

The Official - Unadulterated SMAC Site FAQ

<http://www.storm.ca/~beaudoin/>



Introduction to Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri

"*Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri* is the next product from Firaxis Games. In this turn-based game, you are the leader of a faction that has just crash-landed on the surface of Alpha Centauri; you must now explore the area around you, discover how to survive and expand on the alien world, build up an empire, and conquer rival factions who seek to undermine your goals." Official FAQ from Firaxis. <http://www.alphacentauri.com>.

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Artificial Intelligence

AI Attacks

"As for the computer's suicidal attitude towards its own troops (certainly an amusing feature from earlier games), the computer now usually doesn't attack unless it has quite a few units to throw at you, and then follows it up with support later on. It's quite a different feeling from other games of this type--instead of one lone horseman sneaking into your territory and taking a potshot at your capital, you now have three or four Alpha Rovers moving in a co-ordinated fashion to pick off one of your border bases. Makes the AI a lot tougher and the game much more realistic and fun." Tim Train of Firaxis. From Dante's Inferno SMAC page. Link to source:

<http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

AI and Unit Construction

"Computer players make intelligent decisions, plot with you against mutual enemies, coordinate their actions, and respond to you based on their own self-interest and personality." Official Features. Firaxis. <http://www.alphacentauri.com>

"The computer AI reacts to what you build. If you tend to breed a lot of native units, then the computer will build units with the 'Trance' special ability, which works well against the natives." Brian Reynolds from an interview by LDespot. Beyond Alpha Centauri. Link to source:

<http://ac.gamestats.com/focus/e3/>.

See: Units for other details about units.

AI and Territorial Boundaries

"...push out your borders too far, you can run into situations where competing factions are contesting specific regions, perhaps inviting a series of local attacks and counterattacks, until one side or the other has triumphed." Marc Dultz. Sneak Peaks: Alpha Centauri: Stranger in a Strange Land. Gamecenter Review. Link to source: <http://www.gamecenter.com/Peeks/Alpha/>.

"Civ-style games have always been games of geometric expansion--the earlier you set up a city, the more resources that city can contribute over time. As you mention, the tradeoff to rapid expansion should be overextending your forces, allowing easy conquest by the enemy. The problem in these earlier games is that the AI was not that great at conquest. In SMAC, the problem has been solved by teaching the AI effective conquest. For example, the enemy usually only attacks in echelon (many units co-ordinating their attacks at once) instead of in detail (one lone unit wanders in and takes a potshot at a city, as in Civ). In short, if you expand recklessly in SMAC without regard to internal lines of supply and reinforcement, you are much more likely to find yourself inside Colonel Ortega's interrogation chamber." From Dante's Inferno SMAC page. Link to source: <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

Customization and Game Editing

"Most art, sound, and text in the game are in common formats, so you can modify them to your heart's content. Units, of course, you design as an integral part of the game itself." Brian Reynolds from an interview by LDespot. Beyond Alpha Centauri. Link to source:

<http://ac.gamestats.com/focus/e3/>.

"Most anything you might want to change in the game is kept in common formats (*.txt, *.bmp, *.wav, etc.). Players can therefore customize to their heart's content! There will be a full map\scenario editor, as well as a faction editor." Official FAQ from Firaxis.

<http://www.alphacentauri.com>.

"SMAC uses common file formats for art, sound, video, and text files. Users can therefore modify a wide range of stuff in the game, including the look of the units, the sound effects, and many of the rules." Official FAQ from Firaxis. <http://www.alphacentauri.com>.

Faction creation will be a part of the game. You can customize your own faction including art, music, diplomatic text, etc. Official FAQ from Firaxis. <http://www.alphacentauri.com>.

See: Units for more information on unit customisation.

Diplomacy

"Marshall support for your agenda at meetings of the Planetary Council. Double-cross allies using stealthy probe teams. Manipulate other factions to get elected Planetary Governor!" Official Features. Firaxis. <http://www.alphacentauri.com>

Summary of Known Diplomacy Options

- Pacts of Brotherhood or Sisterhood
- Alliances
- Peace
- Declare War
- Exchange Technology
- Lend or Borrow Energy Credits
- Give Units and Bases
- Demand Withdrawal from Territory
- Request for Votes in Planetary Council

Factions

Known Factions

The seven factions portrayed in the game are:

- Gaians: ecologically conscious
- Morgan Conglomerate: profit-driven
- Spartans: militaristic
- Keepers of Wisdom: technology-driven
- Society of Archons: technology-driven
- Labyrinth: security-minded
- Conclavists: religious zealots

"Every faction will possess different attributes and cultural drawbacks that can both hinder and advance their cause." Marc Dultz. Sneak Peaks: Alpha Centauri: Stranger in a Strange Land. Gamecenter Review. Link to source: <http://www.gamecenter.com/Peeks/Alpha/>.

Faction Interactions

"The factions can interact on quite a number of levels. You can exchange technology, declare war or offer peace, lend or borrow energy credits, give units and bases, exchange unit prototypes, join Pacts of Brotherhood or Sisterhood, co-ordinate battle plans against common enemies, demand withdrawal from your territory, and request for a specific vote at an upcoming meeting of the Planetary Council, to name some of the many options." Brian Reynolds from an interview by LDespot. Beyond Alpha Centauri. Link to source: <http://ac.gamestats.com/focus/e3/>. A faction's baseline attitude towards you is primarily determined by how much the AI thinks you are a threat, and by your social choices. Thus, Lady Deirdre and her ecologically-minded Gaians will be hostile to anyone with a pro-Industry stance. Also, AI leaders are more likely to have a negative attitude towards those allied with their enemies. Brian Reynolds from an interview by LDespot. Beyond Alpha Centauri. Link to source: <http://ac.gamestats.com/focus/e3/>.

Game Play

Automation

"Simplify the management of your empire with unprecedented levels of Auto commands, unit patrol orders, intuitive go-tos with waypoints, colony build queues, and intelligent colony governors." Official Features. Firaxis. <http://www.alphacentauri.com>

"An extensive list of automated features has been drafted in the hopes of reducing some of the burdensome tasks of running an ever-expanding empire. You can issue automated commands to your units, including patrol orders, building queues, and specialized terraformer actions. For instance, tell a terraformer to construct a road connecting one city to another, and it will first clear the intervening terrain, then lay a road, both jobs performed in the most sensible and economical fashion. You can also tell the terraformer to drive around and link up all of the cities within an empire, without having to monitor its progress. You'll also be able to call units to a specified location or stack a variety of units within a specific square." Marc Dultz. Sneak Peaks: Alpha Centauri: Stranger in a Strange Land. Gamecenter Review. Link to source: <http://www.gamecenter.com/Peeks/Alpha/>.

Borders

"SMAC will have borders that are defined by proximity to your bases. Factions with whom you have a treaty cannot found bases inside those borders, and if military units come across the border, you may ask them to leave." Official FAQ from Firaxis. <http://www.alphacentauri.com>.

Blockades

"Blockades are not modeled in SMAC". Tim Train of Firaxis. From Dante's Inferno SMAC page. Link to source: <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

Building

Material Carryovers

"Excess minerals in SMAC do indeed carry over to the next project! This is a nice feature over earlier games of this type." Tim Train of Firaxis. From Dante's Inferno SMAC page. Link to source: <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

Mineral Convoys

"You can establish convoys between bases, so that minerals are taken from one base and put to use in another.

"The other cool feature of the game is the brand-spanking new build queue, which makes management and production much easier than in other games of this type." Tim Train of Firaxis. From Dante's Inferno SMAC page. Link to source: <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

Cut-scenes or Extended Story Line

"There are no cutscenes with speech that are related to the plot or that pass along any useful information. The only speech comes up when you build a Secret Project, and you get a piece of flavoring text. That text is also shown on the Datalinks screen explaining the benefit of the Project, so you still have access to the information." Tim Train of Firaxis. From Dante's Inferno SMAC page. Link to source: <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

Game Saves and Iron Man Option

"There is now an "Iron Man" option that you can turn on that does not allow for saves. And, of course, there will be no saving and reloading in multiplayer." Tim Train of Firaxis. From Dante's Inferno SMAC page. Link to source: <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

Ranged Attacks

"Ranged fire has been modeled, too, which can then be influenced by terrain elevation. Moreover, psionic (mind) combat will also be portrayed." Marc Dultz. Sneak Peaks: Alpha Centauri: Stranger in a Strange Land. Gamecenter Review. Link to source: <http://www.gamecenter.com/Peeks/Alpha/>

"You can indeed attack from 2 squares away with certain units that are equipped with a specific unit special. The attacks only do partial damage, unless you attack a square with an enemy artillery unit in it, in which case the enemy will return defensive fire until one of you is dead. So one new tactic is to use your artillery to soften up a target before sending in your fast movers." From Dante's Inferno SMAC page. Link to source: <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

Resources

"Three principal resources are depicted in the game: nutrients, minerals, and energy." Marc Dultz. Sneak Peaks: Alpha Centauri: Stranger in a Strange Land. Gamecenter Review. Link to source: <http://www.gamecenter.com/Peeks/Alpha/>

Government

General Idea of the Formation of Government

The formation of your government will be a much more complex process than what was present in Civilization II. Choosing the type of government you want is reflected by the policies you establish. As Brian Reynolds explains: "...Alpha Centauri speculates on the future development of human societies. As the leader of your faction, you map out your vision of future utopia by deciding where you stand on a whole series of value choices - economics, liberties, religion, health care, military service, education, environment, and information." (Brian Reynolds. Designer Diary Notes. Gamespot. Page 3. Link to source:

http://www.gamespot.com/features/alpha_dd/060498/index.html)

Choices in Government Stance

Value Choices:

- Economics
- Liberties
- Religion
- Health Care
- Military Service
- Education
- Environment
- Information

Stance Choices:

- Ruthless
- Moderate
- Idealistic

(Brian Reynolds. Designer Diary Notes. Gamespot. Page 3.

Link to source: http://www.gamespot.com/features/alpha_dd/060498/index.html)

Example of the Choices

"Choose the ruthless "free market" economy, which promotes efficiency and economic growth at the expense of the environment, or the idealistic "fair market" economy, which encourages citizen loyalty, population expansion, and raw industrial output at the expense of economic growth.

Similarly, you may choose (ruthlessly) to conscript a massive, inexpensive, but ill-trained army, or you can (idealistically) raise an all-volunteer, highly trained, and very expensive force. Ruthlessly, you maintain ironfisted control of your information networks, preventing enemy infiltration, not to mention the corrupting influences of pornography and subversive literature. Or idealistically, you open your networks to the free exchange of ideas and information, reaping the rewards of greater creativity and productivity but running the risks of infiltration, corruption, or even open rebellion.

Idealistic public health care keeps your citizens happy and healthy, not to mention loyal; a ruthless health care "for profit" scheme encourages economic efficiency, not to mention advanced medical research." (Brian Reynolds. Designer Diary Notes. Gamespot. Page 3. Link to source:

http://www.gamespot.com/features/alpha_dd/060498/index.html)

Maps

Map Editor

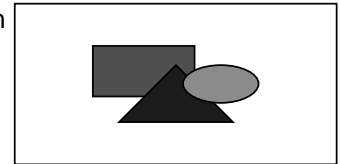
"You'll be able to create complete custom scenarios in the game." Brian Reynolds from an interview by LDespot. Beyond Alpha Centauri. Link to source: <http://ac.gamestats.com/focus/e3/>.

Planetary Council

Apparently, the Planetary Council is similar to what we know as the United Nations. As Brian Reynolds explains: "...you can also meet with all seven faction leaders to vote on matters affecting the entire planet, including global trade pacts, repealing the UN charter prohibiting atrocities, and many other weighty issues. While in the Planetary Council, you can try to influence people's votes through negotiation, bribery, or intimidation". Brian Reynolds from an interview by LDespot. Beyond Alpha Centauri. Link to source: <http://ac.gamestats.com/focus/e3/>.

Secret Projects

Secret Projects are meant to give a player an advantage or a special ability in the game. It works very similarly to the Wonders in Civilization II. There are 32 Secret Projects that confer unique bonuses on your faction. Official Features. Firaxis. <http://www.alphacentauri.com>



Known Special Projects

- Space Elevator
- The Ascetic Virtues
- Bulk Matter Transporter
- The Unity (submarine or spaceship)
- Morgan Energy Bank
- Spartan Command Centre
- Gaian Tree

Speeding-Up the Building of Secret Projects

"The convoys can work either way--as a one time hit to help a Secret Project along, or setting up a constant flow of minerals from one base to the next. Food and energy may also be convoyed in the same manner." Dante's Inferno SMAC page. Link to source.

<http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

Technologies

"80 future technologies define the state of the art in interesting decisions...do you research a new military technology, better medical technology to increase the standard of living, or a new power source to generate more energy?" Official Features. Firaxis. <http://www.alphacentauri.com>

Technology Web

"We've worked very hard to ensure that the technology tree is more like a technology web, where things are kind of cross-linked," says Train. "You can't go all the way down the weapons path without discovering some things along the economic path or some things along the Centauri path."

We didn't want to overemphasize one specialty and have situations where you've, for instance, discovered electricity but you haven't discovered horseback riding." Marc Dultz. Sneak Peaks: Alpha Centauri: Stranger in a Strange Land. Gamecenter Review. Link to source: <http://www.gamecenter.com/Peeks/Alpha/>.

Known Technologies

- Cloaking Device
- Energy Field
- Hypnotic Trance
- Plasma Armor

Terraforming

General Explanation of Terraforming

"The thought of colonizing an alien world immediately brings to mind the idea of altering, or "terraforming," that world to make it more livable for humans. To allow the player to actually make meaningful changes in the climate of a world required us to create a world builder and climatic model far more powerful than anything we'd done before. Temperature, wind, and rainfall patterns have been modeled in ways that allow players to make changes and watch the effects. For instance, with a modest array of future technology, you can raise up a new ridgeline or mountain range. With the prevailing wind coming off the sea to the west, your new mountains will tend to empty moisture from the air on their western slopes, leaving their eastern slopes and the downwind valleys quite dry. So you can raise ridgelines to increase the rainfall (and thus nutrient production) for your own bases while simultaneously drying out your downwind enemies!" (Brian Reynolds. Designer Diary Notes. Gamespot. Page 2. Link to source: http://www.gamespot.com/features/alpha_dd/060498/index.html)

Boreholes and River Diversions

"As your technology progresses, you can also divert the courses of rivers and dig huge thermal boreholes down to the planet's mantle to release heat (not to mention the mining opportunities)." (Brian Reynolds. Designer Diary Notes. Gamespot. Page 2. Link to source: http://www.gamespot.com/features/alpha_dd/060498/index.html)

Global Effects of Terraforming

There will be a concept of global warming as confirmed in the following quote: "Still later, if enough players work together, you can alter the climate on a worldwide basis - global warming to melt the icecaps and raise sea levels, for instance, where you can watch enemy bases sink beneath the waves." (Brian Reynolds. Designer Diary Notes. Gamespot. Page 2. Link to source: http://www.gamespot.com/features/alpha_dd/060498/index.html)

Goal of Terraforming: Breathable Atmosphere

"The ultimate terraforming triumph is a breathable atmosphere, but watch out, since some changes may lead to a population explosion among the native life-forms!" (Brian Reynolds. Designer Diary Notes. Gamespot. Page 2. Link to source: http://www.gamespot.com/features/alpha_dd/060498/index.html)

Trade

"Trade is not handled via Civ-style Caravans. Trade is now handled as a function of your diplomatic interactions. If you are at peace with someone, you are assumed to have a certain level of trade with them. The closer you are as allies, the more trade you have between your two

countries. This adds an interesting angle to your decision to be at war with someone, because it sacrifices your trade. Other countries may also impose sanctions on you for the use of Atrocities, which then reduces your trade." Tim Train of Firaxis. From Dante's Inferno SMAC page. Link to source. <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

Units

"Units in the game are fully customizable in any of five different categories: chassis, weapon, shielding, reactor, and special abilities." Brian Reynolds from an interview by LDespot. Beyond Alpha Centauri. Link to source: <http://ac.gamestats.com/focus/e3/>.

Unit Types

Chassis: Determines the type of unit – land, sea, or air and the number of movement points it has.

Weapon: The offensive armament, or may be replaced by a non-combat package.

Shielding: The defensive capability of the unit.

Reactor: Determines the hit points of the unit – more advanced reactors decrease the overall cost of the unit.

Special Abilities: They add special bonuses to the unit, however, it may come at a greater cost or a penalty to some other aspect of the unit.

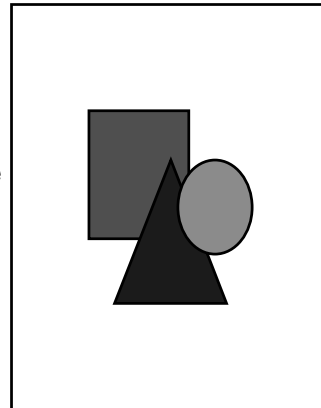
Non-Combat Items: Terraformer equipment, supply pod, colony pod.

Native Units: Units that you can breed and that use PSI combat. Tim Train of Firaxis. From Dante's Inferno SMAC page. Link to source.

<http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

Known Native Units:

- Xenofungus
- Mind Worms



Note: "Cost increases exponentially with new features, so a unit with the best armor AND best weapon will cost much more than two units, one with the best armor and one with the best weapon." Brian Reynolds from an interview by LDespot. Beyond Alpha Centauri. Link to source: <http://ac.gamestats.com/focus/e3/>.

Air Units

"[There are] ...plenty of air units. And with the unit design system, you can find lots of cool things to do with air units. I just put my first Probe Team on a Needlejet chassis the other day, and discovered I had a range-22 Probe Team!" Tim Train, FIRAXIS "Tim Train of Firaxis. From Dante's Inferno SMAC page. Link to source. <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

Moral

"Morale also plays an integral role in Alpha Centauri, much more so than in any of Meier's previous efforts. According to the designers, six levels of morale have been modeled in SMAC, and they're meant to portray the inherent value of properly training units, the units' proficiency at completing specific tasks, and their degree of responsiveness when the chips are down." Marc Dultz. Sneak Peaks: Alpha Centauri: Stranger in a Strange Land. Gamecenter Review. Link to source: <http://www.gamecenter.com/Peeks/Alpha/>. Also see: [Ranged Attacks](#) in Gameplay

Special Unit Abilities

Known Special Abilities:

- Heavy Reactor (allows Long Range fire, -50% to def. & move).
- Hypnotic Trance (2x vs. Psi units).
- Nerve Gas Pods (Can +50% attack, counts as an Atrocity).
- Repair Bay (Repairs ground units on board, used for transports).
- Non-Lethal Methods (x2 Police, -50% weap & armor).
- Deep Radar (See 2 spaces)

Link to source. <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

Unit Stacking

"You can assign units to stacks and move them as a stack, which should help the endgame management problems often seen in this genre of game." Official FAQ from Firaxis.
<http://www.alphacentauri.com>.

Attacking in a Stack

"We feel that the way combat is set up now does take into account the idea of stacked arms. For example, if your stack has air cover, then that air cover must first be eliminated before the ground units can be attacked. If you have artillery, then the stack has long-range fire capabilities. If that stack is attacked by artillery, your artillery will return defensive fire. Additional complexity in this area moves the focus away from the overall strategic feel of the game." From Dante's Inferno SMAC page. Link to source. <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

Defending in a Stack

"Other empire-building games have combat systems where if one unit in a defending stack is destroyed, then the entire stack is destroyed. In SMAC, other units in the stack will take collateral damage from the attack, but won't be destroyed." Official FAQ from Firaxis.
<http://www.alphacentauri.com>.

"Entire stack gets destroyed if one guy dies" is one of the more unpopular features about Civ-style games. The reason for this rule is so you must use terrain effectively and co-ordinate attacks, instead of just marching up to a target with a bunch of units and pounding the heck out of it on the next turn (the 'dogpile' strategy). However, the old stack rules were definitely annoying and certainly unrealistic, and so just recently we implemented the idea of 'collateral damage', which has been working really well. If your units are in a stack and the highest defender loses a combat, all other units in the stack take collateral damage, but are not actually destroyed. This discourages the 'dogpile on the square' tactic without being quite so annoying or unrealistic. I have to say that so far I really like how this works, and it will probably make it into the final product. Another note on stacks: for moving stacks, you can now assign units into a stack and move them together, which simplifies large military forces in the mid and endgame." Tim Train of Firaxis. From Dante's Inferno SMAC page. Link to source: <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

Unit Upgrades

"Units can now be upgraded in the field! If you have built a prototype using a new weapon, you can now (at a specific energy cost) upgrade your older models. This can be done singly, or as a group when the new prototype is built." Tim Train of Firaxis. From Dante's Inferno SMAC page. Link to source: <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

Known Units and Capabilities

Supply Crawlers

"Materials may be moved to other bases by the creation of supply crawlers that start convoy routes to your bases. Those supply crawlers may also be used to help build prototypes and Secret Projects, and may also be used to collect resources from squares that are not close to your base." Tim Train of Firaxis. From Dante's Inferno SMAC page. Link to source: <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

Other Information

Cheats

"The team feels that cheats are useful in constructing your own scenarios (playbalance, etc.) and that some people just like to cheat. As in earlier games by this team, enabling cheats essentially ends your game from a scoring perspective, and, of course, cheats will be disabled in multiplayer." Tim Train of Firaxis. From Dante's Inferno SMAC page. Link to source: <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8242/ac.html>

Demo

"There will be a demo released prior to the game shipping. We don't yet have an exact date, but it will precede the main release by 3-6 weeks or so." Official FAQ from Firaxis. <http://www.alphacentauri.com>.

Requirements

"SMAC requires at least a P133 with 16 Megs of RAM, 4x or better CD-ROM, and an 800x600x256 display; the system must also be DirectX compatible. The game will run under Windows 95, Windows 98, or Windows NT. Please note that these requirements are subject to change as we get closer to the release date." Official FAQ from Firaxis. Link to source: <http://www.alphacentauri.com>.

Price

"Prices are set by our publisher, Electronic Arts, and we don't yet know what they plan as far as the retail price is concerned." Official FAQ from Firaxis. <http://www.alphacentauri.com>.

Multiplayer

"SMAC will be playable by up to seven players on LAN. You can also play over the internet (max number of players has not yet been determined), or two players can connect via modem or serial cable!" Official FAQ from Firaxis. <http://www.alphacentauri.com>.

"Race against six of your friends to dominate the new world on LAN, modem, Internet or serial connections. Chat live over the Internet with text or the latest voice-over-data technology." Official Features. Firaxis. <http://www.alphacentauri.com>

Note: There will be no options for hot seat play.

"All players take their turns simultaneously in the game. The time controls (how long each turn takes) can be set at the beginning of the game. For a real game of speed SMAC, set the controls for 30 seconds. Each player then has 30 seconds to make all his/her moves. For a more stately pace, turn off the time controls altogether. You can also set a sliding time control, so earlier in the game the time controls are shorter; once there are more units and bases on the screen, more time is available for turns. If all players complete their turns prior to the time limit, the game advances to the next turn."

Release Date

"Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri is slated for a Fall 1998 release date." Official FAQ from Firaxis.
<http://www.alphacentauri.com>.