neak Peek: Super Wing Commander

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NOTE: Screen shots and information presented in this article are based on a pre-release version of Super Wing Commander and are subject to change before final release. This article is not a review.

Everytime a "space" movie comes on the tube, I'll immediately start watching. It doesn't matter if it's Star Wars, Star Trek, or even a bad space movie like "It Came From Mars" on some obscure cable channels at 2 o'clock in the morning. I just can never seem to get enough.

Although our fascination with flying has been with us since mankind first gazed to the skies, our thirst for flight in recent times has not only been earthbound but spacebound as well. Trips to the moon, walks in space, sci-fi shows and movies, and, yes, even computer games have heightened our desire to travel through space in search of the unknown. But I'm sure you would agree that space travel would be pretty boring without some action, especially on a computer. Better yet, how about something you can fight against, like in Star Wars? I mean, what's a good space game with some evil aliens trying to destroy you?

Super Wing Commander has all these exciting elements and more. Super Wing Commander originally bore out of the popular Wing Commander series for the IBM PC platform in the late 80's. Released about a year ago for the 3DO game system, Super Wing Commander is a space adventure shoot'em up and represents Origin's return to the Macintosh game market after years of absence. The port is being handled by Lion Entertainment of Austin, Texas for Origin and is scheduled to be released sometime in March or April.

The Terran/Kilrathi Conflict Begins... In the year 2629.105, a lone exploration ship encounters a spacecraft of unknown origin. Standard wide-band non-verbal message to the unknown ship are soon greeted with the alien vessel savagely opening all guns on the exploration ship Iason   and destroying it completely. War on the Empire of Kilrathi is declared on 2634.186 after years of countless acts of piracy and unwarranted assaults on Terran Confederation ships and planets.

This is where you come in. You're the Terran Confederation's best pilot and you've been summoned to defend the TCS Tiger's Claw   in Vega Sector from the evil Tiger-like Kilrathi.

now Thy Enemy. The Kilrathi's are born warriors and raised for battle. You might say their entire culture is based on war and aggression (fighting among Kilrathi tribes has led to countless of civil wars) and they hold little regard for other intergalactic species, especially humans. The Kilrathi's thirst for conquest and domination is unparalleled and they will stop at nothing, not even in the face of death. But don't let their aggression and hatred fool you into thinking they are not skilled fighters. Expect a though fight and be prepared for the unexpected.

Pre-Flight Check. The Rec Room on the Tiger's Claw provides crew members a hangout to check out everyone's latest number of kills, talk with pilots, and practice with the simulator. New Wing Commander pilots can enter the training simulator to brushen up on their flying and combat skills before actual combat.

Once you've honed in our your pilot skills, you can enter the briefing room to begin your missions. Here Colonel Halcyon will brief you on the day's mission. After the briefing is over, you are fitted with a flight suit in the armory and then put into your battle-ready fighter.

Your fighter is equipped with the latest in Terran fighter technology. The viewscreen provides a view of space ahead of you. In the middle you'll find a circular radar display showing the direction of your enemies (and friendlies). On your left is the Left Video Display Unit and shows your shield and armor status. As you take damage you'll see red spots appear where the ships shields are weakening. The Right Video Display Unit shows the ship closest to you. The onboard computer targets the ship and places its profile on the VDU. Here you'll be able to see how much damage you've inflicted on the enemy ship.

Your ship also has other important indicators such as the Blaster, Fuel, Speed, Eject Warning, and Autopilot indicators.

ngaging the Kilrathi. Sooner or later you'll encounter the Kilrathi. This, of course, is where all the action is. They are fierce and relentless so getting them in your sights is crucial. You'll often encounter a number of Kilrathi ships, so you'll need to tell your Wingman to engage the enemy. If you get in trouble, you can also signal him or her to help out or to attack your target. You can even send random insults to the enemy, there by luring them away from your wingmen or another friendly ship.

Depending on your ship (you have a few to choose from), you have access to a number of missiles including dumbfire missiles (just point and shoot), Friend-of-Foe missiles (they don't require a missile lock, but they automatically travel toward the nearest enemy), and Heat-Seeking missiles (they require a heat source to lock on). Also depending on the type of ship you have, you can select between laser, neutron, or mass driver guns. Or you can choose to have all guns combined for a massive punch, but this tends to deplete your blaster power quickly.

Gameplay, Graphics, and The Rest. The gameplay in Super Wing Commander is intense and sometimes challenging. One of the biggest problems I encountered with the 3D0 version of SWC was that it was nearly impossible to control using the control pad. I later tried it with a FlightStick Pro and had better luck with it. With the Macintosh version I used a ThrustMaster and it performed flawlessly and accurately.

The graphics in Super Wing Commander are quite good but since the graphics have been dithered down from 24 bit color (from the 3DO version) to 8 bit color, you'll notice that the 3DO version looks a lot better (if you have one). Also, some people might be turned off by the fact that the graphics are in low resolution but in general the low resolution graphics are not a hinderance. Three screen sizes are provided in the Macintosh version from small, medium, to big (640 X 480).

The beta version I was given ran extremely well on my PowerMac 6100 with only small slowdowns. However, being a beta version and not fully optimized yet, I expect the shipping version to be a lot faster. The game comes with 72 missions although not all of it is linear, so

expect to play about half as many. You are assigned different missions depending on how well you do a previous missions.

Super Wing Commander will ship on a single CD-ROM and will, thankfully, be fat binary for both 68K and PowerMacs.

elcome Back, Origin! Although Super Wing Commander may not be the most technologically advanced space sim on the computer game market (its sister game Wing Commander III on the PC may be), it is none-the-less an exceptional Macintosh game, especially considering the space games that are available on the Macintosh.

Super Wing Commander is really a test, in Origin's eyes. If the title does well, it will spur on more Macintosh game development from Origin. In fact, Origin is in the midst of porting another PC game called System Shock, a first person 3D science fiction action adventure. But for Origin to not only come back but STAY in the Macintosh market, titles like Super Wing and System Shock must do extremely well. I for one am hoping they do because I'd love to see Wing Commander III on the Macintosh.

By the way, look for a Super Wing Commander demo in the next issue of IMG.