Flight sims were once one of the most popular gaming genres around but have taken a backseat to arcade-styled games in recent years. Kids are more likely to pick up Snoopy's Flying Aces than they are to dig into a deep and realistic simulation title. There are plenty out there that still enjoy realistic physics and genuine real-world aerial combat though. For those gamers Kalypso has a treat with Air Conflicts: Secret Wars (3D).

The first thing that Air Conflicts: Secret Wars has going for it is the lack of direct competition. Outside of IL-2 Sturmovik, there aren't a lot of flight simulators out there and that series has been flying missions exclusively on PC since Birds of Prey lit up the

360, PS3 and Nintendo DS back in 2009. Besides being the only simulation to take to the console skies in a few years, Air Conflicts sports a budget price tag that makes the game even more appealing. The real question is how these planes handle.

Things start off pretty slow in Secret Wars, but pilots are rewarding with increasingly difficult missions the longer they stay in the cockpit. There are the slow-paced fly from this location to this location and provide reconnaissance or make a drop off / pick up, but these are early on and provide players with a little time to familiarize themselves with the controls and how things work in the planes. Speaking of the planes, there are plenty here, but don't vary in handling as much as you might think. Bombers fly like giant led sleds in the sky with small fighters providing agile controls with precision for the dog fights. As things progress, you can unlock new planes with unique weapons and payloads that each offer something different.

Despite leaning more towards the flight simulation genre, there are some arcade aspects to the way things play out. For example the way your weapons reload. Instead of needing to head back to base or looking for a friendly strip to touch down, your weapons will reload automatically in the air. This provided a faster pace than other classic-styled simulations, but might give a slight headache to those looking for a 100% accurate flight experience. It's one of the smaller touches that make this game more accessible and more appealing to the arcade

generation of flight enthusiasts.

Graphically, Air Conflicts sports 3D stereoscopic visuals which is a nice addition, but don't expect the planes to come flying off the screen into your cubicle, err living room. The 3D is nice but really only stands out when you're in the close up cockpit view. It's here that the 3D really stands out. Get it? Everything beyond the cockpit is pretty subtle, so don't get bummed out if you're playing on a regular HDTV. The rest of the visuals are fairly nice, but clearly don't push the hardware to the brink. Colors are somewhat drab and dark which adds to the mood of the WWII combat. You may want to turn up the brightness on your TV, especially if you turn on 3D effects.

Air Conflicts: Secret Wars is a fun game that offers a nice mix of simulation and arcade with a dash of 3D. Fans of flying games pretty much can't lose with Air Conflicts: Secret Wars unless they still think Crimson Skies is the only flight game worth playing. The icing on the cake is the budget price tag. This game isn't perfect, but with a limited number of games in the genre, you'll be hard pressed to find a better option on consoles the rest of this hardware generation.

{gallery}screenshots/Kalypso/AirConflictsSecretWar{/gallery}