

Frozen Synapse



The best tactical turn-based game for a generation; and it runs natively on Linux. **Jonathan Roberts** couldn't help but investigate...

In brief...

» *Tron*-like point-and-click strategy game. See also: *Conquest*.

Frozen Synapse immerses you in a world that's at once strange and familiar. Markov Geist is the only city in the world, and it's ruled by the vast corporation Enyo:Nomad.

Life in the city is dominated by The Shape. It 'began as a communications network' but 'soon, connecting to The Shape became as natural as breath ...'

Several splinter groups have formed, including Petrov's Shard, which aims to prevent any single group monopolising political and economic power.

Beyond this background knowledge, you're also introduced to your character, Tactics, and Charon's Palm. Apparently, you're atemporal – whatever that means – and your talents are in demand. Apparently, Charon's Palm is going to kill you, and that's what you want, anyway.

There might not be much original material in this backstory, but it helps to build a compelling world. Who and what are you? What's Charon's Palm and why is it going to kill you?

Lick into shape

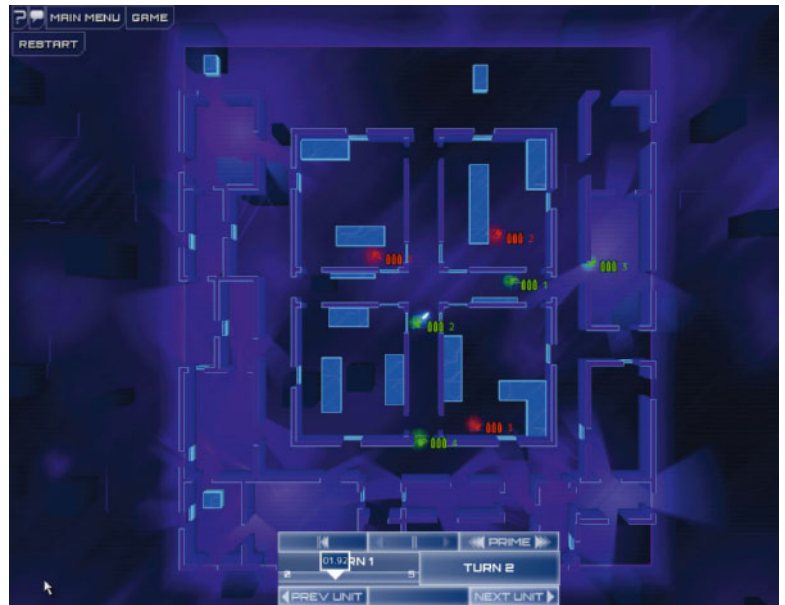
Your role in the game is to control your Shape-connected warriors, guiding their every move through each mission and ensuring that they meet their objectives. Your warriors are so

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dependent on The Shape in fact, that everything is up to you: you must tell them where and when to aim, whether to shoot or ignore an enemy, where to walk next – the list goes on.

As you move your soldiers on the game board, there's a well-defined set of rules to determine who wins in a combat situation. Stationary trumps moving, cover trumps no cover and, both these things being equal, the unit with the best aim wins. This forces you to think tactically, rather than running about gung-ho.

It sounds like a lot of work, but because the game is turn-based, there's



» **Were watching with baited breath as the computer calculates the results of the previous turn.**

ample time to take care of everything. Each turn lasts for a certain period, so you can program multiple steps and moves for each go.

You can also preview how your instructions will work out, based on the position of your enemies. This is handy, but it obviously doesn't take into account the moves that the enemy might make.

The pace of the game is entirely down to you: if you want to spend ages getting your moves just right, so be it; if you want to skip through the levels as fast as possible, that's fine too.

The only problem with game speed is that after committing to a turn, there's a fair delay while it decides what the enemy will do. You can work around this by enabling simultaneous AI in the Options menu but that, frustratingly, slows framerates.

Glowing praise

The bright glowing *Tron*-style blues, reds and yellows really make you feel like you're immersed in The Shape.

The entire game takes place from a top-down viewpoint, with just a slight angle to give a sense of depth, which makes it possible to see at a glance exactly what's happening on the map;

and there's never any confusion about whether something provides adequate shelter or not.

Frozen Synapse, then, is polished and utterly enticing. The story grabs you from the beginning, the gameplay is balanced and powerful, and the graphics compliment it all perfectly. And that's before we've mentioned the reportedly excellent multiplayer mode, complete with the ability to challenge Facebook and Twitter friends, and then brag about the victory afterwards.

Keep an eye out for the Linux version's launch any day now. **LXF**

LINUX Verdict

Frozen Synapse

Developer: Mode7
Web: www.frozensynapse.com
Price: \$24.99

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

» *A thoughtful, challenging strategy game that'll be great fun for many, many plays.*

Rating 9/10