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## Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath

*Kane is back once again*

How can one not love Kane? An egotistical maniac that has been with us since Biblical time (Nod is not an acronym, as is GDI, but rather a direct reference to the "Land of Nod", a place East of Eden where Cain was banished after murdering Abel; it also means "wandering" in Hebrew). A man that can lead legions of zealous followers into battle. A man that GDI has declared dead on at least two occasions only to see him rise up again and threaten the world. A man that can utter such powerful Stalin-like propaganda mantras like "Peace through power!" and "'No, I'm not God. But I'm a close second," while also planning for the worse that GDI can throw at him. A man that some call the Messiah while others just see as a brilliant and very dangerous borderline psychotic sociopath. Kane has become such a known videogame character in no small part due to the passion and flair with which Joseph "Joe" Kucan has embraced the role (not many people know that, until Command & Conquer 3, Kucan also directed all the FMV sequences). So it's a great thing to see that Electronic Arts have devoted the whole of the first expansion to C&C 3, aptly named Kane's Wrath, to an exploration of Kane's character. The writing might not be Dostoevsky, but it still makes for a great videogame experience. *We are LEGION* Brother Marcion, the usurper

**Story** The game has three rather distinct segments which deal with three very different situations that are related to Kane and his quest for Ascension. The bad news, for some, is that Kane's Wrath features no GDI or Scrin campaign. This game is all Kane, all the time, although the lovely Natasha Henstridge makes quite an interesting supporting character. The Nod focus allowed the developers to really dig deep in the factions' mythology and create some pretty engrossing scenarios while working into the single player campaign most of the new features of the game. The missions are not very tough but also not too easy and there are some nice secondary objectives that can be hard to nail. Also the intelligence database entries that have to be discovered within each mission make it essential to try and explore every corner of the map and fight each and every enemy unit. Without spoiling too much of the story, you're being set in the role of LEGION, a new evolved Nod AI designed to replace the crazy-yet-effective CABAL of Firestorm fame, and Kane sees you as crucial to his plans to harness the knowledge of the invading Scrin to make humanity execute an evolutionary leap. As a CABAL-derived entity, you have a special affinity to the Tacitus, which will prove both a blessing and a curse to the Brotherhood of Nod, you and Kane himself. Oh, and the first part of the trilogy features Kane wearing some very funky wargear head-piece that makes him look quite robotic and menacing. *Battle is engaged* Redeemer to the front

**Gameplay** Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath features the same high paced, intense gameplay as the original C&C 3 game. Initial base building is pretty quick and the first rushes have little chance of success. Each unit has strengths and weaknesses that must be exploited to built a balanced force and take out the enemy. The main additions here are the new subfactions for all the three major factions. This idea was first pioneered in the mainstream when Emperor: Battle for Dune was released in early 2001. Unlike in the Dune RTS, you don't have to fight to align yourself to a subfaction, as they are faction-specific and have a clear specific place in the game story. The GDI has the Steel Talons and the ZOCOM. The Steel Talons are a throwback to the Tiberian Sun and Firestorm era, with Titans and Wolverines making an appearance. They have a frontal firepower focus that makes them formidable in face-to-face combat and base assault, but they lack access to some of the special abilities that make GDI flexible on the battlefield. The ZOCOM, which stand for Zone Operations Command, are on the other hand the answer that GDI developed to the Brotherhood of Nod presence in the Red Zones.

Their infantry has a bigger chance of survival in Tiberium-infested space and they can mount quick strikes with very mobile equipment. Also watch out for their mobile sonic tank, which can dish out a copious amount of punishment for its size. The GDI also gets a more powerful Slingshot vehicle that's only good for anti-air work. On the Nod side, the Marked of Kane and the Black Hand emphasize different battlefield philosophies, too. The Black Hand focuses on its quasi religious fanatics and their Tiberium-based flame weapons to quickly deal with enemy infantry and buildings, while remaining largely vulnerable to enemy vehicles. The Marked of Kane are also infantry focused, but their infantry is more robotic, more effective against vehicle and can use Tiberium to their advantage. On the Scrin side things are more cut and dry. There's a Reaper sect, that focuses on firepower and has stronger tanks and shielded harvesters at the expense of the Scrin's very powerful air force. And then there's my favorite skirmish subfaction, the Travelers. They focus on mind control and misdirection to win games. And there's nothing more interesting to me than the Prodigy, which is basically an upgraded version of the Mastermind that can control multiple enemy units. Yuri, eat your heart out without touching it! Apart from the subfactions each of the sides gets a new uber-unit. The MARV for the GDI, a six legged walker for the Scrin, called the Eradicator Hexapod, and a powerful rage generating Redeemer for the Nod. These super vehicles can take a lot of punishment but aren't really war winners in themselves. In most skirmish games they won't get built because of the costs that are associated with them (a new top tier base building and the unit itself). However, they make a nice addition in the single player campaign, where their appearance really feels epic. Apart from the new units and subfactions Kane's Wrath brings a strategic layer to the Command & Conquer franchise for the first time. It's called Global Conquest and it's not as simple as the one in Warhammer 40,000: Soulstorm and not as detailed as the strategic layer in Medieval 2: Total War. It even defies, up to a point, comparison to these examples. The strategic map is basically Earth, with major population centers fired as cities and Tiberium spread out in the Red and Yellow zones. There are no regions and boundaries as in other strategic maps. Each side has bases on the map and can deploy tactical forces. Bases can be upgraded to field more powerful forces and tactical engagements are used to take out the enemy. The goal is to either win by eliminating the other two sides outright or by achieving alternate victory conditions. The GDI has to control at least a third of Earth's landmass, the Brotherhood of Nod must get 24 cities to rebel against GDI and the Scrin need to build 9 of their Tiberium based towers. The strategic game is not as simple as it seems at the first sight. Each side can get some global powers and there's a chronic lack of credits, at least in the first few rounds of play, that makes a truly strategic approach a true necessity. A hardcore gamer might want more content for the Global Conquest mode but, in my opinion, it's fine as it is, providing for an interesting challenge while not changing the true RTS feel of the Command & Conquer series. *MARV Tiberium green all around*

**Visuals and audio** As always, Command & Conquer looks and moves great. The unit graphics are slightly better than those in the original Command & Conquer 3 and the game runs smoother than ever, even if the screen is filled with units, plasma, lasers, bombs, and superpower effects. The epic units especially have nice details like the MARV appendices that get specific graphics depending on the garrison infantry unit and the shield effects on most of the Reaper-17 tanks. There's no *matinée* feeling here, as in the Red Alert series, but rather a polished looking future vibe. Of course, it's over the top but then again the future, and the future of war especially, must be a bit over the top. The music is alright without having the impact that the original Red Alert had upon my ears. I could blame this on me being a bit jaded after listening to games soundtracks. But even if not a star example of music in a RTS, the music and the sounds really do the job. The visual quality on the FMV is very good and you can see that the actors are really having fun. Even Brother Marcion, who gets a taste of Kane's revenge fairly soon in the game, puts in a decent performance and Natasha is always a pleasure to watch, especially in the sequence where she points a gun at Kane's head after fighting off a few guards. Joe Kucan is an embodiment of pure evil mixed with pure genius. Between the

video sequences and the background in the intelligence files, you can clearly see a man that, as Nietzsche said, "stared into the abyss" only to see that abyss imprinted in himself.

*Scrin Epic Unit: The Hexapod* *Global Conquest mode* **Multiplayer** Initial reports regarding multiplayer support are unreliable. Some players report good and stable connections to the Electronic Arts maintained servers while others say that match making is utterly broken and disconnects are the norm rather than the exception. Looking back at last year's Command & Conquer 3 launch, there were some initial problems with multiplayer as well but in a few days they were gone. With the Battlecast feature fully implemented and the addition of the subfactions multiplayer skirmishes should become a more diverse and fun affair, the only potential issue being that the players will all but abandon playing the mainstream GDI, Nod and Scrin sides in favor of adding diversity and tactical flexibility by using subfactions. We'll see how things shape up as the game gets into more hands and people start playing on-line more and more.

**Conclusion** There's a lot of content in Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath. This is an expansion but there's enough in there to keep you occupied for months. The single player campaign is 10 hours long at the most and there ain't any replayability in it, but the Global Conquest is challenging, especially at a strategic level and you can spend an easy 30 hours on just one pass. And there are enough skirmish maps to keep one occupied for months. The only thing that's not right is that the expansion doesn't provide any closure to the Command & Conquer 3 storyline. Whether the events at the end of the campaign are the Ascension that Kane talks off is pretty unclear. And there's also the little issue that the lovely GDI and the insidious Scrin didn't get any campaign attention. Of course, there's also the chance of another expansion to deal with that lack of love. Or Tiberium, the upcoming squad commanding shooter from Electronic Arts, could deal with the aftermath of Kane's Wrath. In the meantime I can only say one thing: "One Vision, One Purpose! Peace through Power!"