

= Desert Strike =

Desert Strike : Return to the Gulf , commonly known as Desert Strike , is a shoot ' em up video game released by Electronic Arts ( EA ) in February 1992 for the Sega Genesis . The game was later released on several other formats such as the Super Nintendo Entertainment System , including a much upgraded version for the Amiga home computer . The game was inspired by the Gulf War and depicts a conflict between an insane Middle Eastern dictator , General Kilbaba , and the United States . The player controls a lone Apache helicopter and attempts to destroy enemy weapons and installations , rescue hostages and capture enemy personnel , while managing supplies of fuel and ammunition .

The lead designer , Mike Posehn , had no video game experience prior to developing Desert Strike . Inspired by Choplifter , he aimed to create a nonlinear game with smoothly animated vehicles . Posehn , a PhD in Mechanical Engineering , developed a camera system with momentum to mimic realistic helicopter movements . Three @-@ dimensional ( 3D ) modeling was used to generate the vehicle sprites , which were later touched up on the pixel level with color .

Desert Strike was a strong commercial success : it was a chart @-@ topping best seller and at the time Electronics Arts ' highest ever selling game . The game also received a favourable critical response , with several magazines awarding scores of over 90 % . Reviewers praised the game 's enjoyability , mix of action and strategy , graphics and sound . There was some controversy regarding the game 's subject matter , with commentators criticising it as in poor taste due the proximity of its release to the recently ended Gulf War .

= = Gameplay = =

Desert Strike is a shoot ' em up game in which the player pilots an AH @-@ 64 Apache helicopter . The game is less frantic than typical shoot ' em ups , with the addition of greater strategic elements . The action takes place on open , multi @-@ directional scrolling levels viewed from an isometric perspective . The player views the action from outside the helicopter , rather than from within the cockpit .

Levels consist of several missions , which are based around the destruction of enemy weapons and installations , as well as rescuing hostages or prisoners of war , or capturing enemy personnel . The Apache is armed with a machine gun , more powerful Hydra rockets and yet more deadly Hellfire missiles . The more powerful the weapon , the fewer can be carried : the player must choose an appropriate weapon for each situation . Enemy weapons range from soldiers with small arms , to anti @-@ aircraft missiles to tanks and armoured cars .

The player 's craft has a limited amount of armour , which is depleted as the helicopter is hit by enemy fire . Should the armour reach zero , the craft will be destroyed , costing the player a life . The player must outmanoeuvre enemies to avoid damage , but can replenish armour by means of power @-@ ups or by airlifting rescued friendlies or captives to a landing zone . The helicopter has a finite amount of fuel which is steadily depleted over time . Should the fuel run out the Apache will crash , again costing the player a life . The craft can refuel by collecting fuel barrels : the player must therefore plan mission routes carefully in order to maximise efficiency . The helicopter also carries limited ammunition , which must be replenished by means of ammo crates .

= = Plot = =

The game opens with a self @-@ proclaimed general named Kilbaba ( Mubaba in the Super NES version ) seizing control of an unnamed , fictional Gulf state . Installing himself as dictator , Kilbaba quickly begins fortifying his position with military weapons and installations , including nuclear facilities with which to build bombs . The United States decides to send in a single helicopter , piloted by the player 's unnamed character and aided by a co @-@ pilot , to infiltrate and destroy Kilbaba 's forces in a series of swift strikes . In the final level , Kilbaba attempts to escape in a bomber plane armed with nuclear bombs , but the player destroys him and his plane before it leaves

the runway . In the ending , the player and co @-@ pilot are seen at the White House , where they are commended by President Bill Clinton for their heroism .

The game 's plot was felt by commentators to be a thinly disguised reference to the Gulf War , while comparisons were drawn between Kilbaba and Saddam Hussein , and between the game 's unnamed desert setting and Iraq .

= = Development and release = =

The game was developed by a team headed by Mike Posehn . In the 1980s , Posehn had previously worked for EA as a software developer . Soon after leaving EA , he obtained a publishing deal with the company for Video Deluxe . The success of the software spurred Posehn to branch out and experiment with a flight simulator titled Fly for the IBM Personal Computer ; however , International Business Machines cancelled the project . Posehn later met with EA president Trip Hawkins who suggested that Posehn develop a game for the Genesis , which was soon to be released . He also recommended that Posehn create a game similar to the Apple II game Choplifter ; Hawkins felt flying a helicopter and rescuing people was " cool " .

Desert Strike underwent few changes from the plans outlined in the original design documents . The initial concept involved smoothly animated vehicles on an isometric playing field . The developers also aimed to include cinematic scenes , similar to The Revenge of Shinobi { { } } 's introduction sequence . The game began development some time before any discussion of an American invasion of Iraq , originally based on the Lebanese Civil War and titled Beirut Breakout ; this was later changed to the Persian Gulf region . A special point system intended to punish players was omitted ; the system would have deducted points from the player 's score if they destroyed objects that resulted in negative economic and political results . The control scheme was not well received at internal reviews of the game 's early versions , and Posehn had to alter his original design to obtain approval for further development .

John Manley , an EA employee , assisted writing the game 's program . He and Posehn collaborated to create the game 's sandbox format , which they nicknamed " SNAFU " . Posehn wanted the game to have nonlinear gameplay , and Manley felt having a storyline and puzzles would help the player progress . Posehn disliked common gameplay elements like series of bosses and power @-@ ups . As a compromise , the developers only included power @-@ ups to replenish ammunition , armour , and other helicopter resources . To provide the player with options , the SNAFU system was designed to allow players to complete side missions in addition to main objectives . If the player alters the game scenario so that the objectives cannot be completed , the game instructs the player to reset the mission by returning to base .

Inspired by Matchbox toys he played with as a child , Posehn decided to make the size of the game sprites resemble toys . Posehn contacted his friend , Tim Calvin , to assist with designing and creating the vehicle sprites . Though Calvin was a practising dentist at the time , he also had experience with 3D modelling . He rendered 3D models on a computer and reduced them to the desired size . Different views were obtained by rotating the models along a single axis . Calvin added colour to the sprites to meet the production staff 's specifications ; most required black , white , red , and blue , as well as four shades of colours like green and brown . Calvin eventually felt the rendering process was a waste of resources and attempted to create sprites on the pixel level himself without 3D models . The developers , however , preferred the sprites created from the models over Calvin 's freestyle ones .

Posehn had a difficult time working within the Genesis 's output resolution of 320 × 240 . He wanted to show as much of the playing field as possible without losing the details of the sprites ; he felt a lack of graphical detail would make them less interesting . Posehn developed a dynamic camera system to help maintain what he felt was the right balance between the size of the field in view and the size of the game objects . The camera travels on an elliptic curve as the helicopter rotates to change the direction it travels ; this puts whatever is in front of the helicopter more in view on screen . Posehn also integrated momentum to the camera movements to smooth transitions . He spent several months working on the physics for the screen and helicopter to ensure realistic movement .

Instead of using completely accurate physics , Posehn chose to model movement that he believed players would assume a helicopter would have . He believed players would be put off by physics that didn 't match their perceived movement .

After the success of the Genesis / Mega Drive version , work began on a conversion for the Amiga , with Gary Roberts ( known for a John Madden Amiga conversion ) and David Colclough ( responsible for Myth ) in charge of development . The developers retouched and redrew the graphics and added additional sound effects taken from military training videos . Conversions for other systems include the Atari Lynx , Super Nintendo Entertainment System , Master System , Game Gear and Game Boy . The game was also ported to the Game Boy Advance , ten years later in 2002 , as Desert Strike Advance , and was re @-@ released in 2006 for the PlayStation Portable as part of a budget compilation .

= = Reception = =

Commentators have felt the game was an attempt to capitalize on then @-@ recent , extensive news coverage of the Gulf War , which had focused on the use of advanced , impersonal weapons ( such as aircraft and guided missiles ) to destroy enemy weapons and installations . Some commentators considered the game 's subject matter in bad taste , with one magazine reporting an incident of veterans burning copies of the game .

Desert Strike was an immediate commercial success , going straight to the top of sales charts . The game remained a top @-@ 10 best seller for months after its release , and was at the time Electronic Arts ' highest selling game ever .

Mean Machines praised the sophistication and tactical freedom found in the game , as well as its longevity and graphics . The magazine deemed it one of the best shooters on the Mega Drive thus far , as well as the best game released for the console that month . Computer and Video Games felt the game 's subject matter was somewhat in bad taste , but praised its depth , soundtrack and sound effects . The magazine felt the game was " essential " for Mega Drive owners . ACE praised the balance of action and strategy , as well as the variety of missions . The magazine felt some of the graphics , particularly the explosions , were a little weak and complained that the fact that the helicopter is not fully rearmed and refuelled after the loss of a life was unduly frustrating . MegaTech magazine praised the graphics and gameplay , and said it was " one of the best shoot ' em ups on the Megadrive " . Retro Gamer included this " thinking man 's shoot- ' em @-@ up " among top ten Mega Drive games .

Amiga Action felt the game was not particularly innovative , but praised its open @-@ ended gameplay , graphics and sound . The reviewer claimed the Amiga version of the game ran more slowly than the Mega Drive version but overall felt the port was " a more than satisfactory translation " . Amiga Computing noted the improved graphics and sound over the Mega Drive version and praised the game as " EA 's finest moment since Populous " . The reviewer also acclaimed the game 's " brilliant playability " . Amiga Format commended the " Successful cross between a shoot ' em up and a flight simulator " , graphics , sound , varied missions and " tremendous fun " of the game , although the reviewer noted some " occasional glitches " occurring in the sound and graphics . CU Amiga praised the Amiga version 's improved graphics and sound , particularly the explosions , though the reviewer derided friendly units ' invincibility as unrealistic and complained of poor enemy artificial intelligence . The magazine however said that " All things considered , Desert Strike couldn 't be a better game " , praising the " fast and frantic " action and " just @-@ one @-@ more @-@ go appeal " . The One praised the mix of action and strategy as well as opining that the Amiga version was a strong improvement over the Mega Drive game . The magazine said the game " plays like a dream " and was " one of the best shoot ' em ups available for any games machine " .

The four reviewers of Electronic Gaming Monthly gave varying praise to the Lynx version 's controls and graphics , but concurred that on the smaller portable screen Desert Strike loses much of its impact and playability , as it is difficult to identify enemies or even see the bullets the player character fires .

GamePro gave the Game Boy version a positive review , saying it " has almost everything that

made the original title great . " They particularly praised the graphics and extensive , realistic sound effects , remarking that they were very impressive given the limitations of Game Boy cartridges . Mike Weigand of Electronic Gaming Monthly likewise deemed it " A fairly faithful portable version of the 16 @-@ Bit military classic . "

= = Legacy = =

Desert Strike was followed by four sequels Jungle Strike , Urban Strike , Soviet Strike , and Nuclear Strike that expanded on the basic gameplay it established . The design staff made efforts to retain game mechanics they felt embodied the core of the original . They believed removing those elements would result in a loss of focus of what attracted fans . As the series moved to more advanced consoles , Posehn became less involved in the programming side of development . Jungle Strike and Urban Strike , both released for the Genesis , featured additional vehicles and locations . Soviet Strike , released for the original PlayStation and the Sega Saturn in 1996 , featured 3D graphics , as did Nuclear Strike , released on PC and PlayStation in 1997 and the Nintendo 64 in 1999 . A fifth sequel provisionally titled Future Strike was planned , but the game was eventually released as Future Cop : LAPD , a mech @-@ based shooter game .