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It is difficult to attach an appropriate label to MacSoft's new release Terminal Velocity (TV). It is certainly a visually stunning sci-fi arcade shoot-em-up, however, despite the designers' claim to the contrary, it is not a simulation in league with the likes of the Wing Commander series. One thing is for sure: characterized by a ferocious pace that never lets up, this is a game where if you like action, you are guaranteed to get your money's worth.

[Hyperspace](#)

The programmers have clearly set out to create an uncompromising design featuring fast-paced action wrapped around a simple interface that would allow any player to quickly immerse themselves without wasting much time with manuals or training missions. There is a background story to set the stage, but there is no need to study it closely in order to glean an important hint that may be required later in the game. The plot is a recycled and predictable story about one last desperate mission to save the Earth from yet another armada of ruthless alien oppressors. Yawn!

Players have a choice between several joysticks, the keyboard, or the mouse to control the ship. The keyboard controls are fully adjustable, but they do not provide a very satisfying alternative to joysticks, while the mouse based control is only for those who have a high tolerance for frustration and wrist pain. It really doesn't take long to get a feel for the controls, and most will be piloting their craft with minimal problems. On the down side, the

simulation is not particularly realistic as a flight model, but since none of us have yet flown a hybrid spacecraft from the year 2704, I suppose it is best not to be too critical.

Once the player straps on their shiny new TV-202 fighter, "the most dangerous fighter craft ever made," the pace of the game picks up rapidly, and it is time to clear the enemy from a series of locations, until the very source of the alien onslaught itself is destroyed. The action takes place over beautifully rendered terrain, such as mist-shrouded hills, snow-capped mountains, desert locations complete with pyramids, as well as subterranean passages and tunnel complexes. The graphics are probably the most appealing parts of the game, and the effect of navigating a mountain range in limited visibility is really quite gripping. There are the usual cinematic cut scenes, and they are not particularly impressive.

ame play becomes even more ferocious when you play against or with your friends. TV offers the option for head-to-head play over an AppleTalk network by pitting individuals or teams against each other. This feature is rather limited, especially when most games of this type offer the option of play over the Internet. Although there is always the option of playing after hours at work, I doubt that too many people will lug their Macs over to a friend's house to play a 4 vs 4 engagement.

The mission targets are normally located on the ground or in the air, but occasionally you'll get the opportunity to explore underground tunnels by entering circular access ports on the surface of the planet. You will need sharp reflexes and a fast computer, because the underworld is a network of tight-turning tunnels with obstacles galore to skewer your ship. Luckily, the tunnels contain plenty of 'power-ups' that appear to have been discarded like

the toys of a careless child. Some passages offer shields, afterburners, and even power cores for you stock up on before your next mission on the surface.

High Fidelity

There is no denying that TV is one of the best looking games of it's type that I have seen. Even in low resolution mode it looks exceptional, but in high resolution, the 3-D terrain appears almost photorealistic. Most objects cast realistic shadows on the ground, and the targets explode in huge fireballs that spew debris and smoke into the air. I have never been quite so satisfied with the results of blowing something sky high in an arcade game before. It produces a definite sense of exhilaration and an almost uncontrollable urge to scream "Yee-haw!"

Each level of the game features a unique new planet with a distinct look and original characteristics. There is a desert worlds with gigantic pyramids, and even an asteroid where players spend as much time fighting the enemy, as they do dodging enormous meteors falling from above. The tunnels below the surface are also rendered in great detail, and I found it fun to cruise around in them even when the enemy was nowhere to be found.

ormhole

The predictable sequence of missions is where the game unfortunately begins to unravel. While most other simulations offer a mix of mission types, TV gives you nothing but endless firefights from start to finish. Each mission contains the same elements: navigate to a series of targets and destroy them, while shooting down an armada of enemy fighters and keeping a keen eye on tunnel entrances that can be counted on to lead to power-ups. The game

consists of half a dozen iterations of this sane sequence with minor deviations.

This is really disappointing, especially in light of the fact that each level is huge and contains all sorts of additional targets, such as ammo dumps, tanks, and alien buildings. Yet the destruction of any of these does little to progress the game, other than giving you the satisfaction of blowing things up. Since almost everything is a target, and all enemy ships your enemies, you might as well just fly around with the trigger pressed and point the nose of your ship all around. You're bound to make a bunch of things go BOOM.

The odds in TV get so ridiculous at times, that it will make players think that the final battle scene from The Last Starfighter was completely plausible. Enemy fighters each have their strengths and weaknesses, but they all have one thing in common: their pilots are all freshly arrived from their full frontal lobotomies. They will attempt to maneuver to get behind the players' ship, but then they'll accelerate past their position on your six to pull in front. Here they will happily play target until a plasma bolt sends them to their alien nirvana.

Star Crash

The action is certainly furious, but the endless explosions begin to ring hollow in time. While your trigger finger will indeed bulk up to gargantuan proportions, the brain activity required to complete the game will not reach much higher than your brain stem. Ultimately, I can best recommend this game for the Beavis and Butthead crowd, who I can readily imagine in front of their monitor till all yelling till all hours of the night:

Beavis- FIRE! FIRE! FIRE! ... FIRE! ... Yeah! Yeah! ... That was cool!

Butthead- Wow! ... Huh-hu-hu! ... That was cool!

Still, TV is a high-quality port that will satisfy those with an itchy trigger finger and an intense craving for action. But for all its good graphics and fast action, there just isn't a whole lot to the plot of this game. I did get a charge out of flying fast and blowing things up, and it was cool to find the first two tunnels. But then I wanted something more. Something that never came.

Pros

- Excellent Graphics
- Ferocious arcade action
- Interesting and visually appealing target locations

Cons

- Repetitive mission profiles
- Wasted level of detail in the terrain that is never exploited for mission purposes
- AppleTalk only network option
- Little replay value

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