

Spring RTS: The engine, the mods, the maps, and the community.

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About

This document will attempt to get an accurate overview of what Spring is, and offer some suggestions on how things can be improved. Everything is of course up to discussion – feedback and comments will be wanted and appreciated. So let's get started!

Overview

As things stand, the Spring itself is “tanking” most of the attention. All mentions of Spring on the net point to the website. Whenever something related to Spring comes up, it's about Spring. When people are talking about it, most of the time, it's about Spring yet again. So when a person does follow the <http://spring.clan-sy.com/> link, wanting to give this awesome Spring a try, he's... greeted with a wall of text. Some news, a sentence pointing out how to get these “mods”, “maps”, “unit packs”, but no clear **Get Spring** or **Download** link he's looking for. Nothing really educates him soon enough that this Spring is just an engine, that there are many mods for Spring that he can play; nor how to get them.

That's not to say the mods are doing a better job are at promoting themselves. Very few have a website to show for; not many really “excite” the person and make them want to get that mod, *right now*. Few are actually organized in a professional manner – that or maybe they aren't finished yet.

Lastly, OTA content. It's like cement on Springs shoes, and I'll explain later on why.

Spring, the engine

As it stands, Spring's slogan is “TA Spring is a project aiming to create a new RTS. The current goal is to make it run content from the game Total Annihilation”. While I'm of course not a developer, and of course cannot speak for what the goal of Spring should be, there are several flaws within the slogan that can be looked at. “TA Spring” and “a new RTS” don't quite mix. TA isn't exactly new; are you looking to stick with TA or make a new RTS? Then, the “run content from the game Total Annihilation”. That goal has been fulfilled already, no? So the right from the start, the slogan needs to be looked at.

This of course the brings issue of Springs goal. How far away from the original TA should the engine stray? Should it stick to some of the basic principles of TA (units can't go backwards), or *really* go out and make a whole new RTS (because you can easily consider it as one too)? That's up to discussion of the coding peoples.

The website. I had a whole section for this, but the need for a change has been realized and ideas are welcome here:

Promoting your mod

What *is* a Spring mod? Since Spring is just an engine, a mod then is a game, that uses an engine. For historical reasons, they're still called mods, but that does not mean they should be promoted as such. So how do you promote a non-commercial game, without a budget, and a hype (read: marketing) team? Judging from other successful games, here's a short layout of what's useful.

A website that “sells” the game. Right from the homepage, your website should a) tell the person what is the game about, b) make them want to get it, and c) point them how to get it easily. Should offer epic videos and screenshots – but don't go overboard, or it'll be as slow as a snail. It should be filled with information that people can read after they play the game at first / or in off-gaming time, including forums. Oh, small thing, but allowing anonymous posting is a big win. See if you can get some good anti-spam system in place to make that feasible.

The website, unlike other games, must also teach the user that they're going to play *this* mod, so when they join the main lobby, they'll know what they're looking for an join those games.

Autohosts – vital in making your whole campaign work. Empty autohosts are great, no autohosts or full autohosts is all your effort **wasted**. Since for many games it's common knowledge that you need a devicated server to host games (if you want a big, nice game), it's not exactly obvious to newbies that this isn't the case with Spring. Wanting to play with people when you can't is a big turnoff, and people will either get disappointed & leave or go play other mods just because they can't play yours. Of course, you want to keep the hosts populated – new players don't really take the initiative of joining an empty server. Don't go overboard though and keep a few autohosts near-full and leave empty servers – it's best to spread out the players, so you can get more newbies in games.

AI's – equally important. Sometimes the person isn't online, or it's their first game and they want to get a feel of the game/train. Either ask AI developers politely to make configuration files (if needed) for your mod, or make them yourself, but it is *vital* that you have some that work.

Missions – practically non-existent in Spring, while they're an important factor in making the game interesting. What else can I say? Getting some would be very useful.

Now, on the main topic of promotion. Possibly the most wrong, the least rewarding, and silly way is trying to convert current Spring players. Too much time & energy for little result, just look at the progress CA is making (which is a -lot- of effort for slow rewards). There aren't that many players to go about anyways. What you do is make the cake bigger, then your slice will be bigger, and you'll even get a better percentage of it. So we aren't looking to promote your mod “inside” the community, we're looking “outside”.

The most efficient way to promote your mod would be the “**game powered by Spring**” way, instead of the “just another Spring mod”. That's what... every other game that doesn't use a homebrewn engine does, and hey, it works. Just like other games, use news resources to build up hype (hot videos, nice pics. Don't go overboard with news releases, or people will get bored and skip them, and don't have too few either, because people will forget about them. Some game-related websites that will be good for a news story (sorry, all

linux related, but that's all I follow): linuxgames.com, <http://www.linux-gamers.net/>, <http://www.happypenguin.org/>). Of course should be a lot of windows websites for this sort of thing too. If you aren't entirely comfortable with approaching people on this, I wouldn't mind helping.

OTA Content – is like trying to do a water race with the anchor down. No, really, it is. Many (or all?) Spring mods are free and open-source – yet they cannot take the full advantages of what that entails, for the *A mods. That means it can't really be uploaded to random sites, not be in Linux repositories (for those who don't know, Linux distros have a very easy way of searching, downloading, and installing applications). They can't be promoted on gaming news websites, forums, and and be uploaded on websites to be shared because of that. This is also in part why Star Wars was features in PCGamer – no OTA content. No serious magazine will be promoting a game that requires content from a 10 year old game that's no longer on sale, because that most likely involves piracy.

Downloading, installing, and setting up your mod should be easy. I can't say much else here because it's not a problem on Linux, but I'm not aware of how is it on Windows. Go through the process yourself several times, and ask a random friend who doesn't play Spring yet to go over it, just to make sure everything is nicely ironed out.

Don'ts

Don't get your own lobby server. Yes, present your mod as a “game powered by Spring” to the outside, but inside, we're still a community. There are many reasons against separating it – a) you'll get less players randomly trying out your mod after playing other ones, b) you'll make it harder for players to play the game – nobody wants to be logging off one server, logging onto another game, and c) because it goes against the latest successful trends of large online gaming communities, where players are playing multiple games within one service happily.

Sames goes for lobbies. 1 lobby 4 all mods is quite good; can't get better.

Have no RSS feed. Those things are very useful to keep your active player base updated!

Be paranoid, or greedy. This is all for **fun**! When you aren't taking it as fun, things are going downhill.

Maps

Over eight-hundred maps are available for Spring. That is 800+. Over five-hundred, and near a thousand. Anything wrong here? Eh, the fact that people still have trouble picking one, if anything... pure awesomeness otherwise.

Lolwut?

Comments? Suggestions? Hate mail? I'm Neya on the lobby server, and Vadi in forums. feel free to PM in either to get in touch with me.