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[UFO: Afterlight](#)

Boom! Boom! He's dead!

So the aliens invaded Earth - nothing new to this point. The human race has proved to be one of the most aggressive races in the Universe ever since we got the idea we may not be alone in the star dust (not to mention all the wars that went on among ourselves). The trick is that this once we lost and we had to accept a not so favorably peace treaty to avoid total annihilation. Actually in UFO: Aftermath you had to choose whether you accept your defeat or do your best of eliminating the Reticulan's threat (and loose lamentably if you don't hold a big enough fire power). Assuming you take the alien offer and leave the beautiful blue planet to serve as a research center for the skinny big headed creatures you head on a new adventure on the orbital station Laputa in the second title of the After-series, UFO: Aftershock. But that's not all you can do. Altar Games (formerly known as Altar Interactive) convinced the Reticulans to also offer humans the help to build up a station on the harsh Martian soil. This is where a new mission begins UFO: Afterlight. What we're facing exactly is a strategy game based on squad tactical combat and word development management. Although it is considered by some a TBS, I can assure you there's no "End Turn" button anywhere in the entire game. The only thing that may remind you of turns is the possibility of issuing orders while the game is paused - but that's what tactical strategies are all about, isn't it? More over, UFO:AL also includes RPG elements. You'll be able to customize all the characters involved on this heroic quest so that their skills suit best their activities. Put them through training and they'll gain features that will enhance their working abilities. Give them new equipment and you'll transform a weak party into a squad that actually stands a chance. Take care of your people and they'll take care of Mankind. **Story**By the same time your fellows were getting used to the conditions on Laputa (around the year 2050), you gather a small group of people and head to Mars. Since it was always been considered a sister planet of Earth, why not try to investigate it at least? Hence you get your very own crater to settle your base of operations and proceed on a new quest: use terraforming technologies to turn the Red Planet into your green and blue New Earth. Luckily the aliens were kind enough to provide you with the common facilities in your new home - a residential area, lab, technical and scientific bays, a solar power plant and a forging area. If all this benevolence seems a little bit fishy wait till you see what's in store for you in the new unknown environment. As you start researching and practically discovering the huge new world, you'll meet up with new races as well as keep in touch with your fellow humans (the situation doesn't look very bright for them either). You'll get started on claiming more and more territories of the Red Planet and as you develop new technologies and prove what you're worth here everybody seems to want to contact you. Not only one, but two human factions offer to share their informational database with you. Seems spooky again? Well, you'll learn that not everybody left Earth, that there's still a religious faction there. What's their story and most importantly what their plans are you'll just have to find out for yourself 'cause I'm not saying anymore. I'll try to be a little vague about it, because the whole story is actually rather captivating and it would be a shame to spoil your pleasure of unravel it yourself. Beside from keeping in touch with your new saviors, the Reticulans, you'll also be able to keep up to date with the events on Earth and the orbital station. There's also the mystery of the ancient Martian civilization. You'll be able to learn more about them from the archives. There are twists and turns all over and just when you think you finally understand, something else turns up. If you have too much spare time on your hands you can also read about the characters' individual stories or head on to the library to read the entire informational database. **Concept**The whole game is practically about sort of a science

project - transform an inhospitable planet to a blooming new home. It is obvious that you can't just get 5 million people, squeeze them into a dome and feed them... well not much actually 'cause you haven't terraformed the planet already, remember? So you head on the heroic mission with a handful of highly trained people. You have skilled scientists and technicians and of course a few soldiers to do all the "dirty" work. One of the new additions to the series is that your crew no longer concentrates on only one thing, everyone can have up to two specializations. As there are missions on which is advisable to bring along a scientist or a technician, you can rest assured the squad can now concentrate on eliminating the enemy rather than serve as a protective shield for the "nerd" of the party. The downside is that since the brainy is out shooting he (or she) can't really attend to the lab job or produce heavens-know-what intricate piece of machinery or at least learn a few new tricks. Well, turns out that people are the most important resource in UFO:AL. You'll need to carefully balance the tasks to assign everybody. At least for starters you won't be able to fully supply all the job openings, especially since some training is highly advisable. Each specialization has it's own features that can be trained. Of course soldiers will be interested in increasing their shooting, scouting and movement skills. That's not that easy though - these all depend on their characteristics: strength, agility, dexterity, willpower and intuition. With each level up you'll be able to raise one of these thus improving the skills it influences. Want even more from your people? Put them through training and they'll acquire feats that boost their abilities even more. Although you'll be quite safe from the usual resource micro-management, the people won't prove such an easy task. They need to be trained and sent to work in the different facilities available at base or they'll just rest in the residential area while things go nowhere on your brand new planet, so keep a close eye on their activities. And again that's not all you need to do. There are ten menus (eleven if you count the library that stores every data available to you to that point) and each of them hides plenty of other windows for a complete briefing along with task appointments.

Gameplay Tutorial and hints. Start with these! Trust me, there are so many things to do on Mars that even if you are a huge fan of the previous games in the series, you may experience some small problems at first. Check the Globe to see how the territory claiming goes - what's new on the world map, what new mines or plants can be built and where as well as the combat zones available. It shows of course a 3D representation of Mars with the cycle of day and night. Handy information boxes on all the available subjects are placed around the planet (you can just hide them if they annoy you in any way). The Base menu takes you to the pretty crater that now serves as home. Protected in domes lay most of your facilities, while the bigger structures were (or are to be) built on the external platforms. This is where you construct new things in the base and, if you learned your characters by their faces, you can even assign certain people to certain jobs. It is advisable though to do this from the People menu. As I was telling you, they are your most precious resource. Hence it's only obvious that they are granted with the most options. If the portraits are reddish, they are attending to some task outside the base - feel free to just wait till they come back. Well, the People menu is where you'll get all the information about your characters. You send them to training from here - actually you tell them what to learn and they'll automatically go to the appropriate facility. As there is a buildings overview included, it's common that you also use this menu to make sure people are attending to their jobs. You'll also be able to check on another new addition: drones, aliens and inactive people (usually dead - oh, sorry, cryogen-ised). Yes, you'll be able to have aliens on your team. And they turn up to be pretty useful. Of course they come with a different choice of features and skills. Their scientists will be of great help to the extraterrestrial technologies research, while their soldiers will spice up the combat map a little with their genuine Psi-vision and the powerful Psi-weapons. Squads are handled in their very own screen. The three squads don't have to be composed of different people - nothing further from the truth. A new squad formation will allow you to decide on a different type of equipment that will be of help to a certain type of mission. Just select the squad formation you want and off you go to battle. Each squad can hold up to

seven characters. Keep in mind that some missions advise you to take a scientist or a technician along, but their tasks don't usually require a very high level in this field, so a well trained soldier with a modest experience in another field will do just great. On the other hand, if you have a Rambo-unit (or you crave for more RPG-like action) bring it on - just, please, save before attempting a solo mission (strength also resides in numbers). The Equipment screen is where you decide what weapons and devices your squads should carry around. Remember that they need ammo for their big guns. Pack those up too. You start off with a decent supply of weapons and ammo, but as you progress through the game more powerful weaponry can be created. You obviously need to build them yourself (well, or ask from others but that another story). This is what the Production screen is all about. The technicians will see that all your requests are satisfied. Certainly they can only create what the scientists have already researched. So let's take a quick tour on the research panel. With each successful mission your soldiers can carry back to the base alien artifacts or even bodies. Using the appropriate facilities your team of scientists can get a little more knowledge about the strange new things. Shared database information can also uncover new technologies for them to look into. While the list of researchable mysteries is getting longer in no time, you should also keep in mind that some challenges may prove more difficult than others. That's why each technology is rated according to your scientists' level of understanding in trivial, simple, difficult and complex - affecting the time it takes for each task. Another most welcomed addition to the After-series is the Diplomacy panel. Here you can propose/accept/reject alliances with the other races or factions involved in the Mars conquest. You can even ask for help with resources, personnel or weaponry supplies. When you first meet, you're also able to share your informational database with others and evidently receive in return their knowledge. Well, everything requires time so don't expect to download the entire archive of a civilization on the spot - be patient for a few days (game days and nights, of course). Although there are plenty more things for you to discover about this strategy component of the game, I'd really like to share a few things about the tactical missions too. Problems? Get the squad in the UFO and head to the conflict zone. Here you have satisfying maps usually covered with enemies. The thing is your team needs to find them first using their scouting skills. In the beginning you'll be noticing some question marks walking around the map, but once their in your sight you can start shooting. Careful with the orders you issue as the soldiers will be a little unhappy when the enemy is outside their range yet you order them to shoot. Control them all as a squad (and they'll move at the speed of the slowest member) or give them specific individual tasks (although one on one combat with a beastman is not a very bright idea). You can successfully end a mission by both getting the job done and cowardly (kidding) returning back to the UFO or by annihilating all enemies. What's more the environment will be more or less harsh on your suits depending on whether the sun burns everything or the night comes to freeze the grounds. This also influences your enemies so if you consider yourself better equipped you may increase your chances by dropping by under more difficult conditions. Your most trusty friend through the game is the Spacebar that pauses/un-pauses the game. At first it may hinder you a little, but you'll get used to it in two or three hours of playing (and don't worry, you won't even notice time flying by). Every event in the world will pause the game for you to issue new orders (it's all work, work, work and no fun for your squad members - or they're in a big hurry to get back to the base). On the tactical map you'll be able to crouch, make use of the feats that allow you a more natural movement despite the heavy spacesuit or use the different firing modes that some weapons have. **Video**The game's interface evolved quite a bit from UFO:AS. The character portraits are now animated and raise up a little as that team member is selected. These are also surrounded by small icons that enable you to quick select different actions as well a box for the character's plans (your orders that is). The cartoonish style is still there, it just looks better than ever. Every panel comes with its own (agitated) specialist that will provide you with hints and suggestions on what you should or could do. The communication with other factions is also done through the small video

windows (3G all the way). Despite not being cut-of-the-edge, I found the visual aspect of the game most appealing. It serves the purpose wonderfully. With three layers for the tactical maps (and the ability to use the difference to your advantage), I'd say the game offers plenty for the acceptable system requirements. **Sound**The voice acting in UFO:AL goes pretty smooth. Each character has a unique voice as well as a personal selection of acknowledgement lines (personally I was fascinated by the granny-soldier Ute). Except for the proposals in the Diplomacy screen, there are no dialog boxes that come without voice acting on the side (oh, yeah - there's also the archive in the library, but to quote the librarian in charge "I sure hope somebody reads all this data"). There's also some background music, but voices are still the stars on this aspect of the game. **Multiplayer**Not yet. There was a proposal on how to implement it on the official forum, but nothing is settled just yet. **Conclusion**Complex research tree, custom made weapons (old Earth technology based weapons proved most efficient - I guess it's the Martian conditions), using the feats available no two characters will look alike, great voice acting, a captivating story and a great quest for the well being of humankind. This is what UFO: Afterlight promises. Your gameplay experience can only be hindered by the rather long loading times and maybe the often events that pause the game at every step (till you got used to them, anyway). The bottom line is that the game really got a hold of me. There are tons of things to do, things to build, technologies to research and it's only up to your imagination of the number of tactics to apply on the battlefield. Thumb's all the way up for the Czech development team of Altar Games. Now please excuse me, I still have an autopsy to attend to in my Martian Pathology Department. Oh, oh! Did I mention the irritating Mechwarriors? Neah! I'll let you discover them by yourselves. Just a clue - watch out!