

Age of Empires III

I have been an avid fan of the Age of Empires franchise. I have played just about all the previous versions. It has been a while since I played the game so I used the tutorial to refresh my memory. I have noticed some new features in this version over previous ones. Some I like but also had trouble with. Here is a synopsis of the game as listed on www.bestbuy.com “**Age of Empires III** recreates the excitement of the age of exploration and conquest, from roughly 1500 to 1850. As a European power from England, France or Spain, you will explore and conquer North and South America. Engage in epic battles with realistic effects and period weapons. Explore colonial-era elements and form potential alliances with Native Americans. Build a Home City back in Europe and utilize its growing wealth to fuel your conquests. It's a fantastic way to combine history, strategy and the discovery of diverse cultures. Set out for the New World.”

First let's talk about the graphics upgrade that was done on this version. It really takes advantage of the newer 3D technology. This game is designed for direct x 9 and needs a video card with hardware transformation and lighting to play. It plays well on my notebook. The notebook doesn't have hardware T&L but it seemed powerful enough to get the job done. I do however recommend that you use a video card with hardware T&L. I found that most of the equipment that I own did not have a powerful enough video card or cpu to handle the game. Most of my machines are about 5 years old so if you have a newer machine in the last couple of years should run the game just fine. Even the clubs laptop which seemed powerful enough at first to play the game was unable to keep up in heavy battle sequences. The machine crawled to a halt and was choppy with the video. So make sure you machine can handle the game before you purchase it.

Now let's take a look at the game play. I found the game play to be similar to what I was used too. The biggest problem I found was that it doesn't play very well with a touch pad. I hooked up a wireless mouse. This made for much better game play but you need to watch the sensitivity. Mine was set rather high so it made movement a little cumbersome. Once I got the movement under control the game played quite well. The basic concept of play is that the game is designed as a strategy war game. Your objective is to build a civilization and defend it. The game can either be played as a single player or as a multiplayer game. Each scenario in the single player game has different objectives. You are given different characters in each scenario with different abilities. Some are town's people that are in charge of gathering resources while others are soldiers that are in charge of defending the civilization. In some scenarios you have the ability to build buildings and advance your civilization. This advancement allows you to build stronger soldiers with advanced abilities. Resources are the key to a strong civilization. You must manage your resources as well, as your troops depend on it. The game is played on land and sometimes on sea. You are given the ability to build ships when the scenario allows for it. You can also build forts and towers to defend the fort. The computer is fairly smart. I played the game on the moderate level and found it to be somewhat of a challenge. I recommend that new user try out the beginner level. I think

if I continue to play the game I will move to the expert level as my skill level is quite high.

One of the features of Age of Empires III that I found to be useful as well as a hindrance is the ability to go back to the mother city and get things sent in. This is good in the fact that when you are in a pinch you can get help sent in. There are limits to this as you can only send certain things at certain times. The reason I found this to be a hindrance is that it is difficult in the heat of battle to remember that you can get help for the home city. I not familiar with the home city feature as it was not in pervious versions of Age of Empires, so it took some getting used too. Depending on the scenario you are in will determine if the option is available. Some scenarios have an automatic re-supply and in between later scenarios you get to make changes and upgrades to the home city. This gives you the ability to send more supplies or troops as needed.

The graphics are gorgeous. The audio is very clear and crisp. The cinematics between scenes were done well. This is a game that I would buy for anyone who loves strategy war games. The cost for the game is very reasonable. I check a couple of places on line and it appears to be about \$30 plus tax and shipping. Microsoft and Ensemble Studios have a real winner here. I highly recommend that you give this game a try.

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