

= Sacrifice ( video game ) =

Sacrifice is a real @-@ time strategy video game published by Interplay Entertainment in 2000 for the Windows 98 platform . Developed by Shiny Entertainment the game features elements of action and other genres . Players control wizards who fight each other with spells and summoned creatures . The game was ported to Mac OS 9 @.@ 2 in 2001 .

Unlike many of its contemporary real @-@ time strategy games , Sacrifice places little emphasis on resource gathering and management . There is no system of workers ; the players ' wizards collect souls to summon creatures , and their mana ? energy for casting spells ? constantly regenerates . Players customize their attacks by choosing from spells and creatures aligned to five gods . To defeat an opponent , the player 's wizard sacrifices a friendly unit at the opposing wizard 's altar , thereby desecrating it and banishing the enemy wizard . Aside from a single @-@ player campaign , Sacrifice offers a multiplayer mode , in which up to four players can play against each other over computer networks .

Sacrifice was created by a small team of developers ; most of the work was done by four key personnel . The graphic engine of the game uses tessellation : thousands of polygons are used to display an object and as lesser details are needed , the number of polygons is reduced . By adjusting the required level of detail , Sacrifice can be run on various machines with the highest possible quality of graphics . Complementing the graphics of the game were the voice work of professional actors , such as Tim Curry , and the musical compositions of Kevin Manthei . Sacrifice was praised by reviewers for the novel designs of its creatures and for its humorous content . The high level of attention needed to manage its frenetic combat was mentioned as a flaw . Despite winning several awards , Sacrifice was not a commercial success , and no sequels are planned .

= = Gameplay = =

Published in 2000 for the Windows 98 platform ( and in the following year for Mac OS 9 @.@ 2 ) , Sacrifice is a real @-@ time strategy video game that incorporates elements of the action genre . Players control wizards , looking over their characters from behind . Each match starts the player with a wizard and an altar . Using the keyboard and mouse , players move their wizards around a virtual world , directing armies and casting spells to eliminate their opponents . A player 's wizard defeats an opponent by desecrating his or her altar through the magical " sacrifice " of a friendly unit .

Wizards can cast spells that harm opponents ( combat spells ) , heal damage taken , or summon creatures . More advanced combat spells affect large areas of the battlefield , taking the form of tornadoes and volcanoes . Casting spells requires energy , which the game represents in the form of mana . Recovery of mana is slow , but a wizard accelerates the process by staying close to his or her altar . Close proximity to one of several fountains of mana scattered across the world increases his or her recovery rate as well . A wizard can monopolize a mana fountain by erecting a structure known as a manalith over it . Because mana can always be regained , it is an infinite resource . Souls are the other type of resource in this game ; they are used , along with mana , to summon creatures , who form the mainstay of the players ' offensive capability . Unlike mana , souls are limited in quantity . Players start with a few souls and increase their resources by locating unclaimed souls , or by converting the souls of unfriendly creatures their wizards have killed .

Summoned creatures are mainly classified into three classes : melee , ranged , and air ( flyers ) . In a rock @-@ paper @-@ scissors manner , each class is a counter to another . Melee creatures inflict more damage to their ranged opponents , but cannot retaliate against flyers , which in turn are vulnerable to those who can attack at range . Several creatures also have special abilities , such as creating protective magical barriers , becoming invisible , or immobilizing their opponents . Two units , manahoars and sac doctors , have special purposes . Manahoars help to recharge their summoner 's mana by channeling energy from manaliths to him or her . Sac doctors are summoned to extract the souls of fallen opponents and bring them back to the altar for conversion . These units are also summoned to hold the sacrificial rituals required for desecrating enemy altars ; killing a sac doctor

disrupts the process .

The spells and abilities of the creatures are designed along the ethos of five gods . Persephone , the Great Healer , bestows her followers with powers of regeneration and nature . Her counterpart , Charnel , God of Strife , celebrates death and decay ; his creatures are undead and his spells drains the life of others . The other three gods ? James , Stratos , and Pyro ? govern natural elements , granting their followers abilities associated with earth , air , and fire , respectively .

Unlike other real @-@ time strategy games released in or before 2000 , Sacrifice 's gameplay is not focused on large @-@ scale management of resources and bases . Instead , the game emphasizes micromanagement of the players ' units ; success in the game is linked to meticulous control of individuals or small groups to overcome enemies . Players order their armies to assume formations by pressing an assigned key or navigating through a pop @-@ up menu . The order can also be given by moving the mouse in specific patterns without waiting for the menu to appear .

= = = Single @-@ player campaign = = =

Sacrifice 's single @-@ player campaign begins with a meeting between the protagonist Eldred and the blind seer Mithras on a war @-@ torn world . Through voiceovers and cut scenes rendered by the game engine , Eldred recounts to Mithras his background and the events that led to the world 's current state . Eldred was a tyrannical emperor who ruled over the world of Jhera . However , his days of rule were numbered : his subjects were rebelling , and his enemies gathered at the borders of his realm . Turning to the mystical arts for a solution , Eldred summoned a demon , Marduk , to eliminate opposition to his rule . Marduk proved uncontrollable and ravaged Jhera . Eldred fled to the world that he and Mithras stand on . The world ? having suffered a past cataclysm ? was riven into a collection of five floating islands . A god rules over each realm , seeking to impose his or her own agenda . The rivalries among the gods are aggravated by Mithras 's prophecy of a traitor amongst them . Sensing the opportunity for a new lease on life , Eldred offers his service to the gods .

The campaign spans ten missions . In each mission , the player chooses a god for Eldred to champion , receiving creatures and spells from that god . The player can build up a selection of units and spells from different gods by changing Eldred 's allegiance between missions ; the selections are used in later missions or multiplayer sessions . As the game progresses , the player 's choices align Eldred with one god . Aside from the stated goals in each mission , there are secret objectives that if accomplished bestow bonuses to Eldred 's attributes ( magical and physical resistance , more mana , etc . ) .

Midway through the campaign , Eldred encounters Marduk again . The demon taunts the wizard and announces that this world will suffer the same fate as Jhera . Eldred warns the gods ; they believe one of them supports the demon and fall upon each other to eliminate the traitor . By the last stage of the campaign , Eldred has helped one god to kill the others . After the end of the wizard 's narration , Mithras reveals himself as Marduk . Stratos , the traitor , had planned for the demon to appear on this world and deliver the prophecy to the gods . Marduk berates Eldred for his naivety and starts the final battle . After defeating the demon , the player chooses one of two endings for Eldred : stay and help the last god rule the world , or leave and seek his destiny in other worlds .

= = = Multiplayer = = =

Sacrifice features the capability for players to play matches against each other over computer networks ; up to four players ( human- or computer @-@ controlled ) can participate in a multiplayer match . Four modes of play are available : Skirmish , Slaughter , Soul Harvest , and Domination . Skirmish 's gameplay is similar to that of the single @-@ player mode ; a player wins the match by banishing the others ' wizards . The winner of Domination is the wizard who controls a certain number of manaliths . The goal in Slaughter is to amass the most kills , while wizards in Soul Harvest have to collect the most souls .

Initially , the multiplayer games could only be played over small @-@ area networks of computers (

local area networks ) , or over the internet through an integrated matchmaking service . Later software patches added online rankings and the capability to connect computers via Internet Protocol Suite ( TCP / IP ) , allowing play over the internet without the matchmaking service . The Macintosh version 's matchmaking , handled by GameRanger , had to be installed through a patch . Multiplayer matches cannot be played between different computer platforms .

= = Development = =

Sacrifice 's development started in August 1997 . The game 's lead programmer , Martin Brownlow , was inspired by Chaos : The Battle of Wizards , which was released in 1985 for the ZX Spectrum computer . In the old game , players take turns to control wizards , summoning creatures and casting spells to eliminate each other . The video game industry was mostly ignorant of Sacrifice 's development , partly due to Shiny 's desire to avoid repeating the bad experience of marketing their last product Messiah . Released in March 2000 , the game was extravagantly promoted by Shiny during its development , and the resulting heavy scrutiny from the media greatly stressed the team who worked on the game . Learning from this mistake , Shiny adopted a low profile for Sacrifice ; until the last several months of its development , no one outside the company knew of the game . According to Brownlow , his team was able to concentrate on developing the game without the media or " fan base questioning every decision that gets made along the way " .

The bulk of the work was done by a small team . Game designer Eric Flannum , formerly of Blizzard Entertainment , recalls that there were only three other key personnel : two programmers and an animator . As more game features were developed , the team expanded . Flannum was tasked to lead four level designers , and Jon Gwyn joined Joby Otero on the art team . After the basic features of the game had been completed , James Phinney , lead designer and producer of Blizzard 's 1998 real @-@ time strategy game StarCraft , was hired to write the plot for the single @-@ player campaign . His first draft was used as the script for recording placeholder voiceovers , which helped the team to judge the atmosphere in the game . Later , Shiny employed professional actors , such as Tim Curry and Brad Garrett , and various voice artists , such as Jennifer Hale , to record the final voices for the game 's characters . Audio filters altered the voices for the gods , giving them a supernatural edge appropriate to their roles . For background music , Shiny hired Kevin Manthei , who had composed many scores for video games and big- and small @-@ screen entertainment , such as *Scream 3* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* . His compositions for Sacrifice were played by an orchestra of 25 instruments . Shiny 's founder , David Perry , was so busy with the game 's development that he passed over the opportunity to create a video game for the science @-@ fiction movie *The Matrix* .

= = = Graphics = = =

Sacrifice 's graphics engine was developed from Messiah 's . The older game renders its characters by tessellation , using thousands of polygons to make up character models and decreasing the number of polygons when lesser details are required , such as drawing the object at a distance . A typical object in Sacrifice comprises 200 to 2 @,@ 500 polygons . Shiny expanded the technology 's application to the game 's virtual world . The environment is not decorated with grass , flowers , and rocks by overlaying two @-@ dimensional images of such objects on the terrain model . Instead , many tiny models of these terrain features litter the landscape . Objects in the game are composed of isosceles right triangles , each of which is infinitely divisible into two smaller isosceles right triangles . The array of infinite triangles derived from these divisions is stored in a binary triangle tree data structure , and the simplicity of the division and its data management algorithms frees up the graphic processor for other duties , allowing more resources to be spent on managing the level of detail . Sacrifice 's spell effects are composed of parametric surfaces , which also can be broken down into triangles , facilitating tessellation .

In early 2000 , the computer industry released the first video graphics cards capable of processing transform , clipping , and lighting ( T & L ) instructions . With the appropriate software , these new

cards took over the burden of T & L processing from the computer 's processor , allowing more detailed graphics and smoother animation . Shiny capitalized on the breakthrough , spending a few weeks to rewrite a portion of Sacrifice 's software . Brownlow and his team refined and improved the game 's graphics , increasing the number of polygons per model and setting the software to scan through scenes a few more times to determine what objects to render and how to display them . Sacrifice was acknowledged as the first game on the market to make full use of the new graphic cards ( the GeForce 2 and Radeon series ) . Because of the adopted technology , animation in the game was smooth , without the jerkiness associated with overstressed graphical engines .

For the character models , Otero and his team eschewed conventional designs inspired by The Lord of the Rings and other fantasies . Otero 's ideal was that of " form follows function " , by which a creature 's capabilities or purposes are readily apparent from its appearance . In his opinion , a creature designed to kill enemies by exploding itself would simply be a " cartoon @-@ ish bomb with feet " . Otero 's simple designs were expanded and fleshed out in detail by Gwyn , who was also responsible for creating Eldred 's model . The artists ' incorporation of humor in their work did not escape the video game industry 's notice ; many pointed out the quirky allusion of James , God of Earth , to Earthworm Jim , star of Shiny 's previous games .

= = = Release = = =

By June , the major features of the game had been implemented , and Shiny proceeded to the next stage of development . It selected a thousand members of the public to participate in a beta test of Sacrifice 's multiplayer modes , receiving feedback on software bugs , performance issues , and possible improvements . The game 's publisher , Interplay Entertainment , assigned its quality assurance department to test the single @-@ player mode . Perry promoted the game by visiting professional game reviewers , such as FiringSquad , and giving copies of the beta version to them . On November 17 , 2000 , Interplay released the game for the Windows platform . Shiny packaged a level editor , Scapex , with the finished product , allowing gamers to create their own levels . The tool displays the user 's changes as they are added to the level . Users have total control over the positioning of models and scripting of events , although the tool does not provide the capability to create new spells or creatures . User @-@ created maps can be shared with other players during the connection phase of multiplayer games .

Earlier in the same month , Macintosh software publisher MacPlay announced that it was porting Sacrifice to the Apple computers . It took the company several months to adapt the source code to the Macintosh architecture , and on December 14 , 2001 , the Macintosh version of the game was released . It has almost the same features as the original version ; however , Scapex was excluded from the port . Another feature left out was multiplayer mode , which MacPlay added through a software patch .

= = Reception = =

Sacrifice was developed and released during a period of growth for the video games market ; the amount United States consumers spent on video games increased from US \$ 3 @.@ 2 billion in 1995 to \$ 6 @.@ 0 billion in 2000 . " Solid " real @-@ time strategy games could sell more than 100 @,@ 000 copies , and those that sold less than 75 @,@ 000 copies were considered commercial failures by the publishers . Many real @-@ time strategy game developers concentrated on enhancing their game 's visuals without concern for innovations in gameplay . Shiny was recognized by the industry for its unconventional games , which exhibited humorous content and unique artistic designs . When it became known that the company was developing Sacrifice as its first real @-@ time strategy game , several industry observers were keen to see whether it could deliver a quality product .

Initial reactions were favorable . Sacrifice 's art was a point of focus for reviewers : the fantasy creatures ' novel designs made deep impressions on the industry . The designs were so unconventional that gaming journalist Michael Eilers remarked , " It is as if Salvador Dalí and H. R.

Giger got together and played around with 3D Studio Max for a few weeks with a cooler full of Bass Ale between them . " To fellow journalist Kieron Gillen , Sacrifice resembled a version of the strategy game Command and Conquer as designed by Renaissance painter Hieronymus Bosch . Aside from being impressed by the details in the graphics , GameSpy 's Lee Haumersen found the creatures ' movements fluid and believable , remarking , " flying dragons heave their bodies through the air reminiscent of Draco in the movie Dragonheart . " Journalist Tom Chick summed up the weird experience of seeing his wizard at the head of " a troop of flapping , crawling , loping , whirling , hopping things " as the essence of " what gaming is all about . "

The game 's spell effects also elicited positive reactions . Next Generation magazine 's Samuel Bass called them " awe @-@ inspiring " , while it was " positively breathtaking " for Eurogamer 's John Bye to see " flaming missiles raining down on the battlefield , tornados lifting [ his ] men up into the sky , or the ground swelling up beneath [ his wizard 's ] feet " . Although such effects were implemented in other games , as Gillen pointed out , it was a vastly different experience to watch them from the first person perspective . Reviewers of FiringSquad and PC Gamer were equally overwhelmed by the stunning visual effects . Despite filling the screen with " winged , fully animated demons " and " multiple gigantic twisters spiraling gorgeously into the clouds " , Sacrifice performed smoothly on the reviewers ' machines , impressing the staff of Edge magazine .

Aside from the visuals , the game 's audio attracted comments . GameSpot 's staff enjoyed listening to the story unfold through the recorded voices . They found that the voice actors did not overact their roles despite the extravagant appearances of the characters . Instead , the actors ' performance conveyed an extra depth to the personalities of these characters . Haumersen noted a few flaws in the game 's vocal presentation : the character models ' lip movements did not match their speech , and they had a limited number of gestures to accompany the words . Michael House of Allgame was not altogether impressed , finding the voice acting to be " spotty [ , ] ... ranging from hilarious to obnoxious . "

To several reviewers , Sacrifice was flawed in its handling of combat . They found that the game 's interface ? which presented a viewpoint that looked over the wizard from behind ? hindered them from having a clear picture of their characters ' surroundings . The game 's fast @-@ paced combat ensured that fights tended to be messy affairs , where aside from picking out their units from a chaotic mass to issue commands , players had to see to their wizards ' safety , and cast spells to support their army . Reviewers commented that once a player had lost a number of early battles , his or her army could never recover from its losses to win the match . Sacrifice 's multiplayer games , as GameSpot 's Sam Parker observed , tended to be long @-@ drawn stalemates until the wizards obtained more powerful spells . PC Zone 's Keith Pullin was disappointed that the game was not designed to reward tactics ; in his experience , he achieved victory by continually summoning groups of creatures to attack the enemy . Bass agreed that the game was lacking in tactical play , but other aspects impressed him enough to downplay this failing in his assessment .

The intensity and excitement generated by the frenetic gameplay pleased IGN 's Dan Adams , but Bye was so frustrated by his experience that he claimed to have suffered a massive increase in blood pressure . The game 's heavy demand for micromanagement convinced Maximum PC to name Sacrifice the " best argument for gamers [ to grow ] a third hand " , an opinion in line with Chick 's comment that the interface " [ seemed ] to have been designed for one of the game 's 13 @-@ fingered beasts " . Sacrifice 's gameplay had its supporters ; the staff at Edge , impressed with the game 's controls and visual perspective , named it one of the " few titles [ that took ] strategy into the third dimension and convincingly used the extra plane for more than a dazzling 3D makeover " .

No sales figures were released for Sacrifice , but several members of the video game industry acknowledged the game did not sell well . James Bell , Infogrames 's Senior Vice President of Creative Development , said that Sacrifice , although an excellent game , suffered poor sales because it was badly marketed and released at the wrong time . Another reason , offered by Gillen , for Sacrifice 's commercial failure was the small size of its development team . Based mostly on the efforts of four people , the game was built around their gaming preferences , failing to take into account the opinions of a wider variety ; hence , the game became a niche product .

== Legacy ==

Impressing IGN with its " wonderful land full of character and imagination " , Sacrifice was the gaming site 's choice for the best strategy game of 2000 . It was honored in the same year by European Computer Trade Show as the Best PC Game of the Show . Since its release , Sacrifice has been one of PC Gamer 's Top 100 Games for at least eight consecutive years . Looking back at the history of real @-@ time strategy gaming , Geryk pointed out that Sacrifice 's " depth and originality " was unparalleled in the genre and often overlooked in favor of its graphics . The staff of gaming site UGO shared a similar opinion , naming the game in 2009 as its eighteenth top strategy game of all time .

Although Sacrifice was honored as a quality game , industry observers pointed out that its qualities were forgotten by most people ; the staff of GamesRadar said the game was " practically invisible to the gaming public " , and according to Gillen , few remembered Sacrifice as the pioneer of the mouse @-@ gesture control system , which was praised as revolutionary in Peter Molyneux 's later game Black & White . Gillen further lamented that Sacrifice 's release heralded the end of Shiny 's forays into creative game development , as the company switched to producing more mainstream products , such as Enter the Matrix . Despite receiving numerous calls for a sequel , Shiny said in 2002 that it would not produce one . Seven years later , GamesRadar repeated the call for a sequel while proclaiming Sacrifice " one of the most underappreciated games of all time " .