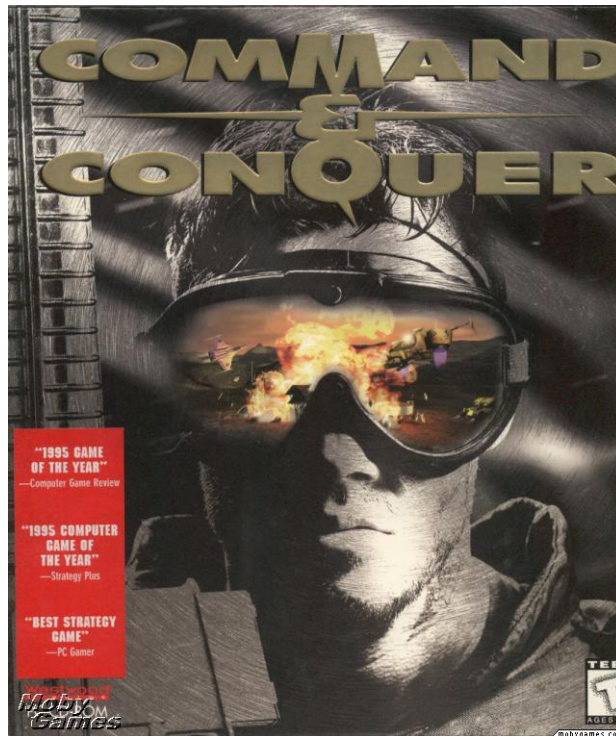# Command and Conquer

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Introduction

It was impossible to be a computer gamer in the mid-1990s and not be aware of *Command and Conquer*. During 1995 and the following couple years, *Command and Conquer* mania was at its peak, and the game spawned a whole series that sold over 15 million copies worldwide, making it "The best selling Computer Strategy Game Series of All Time" (Westwood Studios). Sales reached $450 million before *Command and Conquer: Tiberian Sun*, the third major title in the series, was released in 1999 (Romaine). The game introduced many to the genre of real-time strategy (RTS) games, in which *Starcraft*, *Warcraft*, *Age of Empires*, and *Total Annihilation* all fall.

Command and Conquer, however, was extremely similar to *Dune 2*, a 1992 release by Westwood Studios. The interface, controls, and "harvest, build, and destroy" style were all borrowed, with some minor improvements. Yet *Command and Conquer* was much more successful. The graphics were better and the plot was new, but the most important improvement was the integration of network play. This greatly increased the time spent playing the game and built up a community surrounding the game. These multiplayer capabilities made *Command and Conquer* different and more successful than previous RTS games.

History

In 1983, there was only one store in Las Vegas that sold Apple hardware and software in Las Vegas: Century 23. Louis Castle had just finished up majoring in fine arts and computer science at University of Nevada - Las Vegas and was working there as a salesman. Brett Sperry had also just finished his architecture and psychology degrees at Arizona State

Figure 1: Louis Castle (left) and Brett Sperry (right) with Westwood's early games. Source: Gamespot.

University. His first job after graduating was working for an educational software company in Las Vegas, frequenting Century 23 for his Apple computing needs. Over the next couple years the two developed a friendship.

In that time Brett began to do contract work designing games for Epyx software. But he had no printer of his own, so he would borrow Louis'. The first time he did the two began talking about their future. In the summer of 1985, they decided to start a company together, originally calling it Brelous Software. They quickly changed their name to Westwood Associates and later became Westwood Studios.

Their early games included mainly role-playing games (RPGs) such as *The Mars Saga* (1988) and *Eye of the Beholder* (1990). These games helped Westwood grow, as well as

Figure 2: *Eye of the Beholder*. Source: Gamespot.

providing technological and content inspiration for future games. Sperry commented that, "our game design and programming technologies evolved by quantum leaps thanks to *Eye [of the Beholder]*. Keep in mind this all led me to ponder how the real-time aspects could be applied to strategy games, which eventually led to *Dune II* and its brother *Command & Conquer*" (Mayer).

While *Command and Conquer* (*C&C*) was published for PC by Westwood Studios on August 31, 1995, the foundation for the game was laid in 1992 when *Dune 2* was released. Westwood developed *Dune 2* for Virgin Interactive Studios, and the game was based on Frank Herbert's <u>Dune</u> novels. Sperry, the *Dune 2* producer, explained their thinking: "How can we take this really small wargame category, bring in some fresh ideas, and make it a fun game that more gamers can play?" (Keighley). Previous wargames lacked "Something that took a theater of war and turned it into a fast paced game of frenzy", noted Ed Del Castillo, the producer of *C&C*.

Previous wargames "usually combined a map, playing pieces representing historical personages or military units and a set of rules telling you what you can or cannot do with them" (Dunnigan). Computer wargames converted all these elements into code and visual display, but, as Del Castillo explained, "A few crazy game makers weren't happy with wargames as they existed. …So they set about creating something faster. …A game where the player had to think on his feet like the generals of old, not pause the game and get a pizza while pondering his next move, like chess."

By 1992, personal computers were fast enough to handle a real-time wargame. The *Dune 2* team set out to make "A game that would make adrenaline fire and muscles twitch" (Del Castillo). The interface was simple enough to manage quickly, and the attacks could become fast and furious. Some traditional wargamers frowned upon this new approach, claiming "RTS gave a very inaccurate sense of how things were done at the operational and strategic level. This particular issue irritated a lot of history minded wargamers." (Dunnigan) But many other gamers loved the idea, and *Dune* 2 sold well.

There were a few other earlier RTS games. Strategic Simulations, Inc. (SSI) published *Battalion Commander* in 1985, a "Real-time modern tactical combat simulation" (box), was one of the first real-time computer wargames. *Herzog Zwei*, released for Sega Genesis in 1989, is arguably the first RTS game (Erickson,

Figure 3: *Herzog Zwei*, considered by many the first RTS. Source: Gamespot.

Geryk). Neither of these games was very successful, and Del Castillo aptly noted that "some say *Herzog Zwei* was the first, others say *Siege,* but either way, it was *Dune 2* that put Real-Time Strategy on the map."

Development

While developing *Dune 2*, Sperry and his team had already begun thinking about a follow-up: "Halfway through *Dune 2* we knew there was a lot we weren't going to have time to fit into the game, so we put all those ideas into *Command & Conquer*." (Romaine) The concept for the game came from Sperry, Joe Bostic - a main designer and programmer for *Dune 2*, and Eydie Laramore. The three years after 1992 were spent developing a story-line and improving on their *Dune 2* model. Talking about the differences in developing *C&C*, Sperry noted that, "*Dune 2* was all about taking on the challenge of combining [wargaming and realtime control] together. So the mechanic of *C&C* was really an extension of *Dune 2* - making it more accessible" (Keighley).

Other key players in the game design included lead designer Eric Yeo and producer Ed Del Castillo. Yeo continued on to help design *C&C: Red Alert* and *C&C: Tiberian Sun*, as well

as being name one of the top 25 "Gaming Gods" in 1999 (Romaine). Del Castillo also produced *C&C: Red Alert* and recently founded his own company, Liquid Entertainment. The highly acclaimed soundtrack was created by *Dune 2* veteran Fred Klepacki, who went on to create the soundtracks for the rest of the *C&C* games.

   C&C was released in August 31, 1995 and was an immediate success. Within a couple weeks the game was 2nd on the unofficial Internet top 100 games (Chown) and the game sold over one million units in less than a year (Westwood Studios). It came on two CDs and ran in DOS on a 486/33 MHz computer with 8 Mb of RAM. By the end of 1995, Intel's Pentium was becoming cheaper and cheaper, making the game was accessible to many users. In its first year, *C&C* received numerous awards, including Computer Game of the Year by the European Computer Trade Show, "Game of the Year" by <u>Computer Games-Strategy Plus</u>, an Editor's Choice Award from <u>PC Gamer</u>, and Strategy Game of the Year from <u>Computer Gaming World</u> (Westwood Studios).

Story

   In the *C&C* series, Albert Einstein traveled back in time to 1924 and killed Hitler, creating a "Red Alert Universe" where the Soviets became the prime enemy. *C&C* is set in the present when the Brotherhood of Nod (NOD) and the Global Defense Initiative (GDI) are battling for world control. In describing their differences, one reviewer said, "the NOD team is the devious, sneaky, no-good, third-world gonna-take-over-the-universe type. The GDI team is the fine, organized, sharp-looking, freedom-fighter, defend-the-earth-against-all-evil type" (Schrank).

   NOD, led by the evil Kane, begins to obtain wealth by harvesting a valuable mineral collecting substance called Tiberium. It arrived on a meteor in 1995 and quickly spread throughout the world. The fighting begins with NOD terrorist attacks against G8 nations and fighting breaks out with GDI in Europe and Africa. NOD uses propaganda and develops a nuclear missile, but GDI is eventually triumphant by using their powerful Ion Cannon to destroy the Temple of Nod, the Brotherhood's top secret research facility. Sperry said, "*C&C* is really about me simplifying the geopolitical situation of today's world and projecting … a little bit into the future" (Keighley). The storyline created is more like a fantasy RPG than the wargames of

the past, and was quite popular. One reviewer said, "the plot is interesting enough that I would buy *C&C2* just to see where things are going to end up." (Cirulis 355)

The sides were different enough to keep things interesting while remaining fairly equal. "Westwood did a good job at balancing the sides", with most gamers choosing the side that best matches their attack style (Schrank). Another reviewer thought that, "the multiplayer aspect was (still is) amazingly well balanced between GDI and NOD. Two armies composed of very different units, yet at no point can I honestly admit either side had an advantage in any way" (Rebel Programmers Network). In addition to flexibility of choice, the balance also required users to be ready to face either GDI or NOD and know the strengths and weaknesses of each side.

Dune 2 also has the "good" guys, House Atreides, and the "bad" guys, House Harkonnen, as well as a third side, House Ordos, a house surprisingly not present in Frank Herbert's novels. While the three houses were well balanced, they were also very similar: "This balance [between GDI and NOD] was found in *Dune 2*, but the difference in the sides between GDI and NOD was far greater than the differences between the three houses in *Dune 2*" (Rebel Programmers Network). These differences added flexibility to the game that increased interest and replay value, especially in multiplayer games.

Gameplay

Most of the gameplay features were borrowed from *Dune 2*. "The basic premise of the game is nearly the same: harvest, build up your base, destroy the enemy" (Rebel Programmers Network). Chown wrote, "If you've played *Dune 2* you'll be very familiar with the control system used in *C&C*." The layout of the screen in *C&C* in figure 5 is very similar to *Dune 2*

Figure 4: *Dune 2* in-game screen shot. Source: Gamespot.

Figure 5: *Command and Conquer* in-game screen shot. Source: Planet Command and Conquer.

(figure 4), with better graphics and some minor changes. "Control in *C&C* is very simple. To select a unit or building you just click on it. You can select as many units as you like to give orders to" (Chown). Westwood added features to the controls from *Dune* 2 such as the ability to select multiple units at once and larger maps, but the basic feel is the same.

To play cash must be obtained by harvesting Tiberium, building a base, and then destroying your enemy. In single-player mode, the player chooses GDI or NOD, with each path unique and reflecting their different styles. "The two CDs contain nearly a hundred hours of missions for the average gamer" (Cirulis 353). Between the single-player missions, in which the player usually has to destroy an enemy base or certain enemy structure/unit, actors are shown debriefing the coming mission or summarizing the previous mission. *C&C* was one of the first games to successfully incorporate these scenes using Full-Motion Video (Waggoner and York). The two CDs included over 40 minutes and one reviewer raved, "Westwood did a great job with storyline and cut-scenes in *Command & Conquer*, which (for me) made this game one of the best ever" (Schrank).

Figure 6: *C&C* cut-scene of NOD leader, Kane. Source: Planet Command and Conquer.

Multiplayer

While *C&C* made improvements on *Dune 2*, it was the multiplayer feature that made *C&C* a huge success. One early reviewer thought that, "while *Command and Conquer* reaches some great high points, it remains mainly a good, networkable version of *Dune 2*" (Cirulis 352). The multiplayer feature added almost unlimited replay value, allowing gamers to battle against other human players and/or computer players over modem, network, or the internet. "A typical [multiplayer] game will run for about an hour and time will just fly by" (Schrank) and in the next release, *C&C: Red Alert*, games could last up to 6 or 7 hours (Tsoi). With the two CDs, gamers could also lend to one to a friend and play. Personally, my addiction began when a friend lent me a CD and we began playing against each other.

Part of what made the multiplayer feature successful was timing. At the time there were approximately 10-20 million internet users in the United States and that number was growing

exponentially (Gromov). Yahoo and Netscape were founded the year before; The Microsoft Network, RealAudio, AltaVista and Amazon.com all appeared in 1995. It was the beginning of the internet revolution, 28.8 kbps modems were becoming the standard, and Westwood was taking advantage. Modems had also become fast enough and popular enough, and Westwood Chat only required a 14.4 kbps modem. "The interface is easy, and modem gameplay is smooth and seamless on anything better than a 486 50. I played a friend who had a 486SX 25 and that was dog-slow, but who has those anymore?" (Schrank)

On November 10, 1995, Westwood launched Westwood Chat (later renamed Westwood Online), an online community for *C&C* players to meet and set up games. Internet gameplay was not integrated into the game until *C&C: Red Alert* was released in November 1996. Prior to that, gamers could still use the chat to meet each other, talk about the game, and set up modem games. Once internet play was integrated, online games were extremely popular, and by January 1997 Westwood Chat had hosted more than 300,000 *C&C: Red Alert* games - a rate of more than 3000 games per day (Westwood Studios).

Other networks also offered multiplayer *C&C* capability. A popular dial-in gaming network called TEN added C&C to its games in September 1996. TEN was a subscription based service with a monthly fee, hosting a limited number of games. The games required code modifications to integrate into their service, and *C&C*s multiplayer capabilities made it an easy and profitable addition for TEN. By March 1997, TEN had 26,000 subscribers (Eng). Any other local area network, such as those at colleges or corporations, also supported multiplayer games.

Reviews of *C&C* raved about the multiplayer features, many citing it as the best part of the game. Chown wrote that network play is "a rather awesome experience, and probably the most fun part of *C&C*, if you have the hardware available. While *C&C* is still a challenging and enjoyable game playing through the missions, the immense satisfaction of hearing the guy sat opposite squealing as you nuke his construction centre is second to none." Schrank exclaimed his joy at begin able to kill his friends: "Call your friends and blow them off the face of the earth! That's just what I did, and that's where *C&C* shines the most. It's a whole different game when suddenly you don't know what the other player is going to do. My friends and I have played over the modem one-on-one or over a network with four of us at once; both ways are fun." The only exception was the Cirulis review that hardly mentioned the feature, although <u>Computer Gaming World</u> published a short article on *C&*C net play in September 1996.

Community and Game-Space

In addition to the excitement of blowing up your best friend or new friend/enemy, Westwood Chat helped to develop community. The original chat-room brought players together, and other gaming networks such as TEN and Kali created other communities. The community kept growing as the series became more popular, with many fansites, tournaments, and Battle Clans becoming established.

In his talk, Will Wright emphasized the importance of this community. In particular, he noted that, over time, the gameplay itself becomes less important and the community becomes more important. For *C&C*, there is a similar trend: at first the player will probably play the single-player missions to learn the game and hone their skills. They then want to try and prove their newfound skills against other players and begin to become involved in the online gaming

community. As time continues, they rarely play on their own as they become part of the community and spend all their time in multiplayer games. The feature added significant replay value and allowed the game to become a social phenomenon. This phenomenon built up a huge base of fans that caused the following releases to sell extremely fast.
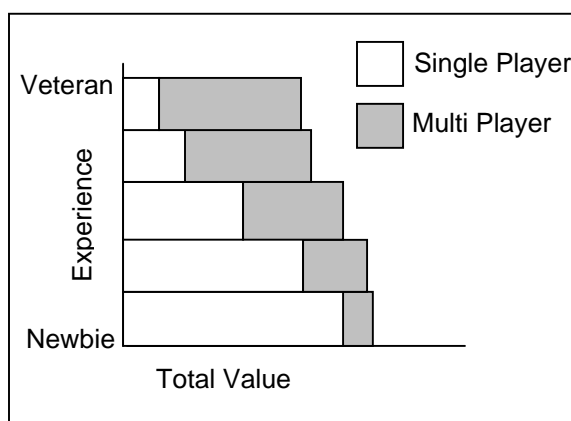
Figure 7: Value of the different modes of *C&C* for gamers. Idea borrowed from Will Wright.

Wright also expressed his desire to make games very exploratory and non-linear, offering players more creativity in the way to play the game. Many reviews complained that the single-player missions are a too linear, a problem that existed in *Dune 2* as well. The developers tried to make up for this by including many different scenarios, but it was the multiplayer mode that created the largest game-space. There was no one best way to win against a variety of opponents, each of whom could have their own strategies. These include a variety of attacks, such as tank rushes, APCs full of engineers, harvester attacking, and racing to create an Ion Cannon (GDI) or Nuclear Missile (NOD). The balance between the two sides also helped expand the game-space.

Epilogue

Within a year after *C&C* was released, *C&C: Red Alert* became the fastest selling computer game of all time, selling 1.5 million copies in the first six weeks after the November 22, 1996 release. By 1997, *C&C Gold* - the SVGA version for Windows 95 - was released, as well as the *C&C: Counterstrike* expansion pack and *C&C: Red Alert* for Playstation. In June of that year, sales of the *C&C* series reached 5 million. *Dune 2000*, a sequel to *Dune 2*, was released in 1998 and *C&C: Tiberian Sun* in 1999. Versions of *C&C* for Nintendo 64 and *Dune 2000* for Playstation were also released in 1999. *C&C: Red Alert 2* came out in 2000 and *C&C: Renegade*, a first person shooter based in the *C&C* environment, was just released on February 26, 2002. Screenshots and concepts for *C&C: Generals*, the first 3D RTS of the series, were also just released. While some have criticized other games in the series for not being innovative or original, the innovation of *C&C* is still recognized, and the game is found most top games lists.

Conclusion

Command and Conquer was more successful than *Dune 2* for a variety of reasons, the most important being multiplayer capabilities. Westwood made improvements in graphics, interface, and gameplay, as well as including more diverse yet balanced sides and high-quality cut-scenes. There were many hours of single-player missions, but the multiplayer mode added a significant replay value. In addition, the launch of Westwood Chat along with the option for network and modem gameplay created a larger community surrounding the game. These features, in addition to the accessibility of the game, made *C&C* extremely successful, and following *C&C* titles were even more successful. More games in the series are still being released today, and *C&C* helped bring the real-time strategy genre to the forefront of computer gaming.

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