

State of Play

We look at the changes made to games after their release...

THIS MONTH...

WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II

PUBLISHER THQ Developer Relic WEBSITE dawnofwar2.com

WHAT'S THIS? IT has to be a pricing error, there's no such thing as free downloadable content in the year 2009. There has to be a sneaky text contained in the EULA for *There Is Only War* to allow THQ to legally pilfer your bank accounts.

Now I've gotten the customary sarcasm out of the way, I can get on with lavishing some praise on Relic. You see, they're a dying breed. They believe in their community and put faith in its ability to help make their games better.

Relic aren't content with shipping *Dawn of War II* and watching their bank balance fatten. They've been busy since day one: listening to your forum rants,

reading your online blogs, and doing the unthinkable – acting human and actually talking to those that play *DOW2*'s multiplayer. Like a pseudo-educational process, if you invest in your children, then you'll reap the rewards.

TACTICAL TRAINING

The result of all this is Relic's largest update to date. The *There Is Only War* patch has an unmatched scope and possibly, the biggest change log I've ever seen. It's balancing is rivaling MMO standards and puts the majority of other developers to shame.

Version 1.4.2 sees every faction painstakingly pampered. Virtually every unit has been meticulously tweaked in

an attempt to strengthen the game. Whether its tier one units or end-game vehicle combat, you'll find the game a sharper, more enjoyable experience. The playing ground has been levelled, resulting in a strategic rethink. You no longer have the right to moan about unbalanced units: if you lose a battle, it's firmly down to your lack of skill.

To get around such a problem, Relic have included the Observer feature. It allows you to watch matches, letting you learn from the best. *Company of Heroes* had a similar feature,

London after swine flu ravished mankind.



and like the WWII RTS, this slowly but surely improves your game. You pick up the ability to micromanage, putting your units to better use. Add in the ability to stream matches with the option to bring in a third-party referee who can maintain order,



Dreadnoughts. They win.



**THE STORY SO FAR...
PATCHES
OF WAR**



FEBRUARY, 2009
The big, burly Space Marines return as *Dawn of War II* ships worldwide.



MARCH, 2009
Games For Windows - LIVE! gets patched allowing for actual working multiplayer games.



APRIL, 2009
Patch 1.1.3 provides one whole map for free! Take that paid-for DLC.



MAY, 2009
Gamers rejoice as ranked two-on-two play becomes available.



JULY, 2009
The aptly named *There Is Only War* update enters beta, as Relic go into tweaking overdrive.



JULY, 2009
Everyone's too busy playing patch 1.4.2's release to notice the global recession.

and you can see how Relic are aiming to make *DOW2* a legitimate candidate for e-sport competitions.

Those who'd rather learn-by-doing will enjoy the eight new maps. More interestingly, the inclusion of four one-on-one arenas implies that Relic are leaning towards the idea of quick multiplayer encounters – something they previously outlined in a video showcase.

You only have to pluck a random statistic from the change log – Scouts now have 40% armour against melee classes for example – and you can see the direction in which they're heading. This isn't a design choice that Relic have taken blindly. Instead it's down to a careful consideration of what the *DOW2* community wants and has asked for.

"Relic have made an admirable stab at redefining the single-player action-RTS experience"

78% – David Brown, *PC ZONE* #205

And if that wasn't more than enough *DOW2*'s *World Builder* is being bundled with the 1.4.2 update. This will mean we'll no longer have to wait for Relic's over-generous updates, but instead enjoy what the internet's mappers have to offer. The developers have gone the distance, putting the game's future firmly in its fan's hands. In-game RSS keeps you up to date with all of *DOW2*'s happenings while an updated *Army Painter* increases customisation options.

This patch contains an astonishing amount of content. New war gear for the single-player, engine improvements, changeable victory conditions, and a tweaked UI – the list goes on and on. It's the perfect time to start playing

online even if, like me, your arse is consistently handed to you.

There Is Only War makes *DOW2* plays like an entirely different game. It's more fluid than it used to be and the update has removed any sense one-sidedness. You're no longer punished for preferring a race that's inherently weaker. If you fail, it'll be down to your lack of tactical skill or more than likely, you've simply come up against someone who's better than you. Even when you're losing, it feels as though you can turn the tide of battle with a few thought-out manoeuvres. Your choice of tactics never feel undervalued, just mistaken.

This is war redefined. Let's toast to another 40,000 years of conflict.

VERDICT
With a patch log reaching to the moon, it's no wonder the update's breathed a breath of fresh air into *Dawn of War II*.
Marco Fiori

