Empires : Dawn of the Modern World

Empires : Dawn of the Modern World is a 2003 real @-@ time strategy video game developed by Stainless Steel Studios and published by Activision . Set in a world @-@ historical period that extends from the Middle Ages to World War II , the game tasks players with guiding one of nine rival great civilizations to victory . Customer surveys from Stainless Steel 's previous game , Empire Earth , were used as a starting point for Empires : these inspired the team to take a more minimalist design approach , and to include civilizations without overlapping styles of play . Empires was positively received by critics , who enjoyed its multiplayer component . However , certain reviewers disliked its single @-@ player mode , and opinion clashed on the game 's level of uniqueness compared to competitors such as Rise of Nations . The sales of Empires , when combined with those of Empire Earth , totaled 2 @.@ 5 million units by 2004 .

Gameplay

Empires : Dawn of the Modern World is a real @-@ time strategy (RTS) game in which the player guides a civilization through five historical periods , from the Middle Ages to World War II . As in many RTS titles , the player collects natural resources , erects buildings and trains and maintains a military . Players use a mouse cursor interface (or hotkeys) to direct their units , which range from crossbowmen to King Tiger tanks . A three @-@ dimensional (3D) camera system allows the player to view the action from any perspective , including isometric and first @-@ person angles . A mini @-@ map is included as well .

Each of the nine civilizations features a unique style of play : for example , the French and English have powerful defensive capabilities , while Chinese structures are mobile . During a match , the player must gather resources to progress their civilization to a new historical era , after which more advanced technologies and units (land- , sea- and airborne) become available . Four civilizations are playable from the medieval to the Imperial age ; at the beginning of World War I , the player transitions their civilization to one of the remaining five . For example , a player of the premodern Franks must transition to modern Germany or France . The player wins a match by destroying all opponents ' means of production , or by constructing and successfully defending a " Wonder " , such as the Notre Dame de Paris or Brandenburg Gate .

Empires allows up to eight players (or artificially intelligent opponents) to compete in two modes : the shorter , battle @-@ oriented Action mode or the longer , defense @-@ oriented Empire Builder mode . In addition , the game contains three single @-@ player storylines called " campaigns " , each of which depicts major events in a civilization 's history . These follow Richard the Lionheart 's medieval wars in France ; Admiral Yi Sun @-@ Sin 's defense of Korea against Japanese invasion in the early modern period ; and General George S. Patton 's exploits during World War II . The editor used to create Empires is packaged with the game , which allows the player to create original levels and campaign scenarios .

Development

Conception

Stainless Steel Studios started work on Empires in 2002 . The project was led by company head Rick Goodman , designer of Ensemble Studios ' Age of Empires and Stainless Steel 's earlier Empire Earth . The Empires team began by studying their previous game for features that could be reused or improved . In addition , they mined history books for interesting " events , battle tactics , weapons , technologies and economic factors " , according to Goodman . A list was drafted of 100 historical elements that excited the team , and it formed the basis of the project . Although a heavy focus was placed on historical accuracy , designer Richard Bishop explained that " fun always comes first . " As it had with Empire Earth , Stainless Steel delegated separate teams to the

multiplayer and single @-@ player modes of Empires .

Further inspiration came from surveys of Empire Earth players , conducted during 2002 . For example , the team found that Empire Earth 's medieval and World War II periods were the most popular , while its futuristic and prehistoric periods were the least . In response , the team reduced the span of Empires to 1 @,@ 000 years , from the Middle Ages until World War II . Goodman believed that this could make the game many times deeper than Empire Earth . Also requested by players were fully unique civilizations , without overlapping units or styles of play ? a feature that Goodman claimed to be a first for a history @-@ based RTS game . The team discovered that those who favored the single @-@ player mode in Empire Earth preferred slower , more management @-@ based gameplay . However , multiplayer users were split , with half in favor of shorter matches filled with combat . To please both audiences , the Empire Builder and Action modes were included to offer " a rush @-@ oriented game for the pro gamers and a more defensive game for the casual gamer " , in Goodman 's words .

= = = Production = = =

In December 2002 , publisher Activision signed Stainless Steel to a multi @-@ game contract , the first title of which was revealed to be Empires in February 2003 . By April , the team estimated the game to be 60 ? 70 % finished . The engine used to create Empire Earth ? later released under the name Titan 2 @.@ 0 ? was retained and upgraded for Empires . Significantly more detail was added to the units ' 3D models than had appeared in Empire Earth . Further additions included reflection mapping , environmental bump mapping and a new physics engine . According to Goodman , reusing the game engine enabled the team to place its full concentration on gameplay , without worrying about technological development . Another priority was storytelling , an element of the RTS game Warcraft III : Reign of Chaos (2002) particularly enjoyed by the Empires team .

Empires was designed primarily for multiplayer gameplay : the multiplayer development team created and fine @-@ tuned each civilization , which the single @-@ player team then used in campaign levels . Because the civilizations do not overlap , Bishop considered game balance to be the most difficult aspect of the project . Previously , Stainless Steel had balanced its games in a microcosmic fashion : the " individual components " of each civilization ? for example , the economic power of Germany versus that of England ? were balanced against one another . Balance on this scale led to overarching balance . However , this technique hinged on a broad similarity between civilizations that is not present in Empires . Consequently , the company had to abandon its earlier practice and " develop an entirely new methodology " , Goodman explained . The result was a macrocosmic system of balance , in which civilizations are inherently unbalanced but equally powerful overall .

As with Empire Earth , each new build of Empires was given to " strike teams " of playtesters . By April , between six and eight months of playtesting had been performed by a group of six professional RTS players . GameSpy 's Allen Rausch wrote that the process allows a game to be " consistently tested , evaluated , balanced , and tweaked " at every stage of development , which enables complex forms of balance . This let the Empires team create a looser version of the rock @-@ paper @-@ scissors system typical of RTS games , wherein one type of unit is either very strong or very weak against other types . In Empires , each unit 's strengths and weaknesses were made subtle enough to curb " hopeless mismatches " and reward skillful micromanagement , according to Bishop . The duration of the average battle was increased to provide more opportunities to micromanage units . Empires went gold on October 7 , 2003 , and it was released on the 22nd of that month .

= = Reception = =

Empires was received positively by critics , according to review aggregators Metacritic and GameRankings . The game 's sales , when combined with those of Empire Earth , surpassed 2 @.@ 5 million units by May 2004 . Game Informer 's Adam Biessener called Empires " a good

knockoff " of WarCraft III and Age of Mythology , worthwhile for fans of the RTS genre . He praised its Empire Builder and Action modes , and the uniqueness of its multiplayer mode ; but he found its single @-@ player campaigns to be lackluster . Jonah Jackson of X @-@ Play , Ron Dulin of Computer Gaming World and Stephen Poole of PC Gamer US were similarly unimpressed by the game 's single @-@ player mode : the last critic highlighted its " stupendously loquacious cut @-@ scenes and terrible voice @-@ acting " . However , Poole dubbed Empires a strong , streamlined and fully featured multiplayer game , which he recommended despite its flaws and lack of innovation . Jackson lauded the multiplayer component as well , and he believed that , while the game at first seems unoriginal , Empires is " the most mature and well @-@ balanced of Goodman 's titles " .

 Regarding the single @-@ player campaigns , PC Zone 's writers noted strong level design and " voice acting of the highest calibre " ; and they praised the multiplayer mode 's " balance and diversity " . However , they criticized the pathfinding , interface , unoriginality and inconsistent graphical quality of Empires , and they named it the inferior of Medieval : Total War and Rise of Nations . Conversely , Dulin agreed with Jackson that Empires is a deceptively conventional RTS , which introduces " great , if initially unapparent , changes to the standard formula . " He summarized it as a well @-@ made competitor to historical RTS titles like Rise of Nations , Age of Empires and Empire Earth . Writing for GameSpot , Sam Parker argued that Empires separated itself from rivals Age of Empires II : The Age of Kings and Age of Mythology , and he commented , " While it may not have the breadth of Rise of Nations ' real @-@ time empire building , the tight scope deals out dividends when it comes to fast @-@ paced battles . "

 Steve Butts of IGN , along with GameSpy 's Rausch , called Empires a major improvement on the foundation of Empire Earth , thanks to its smaller scope and deeper gameplay . Like the staff of PC Zone , both writers enjoyed the single @-@ player mode , although Rausch noted its middling writing and voice acting . Rausch considered the multiplayer mode to be Empires ' best feature : he felt that its Empire Builder and Action modes were both balanced , and that each civilization " offers players a completely different experience " . He noted the game 's audiovisual presentation as a low point . Butts found fault with the game 's camera system , but he summarized Empires as a unique RTS and " a good direction for the genre " .