

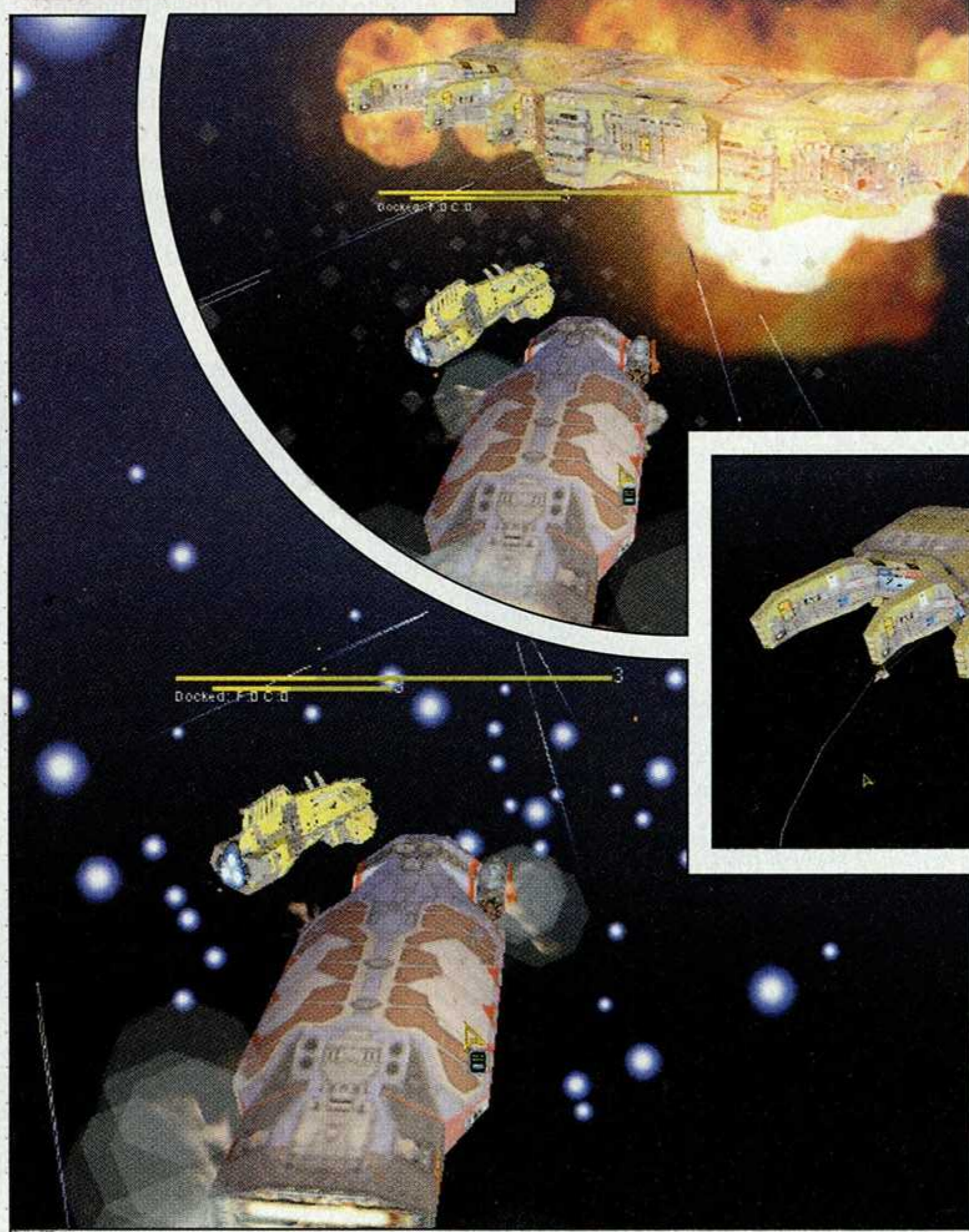
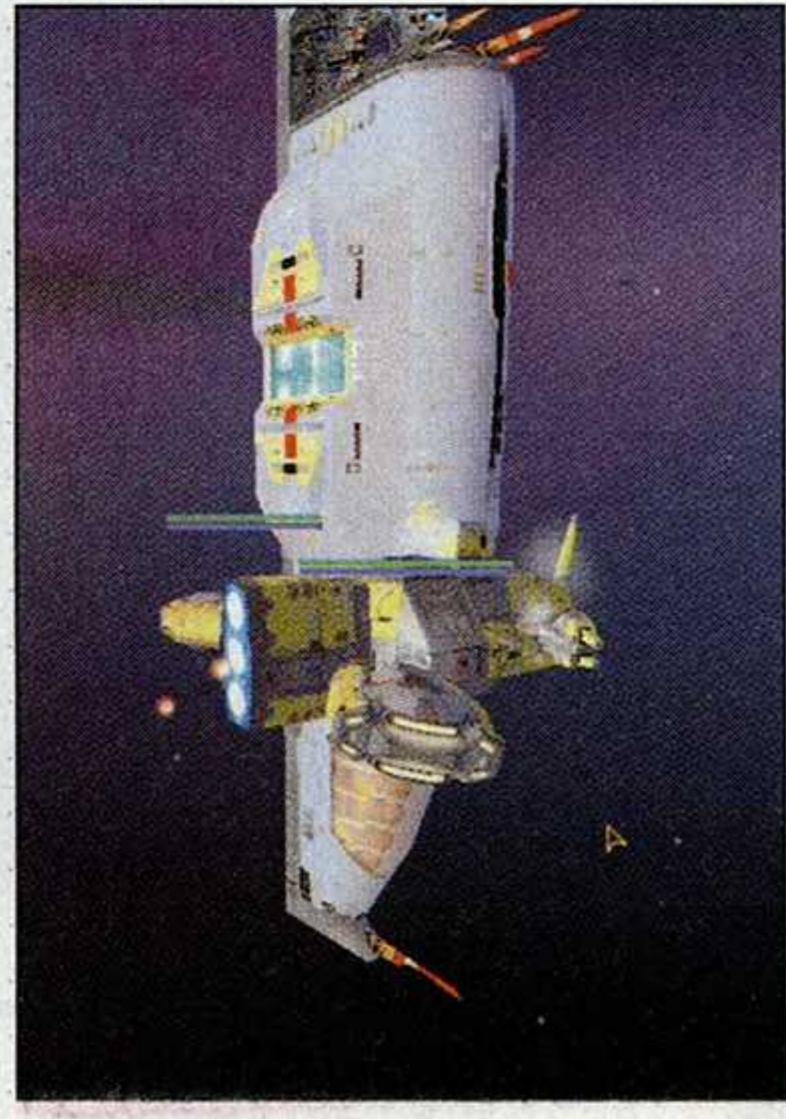
DEVELOPER ... Relic
PUBLISHER ... Sierra
REQUIRED ... P200, 32MB RAM, 150MB hard drive
IDEAL ... PIII 500, 128MB RAM, 600MB hard drive, mouse with mousewheel, LAN, Voodoo3 3500

Homeworld

If this game had the Star Wars license, it would be almost too good

ACCELE-RATED

The software mode is serviceable, but to appreciate the detail of the graphics you want a top of the line card — a TNT2 Ultra, G400 Max or Voodoo3 3500.



Space is big ... really big
Homeworld is a RTS, and the gameplay is structured in the traditional manner: Harvest resources, micro-manage units, climb a tech tree, build defenses, and attack. But instead of the playing field being a 2D top-down tiled map, *Homeworld's* battlefields are vast expanses of empty space — spheres, to be precise.

Developers Relic opened things up by creating a true third dimension to the arenas, and this reveals a whole slew of new tactical and strategic possibilities. Since your ships, especially the capital ships, don't move very fast, it can take quite a while to get them from one end of space to the other, which creates a great sense of anticipation as your massive armada silently heads for the enemy mothership.

Camera ... Action
 In any type of 3D game, especially in a RTS where you need control and awareness of many different units at once, having an intuitive and powerful camera interface is vitally important. This key feature has been well thought out, starting with focusing the camera (middle mouse button or F key) on a ship or group of ships that you

Everyone in the room who liked *Battlestar Galactica*, *Star Wars*, or anything else involving spaceships raise your hand. OK — now, with the other hand, write a note to yourself: "Note to self: Go out and get *Homeworld*."

You've got the future of your race in a giant ship that's bigger than the *Love Boat* and the *Enterprise* put together, and your planet has just been jacked by a malevolent alien race. Sounds like a good premise — at least as good as "Lost In Space" anyway. But seriously folks, *Homeworld* makes realtime strategy games seem like they have a future.

select in the traditional way of clicking or click-dragging. When the camera is focused, you can rotate it by holding down the right mouse button, and zoom in and out with the mousewheel (or by holding down both buttons if you don't have one). That's basically it. It's streamlined so well that before long it becomes second nature.

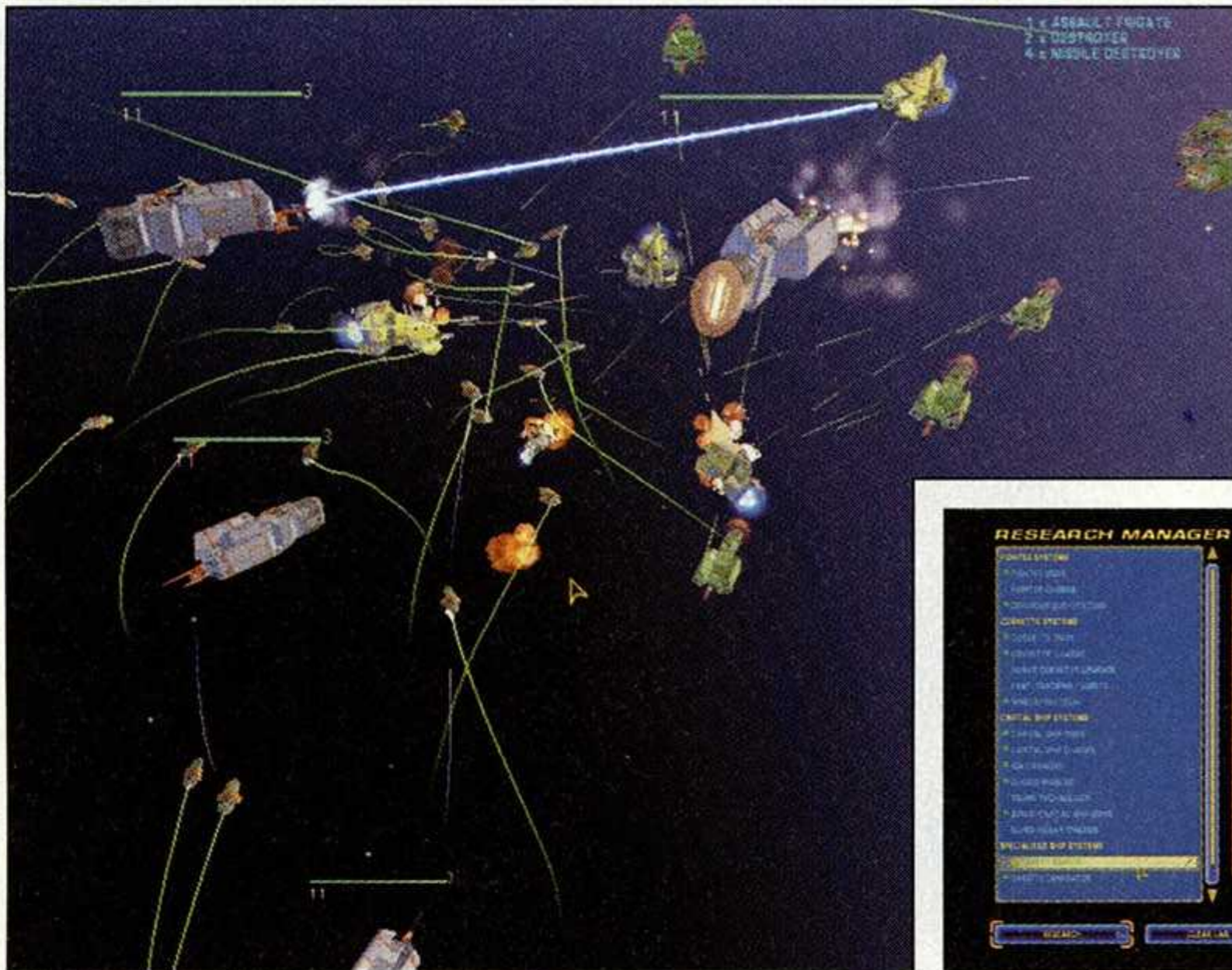
The Basics
 In single-player, the long term goal is to build up and equip a large enough battalion to get revenge on the alien fleet that destroyed your world and also find your mythic homeworld.

The game is divided into 16 missions; you must fulfill certain important story-pushing objectives before you can hyperspace on to the next one. Of course, you will run into some aliens who want a piece of you, and these buggers will make life helluva tough.

And really, the single-player is way challenging even for a seasoned RTS veteran. Since the fleet you create is persistent from one mission to the next, too many mistakes early on will make it difficult or even impossible to make it through the later missions, since the resources are fixed and become increasingly scarce. This is really a great idea, and almost single-handedly creates great replay value for the single-player game. The next time around, you'll try different tactics to get to the later missions, better equipped with more ships.



As it went up in a ball of fire, the mothership's life flashed before its eyes.



All this fuss about who destroyed whose home planet. Who started this fight anyway?

Green dots = good. Red dots = bad. Brown dots = could be either. Guess you'll have to find out for yourself, won't you?

Ships

There's a whole mess of ships in this game, and they're divided by class into fighters, corvettes, capital, and super-heavy. Of course, they're all there to protect the mothership, cuz that's what the game's all about. The fighters buzz like little bugs around the bigger ships — but they can be incredibly effective in skilled hands.

The corvettes are basically support and utility ships, and have specialized functions like the minelayer, which is great for defense, and the all-important salvage corvette, which you will always need. The single-player game can be won (in the hardest difficulty levels) by salvaging most, if not all, the enemy ships you encounter instead of destroying them. The costly and tough capital and super-heavy ships are the backbone of your fleet.

The design of the ships on both sides is superb. They seem completely believable and solid against the silent void of deep space. And then you've got things like sensor arrays, gravity wells, research ships, and of course, the resource collectors. Every ship has a particular function and there's not a lot of redundancy or arbitrary padding of units just to add a nice big number to the box copy.

Combat

After you build all your fancy new ships, you're going to want to use them. To keep them organized you can assign them into preset groups, usually divided by function or class. Then, you decide which of the 10 formations to put them in. The choices are varied

and effective enough in combat to make this an important tactical consideration. For fighters, a claw formation will make them overlap fields of fire quite effectively, while for capital ships, a wall formation will maximize their overall coverage potential.

Speaking of coverage (the amount of space around a ship that it can attack at any given time) ... this will also come into play in your tactics. The powerful Ion Cannon Frigate has a tiny coverage of 3% with its single beam attack, while the Multi Gun Corvette has a coverage of 74% with its five independently tracking turrets. Sheer numbers is never a guarantee of victory, as the full range of 3D movement lets you skillfully maneuver your groups to attack ships when they are in weak positions. Timing, creativity, and mobility are going to distinguish the skilled players from the "tank rushers" of tradi-

tional RTS games. In true RTS fashion, however, the game still requires the micro-management skills of a corporate CEO, and can overwhelm you at times when there's a lot going on. This is why you want to group up your units.

Multiplayer

The single-player game will prepare your tactical mind for some multiplayer *Homeworld* — this is where the game really comes into its own. With limited resources, mobile ships, and particularly the ability to hyperspace your fleet, your mothership will always be in danger — especially since it doesn't do any fighting and it's slow as all get-out. (For much more on multiplayer and combat strategy, check out this month's strategy section, pg. 122-125).

So What's the Big Deal?

These days, when games are becoming increasingly marketing

driven and cookie cutter, it's great to see a game that was created from a strong vision. *Homeworld* actually innovates, and doesn't underestimate the intelligence of its players, while still remaining really fun. If you think RTS is a dead genre, or that *Tiberian Sun* failed to add anything original to the format, check out *Homeworld*. They made it look easy, and that's saying a lot.

— ED LEE likes this game mainly cuz he wins at it

GRAPHICS

Simply great. The textures are detailed and well done, and everything just fits together well.

SOUND

A superior ambient soundtrack, voice samples, and ship sounds combine to make an engaging atmosphere.

DEPTH

The ships are well balanced and the single player is more than challenging. Multiplayer is terrific.

DESIGN

Inspired, with plenty of attention to detail and style to burn. The presentation, from the Yes music to the cutscenes, oozes class.

RATING



+ PLUSES

- Your cure for RTS jadedness
- Everything feels motivated
- Addictive as hell

- MINUSES

- Tons of micro-management
- Single player a bit too short
- Not enough to bitch about



At this point, I'd rather be salvaging.