



ARMED!

Tell us a little about your game studio.

Sickhead Games is full-time independent game development studio in Dallas, Texas. The founders, Tom Spilman and Russell Fincher, were both working at a larger game development company in the Dallas area making some fairly popular racing simulation games for PC. It's a long and scandalous story, but the company went under. Burned by the experience, they decided not to put their futures in other people's hands and started Sickhead Games in 2002.

By 2007 we were confident enough in our financial means to secure office space and eventually bring in four employees. We currently have a modest 900 sq. ft. space which includes an open room where all six of us work. We've always been keen on keeping a lean company, without financial officers or marketing people. We had to teach ourselves early on how to run a business, write contracts, handle taxes and payroll, secure health care, etc. Like it or not, indies have to wear a lot of hats. In the beginning we developed for the PC, mainly because we were already experienced in PC development. We dabbled in Unreal for a couple of contracts, but eventually settled on Torque as our engine of choice. Our latest game, ARMED!, was built from scratch in XNA for the Windows Phone platform.

Tell us about your game.

ARMED! is a turn-based strategy game optimized for the mobile platform. It's part RTS, part tabletop strategy, and puts you in command of a fleet of futuristic tanks, turrets, and robots. The goal is to capture strategic points in small map, infiltrate enemy territory, crush their forces, and destroy their headquarters. ARMED! has three different modes of play: ranked head-to-head game against online opponents; a correspondence game; or single player mode against the AI. Currently there are five different



maps containing different types of terrains and ecosystems, and over a dozen different offensive and defensive units, which can all be customized with various upgrades and special attacks. ARMED! is a full-featured mobile multiplayer strategy game that uses Scoreloop integration to coordinate online matches, and features real time leaderboards, step-by-step tutorial, and turn notifications.

We started prototyping in the Summer of 2010 with pieces of paper and dice on our conference table before any digital prototypes were created. The computerized version was fun, and ARMED! Was born. Serious work on the game began in early 2011 and worked on and off, between contracts, until it launched in December 2011.



SICKHEAD
GAMES



ARMED! is currently available in the Windows Phone Marketplace for \$3.99 US and also as an ad driven free trial with unlimited singleplayer and multiplayer.

We've released a lot of updates in the last few months and plan to continue that pace.

The team is currently working on the 1.5 version of ARMED! which we plan to release in May. The big features are two brand new maps which have a new gameplay mechanic, improvements to all the existing maps, and some additional balance tweaks.

After that we are planning on some gameplay enhancements that will introduce some new units, online profiles and match history, and more maps. We're also currently working on both an iOS and Windows 8 Metro versions of ARMED! to be released in the coming months.

Technical Features.

ARMED! Is a graphics heavy game which is fairly rare to see on a mobile device. We had to pull out the old tricks used in the early days of game graphics to squeeze the most out of the mobile GPUs. I feel our ambition here paid off, but there was a lot of doubt if we could make it work in the early days. Now we are looking to add more.

The team evaluated several services to run our backend infrastructure and in the end we decided on Azure. They offer a very attractive architecture which allows you to plug in your code and not need to worry about server management. It has taken some tweaks to get the right fallover strategy and to keep our transactions with storage low, but we are really happy with our decision.



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INDIE GAMES DEVELOPER