

'Tiberian Sun' returns to original game formula



Game: "Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun"
Publisher: Westwood Studios
System: PC
Rating: B

Westwood knew it was going to have a lot to live up to when it started work on "Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun."

The original was considered a classic, and the follow-up, "Red Alert," was incredibly popular, but fans of the original series felt a little let down by it. And rightfully so.

The thing about the original "Command & Conquer" was that it became, in its own right, like a game of chess. Each unit had a counter unit, and while you could build a massive amount of one unit, there was another that would take your force down even if it was half the size.

"Red Alert" degenerated into common tank rushes, where players would race to see how many tanks they could build and how fast they could build them. That became the game between

players.

In many ways, "Tiberian Sun" returns to the original Zen-like feeling of the original, where every unit has a counter and tactics are just as important as sheer numbers. The fine balance seems solid once more, and that constant battle can't be solved in just a few minutes.

But that's also a little bit of a strike against the game, too.

See, there's always been a difference between the "Command & Conquer" series and its main competitor, the "Warcraft" series.

In "Warcraft," a base siege can be finished in as fast as five minutes. If you can pull that off in "Command & Conquer," your opponent is incredibly sloppy, and you're a pretty sharp cookie.

"Command & Conquer" leans toward the long, knock-down battles

that can drag on for a few hours. Unfortunately, the Internet play, one thing many fans will be using the game for exclusively, is as buggy as the corridors in "Indiana Jones and the Temple Of Doom." Not once could this critic finish a multiplayer game over the Internet without it crashing.

After the long, long, long delays, this is virtually inexcusable. Sure, patches will fix many of these things, but they shouldn't have been broken in the first place.

The cut scenes in this game are the best of the series, though, and that's a refreshing change of pace. Kane is back (still played by game producer Joe Kucan), but this time there are some heavyweight actors in place, including James Earl Jones as the head of the Global Defense Initiative.

And the game itself has gone

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through some pretty interesting changes, including deformable terrain and burrowing units, as well as random Ion Storms that shut down everything mechanical for a few minutes. This has the tendency to make multiplayer mode a lot more interesting.

Is it better than "Starcraft"? That's hard to say, as they're both good in their own rights, but this critic has to say that "Starcraft" is still heavily played at his place even more than a year after it's been released. Time will tell if "Tiberian Sun" can hold that distinction as well.

- Cliff Hicks

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