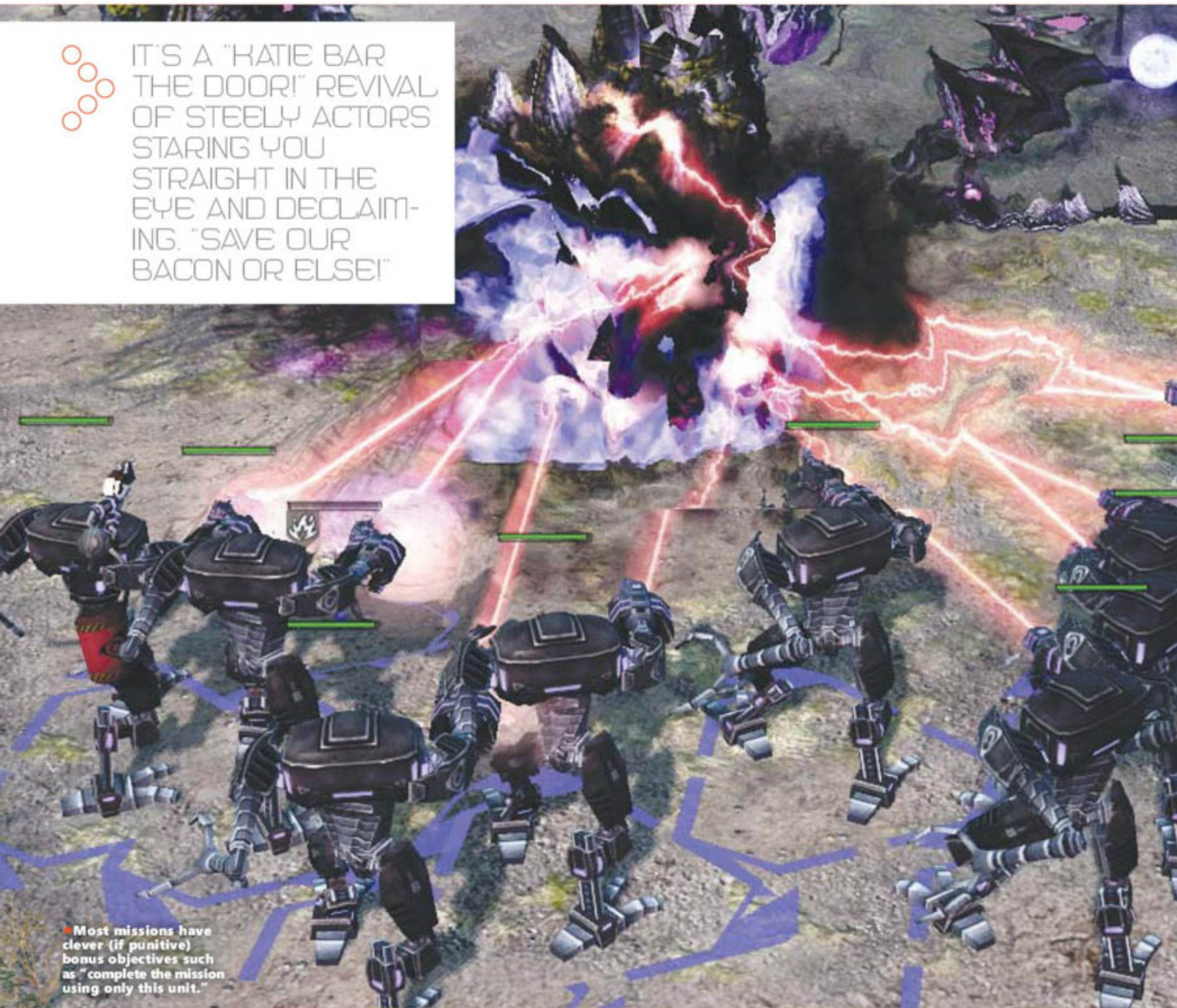




IT'S A "KATIE BAR THE DOOR!" REVIVAL OF STEELY ACTORS STARING YOU STRAIGHT IN THE EYE AND DECLAIMING. "SAVE OUR BACON OR ELSE!"



• Most missions have clever (if punitive) bonus objectives such as "complete the mission using only this unit."



• Harvesters are a bit overaggressive and tend to wander anywhere in search of Tiberium, to the extent of stupidly rolling into enemy territory. If ever a unit needed a behavioral option, it's this one.



• One of the game's few faults is the way smaller units can get lost in the chaos. You'll want to keep everything CTRL-assigned to avoid sacrificing precious seconds foraging for those pygmy-sized commandos.



COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS

'Cause you've got (walk, talk, smile, charm) personality

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: EALA GENRE: Real-Time Strategy AVAILABILITY: Retail ESRB RATING: Teen
MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 2GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 5.6GB hard drive space MULTIPLAYER: 2-8 players VERSION REVIEWED: Near-Final Reviewable



• C&C3's full-motion video really invests you in the missions, much more so than other games' lifeless (and comparatively ugly) prerendered talking heads.



• The Brotherhood of Nod is an insurgent cult led by the fanatical Kane, here played with obvious maniacal relish by returning series actor Joseph D. Kucan.



• Missions are individualized to prevent "build-and-rush" monotony, and several will see you juggling energy use, repairs, and build queues on zero-sum budgets while fending off incoming attack waves.

REVIEW



Great news: *Command & Conquer* is back, like a reunion band after seven hit albums and an eight-year hiatus. We're talkin' harvesters, right-hand sidebars, superweapons, and over 90 minutes of splashy full-motion video with real actors. Real actors! The last time we saw live bodies in a game was...what, last century?

Consequently, this sequel to 1999's *Tiberian Sun* has something that most of its peers don't: personality. Whether it's Tricia Helfer (*Battlestar Galactica*) preaching you up in punky fishnets, Josh Holloway (*Lost*) drawing like everyone's favorite Southern-fried wiseass, or even the terrific Michael "Sam Fisher" Ironside coaxing plausibility out of the script's predictable military hoo-hah, personality's the reason why you really can't miss *Tiberium Wars*—it's not just a great RTS, it's a "Katie bar the door!" revival of steely actors staring you straight in the eye and declaiming, "Save our bacon or else!"

AND THEN THERE WERE THREE

You probably remember the neofascist Global Defense Initiative (GDI) and its nemesis, the cabalistic Brotherhood of Nod...and, yep, they haven't changed much. The GDI still employs dependable meat-and-potatoes military toys, whether that's rifle/grenade/sniper infantry teams, megatanks, and mobile missile-flingers, or the "juggernaut"—a two-legged tank bristling with long-range artillery weapons. The Nod still complements its arsenal with clandestine units such as fanatics (suicide bombers), saboteurs, stealth tanks, and the high-end "avatar warmech," a colossal robot that actually upgrades itself by cannibalizing friendly vehicles. The Nod's support abilities (they're like *The Battle for Middle-earth*'s "ring" powers) are also cruder than the GDI's...so where the GDI gets airborne unit drops, radio-call aircraft strikes, and a high-tech orbital ion cannon superweapon (environmentally safe disintegration!), the Nod gets stuff like "cloaking field," "decoy army," "shadow strike teams" (glider-borne assassins), and good old-fashioned nukes.

But C&C3 debuts a third faction: the Scrin. They're slithery aliens after Earth's Tiberium supply; their tech tends to be more organic, letting you combine little gnatlike swarms of "buzzers" (flying razors) with three-legged "gun walkers" or long-range "devourer tanks." They also pack some incredibly powerful high-end units (their "planetary assault carrier" comes with its own complement of fighters) and wield impressive special powers such as "wormholes" (teleportation), "motherships" (think *Independence Day*), and "rift," a weapon that tears open a mini black hole.

Trouble is, you don't actually see the Scrin until late in the GDI or Nod campaigns, and you need to beat either campaign to unlock the Scrin offensive, which is really just a brief four-mission "in-and-out" of Europe. So, while the Scrin are unquestionably deeper than some are crediting, they don't get the narrative treatment they deserve. That's too bad, because where the GDI and Nod campaigns are first-rate gonzo, the Scrin campaign feels more like an underdeveloped coda.

THE BATTLE FOR (MIDDLE) TIBERIUM

It's no accident that C&C3 looks like *Battle for Middle-earth II* draped in industrial grunge. The game uses an improved version of the SAGE engine originally designed for C&C: *Generals*, and the scale is almost identical. Hovering a couple dozen meters over square battlefields, you place industrial and defensive structures after "click-building" them in the right-hand sidebar (one at a time, until you build "expediting" tech). It's an old and remarkably well-aged C&C convention that limits peasant-pushing to harvesters that automatically trundle off and scoop up glowing Tiberium, a greenish, crystalline substance that funds new structures and upgrades.

Said structures require sufficient power for operation, which you must supply by dropping power plants ("reactors" for the Scrin) and ensuring you don't totter over budget and flatline a chunk of your base. If you do, you'll have to whip up more power plants or manually shutter buildings and defenses.

For all its subtleties, C&C3 might as well be subtitled "speed trumps tactics," something that's especially obvious if you've seen the videos of C&C3's BattleCast feature (our review build shipped without BattleCast, which lets you broadcast your multiplayer games as pundits comment and draw over the action...we can't thumb it up or down in this space, but check our updated review on 1UP.com for the definitive word on this). You can have your base laid down and upgraded in minutes, and in battles—save for long-range weaponry—positioning means little. Winning's all about swiftly countering one unit type with another, or simply overwhelming the enemy with superior numbers of just about anything.

But then, that's what a C&C game does, after all. Real actors, over-the-top stories, hyperkinetic special effects, and straight-up pulp without any silly self-awareness. Let the RTS wonks and contrarians toss it overboard for what it regurgitates—it won't be one iota less entertaining. •Matt Peckham

VERDICT

Personality where it counts; C&C conventions still top-notch; elegant interface.

Tough to locate certain units; harvesters wander too liberally.

9/10

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