



• While every campaign mission feels like D-Day (build-build-build... attack!), it's hard not to marvel at the raw power on display here.



• It's possible to play on two separate monitors, splitting the screens between strategic and tactical views—but you'll need a time machine to build a PC powerful enough to handle both views on high detail.



• High terrain plays more of a mazelike role than anything, forcing you to craft carefully coordinated rearguard attacks or advance in successive waves in order to move through narrow canyons.

SUPREME COMMANDER

Supremely annihilating in total command

PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: Gas Powered Games GENRE: Real-Time Strategy AVAILABILITY: Retail ESRB RATING: Everyone 10+
MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 1.8GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 8GB hard drive space, 128MB videocard MULTIPLAYER: 2-8 players VERSION REVIEWED: Gold Master

REVIEW

Jamming with Chris Taylor's Godzilla-sized *Supreme Commander* is like dunking your eyeballs into a giant tub of neon gnats—a glowing terrarium where whirring battalions of robot critters wade, lemminglike, into battle...or circle like hornets, transforming your screen into something like *Star Wars: Episode One* meets *Tron*. Think "ostentatious" on a scale that mocks anything you've played before (without mods, anyway), reined in by a sleek, muscular interface...and you end up with a respectable



• **Supreme Commander's A.I. is brutally calculating, dispatching aerial units to wear down shields and overwhelm AA guns in suicide bursts before trotting out ground troops at precisely coordinated intervals.**



• **You need to chain orders continuously—especially when coordinating hundreds of land, sea, and air units in frontal or flank assaults.**

enough RTS that almost outpaces its own towering hype.

TOTAL ADORATION

Almost, but not entirely: For all its pomp and circumstance, *SupCom's* pretty conventional, and it's easy to see why. Like in Taylor's *Total Annihilation*, you have to secure and defend lodes of "mass" and lay rows of power generators to produce "energy," then balance the precarious consumption rate of either to build land, air, and sea forces before winging the whole kit and caboodle at your opponents. Grind. Build. Attack. In light of all the fawning previews, it almost makes *SupCom* feel like another drive-by victim of PR tall talk.

Except that it's not, thanks to a few saving graces. Chalk the first up to Taylor's penchant for supersizing everything he touches. In *SupCom*, this takes the form of "strategic zoom," which involves blasting the camera into orbit with your mouse wheel and observing as your trundling units become tiny 2D symbols. Instead of bounding between scuffles from just a few stories up, you hover like a satellite, eyeballing hundreds of units spread across gargantuan maps.

Trouble is, those symbols look more like 8-bit scribbles scrambling around the screen in jumbled swarms—tough to follow, tougher still to select with any accuracy. In fact, it almost begs the question as to why the strategic view couldn't automatically translate clumps of units into aggregate markers (like NATO symbols) so that the perspective frankly felt more *strategic* and less like trying to herd ants through a telescope. It's unsettling enough that you'll probably end up using strategic zoom as more of a glorified "jump-map" for getting around quickly than anything else. Great idea here, Mr. Taylor...but it still has some kinks to work out.

There's no kinks in order queuing, thankfully. In the space of seconds, this *Total Annihilation* carryover lets you deploy a unit—say, an engineer (your builder class), who can clear battle flak, capture a few nearby enemy extractors, repair some tanks, then finish by building a dozen power plants. Add orders as you go, tack on extra helpers, or even harmonize complex offensive maneuvers. Extrapolate that out to massive multisquadron offensives...and after successfully coordinating a batch of forward bombers, flanking cruisers, follow-behind tanks, and mobile artillery, you won't want to play without this feature again.

INSTEAD OF BOUNDING BETWEEN SCUFFLES FROM JUST A FEW STORIES UP, YOU HOVER LIKE A SATELLITE, EYEBALLING HUNDREDS OF UNITS SPREAD ACROSS GARGANTUAN MAPS.

COGNATE COMMANDER

SupCom's three standalone campaigns acquaint you with the United Earth Federation (human), Cybrans (cybernetic humans), and Aeon (alien-influenced hippies...OK, and human), each engaged in a thousand years of future total war. Sadly, they're more excuses to stamp different colors on a bunch of look-alike, perform-alike tanks, planes, boats, and defensive guns; if you want to see the cool stuff, you must first level up land, sea, and air factories to build distinctive "experimental" megaweapons like the UEF's submersible aircraft carrier or the Aeon's unit-crushing Sacred Assault Bot.

Consequently, all three sides play an identical early game, beginning with the upgradeable Armored Command Unit (ACU), which starts as a wimpy base-builder but can grow powerful enough to house tactical nukes. Think of the ACU as each side's chess king—not the most powerful unit, but one of the more versatile, and the de facto benchmark for winning (lose your ACU and it goes nuclear—see ya later, alligator).

If you think *Total Annihilation's* still the cat's pajamas, look no further than *Supreme Commander*. It's the *ID4* of videogames—a little sleepy early on, occasionally a little baffling, but incontrovertibly epic...and you're here as much for the light show anyway, right?

• **Matt Peckham**

VERDICT

▣ **Seamless command vantage; unlimited order queues; beautiful FX-laden engine.**

▣ **Lackluster diversity; muddled strategic view; snooze-worthy early game.**

7/10

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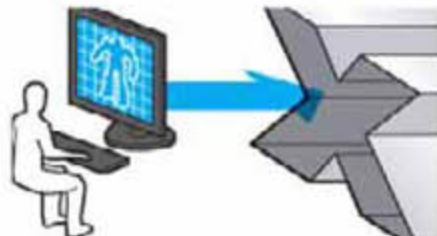
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