

Cavedog Entertainment's Total Annihilation FAQ

GENERAL QUESTIONS AND TOP FEATURES:

Total Annihilation is a strategy war-game developed and published by Cavedog Entertainment. To find out the details about Total Annihilation (abbreviated TA), read this FAQ and check out the TA webpage at: <http://www.cavedog.com/ta>

When is the game going to be released?

It should be in stores in early October 1997.

How much will it cost?

Around \$49.

Are the units true 3D, or are they just hundreds of bitmaps?

All the units in the game are true 3D. Each one is rendered in run-time and can exist in virtually an unlimited number of angles and positions. In addition to that, most units have articulating parts, such as turrets, doors and wings that all move in true 3D. If we had to make bitmaps of all the possible angles and permutations of each unit the only computer with enough RAM to run the game would be at the CIA. (Of course with the price the government pays for most things we could have made more money selling them than one copy).

What makes TA different from the other real time strategy games?

There are a bunch of innovations and new features that we have put into TA but the biggest difference is that we have true 3D models for both the units and the terrain. So when a tank goes up a hill it really tilts and you see it from different angles. When a unit fires a heavy gun, the whole vehicle will rock. Turrets can move separately from the rest of the vehicle, hatches can open and units will unfold and change before your eyes.

Cool! I heard from a friend at E3 that the tanks shake when they are hit!

Yep. In addition, the whole tank recoils when it fires a shell.

What else is different?

This is not just one game. It is a game system that will be growing and evolving for a long time. We will be building new units, and people can download them from our web site. We hope to have a new unit every week that you can put into the game and try out.

Is your web page the only place to get these new units?

Units will be available from the website and in add-on packs that you can buy.

Why do so many games come out at the end of the summer?

One word: Holidays. Most companies plan for the games to come out in June, but then they slip until September.

Are the sounds in the unit viewer and the animated screen shots final?

No, some of the sounds you hear in the unit viewer and animated screens are temporary. Our sound designers are just now dropping the final sounds into the game. In addition to the sounds, some of the graphics are also not finalized. Someone noticed that there is no shadow of the tank being carried by the air transport. This is true and is not an oversight, just a feature yet to be in. Same goes for the “yellow balls” that the tanks shoot.

Is there going to be any cool music?

There is an extremely powerful score that has been composed just for TA and we are very impressed with it. As well as having a very rich sound, it will adapt itself to interact with the pace of the game.

THE PEOPLE

Who are you?

Chris Taylor is the designer and project lead of TA and Ron Gilbert is the Producer as well as the founder of Cavedog Entertainment.

How long have you been working on the game?

We began in January 1996.

Have you guys done anything else?

But of course! Chris is best known for his baseball games, ‘Hardball II’ and ‘Triple Play Baseball’, not to forget ‘4D Boxing’. Ron designed ‘Maniac Mansion’ and ‘Monkey Island 1 & 2’ plus numerous other games while at LucasArts.

Why build TA?

We really liked playing real-time strategy games and wanted to take the experience to the next level.

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

What are the minimum requirements to run TA?

Total Annihilation is going to require a Pentium 100 with 16M of RAM. You can probably get away with playing the missions on a P75 but huge multiplayer games will bog your machine. We do have a feature where you can tell a multiplayer game to limit the number of units that can be built, which should make it playable on some slower machines. This feature also adds a very interesting strategy to the game. Try playing with a limit of 5 units/side! The game becomes much more strategic and you really have to think!!! We would not suggest playing with less than a P90. Also included with the game are some very large multiplayer maps that require 32M of RAM.

You will also need:

a Double Speed CD-ROM,
Windows '95,
DirectX compatible machine with the drivers (included on our disk) installed,
SVGA Video card,
Mouse and Sound card.

Are you going to be supporting 3D cards?

Not right away. If a game has huge polygons filling most of the screen, then these cards can make the game run faster. With a few (and very expensive) exceptions, 3D cards do not do all of the 3D related work that needs to be done, especially the geometry. Most of the processor time in Total Annihilation is spent calculating the 3D geometry and doing the unit AI. A 3D card won't help buy more than a few percent and some of the cheaper cards will actually slow the game down. Since it's too early to make a game that runs only on 3D cards, we had to optimize the 3D routines to run as fast as they could. Our 3D programmers are the best around and the code flies! Cavedog Entertainment is committed to ongoing support for Total Annihilation and in addition to new units, maps and missions, we will be posting new executables that may include 3D hardware support.

Will TA support on-line gaming services such as Ten, Kali or MPlayer?

Yes, but we don't know which ones yet.

If I have a slower Pentium, but extra RAM, will I be able to play?

Extra RAM is always a welcome addition but if you want a great game experience you should play on a P100 or better.

Will TA run on NT 4.0 and up?

We are not currently supporting NT, but don't expect it to stay this way.

Will TA take advantage of MMX?

We do a lot of code optimization in the final phase of the product and at this point MMX looks like it will be part of that... but if it doesn't go in we will likely do this in one of the updates that we make available on our website.

THE TWO SIDES AND BALANCING THEM

Where did you guys come up with the names Arm and Core?

The name for the Arm comes from the fact that they occupied an 'arm' of the galaxy that was far away from the Core home world.

Will there be night scenarios?

No.

Will there be any underground areas?

No. But a tunnel mission was planned for one of the expansions. We will have to see what happens.

Will the Arm and the Core really have more than 50 units each?

It now looks like they will have more than 75 units each.

Will the Arm and Core have the same types of units like Warcraft?

Each unit has its own 3D model and performance characteristics.

How do you hope to keep 150 units balanced?

We have developed a special system for balancing our units and so far have found this to be very successful.

Will the Core and the Arm be equal, or will one have a huge advantage over the other?

We have balanced the two sides while still providing a variety of units.

GAME UNITS

Will you be able to download new units that can be used in the game, or are the units on the website just for the unit viewer?

You will be able to download new units from the Cavedog Entertainment website that can actually be used in multiplayer games (what a concept!). All the units currently on the website are included in the game when you buy it. When the game is released, those will be removed from the site (or moved to a different place) and only new units will be offered.

What types of units are available?

Well, first of all there are buildings that allow you to build mobile units. Second, there are 'construction vehicles' for land, sea and air, which allow you to build fortifications and other larger buildings. Last of all, we have military units for the land, sea and air.

Are units upgradeable, like in Warcraft?

When a unit has 5 or more kills it becomes a veteran and this improves the performance of the unit depending on what the unit does, for example, when tanks reach this level they can fire on moving targets more accurately.

Will any of the units have hiding abilities?

Yes, deception is so much a part of warfare that we have three ways of hiding your units. First, units can hide underwater where only enemy SONAR can find them. Second, units can be 'stealthy' so they don't show up on radar displays. Lastly, units can be 'cloaked' which makes them invisible to the enemy unless the enemy is right on top of the cloaked unit. Of course, small units can get behind a tree and simply be overlooked.

What is the deal with air units? Can air units fight air units?

Not only can our air units fight ground, sea and air units, but there are ground and sea units specifically designed to shoot down aircraft. Our aircraft are equally specialized-- the fighters are good at shooting up bombers and fighters, while the gunships are poor air- to-air fighters but excellent at shooting up ground targets.

Will the number of land sea and air units be balanced?

Not counting buildings and fortifications, we will have about 55% ground units and 45% sea and air units. But what they lack in numbers they make up for in strategic importance.

Will the shells stay little yellow dots in the full version of the game?

No those are temporary art.

What is the most powerful ground unit?

That would have to be the Commander. The Commander can destroy anything in the game.

When you build multiple factories, does that allow you to build multiple units, or does it just make production faster?

Multiple factories all work independently so you can be building a Bulldog tank in one, while another is churning out Stumpies.

What are those little people looking thingies I see in the screen shots?

KBOTs - Kinetic Bio Organic Technology units.

Are there straight infantry units?

No. All of the KBOTs in the initial release, are nano-tech constructed robots.

MAPS AND EDITORS

Will there be a unit editor?

No. Our units are VERY complex and no reasonable editor could be made both inexpensive and easy to use. However, you can send your unit ideas to us and who knows, we might build the unit for you! (How to get in touch with us is at the bottom of this document.)

Will there be a map editor? A scenario editor?

Yes our map editor is currently being revised, but it will not be ready for the initial release. You will be able to edit the same scenario files as we do, so you will have full flexibility to make all of the mission and campaign choices that we do here.

How large can a map be?

This depends on how complicated the map is and how much RAM memory (not hard drive space) your computer has. If you have a minimum RAM capacity of 16 Megabytes then normal maps that are 6X6 screens can be built. If your system has 32 Megs or 64 Megs of RAM, then really huge maps that are hundreds or thousands of screens square can be made.

Can you rotate the map to look at it from different angles?

No, the map data is stored in memory so it can only be seen from one direction only.

I have heard people mention wind. How does the wind affect the game?

In two ways. First, planets with high winds and dense atmospheres are much better to put wind generators on. Second, if a planet has trees and they catch fire, the fire will preferentially spread down wind. Since all units slowly take damage in a forest fire, if you time your pyrotechnics well you can roast your opponent. Both windmills and the way puffs of smoke drift show the direction of the wind.

How does the terrain effect the units?

In many ways. First of all, you have to be sure you have a good shot. If you're trying to shoot up to the top of a plateau you might not be able to reach with a line of sight weapon like a laser. Your best bet is to lob shells up there. And even in that case you can't be right under the lip of the ledge. Holding high ground is the best choice. Some units are only good on fairly flat land, while others love to climb steep hills. Units also slow down when climbing hills or fording rivers and can become easier targets. Each unit has a true size and smaller units are better to creep through tight valleys or small openings.

Since you have 3D terrain, will getting on a high point increase my range?

Yes. We use a true physics model to calculate the flight paths of the shells, so being on high ground will increase the range the projectiles can travel.

Will we see any trees? What do trees do?

Yes, some worlds will have trees and forests. Trees are very useful because they can be harvested for the bio-mass energy they contain; they may block shots that are being fired at you; and they can hide units. Best of all you can burn 'em down for fun.

Can we blow up trees?

You bet. They can be burnt, blown to fragments, or harvested,

GAME PLAY

What is the economy? What resources are you trying to find and how do you get them?

The two resources in the game are metal and energy. Metal is mined from the ground, taken from rocks or reclaimed from damaged or destroyed vehicles and buildings. If you want you can reclaim metal from any unit you have-- even if it is 100% healthy. Energy is generated from solar collectors, geothermal plants, wind generators, tidal generators, fusion reactors or taken from trees and other organic matter on a planet surface. Once you drop down a metal extractor or build an energy generator, you get a steady supply of metal or energy. There is also a way to convert energy into metal using the Metal Maker. It's not the most efficient way to do it, but it works in a pinch. The Commander has the ability to generate a small amount of energy and metal. You can lose your whole base, sneak away and start rebuilding. It was important to us that the player could never get into a situation where they couldn't boot-strap themselves back up to super status.

How are the energy and metal used in the game?

Every unit requires a certain amount of energy and metal to build. As the unit is being built, it slowly uses these resources. With the exception of some of the high powered base defenses,

once the unit is built it doesn't use any more energy. The exceptions to this rule are the big laser towers, long range cannons and the Commander's disintegrator gun (plus a few others). These can use enormous amounts of energy and a fusion plant should probably be built to provide this energy.

Is there going to be Resource Management in TA?

We won't force people to constantly manage how and where they are collecting their metal and energy. Basically, the players set up their mines and power generators and forget about them until you need more, or some are destroyed.

I've heard that I'll be able to tell a factory to build a whole bunch of units at once?

Yes, you can tell one of your buildings to build as many units as you want and the orders are just queued up and the units will be built. This means that you can start a factory building something, go off and fight a battle and when you get back you have a new army built for you.

What can we look for in User Defined unit AI?

You can tell your units to hold their fire, return fire or fire at will (holding fire is good if you are trying to capture units intact). You can tell units how actively they are supposed to move about when the enemy approaches.

What kind of control will I have over land, sea and air units?

You have full control over all the units in the game. For example, you can select aircraft right out of the air and tell them to go and attack whatever you want.

Does Total Annihilation have true line of sight?

Total Annihilation has several different modes for line of sight (or fog of war as some call it). You can play with 1) The whole map visible, including all units. 2) The map unexplored, leaving a trail of visible area as you move, just like C&C. 3) Leave a trail of explored map, but unable to see units outside of your vision just like Warcraft II. 4) The whole map explored, but still can't see other units outside your vision. 5) In addition to these modes, you can select true line of sight, meaning you can't see over hills.

Does TA have movement modification (Terrain can slow some units down, certain units can't move inhospitable terrain, etc.)?

Yes, some units are slowed more on rough ground than others, and almost all units are unable to climb vertical cliffs, except the Spider Tanks. Trees are a type of "terrain," and can block incoming shells, which improves the unit's defense significantly.

How is a Multiplayer game set up?

First you enter the Battleroom and you configure all of the options of the game. When everyone has given the OK the game starts.

What about Cheats?

We have left the choice up to you. There is an option that you can select for multiplayer games that turns the cheat codes on and off. So once you have decided not to cheat, there is absolutely no way that anyone can cheat.

Do you have to build your base with each building touching the other?

No. Buildings and base defense are built by construction vehicles or the Commander. There are structures such as the energy storage buildings and fusion plants, that you should build away from other buildings because if they get hit by enemy fire they can destroy a whole screen worth of your base.

What kind of interface will the game have?

We have two selectable interfaces based on what people have gotten used to while playing other games (we call them the left mouse and right mouse button interface). The odds are that you can play our game with the same mouse clicking habits you are already comfortable with. We have also included hot keys to access menus and other things quickly.

With hundreds of unit types, how do you control them all; what is the density of units on the screen?

There are many different ways to control large numbers of units. You can click on each one independently or you can create squads. You can also create groups by clicking and dragging on a whole bunch and then give them a command. You can also use the mini-map area in the upper left hand corner of the screen to give orders.

NETWORK AND MULTIPLAYER GAMES**How many people will be able to play TA at once?**

We currently have a limit of 10 people over a Local Area Network or 4 on the internet with a minimum 28.8 modem.

Will you guys have an Internet Interface like Westwood chat?

We are working on making the game as easy to use as possible.

Can I ally with my friends?

Absolutely-- and you can break that alliance anytime in the game.

Can you share resources, units and information with your allies?

Yes, yes and yes. You can give metal and/or energy to any player in the game. You can also give other players your units and even mapping information. And best of all, it's not limited to players on your side-- you can give your stuff to the enemy. It's a great way to help out a beginning player or can even be used as the ultimate insult (Hey, take all my stuff, you still can't win!).

One hundred and fifty units are a lot. Do we have to play with all of them in multiplayer games or can we disable some?

The player who sets up the game can exclude any units that they don't want to play with, even the ones that are included in the game. We also have an advanced option which sets the maximum number that can be built of a particular unit. You can also specify the total number of units that each said can have at one time.

How will the multiplayer be handled? Two CD's like C&C or spawning like WC, or must everyone buy their own game?

We allow up to 3 people to play off of one purchase of TA on a LAN, 6 with the second copy and up to 10 with a third copy of the game.

TALKING TO US & OUR WEB PAGE

Our Web address is: **<http://www.cavedog.com/ta>**

When is the Cavedog Entertainment website updated?

It is updated every Thursday night with new units, single screen shots and animated screen shots from the game.

Will there be a beta test program?

We don't know yet. Please **DO NOT** Email us about the beta test, if we decide to do one information about signing up will be posted on our web site.

Will there be a demo version?

The good news is yes. The bad news is not until after the game ships. The good news is the game is only a few months away (really). We talked about doing a demo before the game released, but opted to get the game out sooner and not have the demo.

Well, that's it for now. Thanks for reading through this list of questions and answers, but if there is still something you don't understand drop us an *e-mail* and ask.