

Dark Reign 2 – Windows

Developed by: Pandemic (<http://www.pandemicstudios.com>)

Published by: Activision (<http://www.activision.com>)

Reviewed by: Tim Maxwell

Official Site: <http://www.activision.com/games/dr2/index2.asp>

Genre: Strategy

System Requirements:

233MHz Pentium II processor
Windows® 95/98
64 MB RAM
650 MB of free space
DirectX 7.0a video and sound card
4X CD-ROM
16 Bit Windows compatible sound card
DirectX 5.0 (included) or higher
Microsoft® mouse or compatible pointing device

Supports: N/A

ESRB: Teen

Overall Rating: 8

Graphics: 9/10

Sound: 9/10

Documentation: 9/10

Getting Started: 9/10

Gameplay: 8/10

Value: 8/10

The Good Press: Spectacular graphics; simple, yet intuitive interface; excellent musical score; engaging story.

The Bad Press: Gameplay closely mimics that of just about every other RTS game you've ever played; some annoying AI quirks.

Overview: Although not groundbreaking, superb ambience and a strong plot make *Dark Reign 2* a must-have for RTS fans.

Tips:

If possible keep a couple of repair vehicles near your sentry guns protecting the base. That way, as they take damage, they are instantly repaired.

Before launching a full-scale assault on an enemy base, it's often wise to send out a single unit or two to see what you're up against.

Don't get overzealous while building. Using too much power can slow down production.

Real-time strategy games really haven't changed all that much since the initial popularity of *Command & Conquer*. Sure, technology has done wonders for graphics, sound and multiplayer capabilities, but the tried-and-true gameplay always remains essentially the same. So, how do you know which one is right for you in such a crowded and competitive genre? Well, if you're looking for awesome graphics and sound, an intuitive interface, and a gripping storyline, Activision's new *Dark Reign 2* just might be the ticket.

The story in *Dark Reign 2* revolves around a struggling planet Earth. Years of war and carnage have substantially depleted the world's resources, and the planet is now governed by an oppressive worldwide police force known as the Jovian Detention Authority. For a long period of time, the JDA was considered to be the superpower of the world, while the lowly Sprawlers were mired in personal conflict in the toxic regions of the world. An unexpected catastrophic event has changed all this, and the Sprawlers have united in an effort to overtake the JDA and ultimately, the world. Which side will reign supreme? The answer is up to you.

Your first order of business in *Dark Reign 2* is to choose which race you'd like to control. You really can't go wrong either way, as both have the ability to build and manufacture some impressive vehicles and structures. Each of the twenty missions will require different building strategies and resource allocation. The storyline and objectives are laid out for you in the form of nice, between-level cutscenes. The campaigns are fairly standard for RTS games—including such tasks as search-and-destroy, escorts, disabling a base, attempting alliance with an unknown

species, etc.. As an added challenge, the missions take place in varying weather conditions, and at different times of day. This may sound like just a throw-in, but these factors play a great deal into your overall strategy. For example, your base may need solar power in order to function properly. If power is low and the sun has set, you may not have access to the vital overhead map or production may slow down.

These little extras not only add to the realism of the gameplay, but are darn cool to look at as well. *Dark Reign 2* has strayed from the norm in the RTS genre by introducing full 3D graphics and terrain. Gone are the days of tiny, pixilated vehicles and microscopic, indistinguishable troops parading around. Everything from immense structures like the Sprawler Juggernaut Factory to the miniscule JDA Guardian are presented with meticulous detail and are quite literally a joy to behold. Each individual unit is instantly identifiable and beautifully animated as well. The same can be said for the terrain, which again is not only breathtaking to look at, but makes you think at the same time. The maps range from sweeping, green meadows to dry, desolate wastelands and encompass just about everything in between. Enormous rolling hills are everywhere, as are deep valleys and bodies of water. Best of all, I didn't experience any slowdown on my P2-450/Voodoo3 combination—even with all the details cranked up. If nothing else, *Dark Reign 2* is worth the price of admission just for its visuals.

The game's audio is equally impressive. Music, which is usually more of an annoyance than anything in most RTSs, is very well done here and fits the mood of each mission perfectly. Most of the tracks are your standard rock/techno selections, but sound great and won't distract you as you play. The voiceovers for each of the structures and vehicles are excellent as well. Admittedly, I did grow tired of the same phrases over and over every time I ordered my troops to move, but this is a minor problem and can easily be adjusted to suit your preferences. The construction rigs have perhaps the coolest voices—similar to the battle droids in *Star Wars: Episode 1*. All explosion and gunfire sounds as it should as well, and a soothing female narrator chimes in frequently to let you know about events taking place.

Fans of the *Command & Conquer* line of games will be quite familiar with the interface in *Dark Reign 2*. The screen is broken up into several areas—including the terrain you're currently looking at, a small (perhaps a little too small) overhead map of the area, and other handy information such as status of construction projects, time of day, and available resources. Similar to just about every other RTS out there, the first thing to do in many missions is to create a base, build some collectors and a refinery, build a garage/barracks, and get some troops going. The interface is very simple to navigate, and allows quick access to your available units and makes programming them a breeze. I especially liked how easy it was to divide troops into teams and attack the enemy from different locations. Interface is of utmost importance in RTS games, and certainly doesn't disappoint in *Dark Reign 2*.

I really don't have much to complain about with *Dark Reign 2*, but it should be noted that it does have a few minor problems. As mentioned, the overhead map is really small and doesn't really give you an accurate representation of the areas surrounding you. Furthermore, troops tend to get stuck in tight places and sometimes will ignore orders after a period of time. In fairness, these problems are typical in all RTS games, so I'm willing to look past them. *Dark Reign 2* is every bit as enjoyable and addictive as all of the other strategy games you've known and loved, but raises itself to a new level with incredible graphics, sound, and ambience. If you're a fan of real-time strategies, you owe it to yourself to buy this game. If you're not a fan, *Dark Reign 2* will make you one. It certainly did me.