
C&C 3 Review

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{mos_sb_discuss:4}Okay so last night I finished C&C 3's campaign mode: All three campaigns: Nod first, GDI second, the Scrin (because you have to beat the other two first to do it) third. Overall I think the game is very good. C&C3 is not an empty sequel that just rides on the previous success of a series. No, C&C3 is a true sequel that manages to outshine or at least match up with every facet of the previous games in the series, and this is a tall order for someone like me who was pretty much seduced into the genre by the original Command & Conquer. The C&C3 single player experience is outstanding. While the missions themselves are kind of short, there are a bunch of them, far more than the "10 missions per faction" standard set by the legendary Starcraft (save for the Scrin campaign which is very short, though this is for good reason). So while each mission might be a bite-sized game never exceeding 45 minutes in length, they are a part of a much greater flowing storyline that is broken into 5 acts.

Another interesting depth to the single player game's mission structure is the presence of both Primary and Secondary objectives. RTSes have incorporated optional objectives before, they normally only affected getting a small bonus to that particular mission. In C&C3, accomplishing these objectives unlock new story info for the intel database (more on this later), and add a stripe to your "medal" for completing the mission, giving you bragging rights. While this feature seems obviously designed with Xbox Live achievements in mind, it's a welcome depth to people who wanted a little more "extra credit" to earn in their single player RTS play.

Unlike other RTS games where the choosing your faction alters the storyline, making it hard to tell which plot arch will be used in any future games or expansions (a problem the C&C series historically has), C&C3 actually deploys one storyline told from multiple perspectives. However, even if you know how the story "Ends"; from one side, there are details that you will miss until you beat the other side. For example, at one point in the game GDI triggers a detonation while trying to kill Kane. While playing as GDI, at this point in the game you think this was an un-intended side effect to one man's incompetence, but when you play as Nod, you eventually learn that this is all a part of Kane's master plan. The story is also wonderfully supported by the "Intel database," which is different for each faction. The entries are narrow to that faction's perspective, offering detailed data on their own units, and only sketchy intel on the enemy's.

It is because of this fixed storyline that the Scrin campaign must be both unlocked and is very short. The Scrin are not in the game from the onset – in fact you're pretty much half done with the story when the Scrin make their appearance. The Scrin campaign is still interesting since neither GDI nor Nod learn much about these "Visitors" before they send them packing. Still the campaign is comparatively short and pretty much a "bonus feature" instead of a full campaign. While I feel this fits, I could see where

someone who is particularly attached to this faction might feel bummed by the way the Scrin campaign works out.

The faction identity/balance in C&C3 is also interesting. As mentioned, GDI and Nod borrow heavily from previous games to identify their function, but the addition of the Scrin throws off their groove a little bit. For example, normally GDI is the slow-building powerhouse that can beat up Nod toe-to-toe. On the flip-side however, Nod has a large number of specialist units that when used in harmony, can cripple and defang GDI, leaving them vulnerable for the finishing blow. While these concepts are overall true, the Scrin have some units that out perform the two human factions. For example, the Scrin Annihilator Tripod can stand up quite well to GDI's monstrous Mammoth Tanks, and Nod really needs to upgrade their Avatar to stand up to them. The Scrin also have some potent specialist units as well, like the Buzzers and the Corruptor, which are brutally effective against infantry much like Nod's flame units, as well as their Mastermind which can take over enemy units. Another interesting factor is that historically, GDI has been the air power. However, now Nod's venom and stealth bomber gives them air presence and the Scrin really shine in air-borne base assault more than anywhere else. So while GDI still has some of the air power they are known for, they cannot establish air-dominance as easily as they used to.

Another good side to C&C's campaigns is the variety. Too often an RTS's campaign mode is just mission-after-mission of "Build a base"; "kill enemy"; with little to no variation or change in objectives. C&C3 continues the proud C&C tradition of mixing that bag up quite well. This is especially true in the Brotherhood of Nod campaign as Kane often would rather have you take a covert approach even if he has the forces available for assault. So rather than just getting a base at mission start, you may need to invade an area with a small strike team, wipe out a key objective, thus clearing the way for your forces to enter the battlefield. This approach to mission design really helps to bring out the character of the armies in not just storyline and plot, but also gameplay. It also serves as a great tool to teach the player the unique abilities of certain units.

One thing fans of the Tiberium games might notice is that this game plays a bit faster than they used to. C&C and C&C: Tiberian Sun really required the player to spend some time setting up before they could launch an effective attack, and attack groups were generally smaller due to cost and build time. C&C3 plays out more like C&C Generals where you can get a game done in 10 or fewer minutes if you truly crush your foe, and the tech tree isn't hard to climb. People who liked the long, drawn-out conflicts in Tiberian Sun that required you to expose non-obvious weaknesses in your foes defense will be disappointed to hear that enough pressure will crack a base wide open. Tank rush, love it or hate it, is a viable tactic in C&C3. However, unlike Red Alert 2, it's not the only viable tactic and is still quite stoppable, no matter the faction.

Many units have abilities that are not obvious that can

change the game if you use finesse. Nod's Avatars don't match up Mammoth Tanks or Annihilator Tripods when first built, but when upgraded by stealing the weapons off of other vehicles (killing them in the process), Avatars can become just as powerful, if not more versatile. You can plug the stealth-generator off of a stealth tank and slab it onto an avatar to get a rather powerful base-ruining unit stealth ability, making it possible for you to sneak him around to unexpected angles of the enemy base or ambush an enemy attack. GDI can use Sniper teams to spot for their Juggernaut units, making them able to shell any position on the map, regardless of how far away from the Juggernaut it is. Since the Sniper teams are stealth, this can allow a crafty GDI player to get in some good preliminary bombardments before marching through a now-defenseless base. Air power is also a great way to stop tank rushes, even "power unit" rushes since many lack air-defense of their own.

The great thing about this mix between unit abilities and rushing is that it makes the game so you can micro manage about as much as you want to. If you build enough units, you can power through pretty much anything so it's your foe's fault for letting you have that much set up. But if you are toe-to-toe and you micromanage your abilities well and your foe doesn't, you can turn the tide of the battle quickly.

One complaint I do have is you do need to micromanage your forces to some extent simply because unit AI in C&C3 is not as nice as I would like it to be. Giving your forces an attack-move command will not cause them to attack enemy structures aside from base defenses. This means that they will wipe out all the enemy units and turrets in a base, but then park outside of the barracks and let units come out. You CAN give an "assault move" command that will attack structures as unit see them, but I've noticed this command can sometimes be problematic when there are walls or other oddities for them to target in the base. You also have to be careful about some units, especially Nod's elite Infantry, being too gun-ho about fighting units they aren't even specialized to fight and dropping stealth or cover to fire on them. There are some things I want to go back to the 90s about when it comes to RTSes, but having to baby sit my units by repeatedly right clicking away from enemy base defenses is not one of those things. At least harvester AI is a lot better; not that you don't have to micromanage those too a bit.

If competitive multiplayer is your bag, C&C3 also features a quite robust online matchmaking system, complete with stats tracking, 1v1 and 2v2 ladders, clan support, and even make replays available for download. You can also download a program called "Battlecast" which will allow you to watch game replays without even owning C&C3. Battlecast has other exciting multiplayer features planned for the future as well. If you're more of a comp-stomper however, there are still custom games available as well as a robust skirmish mode that not only lets you set the AI level of your foe, but also their strategy type. So if you want to improve your anti-rush game, you can set the AI to rush.

While not the visceral, all offense battle field of Dawn of War nor the massive strategic wars of Supreme Commander, Command & Conquer 3 still brings a simple to understand yet deep game play to the table that more than makes up for its comparable shortcomings. If you are a fan of C&C, you should pick up this game. If you are a fan of RTS games and feel there hasn't been a real solid entry since Dawn of War (or older), you should also get this game. People looking for a brand new way to play or lots of micromanagement will probably find C&C3 too simple to really get into. While in the end Supreme Commander might be a better overall game from a mechanics stand point, it's not better enough to justify the computer upgrade you will probably need to enjoy it; a computer upgrade the light-weight and efficient C&C3 will not require of you.

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