

## New IGN Preview

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UK, December 1, 2008 - Since the turn of the millennium the Total War series has dominated the landscape of strategy gaming with its bold, brilliant depiction of battlefield combat, serving up scintillating siege warfare and sprawling turn-based campaign maps. Yet despite its impressive array of features, there's always been something missing - naval warfare. Indeed, there's not so much as a whiff of giant galleons sailing the seas in either Rome or Medieval, so after an almost nine-year wait that's all about to change. With Empire: Total War, The Creative Assembly's latest strategy epic, set between 1700 and 1800 there's tremendous scope for war to spread across the water, something we experienced first-hand when we visited the developer

First off, let's get the numbers out of the way. Empire's sea battles are impressive skirmishes with up to 20 ships fighting on each side, with numerous factions engaging simultaneously. While this number may sound modest compared to Total War's land battles, which typically involve thousands of troops, the slower, more considered pace of the naval conflicts – and the impressive attention to detail – more than compensates for the lack of numbers.

Controlling your fleet couldn't be easier with individual ships selected by clicking on the corresponding icons at the bottom of the screen, after which orders are issued using the simple, intuitive command interface. Successfully navigating your fleet is anything but easy though, as you have to factor in wind speed and direction when moving your ships into position. Add the task of lining up each vessel's cannons to accurately fire off a volley and there's a stiff challenge in store for any fleet leader.

Indeed, navigation certainly took some getting used to and our first attempts at bombarding the enemy resulted in farcical, wayward shots plopping harmlessly into the sea while the remainder of our fleet meandered across the waves in the opposite direction. Although our skills as a wannabe Napoleon were partly to blame for the poor show, it's also due to Total War's tireless pursuit of battlefield realism, which means pretty much everything – from the height of each ship's mast and the size of their hull – affects the manoeuvrability of your fleet. The good news is that it gets considerably easier with practice and within an hour we were ordering our ships around with precision and speed.

Each battle begins with a strategic set-up phase, during which time you and your opponent place your vessels in preparation for the forthcoming conflict – a bit like playing Battleships, only with more ships and more freedom. Once the hostilities begin it's down to you as a tactical genius to outwit and out-manoeuvre the enemy. You see, most ships are fitted with cannons along each side of their hull, meaning you have to present the largest face of your ship as a target in order to fire. True, some of the larger craft also possess forward-mounted weapons, but these are more of a rarity out on the high seas. In addition there are three shot types to choose from and each is useful for a different purpose: chain shot is a medium-ranged round ideal for bringing down the masts of an enemy vessel, rendering it a sitting duck for the remainder of the battle; cannonballs are effective at knocking holes in a ship's hull; and lastly there's the grapeshot, which is perfect for taking out an enemy's crew. Each shot, down to every resulting splinter and shard, is given its own physical property too, with explosions created on the fly to create the most authentic battles we've seen in a Total War game yet.

To fully appreciate the visual splendour of these naval battles it's best to zoom right down into the action. Up close every last detail is clear to see, from the crystal clear waters on which your ships bob up and

down to the foam that forms on the crest of each wave. The level of detail on each ship is equally impressive, with hulking galleons crawling with crew and soldiers – the bigger ships carry over 200 individuals, all kitted out with the correct gear. Move the camera in close and you can see cannon crews hurriedly reloading below deck between barrages, while up top men rush about their business with military precision. The battlefield is further brought to life by dynamic weather effects and skirmishes that begin in searing sunlight often end in a torrential downpours, with swirling winds making accurate navigation and cannon-fire almost impossible.

The presentation is all the more impressive during a battle, with metal shot pummelling the hulls of ships, sending wood splinters and injured crew in every direction. This level of visible damage makes it easy to track how much damage a particular vessel has taken, plus there are three damage meters – one for the mast and one each for the sides of the hull – that enable you to keep tabs at a glance. Sails are harder to target of the two, though if successfully destroyed even the most powerful vessel is rendered virtually impotent, unable to move or turn. Likewise, if a hull is fully breached the ship begins to take on water until it completely sinks. Having said that, you don't need to sink an enemy vessel in order to defeat it – take out an enemy's sails and you're able to close in, using grappling hooks to send your men onboard to engage the remaining enemy forces in hand-to-hand combat. It's impressive stuff and with such a wide range of tactics on offer, from attacking from afar to getting in close and slicing the throats of your enemies, there's plenty to get stuck into.

With two months remaining before Empire's release the new 3D naval battles are showing ample promise. Having resisted the temptation to simply recreate land battles at sea, The Creative Assembly has done an admirable job in forging a new kind of gameplay experience. Although they're initially confusing, naval battles slowly morph into tense, highly tactical slugfests. The impressive number and variety of ships also adds a great deal of substance, with vessels ranging from small, single mast sloops to hulking 120-gun admiral ships. Our only concern is the need to micromanage your ships' cannons – you must manually order each side of every vessel's hull to reload after firing, unless you order them to fire at will. While this worked well during the smaller battles we played it remains to be seen how manageable this mechanic will prove during some of the larger and more intense sea-based confrontations.

While naval battles may be Empire's most highly anticipated new addition, it's certainly not the only feature to be getting excited about. The campaign map will be the largest in the series' history, spanning from India to the America, while land battles are set to bring new tactical elements to the Total War table thanks to the prominence of muskets and cannons in the 18-19th centuries. And despite some niggles which require attention before release, Empire's naval battles are showing enough promise to suggest that they could add yet another layer to the already unrivalled strategic depth of the Total War franchise. It may have been nine years in the making but Total War's first attempt at sea-based combat looks as though it'll have been more than worth the wait.

<http://uk.pc.ign.com/articles/934/934366p1.html>

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## Re: New IGN Preview

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Muchas gracias Sertorio eres un hacha cazando novedades. ¿Has visto algo llamativo en esta preview?

Por lo que he podido entender no hay mucha información nueva...

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