STAR WARS
SQUADRONS
EA
A BLAST FROM THE PAST
GDC 2022

WHO IS THIS GUY?

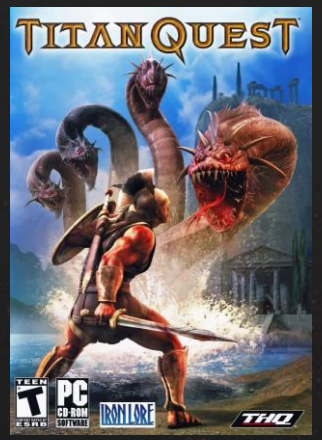
IAN S. FRAZIER

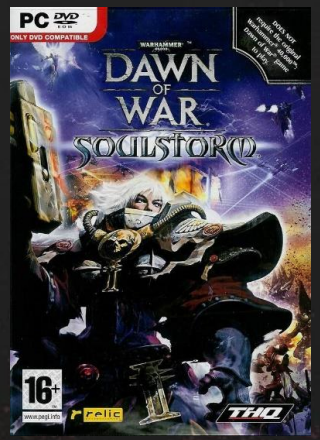
- Lifelong gamer
- Game designer
- RPG nerd (both tabletop & videogame)
- Creative Director at EA MOTIVE
- Very lucky guy

WHO IS THIS GUY?

IAN S. FRAZIER

2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 | 2020





(CANCELLED ☹)

WHAT IS STAR WARS: SQUADRONS?

- Star Wars Space combat game
- Developed by EA MOTIVE
- Singleplayer & Multiplayer
- Supports VR and traditional display
- Shipped Oct 2020 for PC, Xbox One, and PS4

PURPOSE OF THIS TALK

Helping teams on other games
built upon childhood dreams
to learn from our experience:

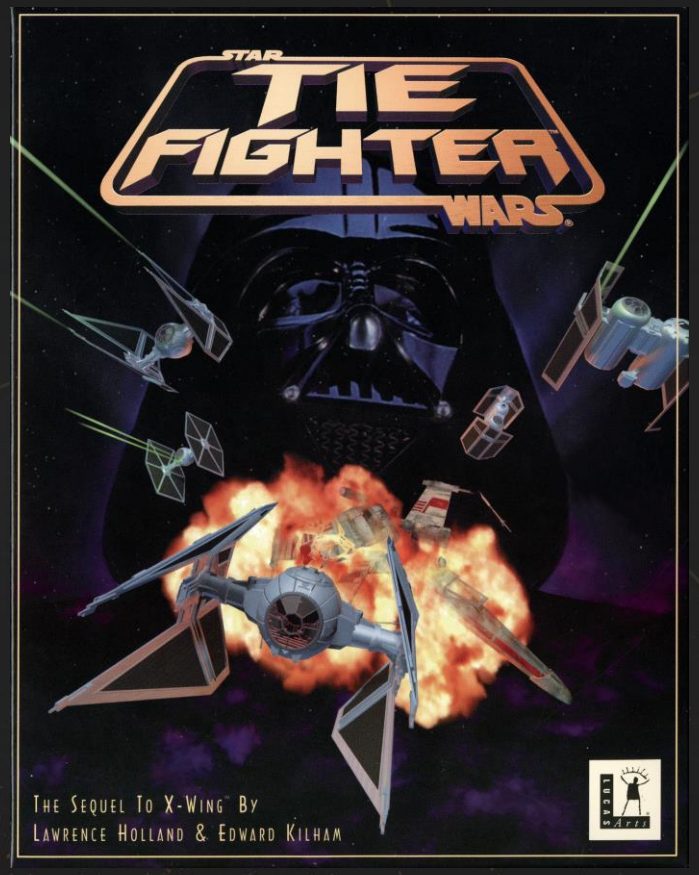
6 Lessons from Star Wars: Squadrons

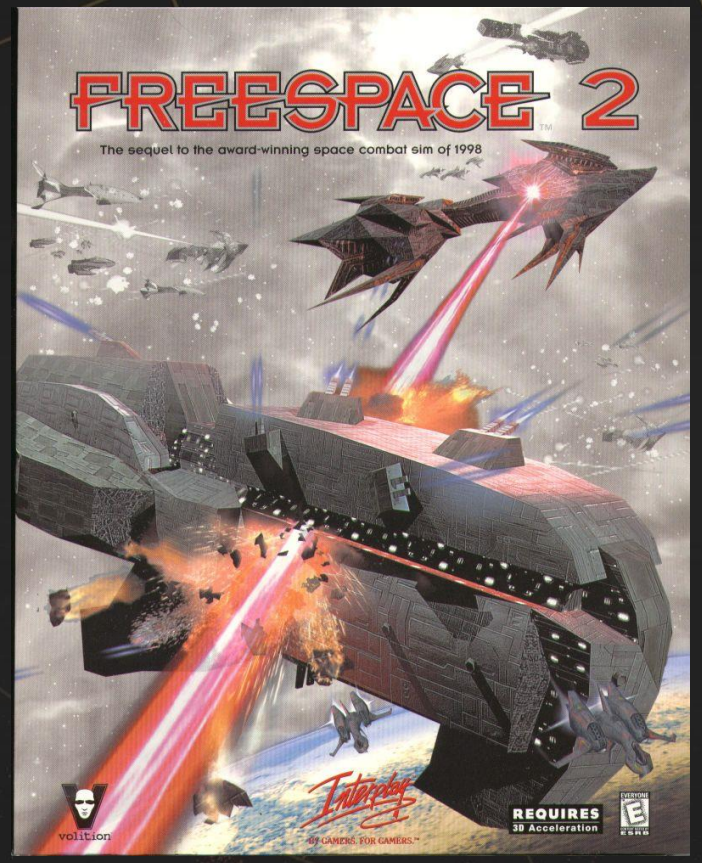
But first, some background...

A brief history of pewpew

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PEWPEW

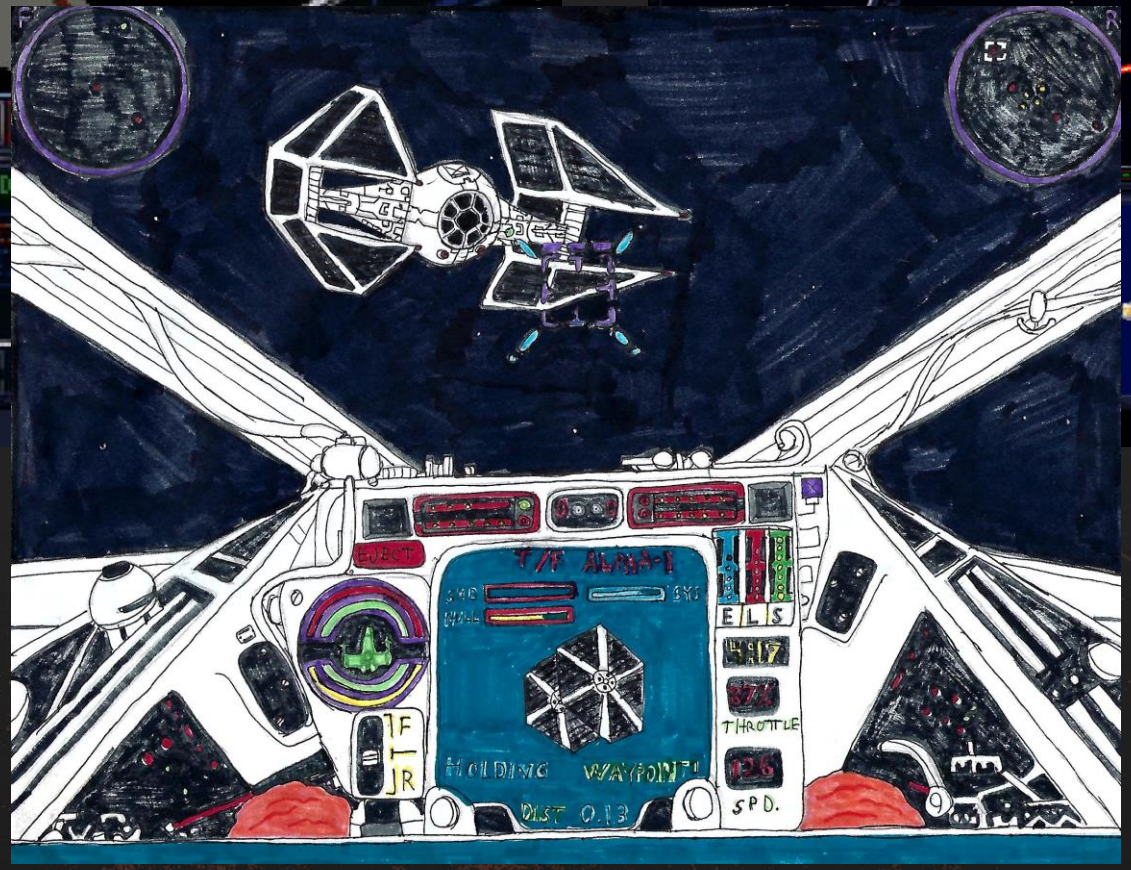
The 1990s: Golden Age of Space Combat





A BRIEF HISTORY OF PEWPEW

CHILDHOOD DREAMS

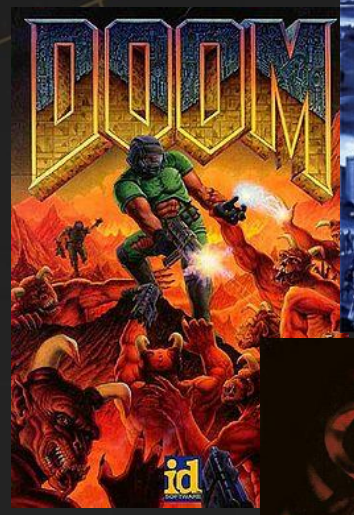


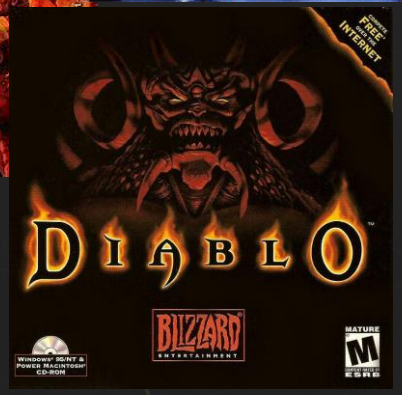
A BRIEF HISTORY OF PEWPEW

SADLY, BY 2000 THE GENRE WAS EFFECTIVELY DEAD

COMPLEX CORE CONTROLS & MECHANICS

SPECIFIC PERIPHERAL REQUIREMENTS





NEW COMPETITION
(FPS, RTS, ACTION-RPG)

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PEWPEW

The 2010s crowdfunding boom gave the genre some new hope...

THE PITCH

PITCH PROCESS

EARLY PROTOTYPING

Out of opportunity, a small but passionate team starting working hard on a prototype to prove just how compelling such a game could be…

PITCH PROCESS

ORIGINAL PITCH

A RESURRECTION OF CHILDHOOD FUN

A GIFT TO STAR WARS FANS

LESSON #1

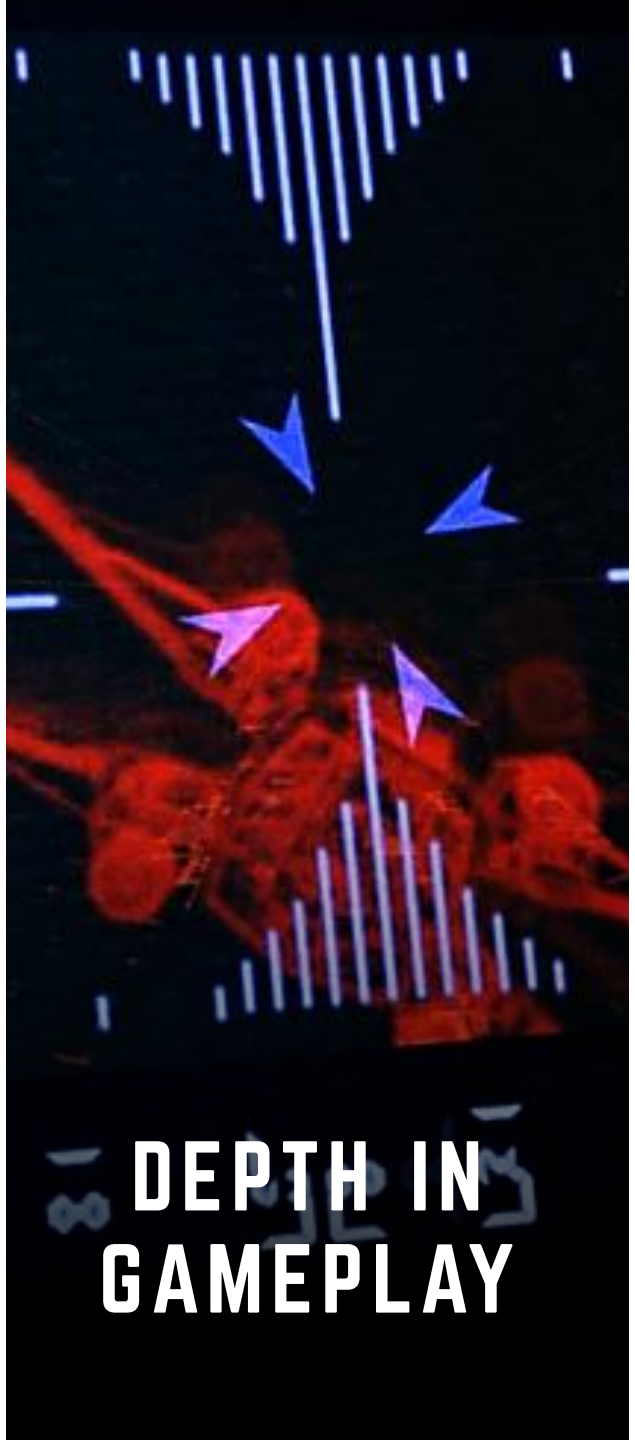
START FROM THE HEART

RAMPING UP THE TEAM ON THE CLASSICS

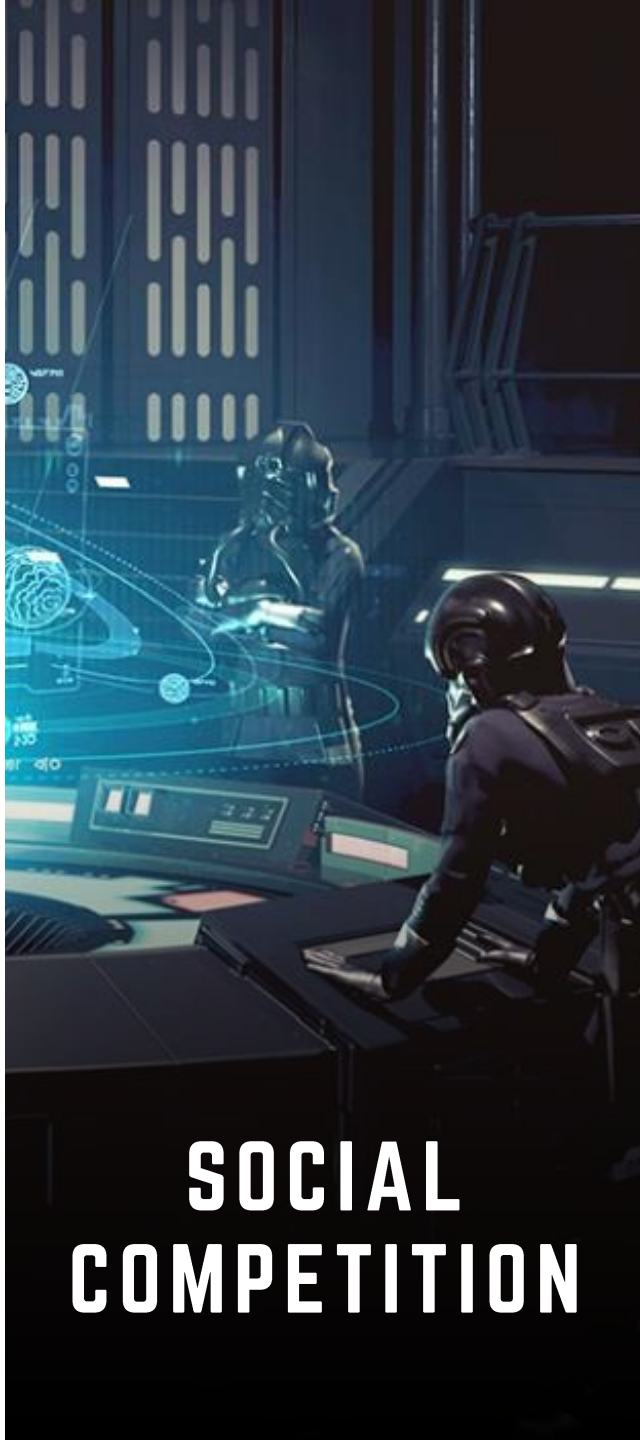
READING OLD REVIEWS & FAQS

BRINGING IN THE NEW

PILOT
FANTASY


DEPTH IN
GAMEPLAY

IMMERSIVE &
FAMILIAR


SOCIAL
COMPETITION

BECOME AN ACE PILOT &
FORGE THE BEST SQUADRON IN THE GALAXY
003697
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LESSON #2

FEEL COMES FIRST

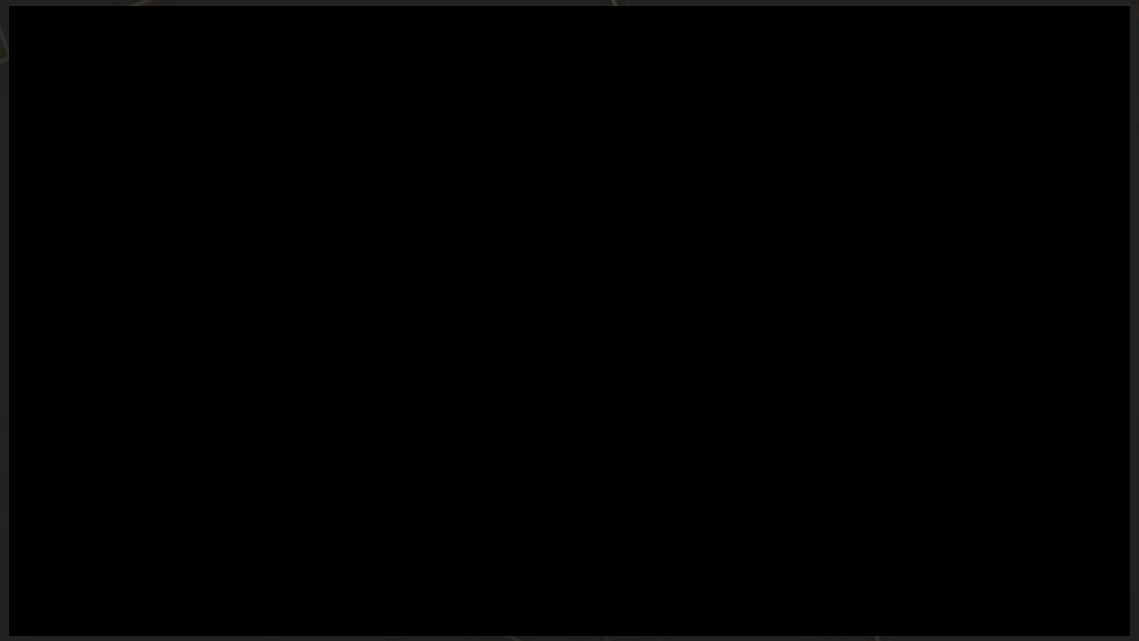
SQUADRONS

EARLY PROTOTYPING

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

ROGUE ONE: X-WING VR MISSION



SQUADRONS

EARLY PROTOTYPING

SQUADRONS

CORE EXPERIENCE

STAR WARS

PROGRESSION
TEAMWORK
CAMARADERIE
HANGARS
DEEP SYSTEMS
SHIP CHOICES
COCKPIT
IMMERSION
TACTICS

PILOT EXPERIENCE

STORY
ONBOARDING
CINEMATICS
CHARACTERS

SINGLEPLAYER

COMPETITION
SPECTATORS
COSMETICS
REPLAYABILITY

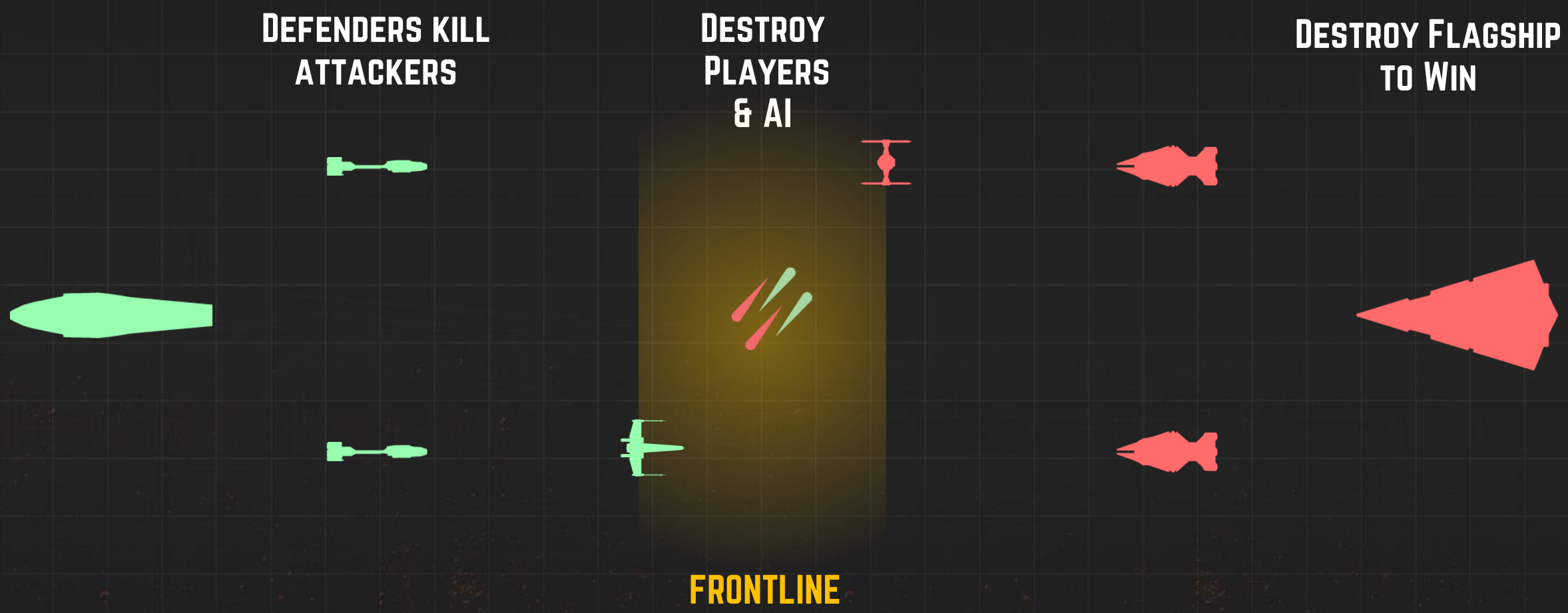
PVP

PRACTICE
COOPERATION

VS AI

PVP FLEET BATTLES

TUG OF WAR



LESSON #3

ASK THE FANS

USER RESEARCH

EARLY FOCUS TESTS

USER RESEARCH

MAKING HARD CHOICES

Forced Choice Exercise

AKA Game Development: The Card Game

No Story Mode

There are no story missions in the game at all

0

3-hour Story Mode
(Pick One)

I can play through a series of 5-player story missions, totaling roughly 3 hours of play

6

6-hour Story Mode
(Pick One)

I can play through a series of 5-player story missions, totaling roughly 6 hours of play

10

Deep Gameplay Systems

During play I can transfer power between my different ship systems (engines, weapons, etc.), perfectly control my throttle for better maneuverability, and manage the shields on my ship for maximum defense. Doing these things well can make the difference between victory and defeat.

1

Detailed Targeting

I have robust control over how I target other ships, easily prioritizing objectives, enemies, friendlies, or even specific sub-systems of capital ships (to disable their engines, for instance)

1

Varied Ship Abilities

Beyond the basic lasers and missiles, ships have an interesting array of varied abilities, from stealth drives to tractor beams and proximity mines

6

Customizable Ship Components

I can change out the parts (droids, laser cannons, engines, missiles, etc.) on my ships to dramatically change their stats, abilities, and gameplay

Kill Cam

When I'm killed in a game, I can watch the last several seconds of my life from the perspective of whoever killed me, so I can learn from it

Tactical Map
(Must also select PVP mode)

I can bring up a tactical map UI at any time to get a clear sense of who is winning, who is losing, and where I should focus my efforts

Customizable Controls

I can deeply customize my input in the game, mapping specific keys or gamepad buttons to specific functionality

3

(THESE ARE JUST EXAMPLES, NOT THE WHOLE SET OF CARDS)

USER RESEARCH

CAPTURING THE FEELS

USER RESEARCH

CAPTURING THE FEELS

KEY SENSATIONS

Speed

Power

Vulnerability

Immersion

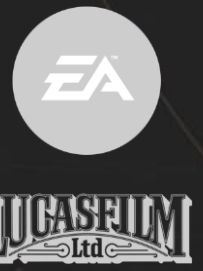
Presence

Joy

PITCH PROCESS

GETTING OUR GREENLIGHT

FIRST OFFICIAL GATE



2017 — 2018 — MAY & JUNE — 2019 — 2020 — 2021

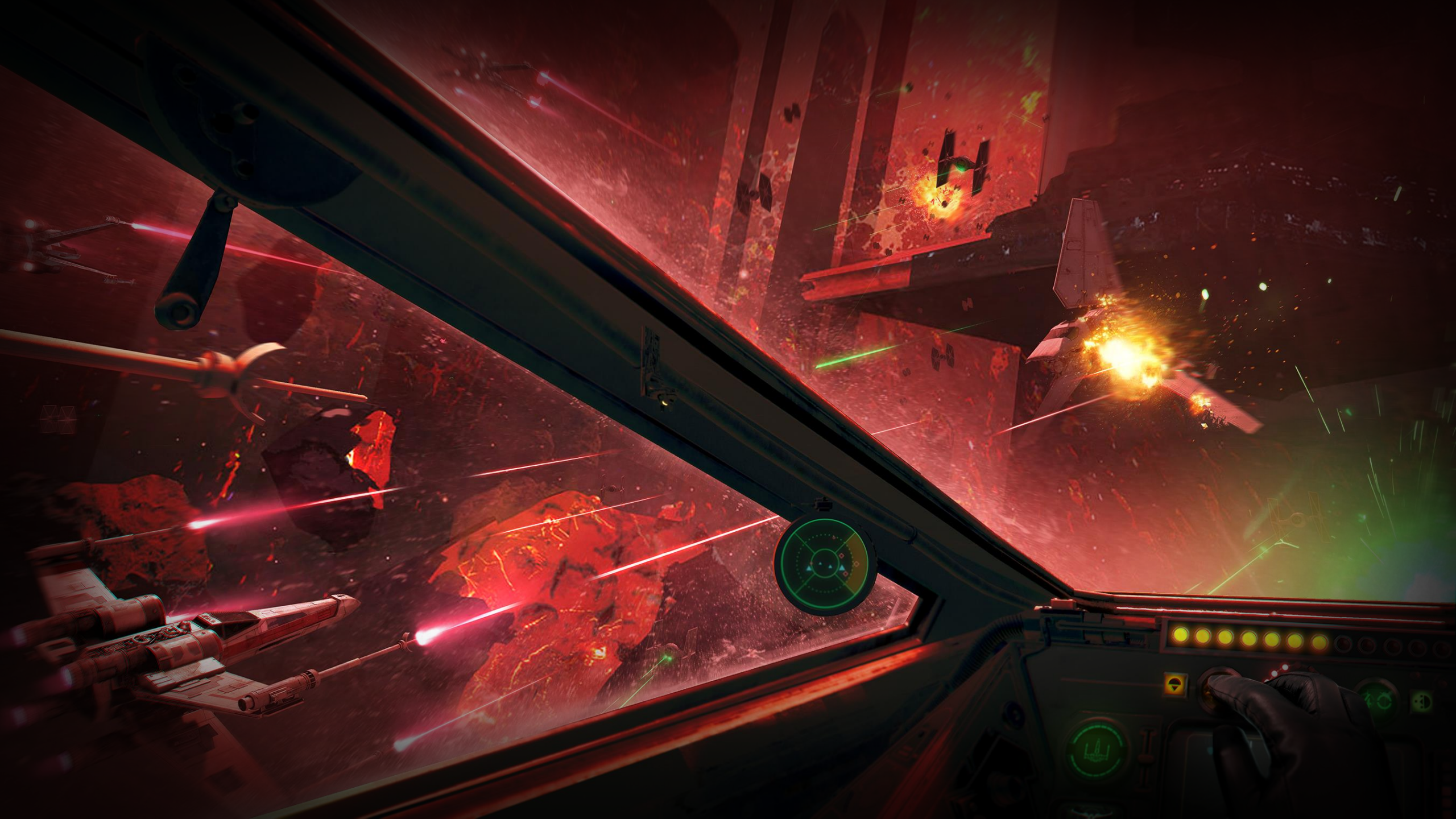
LESSON #4

YOU LIVE IN THE FUTURE. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IT.

SOCIAL COMPETITION

FULL VR SUPPORT

HIGH-END PERIPHERAL SUPPORT (HOTAS, ETC)

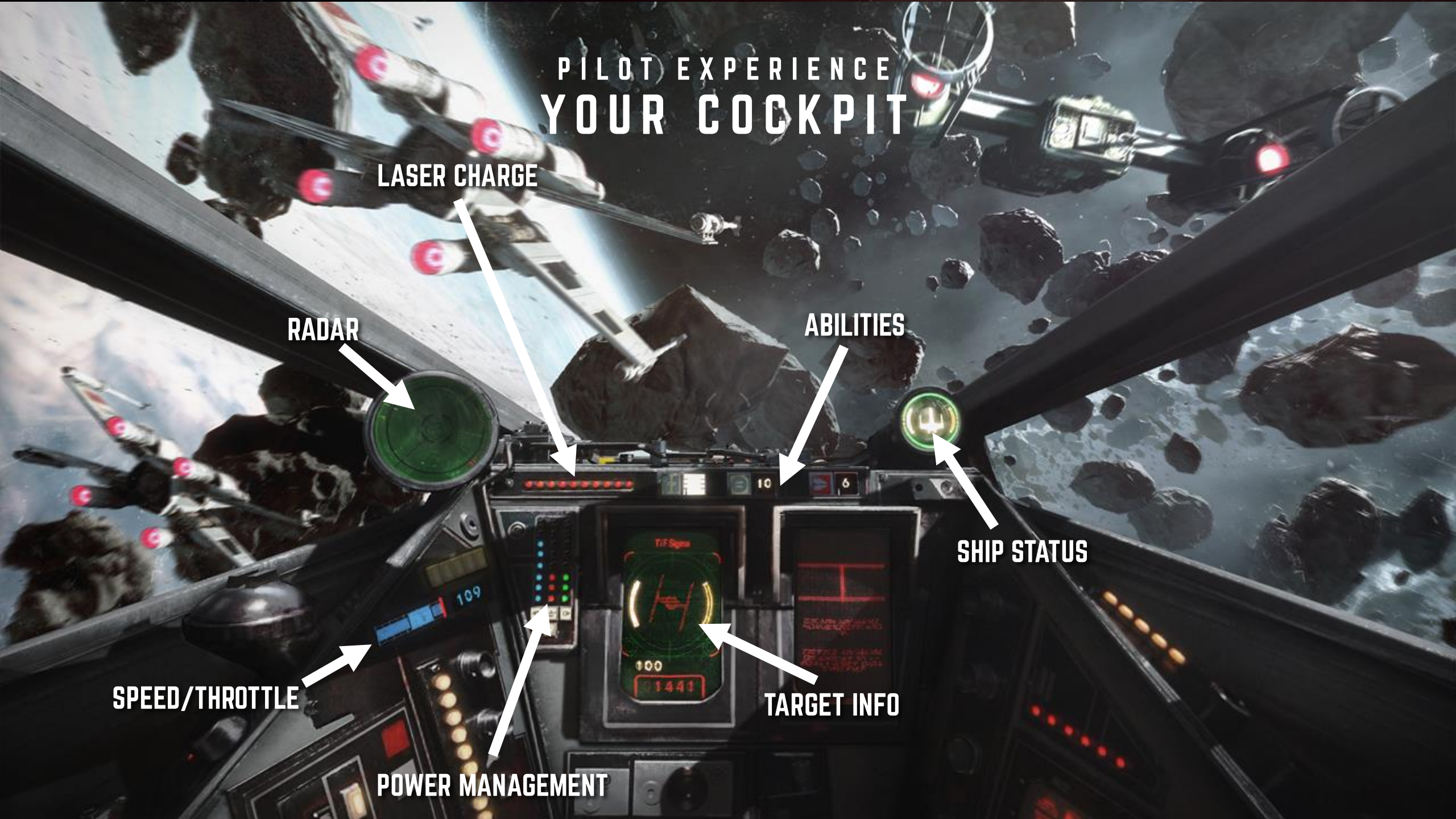


PILOT EXPERIENCE

YOUR COCKPIT

PILOT EXPERIENCE

YOUR COCKPIT



STAR WARS

100% film authentic

Adapting existing elements

Adding elements from other ships

100% gameplay function

U-Wing concept art

Early U-Wing model paintover and exploration of the UI

STOCK

Incom X-Wing T-65

Rogue One: X-Wing VR mission – Criterion's 3D model

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Making it real

Whether it be a backlit speed gauge, an old CRT or LCD screen, light bulbs or painted-on icons, all the UI is grounded in the cockpits with a lot of attention to materials and environment.

UI & Environments

Real-time post-effects let us move in and out of more stylized visuals, highlighting ships & pilots and keeping players grounded in the world even when menus are up. Bonus: This looks great in VR!

HANGAR SPACES

STAY ON TARGET

STAR WARS
SQUADRONS
EA
VR CHALLENGES
MOTIVE
LUCASFILM
EA

LESSON #5

STAY FLEXIBLE

STORY CAMPAIGN
A TALE OF TWO SQUADRONS
A DUAL-PERSPECTIVE STORY DESIGNED
TO IMMERSE, ENTERTAIN, & ONBOARD PLAYERS

STORY CAMPAIGN

A FUSION OF INSPIRATIONS

MILITARY SIM FLAVOR + POPCORN PILOT FANTASY

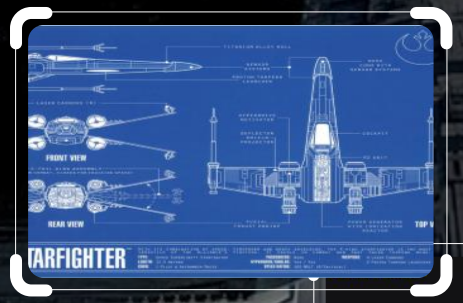
VERTICAL SLICE
FLOW

INTRO
& MENU

CO-OP LOBBY & BRIEFING

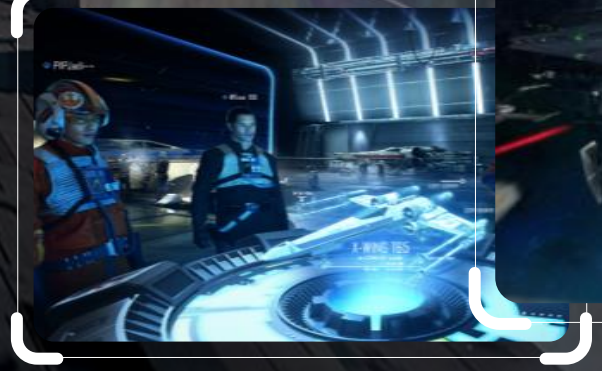
CO-OP MISSION

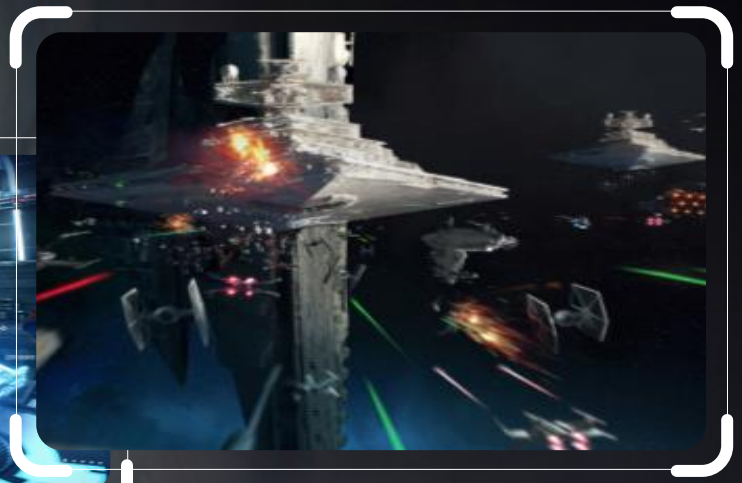
LEVEL UP



SHIP & PILOT
CUSTOMIZATION

PVP LOBBY





PVP MATCH
& SPECTATING

I'VE GOT A BAD
FEELING ABOUT THIS...

STORY CAMPAIGN

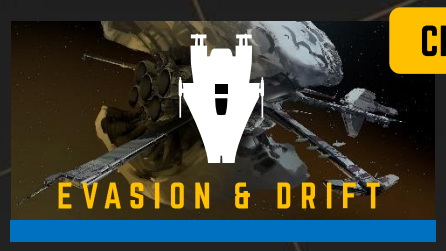
MISSION BREAKDOWN

EMPIRE: PROLOGUE I (HAVEN)

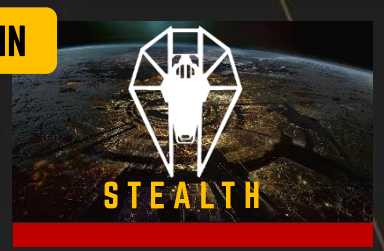
REBEL: PROLOGUE II (HAVEN)

REBEL: MISSION 1 (BRENTAAL)

REBEL: MISSION 2 (YAVIN)



REBEL: MISSION 3 (NADIRI)



EMPIRE: MISSION 4 (HOSNIAN PRIME)

EMPIRE: MISSION 5 (DESSEVRO)

REBEL: MISSION 6 (ESSELES)

REBEL: MISSION 7 (ZAVIAN ABYSS)

EMPIRE: MISSION 8 (REMITIK)

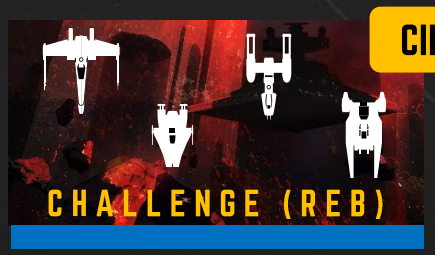
EMPIRE: MISSION 9 (MON CALA)

EMPIRE: MISSION 10 (NADIRI)

EMPIRE: MISSION 11 (SISSUBO)

REBEL: MISSION 12 (RINGALI NEBULA)

EMPIRE: MISSION 13 (CRACKED MOON)



REBEL: MISSION 14 (EXPLODING MOON)

16 MISSIONS WITH ALTERNATING POV

TELL A STAR WARS STORY & PREPARE PLAYERS FOR PVP

LESSON #6

EXPAND YOUR AUDIENCE, DON’T REPLACE IT

DESIGN & MARKETING

STAYING TRUE TO THE CORE

STAR WARS
SQUADRONS
EA
MOTIVE
LUCASFILM
EA

ATTENTION TO DETAIL

THE BIG BAD BFF-1

100

6 LESSONS FROM SQUADRONS

#1 - START FROM THE HEART
#2 - FEEL COMES FIRST
#3 - ASK THE FANS
#4 - YOU LIVE IN THE FUTURE. TAKE ADVANTAGE.
#5 - STAY FLEXIBLE
#6 - EXPAND YOUR AUDIENCE, DON’T REPLACE IT

MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU

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@tibermoon

Additional Reading:
tinyurl.com/squadvr1
tinyurl.com/squadvr2