

y Bart Farkas

Well Colonel Blair, you have successfully dispatched the kitty planet of Kilrath and now you've decided to settle into a nice life of farming shoulder to shoulder with the average civilian population. Feels nice doesn't it? Real soil under your feet. No worrying about being blasted into the cold vacuum of space. Yep, this is the life. Think again Colonel, because you are just about to get pulled into the most complicated story you've ever been written into.

[Wing Legacy](#)

The Wing Commander series of games have long been popular distractions for (mostly PC) gamers. From its relatively humble roots, the Wing Commander saga has expanded and grown into an entity I doubt even its creator, Chris Roberts, would (or could) have envisioned. Wing Commander IV is now nearing the state of reality on the Macintosh, just two short months after its much ballyhooed PC entrance. Despite the hype, the actors, and the legacy, this game is very special for one very big reason. 12.5 million very big reasons actually.

"12.5 million?" you ask?

Yep, the official cost of this baby was 12.5 million U.S. Dollars. To put this into perspective, the movie 'El Mariachi' could have been made over 1600 times for the same amount of money. Although the thought of an 'El Mariachi Part 1532' may sound far fetched to some, the concept of computer entertainment software costing more than most 'B' Hollywood movies sounds like it belongs in a bad Cheech and Chong flick. In fact, if you'd have told me 5 years ago that a computer game would cost more than 10 million donaros I would have questioned your mental health. However, hairstyles change and so does the computer gaming market, sometimes in dramatic ways.

[What can you get for a suitcase of green?](#)

While Wing Commander III broke new ground with its 3 million dollar budget and cast of fairly well known actors, it seemed to lack something in the hybridization of movie and computer game. This something was to most, intangible, but present nonetheless. Some felt that the blue screening process left the actors looking unrealistic in the computer-generated backdrops, while others complained that the acting seemed unnatural at times. Whatever

the complaints, Wing III was a great game and has sold a reported 700,000 copies (that's a bunch). Obviously Origin and Electronic Arts felt the \$12.5 million risk was easily recoupable on a sequel.

If Wing III's engine or basic construction had any shortcomings, they have largely been addressed in Wing IV. Perhaps the most striking new feature comes in the form of real sets for the video cut scenes. This, as you might expect, greatly increased the cost of making Wing IV, but the end result is a life-like backdrop to support the plot. By moving to realistic sets the actors seemed to have a better grip on what was going on, and thus their performances seem a little more inspired, and indeed more realistic. In fact, the movie (or passive) portion of Wing IV is substantially more entertaining than its predecessor, and as you flow through the game you become ever more engrossed in the tangled web of lies and deceit which entangles the storyline from start to finish.

[ut I thought the war was over!](#)

Since the end of the war with the Kilrathi there have been an increasing number of attacks on the Confederation frontier. The frontier was defended vigorously by the people of the Border Worlds during the war with the felines, but now it seems that they have taken it upon themselves to make a move towards self government. Admiral Tolwyn pulls you back into the fray to help investigate what the heck is going on near the Border Worlds, and being the well decorated hero you are, you accept. Problem is, this isn't a cut and dried go-out-and-get-the bad-guy type of game. This time, you'll have a much harder time following orders, and indeed you'll have to choose your allegiance, and thus your destiny.

Not only does this interwoven plot will make Wing IV perhaps the most interesting game of

its kind to be involved with, but it pulls you into the story in a guttural way that defies description. As with Wing III, Wing IV will have plot changes hinging on the outcomes of certain missions, but Wing IV also puts a fair bit of emphasis on your interactive movie choices. Should you give the begging ex-fighter pilot some cash? Could that affect a mission much later in the game? Maybe. Wing IV actually has two losing scenarios and only one winning endgame. However, there are a bunch of ways to reach the end, even the winning end. There's around 50 missions throughout the game and over 30 'conversations' where your response has some effect on the game.

[Flight Engine Changes](#)

There are essentially no fundamental changes to the flight engine in Wing IV, and thus, it behaves much like Wing III in this respect. This was because of the quick turnaround time between Wing III and Wing IV, there just wasn't time for Origin to rework the flight engine. And hey, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. The changes you will notice immediately are in the elimination of the cockpits in your spacecraft. Yep, Wing IV has become fully HUD (Heads Up Display) and the added viewing real estate is a welcome bonus. Also, you won't be flying in the same craft as you were last time, there are several new makes to take for a spin, and several new weapons that are fairly flashy (you'll know what I mean when you get the game).

[Building on the Best](#)

Wing III was one of the best selling games of all time, and its younger sibling is bound to match, or even exceed the previous sales marks. With a record-setting price tag, big name actors (Mark Hamil, Malcolm McDowell, Jason Bernard, and John Rhys-Davis are all returning, along with 'Maniac' (Tom Wilson)) and the most engrossing storyline ever seen in a Wing Commander game, Wing Commander IV is sure to be a winner. Get your CD changers ready though, this baby comes on six-count 'em-six CD ROMs.

Note: The demo below is for Power PC computers only.