



Star Power:

The cinematic sequences in Wing Commander 3 are a major portion of the game. Origin supports the script with major motion picture talent. As well as Malcolm McDowell (top), John Rhys-Davies (with Mark Hamill--middle), and Tom Wilson (bottom), on screen characters were played by Jason Bernard, Ginger Allen, Joshua Lucas, Julian Reyes, Courtney Gains, and more. Talented voice actors Tim Curry, Alan Mandell, John Schuck, and John Rhys-Davies (performing a dual role) supplied the gruff alien dialogue.

Improved Game Design

Of course, star power doesn't mean much unless there's a solid game to back it up. With years of innovation and game engine tinkering, Wing Commander 3 has an almost breathtaking game to back up its great presentation. Dogfighting has never been so visceral as it is here. The game play is much faster and more responsive than its predecessor, and the scrolling and scaling is much smoother. Indeed, the 3D environment of Wing Commander 3 feels very real.

Control, especially with the Flightstick Pro, has been greatly refined since Super Wing Commander introduced flightstick control. With the stick in your hands, sound through a good source, and darkness all around, Wing Commander 3 is one of the closest experiences to virtual reality that I have ever experienced. It just plays that well.

One huge improvement over Super Wing Commander is the option to turn off the cockpit, leaving only vital displays and open space before you. This gives you a full screen to view the fight, instead of the claustrophobic viewpoint to which Super Wing Commander players were confined. Also, a much improved flightstick top hat control enables simplistic targeting changes, auto pilot, and decoy release. In direct comparison to Super Wing Commander, Wing Commander 3 has virtually no slow down or flickering (except when you are right on top of a capital ship) which eliminates two flaws that were, at times, rampant in Super Wing Commander.

Wing Commander 3's ships are all made from textured polygons. This allows for faster, smoother scrolling, and gives the ships a realistic 3D existence. The graphics are cleaner, sharper and more well-defined than Super Wing Commander. Pixilation, while still present at close range, is not as noticeably distracting.

Wing Commander 3 also keeps the mission difficulties at a more manageable level than Super Wing Commander did. If, however, you find



a mission just too tough, there is an invulnerability setting in the controls menu. There are definitely some very hairy missions, but overall the game can be won without cheating.

As with past Wing Commander versions, game and storyline progression depends upon your success rate with missions, but Wing Commander 3 goes further and allows some degree of character interaction while out of the cockpit. At certain points in the game, you must pick from two different responses during a conversation. That, in turn, will divert the game's progression to some extent.

Admittedly, in action, a lot of these dialogue choices seemed more gimmicky than anything else (especially the romance aspect, which I found to be handled ridiculously given the grim direction the story had taken), but it's an interesting attempt, nevertheless. Unfortunately, the live action characters aboard the Victory just do not seem as interesting, or appealing as the computer-generated characters aboard Super Wing Commander's Tiger's Claw were.

Wing Commander 3 has totally done away with the mission debriefings, while the mission objective briefings tended to be much shorter. Also, since you are already an ace, there are no promotions, no helpful advice from fellow flyers, and no shifting around to different units. I





Your Choice: You choose your wingman based on the mission and the ability of your personnel. Lose a wingman in battle and they will gone from the roster.



Two Problems:
Only 5 missions can be saved at any one time (middle).
All surface missions are flown in Full Motion Video with no interactivity (bottom).

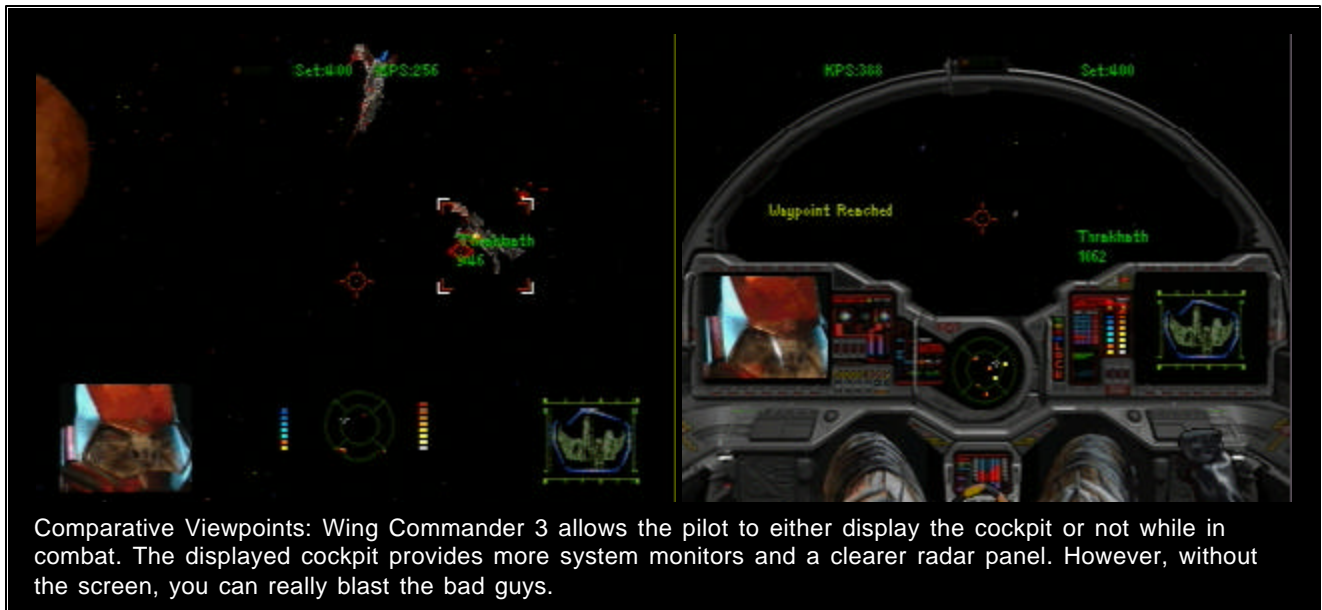
did like the fact that players have almost total freedom of the ship, selection of their wingman, and the ability to choose their armament for a mission.

While Super Wing Commander had a far reaching, heroic, all-odds-against-you kind of storyline, it is nothing compared to the veracity of Wing Commander 3's plot. This time around, you are not just out to save a single sector of space, but to completely end the war. Indeed, the ultimate goal is to destroy the very foundation of the Kilrathi's social structure: the Kilrathi home world, Kilrah. And for once, the good guys have their own little Death Star-like planetkiller (two of them).

While Wing Commander 3 is a result of the continued merging of Hollywood and Silicon Valley, the fact remains that with or without the star power and the expensive movie-like sequences, Wing Commander 3 is simply a great game.

The cinema sequences which provide the story are definitely top notch. The plot unfolds very much like a movie, in a sometimes thrilling, sometimes humorous, and sometimes tragic and horrific manner. Kudos to Origin and Electronic Arts for providing high production values.

One disappointing aspect were the ground missions. While surface missions come up at several points during the game, they are handled through non-interactive (though thrilling) cinematic sequences. Just as I would have liked to have seen some deep space action in Shock Wave, I wish Wing Commander 3 had



Comparative Viewpoints: Wing Commander 3 allows the pilot to either display the cockpit or not while in combat. The displayed cockpit provides more system monitors and a clearer radar panel. However, without the screen, you can really blast the bad guys.

contained some playable planetside missions. Reportedly, however, this flaw will be addressed in Wing Commander 4, which is scheduled for a winter release on the PC.

Wing Commander 3 is not a game for everyone. The complete freedom of movement allowed is very different from games like Shock Wave or Total Eclipse. Additionally, the complexity of control and motion require a greater level of strategy and attention. I thoroughly enjoyed this adventure through the Wing Commander's universe, and will for some time to come. Multiple choices and mission success rates allow for some degree of variation from game to game, prolonging play life. Dog-fights always have a degree of randomness as well, since the actions of both your enemies and your fellow wingmen vary each time you play.

While Wing Commander 3 is a result of the continued merging of Hollywood and Silicon Valley, the fact remains that with or without the star power and the expensive movie-like sequences, Wing Commander 3 is simply a great game. It looks and sounds great, plays wonderfully, and is unbelievably addictive. Wing Commander 3 should rocket up to the top of many a gamer's most played list.

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CAN YOU DO IT?

Can you save Angel (top) or is she doomed? Can you bring the aliens to the peace table (middle) or will you slumber in a tomb among the stars?