

PC CD-ROM

U N I D E R S I E G E

تحت الحصار

لعبة عربية ثلاثية الابعاد

'A bit like life really'
BBC News



ما ستره ليس وهما ... انه الكيفية

ملحمة اسلانية لخصها امامه بن بحد كني لا تسمى ... ارضك وجودك

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Poster for game Under Siege: Tahta al-Hisar, 2005.

of the profit to The Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund, devoted to the families of American soldiers killed in the service to the homeland. The action game in which the hero hides at the beginning and tries to avoid combat – as is the case in Afkar Media's games – is in its sense unique and offers the possibility of a stronger identification with the hero, who is a normal human being confronted with a reality he cannot change.

A true story or political propaganda?

The work of Afkar Media in the field of political videogames is special, because the authors realize their media image and intentionally work with the themes of manipulation and propaganda. The freely accessible demo on Tahta al-Hisar introduces the game with a slogan: "A true story or political propaganda? You have the right to decide." Afkar Media's presentation clip, which the company sends to its prospective clients, starts with a mass call of "Allah Akbar" (a scene from the prayer in the first mission of Tahta al-Hisar) which will surely have a different influence on Muslim consumers and on Western viewers, but in both cases it calls for attention. A short montage of news about Afkar Media follows, with captions describing their games as political manipulation not being omitted. On their pages they collect reactions of Americans or Israelis too.

On the other hand the above-mentioned games of the company Kuma/War, a recruitment game of the US Army (America's Army, 2003) or the Hezbollah's game, Al-Quwat al-Khasa, which all show a clearly ideologically loaded picture of real conflicts consistently claim they are independent and based on reality. The games that openly work with the theme of political manipulation are themselves rarely engaged or politically persuasive. The action game Halo 2 (Bungie Studios, 2004) is about the distant future, where a conflict between people and intelligent aliens takes place. The story is shown step by step from the view of a human and an extraterrestrial infantryman. The game has a limited version, with printed material written only from the perspective of extraterrestrials with a completely different description and evaluation of the conflict. The parallel reading of both versions gives the reader the same feeling as the parallel watching of the war in Iraq on Fox News and al-Jazeera.

Although the designers of Afkar Media open up the theme of propaganda and their own politics they in fact use the same manipulative means as the games they define themselves against. First of all it is about a legitimization of their own understanding of reality stressing the truthfulness of the presented stories. Kuma/War

You have said that your games are not a reaction to Delta Force etc., but what is the main difference? In Tahta al-Hisar you are also playing a Palestinian killing Israeli soldiers...

You know, if you compare a Hollywood movie with a European one, the Hollywood one will be splendid and gorgeous, with exploding cars, helicopters and so on, but European movies are deeper. There is a similar distinction between our games and, say, Delta Force, I think. It was our aim to show what happens in Palestine behind politics, to show people stories and problems. The civilian, who takes a gun at the beginning of the game is killed by soldiers in the end, but he took the gun only for defense. I think that the main message, which we try to spread throughout the game, is that what happens in Palestine is a result of some problem, and we also offer an opinion on what the cause of that problem is by showing it. Before you can solve a problem you have to describe it and be aware of it, and we wrote a book about this problem with our game. We do not try to give an answer, we just present the topic, we can not change someone's opinion by a videogame, but we can move the player to go and search for the answers on his own.

You raised an interesting point in that all the "heroes" who take a gun are killed sooner or later in the game...

In Tahta al-Hisar there are five main characters who represent archetypes of Palestinian society. There is a lad who believes that he can change the world with a gun, there is another one who discover after some time that this is not possible and he starts to collaborate with the Israelis, he hopes that this will lead to a solution. There is Abu Himayn who observes everything from afar, an old man who remembers how things used to be before and how they are now. And finally Maan, a schoolboy who sees his school always closed and the houses being demolished. With a group of his friends he is used to throw stones at Israeli tanks until he is finally killed. I am afraid that exactly the thing which is happening now – killing the youngest generation of the conflict – is killing the future of Palestine.

You have told Kim Ghattas that you can still see a solution for Palestine, do you still think the same?

No society wants to live in a war, I believe in peace in Palestine, but I also believe in justice. If it should be strong and stable peace, it has to be just.

Tahta al-Hisar is based on reality, for example, a majority of the missions have real backgrounds, and that because of this reality the game is objective. However, the Israeli point of view seems to be completely missing. Moreover, all Israelis who you meet in the game are soldiers, you can see them only through the sniper scope or when you are hiding in front of them. Surely these elements of the game lead to a partiality? In

Screenshot from the game Under the Ash: Tahta al-Ramad, 2002.

