

-

-

y Dan Radmacher

-

he war with the Kilrathi is over, thanks to your heroics in Wing Commander III. You've retired to a farm on an out-of-the way planet (a desert planet suspiciously similar to Tatooine from Star Wars). But all is not peaceful. Pirates are attacking civilian space ships, and an increasing number of skirmishes with ships from the Border Worlds may lead to civil war.

So, Colonel Blair — known to the Kilrathi as the Heart of the Tiger — is being recalled to active duty. You'll be reunited with old friends (and enemies) and make new ones. You'll get back in the cockpit to defend the interests of the Confederation.

But you'll also be pulled into a web of intrigue and mystery. Your loyalties will be tested, perhaps to the breaking point.

Welcome to the long-anticipated Wing Commander IV: The Price of Freedom.

#### [More than a game](#)

The fourth installment in the Wing Commander series (the second to be brought to the Macintosh), WCIV comes closer than any of its predecessors to fulfilling the promise of a kick-butt space simulator melded with an involving and entertaining

interactive movie.

The budget for WCIV was an impressive \$12.5 million, unheard of for a video game. But the money was well spent. If you are familiar with WCIII, you'll be pleased to see the actors on real sets instead of computer-generated ones during the numerous and lengthy cut scenes.

The acting is still not feature film quality. Mark Hamill portrays Col. Blair, your alter-ego. Best known as Luke Skywalker, Hamill hit his creative peak with the Star Wars movies. Too often, he seems to be going through the motions in Wing Commander. Of all the actors, only Malcolm McDowell as the sleazy Admiral Tolwyn really seems to relish his role. Tom Wilson is way over the top as "Maniac," though he does manage some subtlety later in the movie, er, game.

But despite the cheesy acting, the cut scenes manage nicely to pull you into the story. There is less repetition than in WCIII (for example, you don't have a mechanic repeating the same inane phrase every time you finish a mission).

-

ame play is not significantly changed from WCIII, although the cockpit is gone, replaced with a full-screen HUD that is well-organized and fairly easy to interpret. The flight model is still more arcade than flight-sim. I especially miss the "axial roll" X-Wing provides.

There is a good variety of missions — everything from escort to recon to atmospheric missions (the fighters don't seem to handle any differently in

atmosphere than in vacuum, though.) Odds are usually more even than in X-Wing, and your wingmen actually help out a lot.

And, unlike X-Wing, you can fail a mission without the chance to replay it over and over (if you die, you do get the opportunity to try again.) Your success or failure has direct bearing on the progression of the story. If you mess up a recon mission, the next mission will be that much harder. Fail too often, and you will end up washed up back on Tatooine's twin planet, dreaming of old glory.

The game portion of WCIV is quite challenging (hint to newbies: you start out on the "Ace" skill level. Take it down to "Veteran" or "Rookie" for awhile until you figure things out.)

As in WCIII, you get the opportunity to make decisions about Blair's reactions during cut scenes. Again, you only have two choices. Some of the forks in WCIII seemed thrown in just to make the movies more interactive. In WCIV, the decisions are usually much more plot-oriented.

Outside of the cut scenes and cockpit, you maneuver around the carrier by pointing and clicking on hotspots. Hitting "M" calls up a map of the carrier, and handily, shows where conversations with other characters are possible (blue dots) or required (red dots).

### Potential

Wing Commander IV is starting to show the true potential of interactive movies. On top of that, it is a very decent and exciting space combat simulator. This game is fun to watch and fun to play. Shipping on an impressive six CD-ROMs, WCIV is a good, game-playing value, offering lots of replay possibilities and lots of full-screen video.

I like this game a lot and will anxiously play it through to the end.

### Pros

- o Real sets with good actors for involving cut scenes
- o Intriguing plot
- o Full-screen HUD instrumentation makes for easier flying

### Cons

- o Limited interaction in cut scenes (two choices)
- o Less-than-inspired acting by some

### Publisher Info

Origin Systems

5918 W. Courtyard

Austin, TX 78730

Phone: (800) 245-4525

- <http://www.origin.ea.com>

-

