

Defcon

Everybody dies. Everybody, that is, except **Paul Hudson** and his 13-legged pet cockroach, who bring you this review...

In brief...

» World domination and tactical nuclear missile strategy game. Also consider *Darwinia* and *Uplink*.

As I write this, supreme executive power is being transferred from Tony Blair to Gordon Brown, which means that – technically – we've got half an hour or so where there is no prime minister. So what would happen if someone just happened to, say, launch a full-scale nuclear assault on the entirety of western Europe?

Defcon is the latest release from indie game developer Introversion, and places you in the government nuclear bunker with your finger hovering over the red button. You have missile silos that either attack or defend, radar bases scanning the sky, airfields ready to scatter fighters, plus submarines, carriers and battleships to fight for naval superiority.

Defcon 5

International treaties stop you from pounding your enemies straight away, so you have about ten minutes to organise your defences and set up fleets. Mixing battleships with carriers gives you the best defence coverage, at the expense of raw offensive power. You also have time to talk to your opponents – a ceasefire means you

“After the fifth missile hits, Mexico is nothing more than a green glow.”

can divert firepower elsewhere, but if you're lucky enough to get an early alliance it means you have fewer attack vectors to worry about. Of course, alliances can easily be broken, so suspicious commanders



» Use your carriers and battleships in unison to control the seas, then sneak your subs up close to get in some sure-fire nukes.



» Spread your nukes across multiple cities to ensure maximum damage.

ought to keep a few subs floating off their “allys” shores, just in case...

Although you can't see where your opponents have placed their defences during this build-up period, you can at least start making intelligent guesses about where their attacks are most likely to come from. But the timer ticks down quickly, and if I haven't placed all your units by the time Defcon 3 starts, I don't get another chance.

Defcon 4

Everyone's radar bases have activated, lighting up the map with live views into the enemy's territory. My forces peer over the Afghanistan border into Russia, where Graham “Degville” Morrison's silos lie clustered around his Moscow fortress. The rest of his country lies unguarded, its

citizens left digging nuclear bunkers by hand and wondering whether their stockpile of brown paper bags will save them from the inevitable fallout.

Defcon 3

Over to the east of Tokyo, Graham has deployed two carrier fleets only a few miles from part of my own fleet, so it looks like this war is going to start early. As I sip champagne in the deluxe government bunker deep under Tehran, the guns on our battleships start blasting. At the flick of a switch, I dust off ten wings of bombers from nearby airfields to provide air support to the Pacific fleet. Nick – controlling far-off South America – is a distant threat.

Defcon 2

Graham's fleets are left as smoking wrecks, which is a glorious victory for the Democratic People's Republic of Hudzilla. But as my citizens celebrate, my Pacific aircraft carriers get reports of incoming Nick submarines so I send out fighters to scout the area. Over in the main battle arena, Graham has all his ICBM silos set to air defence mode, presumably because he thinks he can fend off the combined onslaught of my bombers and nukes. How little he knows...

Defcon 1

Weapons are free, nukes are armed and the red button has been pressed several

For the pacifists out there

Defcon is completely moddable, so if the idea of death and destruction doesn't appeal, why not try the *Defcon* Christmas mod instead? This lets you send Christmas cheer rather than bombs. You launch reindeer-pulled sleighs at people you want to be generous to, and when they arrive you get messages like “San Francisco: 3.5 million happy children.” Genius.

The eerie sound of silence

Defcon takes Introversion's usual route of understated graphics and sound: the game is rendered entirely in 2D, using line graphics of the world with a subtle glow behind continents to help them stand out. The bright white glare of mushroom clouds are soon followed by eerie green clouds of radiation, showing you at a glance where the areas of most destruction lie. But the creepiest thing about the game is the audio: it's mostly subdued, with occasional choir sounds mixed in with the sounds of people crying and screaming in the distance. When a nuke hits, all you hear is a dull rumble, as if it really were landing several miles over your bunker. Your virtual people are dying, but you feel cold and detached, trying to focus on inflicting the same damage on your



times just to make sure. But disaster strikes – all eight nukes I fire are shot out of the sky by Graham's cowardly defence force. So with Graham on one side and Nick on the other, I do what any mighty war general would do: I make an alliance with the enemy.

War!

The United States of Degzilla occupies all of Russia and Asia, from Moscow to Tokyo. The Axis of EvilNick sprawls lazily across South America, with its headquarters near Mexico City, half a world away. While it might seem like it would take a long time for our forces to make the journey to within missile range, it seems Nick has been using the miniature spat between Graham and I to position his forces: two flotillas of EvilNick submarines surface, one off the coast of Bombay and the other somewhere off Norway. And – within the space of 20 seconds – have offloaded their nukes, which head towards our cities.

As the defensive batteries around Moscow warm up and start firing, another Pacific sea battle kicks off, this time between EvilNick's forces and mine. More

› **Defcon at its craziest: dozens of nukes in the air, millions of people dying, yet more launches in progress.**

planes, more sinkings, more screaming, and soon EvilNick's Pacific fleet goes down to join Graham's in the murky depths of the ocean. While EvilNick is distracted, Graham surfaces his subs just off Mexico, and launches his own salvo of nukes. But it's not good enough: Nick's defence silos pick off the approaching nukes. Sadly the same isn't true in Graham's territory: Leningrad has been hit, with 11.2 million people dead.

EvilNick has scrambled defence flights from Columbia, which are picking off Graham's defenceless subs one by one. In the next few seconds, millions die across the world. Kiev is hit with 5.6 million fatalities. Graham's air force try to take on Nick's fleet just offshore of north Siberia, but they get shot out of the sky before they even get close.

Moscow is hit: 12.3 million dead.

Bombay is hit: 9.1 million dead.

Tokyo hit: 15.9 million dead.

Fightback

As EvilNick pounds East Russia into radioactive insignificance, my subs finally finish their approach to Mexico. At the same time, my ICBM launchers open and fire, my bombers launch, and the world map becomes a blur of bombs – all heading towards South America. As the minutes tick by, I wait. I sip my tea, and chat to Jeremy 'Dr Strangelove' Ford from *PC Format*. Only when my rockets are off the coast of Florida do my subs belch out missiles of their own: this is a synchronised attack designed to throw so much firepower at Nick that his defences won't be able to cope with the onslaught.

And it works: in Mexico, 15 million die. Minutes later, the ones who thought they'd

made it meet a similar fate. After the fifth missile hits, Mexico is nothing more than a green glow on my map.

Doublecross

As my commanders suck celebratory champagne through a straw into their radiation suits, the phone rings. And not just any phone – it's the special red phone I had put in place when the Degsy alliance was agreed. It's not good news: the United States of Degzilla has fractured in two, with Degville targeting his nukes at my cities, eager prove himself in the annals of history.

Annihilation

I write this from our nuclear bunker. Our chief scientist thinks it ought to be safe to surface again at new year. Well, new year 2077. The Hudzillian Empire won the war. Yes, three quarters of the world lies barren of all life, but victory is mine! Long live the Dear Leader and Timmy the Cockroach! War has never been so much fun... **LXF**



Graham says...

"What Paul fails to mention is that Nick and I won all the other games we played. Well, one or two. For 10 old colonial pounds, Defcon is a blast."

Load up on guns

Defcon is an incredibly fast game. The race to Defcon 1 is punctuated by sea battles, fighter scouts and frenzied alliance-forming, but that's nothing compared to the chaos when Defcon is finally reached. Nukes – sometimes 30 or more – fly in all directions, and you need to carefully balance the number of silos you set up to fire nukes and the number you leave scanning the air in defence mode. Of course, if you're too defensive, you might end up with no nukes at all, because your missile silos can only take three hits before being blown to oblivion.

LINUX FORMAT **Verdict**

Defcon
Developer: Introversion
Web: www.everybody-dies.com
Price: £10

Gameplay	8/10
Graphics	9/10
Longevity	7/10
Value for money	8/10

» *Everybody dies. Nobody lives. But, you know, laughter is only one letter away from slaughter...*

Rating 8/10