'A' Target Midget submarine under the noses of the Allies to sink a munitions ship.

Battlestations: Pacific packs in more than 100 playable units, from the A6M Zero to the battleship USS Iowa, and you can also capture islands using transport ships for launching an amphibious assault. The graphics engine has also been overhauled from Battlestations: Midway – water now becomes transparent at shallow depths and you have the option of a cockpit view in most planes. When a ship sinks, it now breaks in two and crewmen are blasted overboard, while planes splinter convincingly when hit. Another nice touch is the use of different environmental conditions, such as battles at night with a storm raging, which add another layer of atmosphere to the realistic gameplay.

This element of realism runs through every aspect of the game, from the detailed weaponry to the campaigns. Incidentally, while the US campaign is based on events post Battle of Midway, the Japanese campaign is based on the actual plans for their domination of the Pacific, which adds an interesting dimension to the game. Moreover, in the battle scenes, with enemy planes buzzing round your battleship, they're reminiscent of Second World War footage of the actual campaigns, which only serves to heighten the realistic aspect.

However, there are a couple of niggles. First off, planes seem to be a disposable commodity and you can lose several in the blink of an eye yet still manage to fulfil



▲ Gunnery in this game is much more complex than simply pointing and shooting. Allowing your gunners to concentrate their aim beforehand means your shots are much more accurate.



▲ Bombs away as you try to sink the British battleship HMS Prince of Wales.



▲ The strategic map is where you can give orders to your units. We're launching aircraft from the carrier USS Yorktown.

the mission's objectives. Further, while the dialogue adds a nice touch over the airways, it's lacking in variety and having heard 'Enemy fire is being directed at us' a hundred times it quickly becomes annoying.

The game ran smoothly on a MacBook with 2.4GHz processor and an Nvidia GeForce 9400M graphics card, although occasionally it did seem a bit choppy, but not so much as to spoil our enjoyment. Cutscenes have kept the old-footage feel and serve to show you when an objective has been completed. If you find them annoying, then you can easily click through them.

You aren't just confined to single-player mode, either, as there are also five multiplayer modes, each with different objectives. These are Capture, Duel, Competitive, Escort and Siege, and you can play against the AI or friends, online or offline.

Although true armchair strategists will find the tactical map stifling, most gamers will find this element means you'll have to put some thought into your battleplans and lifts the game from being a bog-standard shoot-'em-up. While the variety of missions means you'll never find the game repetitive, there are some that you'll want to play again and again. In all, then, Battlestations: Pacific is great way to spend a rainy weekend.

▶ A kamikaze is on its suicidal mission. Try as we might, we couldn't shoot it down before it slammed into the USS Wisconsin.

