

SKY LEGENDS

FLY – FIGHT – BUILD

Clark Stacey, the CEO of Smart Bomb Interactive took some time out of his busy schedule to fill us in on the history of the company and its latest offering.

We founded Smart Bomb Interactive in 2003. Kris Johnson, the other founder, and I ran another studio called Beyond Games together for 10 years; with games stretching all the way back to our first title on the Atari Lynx. Having run a contract development house for so long, we were eager to escape the publisher-developer wheel of karma and create intellectual properties we would actually own. We needed to establish Smart Bomb in the industry first, though, to prove out our technology, attract great talent, and secure investment for our original projects. So we did some contracted titles for Namco Bandai and Activision, creating cross-platform games like Pac-Man World Rally and Snoopy vs. the Red Baron. We grew very slowly and carefully; from three of us at the beginning to our current staff of around sixty.

Smart Bomb is probably best known these days for Animal Jam, our online animal-themed game world for kids with National Geographic. But multiplayer flight combat fans have been waiting patiently for Sky Legends, the free-to-play, browser-based dogfighting MMO we announced not long after our Snoopy Flying Ace title was so well received on Xbox Live Arcade.

Sky Legends is everything we've ever wanted to do with a multiplayer action game. Even though it takes place on another world, and some of the technology is unfamiliar, its roots are in the barnstorming early years of flight combat on our world. Like the planes of that era, the core flight mechanics are simple, fun, and easy to pick up... but very challenging to master. As a game genre, flight combat has a reputation for being highly complex and sim-like, with the simple joy of flight buried behind thick user manuals and unforgiving control schemes. Sky Legends makes it fun again by making the staying-aloft part easy, so you can focus on fighting your opponents instead of your airplane.

This is a PvP game at its core, and that will be the focus of the experience when it launches. Players will choose a race and faction for their pilot, and that will govern what sorts of planes and weapons are available to them in the beginning. Some factions build heavily armoured planes that favour those who like to charge straight into a sky full of jousting planes and anti-aircraft fire, while others build light, manoeuvrable planes that favour a hit-and-run fighting style.



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Sky Legends will be free to play, and players will never have to pay anything to earn their way up the ranks and get the kit to customize their planes and weapons. You'll be able to purchase planes, weapons, upgrades and buffs to get them faster than other players, but you can still be competitive with nothing but skill and patience. Players can also form or join squadrons, which function a lot like guilds. They can share resources and fight as a team, and team games are really unique in Sky Legends. Players with particular manoeuvres and plane configurations naturally fall into playing different offensive and defensive field positions in a capture the flag game, for instance; and we're still discovering complementary configurations all the time.

Sky Legends was originally scheduled to launch in late 2011, but our publishing partner closed up shop and development has been stalled while we find the right partner to collaborate with us on an international release. The game is over 80% complete and fully playable, which makes it an easy sell to publishers. It's not often they see something this far along, where all the risk has already been funded and the big technical hurdles have been overcome. We haven't announced a new release date yet, though; because while technically it is very close to finished, we don't want to give a date until we're certain of the publisher and their plans.

Of course, the really unique thing about Sky Legends is that all of this is taking place in your web browser. When you're playing full-screen, it's easy to forget that this isn't a client-based game - which means there's no huge download to jump in and play.. all you need is a PC, Mac or Linux web browser with the Unity plug-in. The game scales automatically to your graphics hardware, and we've tested it on everything from current MacBooks to old Pentium 4 PCs with only 1GB of system RAM. Of course, if you have a great gaming system with dedicated video RAM the game will certainly take advantage of it and reward you with better effects, but it's playable at 30fps on slower machines.

