y Gene Alloway

ood Morning, America. With today's dawn comes a spectacular meteor shower seen all over the planet. Suddenly, Earth forces in orbit report a huge Alien armada hiding behind the swarm. And they're not here to go to Disney World....

So opens the latest installment of flight sim space opera's for the Macintosh, Shockwave Assault. As a talented rookie, you must first take on the invaders all over the globe in places like Peru, England, Los Angeles, and the Congo. After you defeat the evil mothership on the Moon, you head to the planets: first Mars and then further out to find the gate by which they came to our star system. Sounds like a standard storyline? Well, it is. However, it is well executed both technically and visually, and I have to say I did enjoy it. The folks from EA and Advanced Technology Group-2 have created a fast paced, straight-forward space opera in 3-D which will keep you fairly engaged.

Installation, and Technical information
Aside from the specifications listed above, I wanted to mention a few items of import about the technical side of things. First, the program does require QuickTime 2.1 or better and sound manager 3.1 or better, both of which are kindly included on the disc. Secondly, it does not like virtual memory or Ram Doubler. I want to emphasize that, because the game's performance drops noticeably if either memory tools are used. Lastly, I want to mention that the game runs off the CD-ROM, and even on a double speed player, it performed great when

showing QuickTime movies and when flying the ship. I was very impressed at the speed and clarity the game had running of the disc.

Machines and Guns
Actually, the game is a very simple flight simulation with a very basic science fiction story wrapped around to give it context. As I mentioned, the aliens have to be booted off the Earth and then tracked down to their Jump Gate to ensure a safe future for humanity. The aliens have a number of ships and ground machines which have different abilities. A scout is a fairly weak ship which you can out-fly and outshoot. Other ships include what I call a fighter which can take numerous hits (like your ship can) from lasers but is vulnerable to a single missile. Another ship is slower than the fighter and appears to be a heat seeker. It has a thin skin but packs quite a punch. There are other ships which appear to be in two linked parts and are very maneuverable. Occasionally, you will see what appears to be headquarters or command and control ships. These really pack a wallop if you don't take them out quickly. The mothership, in addition to being big, has both a number of defenses and a flock of protection to boot. Ground machines consist of "walkers" (my term) which stand tall and fire in a 360 degree arc. Also, there are vacuumers which scoop people up and deliver them into large purple pyramids placed at major population centers. Some immobile ground units have missile launchers as well.

To destroy these extraterrestrial machines, you have your F-177 with extensive shield and laser reserves, a load of fuel, and 14 missiles which have a good long range. To help you use it, you get a number of tutorials to help you learn how to fly and fight. Flying is handled by either keystroke commands or mouse while weapons firing is keystroke only. You can customize which keys you want to use. You also learn about how to stay on course. If you stray from your path, you start taking hits from artillery and other ordinance which is (supposedly) protecting you flanks and keeping the aliens pinned down. The path is marked on your radar screen, but if you don't keep away from it as you chase that last fighter, you can get hurt.

Weapon-wise, you have some good tools of destruction. Your lasers can do a lot of damage but have about the same range as the alien energy weapons. Your missiles can really help you out. They have a much greater range and can thin out a horde of enemies before they lock on to you. Your plane itself can take a lot of punishment and has a radar to let you know what is coming up (green for land machines, yellow for aircraft, white for friendly machines.) It also has heads-up crosshairs that turn red when a target is acquired. Even if you only have the red up for an instant, your shot will count if it goes off then. At certain times in your mission, a refueling drone will appear and replenish you stocks and repair damage. Also, there will almost always be some alien activity around the drone, so be prepared to either get a quick pass at the drone or clear the area of enemies so you can take you time. You can use a drone at least twice, which is handy if you have to deal with a hot repair area.

he Story

The story is run-of-the-mill. However, the actors in the movie scenes are good as are the sets. The story is well executed, and I found myself looking forward to the intervening movies as much as to the next mission. You look in on logs from commanders, see mission briefings, look through the eyes of probes as they seek out alien bases and watch superb shots of spaceships and planets. However, there is next to nothing you can do to participate in the story other than flying and blowing the bejeezus out of any alien you come across. If you do not hit all the targets, you damage something you shouldn't, or you go down (you have three lives per mission), you do get another crack at the mission with appropriate comments from various characters. Once in a while you will hear comments on your ship-board radio and video from other pilots or commanders, but it is just color. You do not have a wingman, and there are no other friendlies helping you out. The worst thing is that you occasionally get a news report in the middle of a dogfight! I know this is done to help with the story and to provide atmosphere, but the last thing I want to distract me is a CNN broadcast telling me Moscow is burning! What do I care when I am lining up a scout in my sights? If I get distracted, I may wind up burning myself, and I doubt CNN would carry that.

Best and The Worst

Overall, the best parts outweigh the bad parts in this game. The attractive graphics; the smooth display of movies, objects, and terrain; the speed of play, and the nice video scenes all contribute to an entertaining environment. I also liked the fact it was robust and did not crash on me despite a lot of video playback and dogfighting in a marathon session.

However, there are caveats. The game does not break new ground story-wise, game-wise, or technically. I could just as easily called the aliens "chigs" and myself a "marine". Also, there is little replay value. I wish they had automatically generated simple "patrol" scenarios you could go on, which wouldn't necessarily advance the storyline but would provide something new after you finished the major stuff. Lastly, the flight part of the simulation is really basic. You cannot crash into the ground. You only have a small range of height to stay within. You do have a number of interesting maneuvers like barrel rolls, loops, and spins, but they require keystroke combinations even if you choose to use your mouse for flying. It is not as realistic or complicated as A-10 or Hellcats, but it is functional.

Conclusions

Overall, Shockwave is a good beer and pretzels introductory space flight opera game similar to Lunicus published a couple years back but with better graphics and a smoother display of information. As a person who does not generally play flight sims, I found it fun and engaging enough for me to want to finish the missions and see what else was coming up. However, if

you are looking for something with some innovation, realism, or sophistication, this is not the game for you.

Pros
• Runs beautifully off the CD-ROM
• Very attractive 3-D Graphics and sets
• Good actors
• Nice mix of alien weapon systems

Cons
• Extremely basic flight sim
• Story line is standard space opera
• Little replay value

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