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[Galactic Civilization 2: Twilight of the Arnor](#)

More turn based space empire building

When a second expansion for a game is announced, it might be time to tell the developers they're pushing the limit of what's acceptable. Usually expansions mean more levels, same gameplay, more movies and less entertainment for the player. Well, that's certainly not the case with Twilight of the Arnor, the most recent expansion for the Galactic Civilizations 2 title from Stardock.

Galactic Civilization 2 can singlehandedly be credited for the revitalization of the 4X genre in space. It's true that the 4X flame, that spawned creatures like Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri or Master of Orion, was never endangered because of the long running and always successful Civilization franchise. But the space- and turn-based strategy games have long been plagued by bad design, feature creep (which means putting together a game so loaded with stuff to do that the fun is thrown out the window) and, ultimately, lead to a lack of interest from gamers.

Galactic Civilization 2 brought in a new perspective on the genre and several gameplay mechanics were changed from old classics like Civilization when it debuted in 2006. Even if the game did not contain a multiplayer mode, sporting only a Metaverse where players could post their highest scores, it was praised by critics for the way it created a complete experience that introduced new elements without breaking the 4X gameplay template.

Tech trees are now different

Game is looking better

The second and, quoting Stardock, "last" expansion for Galactic Civilization 2 is named Twilight of the Arnor. The single player will revolve around Terran forces finding the last member of the once powerful Arnor race in a bid to restore peace to a galaxy that was threatened by both the Dread Lords and the Korath clan of the Drengin. Usually the single player campaign challenge is well crafted and enjoyable, but real TBS players that enjoy the space setting will no doubt get Twilight of the Arnor for the sandbox mode and all the countless hours of turn-based bliss it can offer.

The range of choices is as big as that from Dark Avatar when creating a game. Smaller maps, up to medium galaxy size, make for-good one-on-one matches or three-way duels. The AI can be a really tough opponent on these smaller galactic battlefields. I'd go for a Gigantic or even a newly introduced Immense galaxy. Sure, it's gonna suck up time quicker than a black hole, but at least you can get nine computer opponents into the game and have a blast while trying to survive.

While launching the game don't forget to customize the points allocation for your race and the political party that's in charge at the beginning of the game. A war-like expansionist Krynn plays a whole lot different than a defensive and tech incline Krynn. And there's nothing more rewarding than making the poor Torians a more aggressive bunch than the Korath.

The main enhancement in Twilight can be seen as soon as you begin researching. Each civilization in the game has a different tech tree and, because of that, different planetary improvements and different weapons to be employed in time of conflict. The technologies and the planetary improvements are tailored to the backstory and unique characteristics of each civilization. The Drengin are gonna get a lot of mileage out of slaves and slave-related structures, while the cybernetic Yor get a lot of technologies that improve their economic efficiency and a structure that's half power plant. Trading with other civilizations can also net you their unique techs, but mostly they have little to no effect with another civilization. The AI is also apparently rattled when forced to give up faction specific tech and more than once it went to war after such trading.

A most interesting addition to the game are the Shards of the Precursors, ancient pieces of resource that can propel any of the younger civilizations to the level of the Arnor and of the Dread Lords. You can build starbases on top of the shards, as you can build starbases on top of all other resources and they slowly generate the points needed to make your civilization ascend. The problem is that once you go past the half way point in your pious road to Ascension pretty much every AI lead civilization wants a piece of you. So, either you're a great turtler and can take their assault while you become pure energy or you can pretty much conquer the galaxy by yourself by the time you take your existence to a whole new level.

Assisting every would-be ruler of the galaxy in his quest will be the new Terror Stars (I guess naming them Death Stars would have been too obvious, ha?) which are basically star killers. They move slowly and are pretty vulnerable to all enemy fleets, but they can destroy the star of a system and take out all the planets around it. Best used by the Korath while playing the Imperial March from Star Wars and doing your best Darth Vader "I am your father!" impression.

New techs coming your way
Nice empire

Other major improvements are under the hood. Galactic Civilization used to eat memory like I ate salty crackers while playing GalCiv 2. Now I'm on a damn diet and Stardock seems to have put the game on a diet, too. Even on Immense maps with all the civs loaded the game looks much better and runs much faster than a Gigantic map with four civilizations did in Dark Avatar. The performance improvement is mainly down to shred yet more detailed textures for the ships and pre-designed rather than fractal-based planet generation.

And if all the replayability and the customization aren't satisfactory enough for the hardcore gamers amongst us, Stardock will also be shipping a complete editor with the game. Users can design everything in that thing, from new planetary improvements and new weapons to new maps and new campaigns. All the products of the community's creativity can then be uploaded to the Internet. Don't forget, to share is to care.

All of the elements that made the original game great are still there. The player's economy is not divided into the two familiar separate spheres of production and trade. Instead, the production values on all planets were tied into the income system. If you don't have the currency to pay for a unit of production, then stuff would not get built. This concept made the game more challenging at purely economical level, forcing the player to never buff his industrial power more than his income allowed or risk getting a deficit which in turn could also affect people's loyalties to him as a ruler.

The single player AI is also extremely well crafted and capable. The "intelligent" setting provided no resource handicap to the AI or to the player, yet the AI opponents are quite capable of creating strategies and counter-strategies to most moves a human player could produce. Stardock has gone on to implement more advanced AI in patches and in the Dar Avatar expansion which hit in early 2007 and the AI in Twilight feels more capable than ever. Sometimes they launch massive assaults and sometimes they limit their war effort to quick hits and run raids. The diplomacy smarts of the AI are much improved, too, as they tend to offer much less in deals than in Dar Avatar.

The only complaint at the moment is that some of the text in the game is limited or missing, but that's probably going to be solved till the game launches. Also the technology victory seems to be a bit too easy to achieve, especially if you invest some points in research at the beginning of the game and then create a tight little empire with well developed defenses. Other than that, only a deep hatred of all things space-based or of all things turn-based can limit one's capacity to love Galactic Civilizations 2: Twilight of the Arnor.