

UaW:EA DD – Story & Setting

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In this designer diary, we'll be talking about how and why we set *Universe at War : Earth Assault* on near-present Earth, instead of in the distant future, the near to distant past, or in a galaxy far, far away. We'll also fill you in on the story and how it unfolds for each of our three main factions.

From the start, we wanted humanity to appear to have the slimmest of chances against the invading alien forces, because humans are typically at their best when they're down, but not out. We decided on a near modern setting, since that fit how we wanted humans to fare against our invaders – *close* to being able to fight back, but just not quite there yet.

We also love to tie our game fiction into reality and popular culture if possible, so 2012 as the start year for our game fit nicely. In our history (real history, not game history), the Mayan calendar ends its last cycle on December 21st, 2012. The meaning of this is widely interpreted by those researching it. Anything you could imagine has been predicted already. Anything from massive sunspot activity to a reversal of the Earth's magnetic field, creating destruction or enlightenment – your choice – could occur. Although *Universe at War* doesn't start on that exact date or follow any specific prediction precisely, the similarities between what the Mayan calendar may mean and our game universe are certainly open to interpretation... especially as you play through the solo campaign and learn more about our third faction, the Masari.

We haven't talked about the Masari before, and we'll have a lot more on them in the near future. While we're not going to say a tremendous amount about them in this diary, let's just say that they've had a hand in human evolution and advancement... and have a very large grudge to settle with the Hierarchy.

With the near-present day setting fixed in our minds, we started to create the story. We had already built our factions and their play-styles, so we knew what each faction was capable of and how they would play against each other. At that point, it was a matter of coming up with a story that was interesting for the player to experience, provided fun mission objectives that drove the story forward, utilized different units for the scenarios, and most importantly, didn't wear out its welcome.

Our solo-player campaign runs 22 to 25 missions, depending on some late game choices. You'll get to play as Novus, the Hierarchy, the human military, and the Masari, each with their own campaigns. The mission total may seem short compared to some other recent RTS games, but we really didn't want you doing the same things over and over in each map with little change in-between. Every mission you play is unique from the others in objective, set up, routes through it, and the tech that you and your enemy have to work with.

So what's the story? At its heart, *Universe at War* is all about an unwillingness to change. Every faction is running head-first towards the future with some very large blinders on, and this is going to hurt them unless they can gain some greater perspective on their

actions and realize what they're really doing. We don't want to give too much of the game away, but we can give you a peek into each faction's dilemma as *Universe at War* begins.

Novus' leader, the Founder, doesn't want to abandon his rigid protocols of attacking the Hierarchy. Each time Novus discovers a new world reduced to nothing but ash by the Hierarchy's march, they turn it into a tomb to honor and memorialize yet another fallen race. When they finally make first contact with a living and breathing planet such as Earth, the Founder is unable to let go of the past. He ignores the human's plight in favor of accomplishing Novus' mission of sabotage against the Hierarchy. Only Mirabel, a clone of one of Novus' original race, can see they have a chance to move beyond an existence consumed by revenge.

Kamal Re'x, a mid-level controller in the Hierarchy armada, has spent a century trying to gain the favor of the Overseers, the Hierarchy's mysterious rulers. He's been in service longer than others, knowing he's destined for greatness and wealth. Just as he finally succeeds in accomplishing a task that will get him the recognition he deserves, his hopes are dashed. He's ordered by the Overseers to abandon his project and leave Earth. Refusing to obey, Kamal goes to greater and greater lengths to claim a new prize he feels is beyond value to his career – the capture and subjugation of the fabled Masari, ghosts from his race's past. This puts him at odds with his military commander, Orlok, and tactical advisor, Nufai, who both believe Kamal may have overstepped his bounds.

Meanwhile, the Masari awaken from their millennia-long hibernation in the ocean depths only to find the planet heavily polluted by the humans, an infestation of living machines walking the world, and their ancient enemy, the Hierarchy, standing within the walls of their nearly-destroyed city-ship! Striking out at everything and anything, the Masari react with a savagery that rivals the ferocity the Hierarchy unleashed on many centuries before. Unwilling to trust the humans, and distrusting these living machines, the Masari set themselves on a path towards extinction, this time with no hope of escape.

So now the stage is set for a titanic conflict between these three alien factions, with humanity stuck squarely in the middle of it all. This holiday season you'll have the chance to play through the campaigns yourselves to see how it all shakes out. Who will emerge victorious when the dust finally settles? We won't give it away, but some will survive and some will certainly fall... but no one will emerge unscathed.

Thanks for taking the time to learn more about the setting and story for *Universe at War : Earth Assault*. We'll be bringing you more information on the game itself and our mysterious third faction, the Masari, in the near future!