

Asian Dynasties is set from the late 15th to the late 19th century.

AGE OF EMPIRES III: THE ASIAN DYNASTIES

Fantastic dreams of rickshaws and elephants

PUBLISHER: Microsoft DEVELOPER: Ensemble/Big Huge Games GENRE: Real-Time Strategy AVAILABILITY: Retail ESRB RATING: Teen
MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 1.4GHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 2GB hard drive space, Age of Empires III MULTIPLAYER: 2-8 players VERSION REVIEWED: Near-Final Reviewable

REVIEW



Columbus may have made a few small errors while trying to find his way to the East Indies, but it's apparent that Big Huge Games did not. In *The Asian Dynasties* (the second expansion to *Age of Empires III*), series developer Ensemble partners up with the folks from Big Huge, trusting that its *Rise of Nations* roots—along with creative director Brian Reynolds' design legacy—would do justice to the *Age* franchise. It's in good hands.

Big Huge threw out the "personal touch" of the *WarChiefs* expansion's campaigns, returning to more historic material. While something could be said for "Lizzie the Pirate" types of stories, something's more...intense, perhaps, about focusing on things like the events surrounding the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, which is the crux of the game's three-campaign series. While the other two campaigns seem a bit "Asian lite," this final Indian campaign definitely feels more sensational. Could the presence of flail elephants have anything to do with this?

DON'T GIVE TOO MUCH OF A RISE

Although proponents of the *Rise of Nations* games were hoping that a lot of the essence of that series would bleed through into this one, it doesn't. You can see a number of *RON* influences, though—particularly in the way that *Dynasties* handles Wonders. Wonders were all but gone in *AOE3*, but this game integrates them spectacularly well with the civilization-advancement system. When it's time to tech up to the next age, you just tap a villager on the shoulder, and your age advancement and Wonder construction are concurrent. It works

really well...until you decide you've chosen the worst possible Wonder for your civ at the time.

You also won't see a trace of expanding borders and attrition, but the fourth resource, export, can virtually enlarge your borders with the abilities to recruit foreign allies and hone in on other countries' technologies. Export is a small percentage of your overall resource gain, and its effective use is subtle, but it can really turn the tide.

UP YOUR RALLY

The truly die-hard RTS player never has enough hotkeys, but *Dynasties* brings sufficient new ones to really boost your multiplayer speed. While you can't rally to specific select groups, you can build and rally troops from an entire set of barracks and set the stance of unit types. Alt-Y, however, gives you something you've *always* wanted to do: "Move all military units *here*." When your ally is in trouble, or you're about to lose your Town Center, or [insert any emergency], at the flick of a hotkey combo, you forsake all other stands. *Not* choosing this option takes practice, especially for novices.

It looks so remarkable that you'll want to play zoomed in at all times, so yeah (ahem), you do that. And die a thousand deaths in any gameplay mode. But it's OK...in *Asian Dynasties*, it's always cherry blossom season, whether your ass is on the line or not. **—Cindy Yans**

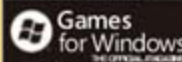
VERDICT

■ New hotkeys; interesting age advancement dynamic; new export resource.

■ Moderately clumsy interface; single-player campaigns feel "token."

9/10

EXCELLENT



• The new India faction gets lots o' free villagers.

ALT-Y GIVES YOU SOMETHING YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO DO: "MOVE ALL MILITARY UNITS *HERE*."

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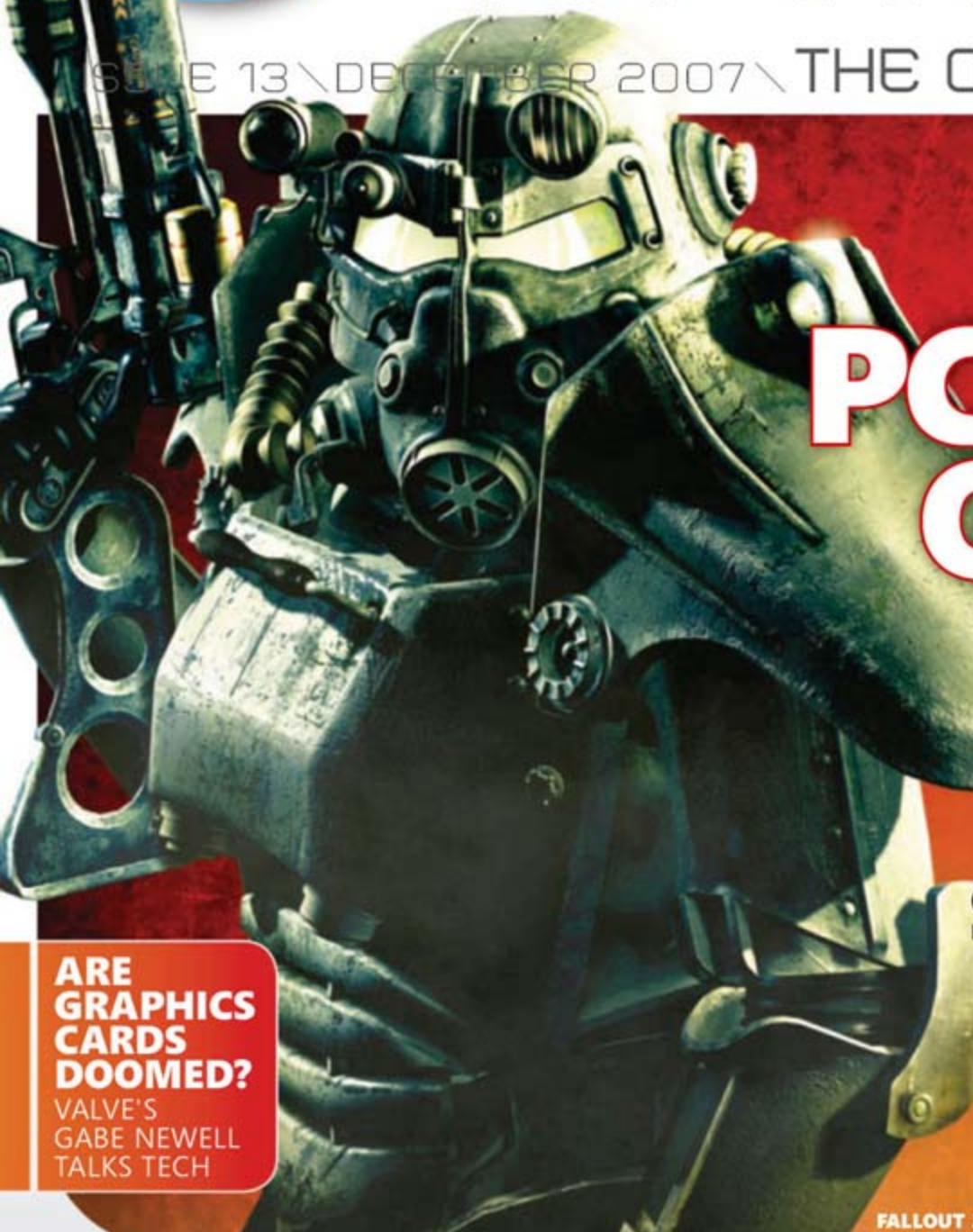
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