

TotalVideoGames.com Battlefield 2 Interview

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TVG: Hi Lars, could you please firstly tell us a little about the team currently hard at work on Battlefield 2, and what visions lie behind the creation of the sequel?

Lars: The team size is determined by the stage of production. So, for example, during pre-production we had a small team whose focus was on building foundations for the game. During production, we estimate we'll reach almost 50 people as we try to achieve all the goals we've set for ourselves. Towards the end, we'll most likely scale the team back to include specialists, whose job is to focus on polishing to ensure we ship the best product possible.

You ask about the visions and how the team conceptualise and come up with new ideas. Well, Battlefield 2 will incorporate the best features/philosophy of Battlefield 1942 with the addition of cutting edge graphics, sound and, more importantly, new gameplay features. When we finished BF1942 we took the time to assess what worked and what the fans liked. We determined that the key areas of the BF universe are things like the fun-factor, the balance of a rock-paper-scissor gameplay, and easy-to-learn but hard to master vehicles and weapons.

What we're doing now is building upon these foundations of BF1942 with new gameplay features. One of our most important sources of new features is the BF community. However, we spend the entire time evaluating the effectiveness of a new feature. If it doesn't add value or misses the core gameplay experience, out it goes. This is something few people realise, while it's easy to promise everything, it's the smart person who only guarantees that which he can deliver.

TVG: Tell us about the creation of your new game engine, how this will help to create a new experience and improve on what has previously been created and the kind of techniques and visual deformation onscreen the player will see and experience?

Lars: To achieve our goals and expectations for Battlefield 2 we had to raise the bar for visual quality several notches from our previous titles. The new rendering engine, developed from scratch for BF2, is completely shader driven, and is written to utilize the full potential of next-generation graphics hardware. One of the major improvements over the first Battlefield installment is that in the new rendering engine, every pixel you see on screen is dynamically lit and shadowed from multiple light sources. To make lighting in the world of Battlefield both compelling and convincing to the player, and still retain the frame rate required to enjoy the playing experience, we've had to develop several new techniques to compose the end result you see on screen. We've developed techniques that allow us to combine global illumination and hemispherical lighting with per-pixel normal mapping, and we further expanded this by using a new, more realistic looking approach to applying normal maps. Lighting and shadowing such an expansive and dynamical world as Battlefield also meant that we had to come up with new hybrid shadowing techniques, which realistically integrate the players into the world. All of these new features allow artists and designers alike to put an enormous amount of detail into the game world, both in terms of per-pixel visual detail, and dynamic, interactive game environments. In the end, this makes for a rich and visually pleasing environment for the players to interact with.

TVG: So how much forethought does the team have to consider, in terms of presenting the game to a lower spec machine and does this also mean that there could be a number of ideas you cannot implement?

Lars: That's always the trick when you design/develop games. How do you take advantage of the high-end machines while giving as

many people as possible the opportunity to play the game? We take the time to design the best features possible – then we go through the process of hammering on these until they can be played on both a high-end and low-end machine. The danger is in including features, which give the high-end PC person an advantage, such as more foliage. If I can't render bushes on my machine, but you can on yours, you'll have the advantage on me. So, we have to consider that when we design the game – and if it looks like a feature will unbalance the game because of how it performs on specific machines we remove it. This is called 'killing your darlings' and it hurts every time you do it.

TVG: OK back to the game and the challenges on offer. Could you please explain the Commander Mode in a little more detail?

Lars: When we played BF1942 we noticed that the community, and even our own team members, played in a million different ways. We had lone-wolves, sneaky engineers and good-hearted medics, among others. People ran around and minded their own business most of the time and it was rare to see them cooperate. But as time went on, people naturally began working together because they discovered that it was more effective, having an engineer and a medic with a group of assault guys made more sense than just going after someone by yourself. If you've ever experienced a game where the entire team is acting like one, synchronized mind, it's a thing of beauty. With the Commander we go one step further and introduced this feature to coordinate all these teams (we refer to them as squads in BF2) so that they work for a common goal. To encourage this we let him/her have access to more information and tools than any other player in the team. With this information and tools, the main goal will be to lead his/her team to victory since the commander's personal score is totally dependent on how he/she led the team.

TVG: Briefly back to a general question, do you believe that interest will remain strong in war games despite the deluge of them in recent years?

Lars: My feeling is that war games are something that will always be around and will remain in the business in some shape for as long as the games industry exists. War is something terrible but when you make movies and games about it you are suddenly allowed to dream about being, or in games even becoming, that hero who isn't bothered by bullets flying around him as he charges the machinegun nest and blows it to pieces. You could see it as a need for something more in people's daily lives, but I guess that stories about war heroes have been around for a long time, except now, instead of listening to someone tell you about it – you can actually BE the hero.

TVG: Why the reason to focus on the same three superpowers in both Battlefield 2 and Battlefield: Modern Combat, are you trying to unify the brand?

Lars: That's an interesting question. To be honest, we were working with these two games in two different offices at DICE and when both teams made their first drafts of design, we ended up with the same participants. Given the time-period and desire to set the game in a semi-historical perspective, it just made sense. Of course, Battlefield never pretends to be real or realistic – we're not trying to make a political statement, just a game.

TVG: The Material Penetration appears to be a major innovation for first-person-shooters; has this been hard to incorporate and what does this bring to the game?

Lars: It wasn't difficult to incorporate, rather the challenge comes in how to add it as a valuable gameplay element. It changes gameplay in so many ways that go beyond just visual candy. Suddenly it means that running behind a wall doesn't mean that you are safe – am I under cover or is it just concealment? The trick for us is to incorporate it without making it frustrating or unintuitive, which, I'm happy to say, is a challenge we've managed to overcome.

TVG: Finally, and we appreciate it is early days yet, could you please tell us about some of the vehicles that players can expect to get their hands upon; particularly highlighting one that you feel will impress the readers?

Lars: Well, it's Battlefield – so you can expect land, air and water vehicles. With the concept of rock-paper-scissors in mind, no

vehicle will have an overwhelming superiority, and everyone seems to have their particular favourite. One of my favourites is the US Marines Super Cobra, which usually ends our lunch time battles with a well-placed missile hit!

TVG would like to thank Lars for taking the time out from a busy E3 to answer our questions; we wish the team all the luck in creating the eagerly awaited sequel, and will have more information on Battlefield 2 soon.

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