



VIDEO GAME REVIEWS



A Chance To Be A ‘Top Gun’ In Unfriendly Skies

[By Jeb Haught]

Game: “Ace Combat 6: Fires of Liberation”

Publisher: Namco Bandai

System: Microsoft Xbox 360

Cost: \$60

ESRB rating: T

Review rating: 3 1/2 stars

Ever since I first saw “Top Gun,” I fantasized about flying the unfriendly skies as an ace fighter pilot. More than a decade later, my dreams were fulfilled when the first Ace Combat game was released (titled “Air Combat”). Several other air-battle franchises have come and gone since, but the Ace Combat series always soars above the rest.

For “Ace Combat 6: Fires of Liberation,” budding pilots are tasked with taking out futuristic enemy land and air forces and, eventually, a giant flying ship that resembles a manta ray. But every fan of the series knows that the storyline is merely an excuse to blow the heck out of everything they see. That’s why I appreciate the fact that players no longer need to break out of combat in the middle of battle to reload their weapons.

Fifteen missions are available in the single-player campaign, and they each sport up to six secondary objectives. It is nearly impossible to complete all secondary objectives in one mission, so virtual pilots will have to replay them at least once. However, this doesn’t become repetitive at all, since the action plays out differently depending on the order in which the player completes the objectives.

It has taken six iterations of the franchise

to finally offer online game play, but the wait was well worth it. Up to 16 players can duke it out online in team-based and free-for-all dogfights as well as Siege mode, which resembles the single-player missions. On top of that, up to four players can team up for co-operative battles against computer-controlled enemies. Connecting to online matches is very easy, and shooting down rival aircraft is just as smooth and responsive online as it is offline.



There is no denying that “Ace Combat 6: Fires of Liberation” is the most gorgeous flying game to date, and with such robust single and multiplayer modes, the competition will be lucky to get off the ground.



Game: “Pirates of the Burning Sea”

Publisher: Platform Publishing

System: Windows XP/Vista

Cost: \$50 plus monthly fee

ESRB rating: T

Review rating: 3 stars

Avast ye lily-livered scallywags, a new Massively Multiplayer Online game has risen from the depths of Davy Jones’ locker. Only brave swashbucklers that are stout of heart need apply, because the fate of the entire Caribbean is at your fingertips while playing Sony Online’s brigand-based MMO, “Pirates of the Burning Sea.”

Promising buccaneers begin their adventure by pledging allegiance to a nation or choosing to be a homeless pirate. Then it’s time to pick a career. Pirates are limited to being, well, pirates, but those that align with a nation can choose to be a Freetrader, Naval Officer or Privateer. Different career paths offer the player a variety of abilities ranging from combat style to the ability to sail where you choose.

Both hand-to-hand combat and ship warfare are available to budding captains, with ship-to-ship skirmishes being the more enjoyable of the two. As a result, most players will find themselves tackling sailing missions more frequently than land missions. It’s not that the melee combat is bad, it’s just not terribly interesting.



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What does capture my attention, however, is the player-versus-player (PvP) aspect of the game. Basically, each nation (pirate being one) is free to fight over any port in the Caribbean, and the nation that reaches a set number of "victory points" first is the winner. Then the entire map is reset and the struggle begins anew. PvP combat occurs both on land and in the waters surrounding a port, so it can get very exciting and unpredictable.

"Pirates of the Burning Sea" is an entertaining adventure that features exhilarating ship-to-ship battles and a fun PvP element that is slightly hampered

by mediocre melee combat. It may not be perfect, but at least it's not another "World of Warcraft" clone.



RATING KEY

4 stars - Must have

3 stars - Pretty good

2 stars - So-so

1 star - Don't waste your time

Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)

E: Everyone

T: Teen (13 and older)

E10-plus: (Everyone 10 and older)

M: Mature (17 and older)

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