

Crimson Skies Review – Windows

Developed by: Zipper Interactive (<http://www.zipperint.com>)

Published by: Microsoft (<http://www.microsoft.com>)

Reviewed by: Tim Maxwell

Official Site: <http://www.microsoft.com/games/crimsonskies/default.asp>

Genre: Action / Flight Simulator

System Requirements:

Multimedia PC with a Pentium II 266 MHz or higher processor
Microsoft Windows 95, Windows 98, Windows Millennium Edition, or Windows 2000 operating system
64 MB of RAM
675 MB of available hard disk space for a typical installation; additional 250 MB of available hard disk space for the swap file
Quad-speed or faster CD-ROM drive
Microsoft Mouse or compatible pointing device
DirectX 7.0a or later API (included on CD-ROM)
DirectX 7.0a or later compatible sound card
DirectX 7.0a or later compatible PCI or AGP video card with 8 MB of video memory capable of displaying 256 or more colors at a screen resolution of 640 x 480 pixels or higher; Direct3D 7.0a API or later compatible 3D video adapter with 8 MB of video memory required for 3D hardware acceleration
Super VGA, 16-bit color monitor

Supports: Joystick/Gamepad

ESRB: N/A (Can't find online but assuming Everyone)

Overall Rating: 7.5

Graphics: 8/10

Sound: 8/10

Documentation: 7/10

Getting Started: 8/10

Gameplay: 7/10

Value: 8/10

The Good Press: Easy to pick up and play; wildly addictive; awesome plane creation feature; tremendous graphics and sound; solid control and physics engine, a plethora of witty one-liners.

The Bad Press: Missions tend to be fairly repetitive; beefy system requirements; buggy.

Overview: If you've got hard drive space to burn and can tolerate a few bugs, *Crimson Skies* offers a swashbuckling good time.

Tips:

Don't go hog wild equipping your new plane. If you buy the most powerful (and heaviest) engine, your aircraft won't be able to carry the weight of better weapons or armor.

Stay close to the friendlies you're protecting. If you stray too far in the heat of a dogfight, other enemies might take them down with a backdoor attack.

Save yourself a lot of frustration by downloading the [latest patch](http://www.microsoft.com/games/crimsonskies/downloads.asp) for the game before you start playing.

If there was ever a title that deserved an award for innovation and addictiveness, I couldn't think of a better candidate than Microsoft's new action/flight simulator *Crimson Skies*. The game serves up enough reconnaissance and aerial maneuvering to appease the flight simulation crowd, while the intense dogfights and over-the-top physics engine makes it a perfect choice for the action gamers as well.

The story of *Crimson Skies* goes like this: the year is 1937 and the United States has been throttled by the harshness of the Great Depression and the onset of prohibition. In this believable alternate era, the country has broken apart into regional sections and the tension between them has led to the irreversible collapse of the nationwide railway system. As a result, air travel is the primary means of commerce, and the vast majority of cargo is carried in massive, slow-moving zeppelins. As you might guess, these defenseless vessels are prime

targets for an ever-expanding threat known as “air piracy.” The most notorious of the air pirates is you, Nathan Zachary, the renowned ladies man and witty conversationalist. With the help of your rogue band of wingmen, your job is to pillage as much as you can while maintaining your reputation as the ruler of the skies.

The first time I booted up *Crimson Skies*, I had a hard time deciding just what kind of game I was playing. I suppose the game is a flight simulation at its core, but it could also easily be characterized as an action game thanks to its forgiving physics engine and simple pick-up-and-play nature. The straightforward interface allows you quick access to the main gameplay modes: instant action, campaign, and multiplayer, and you won't even have to crack the manual to set up your control scheme or make other settings adjustments. The campaign mode is the real meat of the game, allowing you to hone your aerial skills in a series of increasingly difficult missions that span the globe. The main objective at first is to simply seek out treasure and build up your cash flow so you can purchase new planes and equipment. As you progress, the duties change according to developments in the story, such as coming to the aid of an old friend in need, or challenging an old nemesis for air supremacy.

What really separates *Crimson Skies* from your run-of-the-mill flight sim is its emphasis on aerial mobility, low flying, and combat skills. The physics engine won't win any awards for realism—you'll be able to take an exorbitant amount of damage before your plane will go down, and rapidly ascending or banking at high speeds is child's play. You'll be thankful for the leniency here when you narrowly escape death by painstakingly maneuvering your way through a narrow mountain passage. This gives the game an exciting arcade feel and lets you worry about surviving a dogfight instead of keeping your plane in the air. Furthermore, the game is actually quite playable with a standard gamepad and won't overwhelm you with an abundance of overly confusing keyboard commands. This is a breath of fresh air for those of us who enjoy a good flight simulation, but don't want to read the equivalent of the official pilot's training manual to understand it.

The coolest aspect of *Crimson Skies* has to be its awesome plane creation feature. As you continue to conquer missions in the campaign mode, you'll undoubtedly earn a good chunk of change to upgrade or purchase new planes. Everything about the plane is fully customizable, including the weapons, armor, airframe, rockets, paint job, and decals to distinguish your aircraft from the next. In order to build the ultimate flying machine, you'll have to carefully weigh (literally) your options. Each specific airframe can only support a certain weight, so you've got to decide what takes priority given your flying style. Will you go with a peppier engine and skimp on the armor? Should you get stronger guns or purchase additional rockets instead. These are just some of the decisions you'll have to make if you hope to become the ultimate air pirate.

Aesthetically, *Crimson Skies* delivers an outstanding performance in both graphics and sound. The planes and other aircraft all look great, as do the explosions and translucent smoke effects. The backgrounds are also exquisitely detailed, and I'm happy to report that despite the abundance of eye candy, the game maintains a smooth framerate throughout. The audio is also outstanding, with brilliant voice acting and a soundtrack that fits the mood of the game perfectly.

The only thing keeping *Crimson Skies* from a better score is the fact that it has its fair share of bugs—most of which will have you pulling your hair out if you don't patch the game immediately. Most notably, an infuriating glitch arose that would corrupt your save data during a campaign. Microsoft quickly released an update to remedy this issue, but the game is still prone to crashing. My guess is that the majority of the stability issues will be worked out with later patches, but it's disappointing that Microsoft let such glaring deficiencies slip through the cracks.

All in all, despite a few minor issues, *Crimson Skies* is an excellent arcade flight simulator that doubles as a wildly addictive action game. The game is easy to pick up and play, but with all the planes and adjustments at your disposal, you won't be mastering this one anytime soon. If you want an intense dogfight but don't want to deal with all the complication of a true flight sim, you can't go wrong if you take to the crimson skies. And, to borrow a line from the hero himself, “when you hit the ground, tell ‘em Nathan Zachary sent you.”