STAR CONTROL II - 3DO

A long time ago, I used to play an arcade game known as Space War, which had two ships (one looking like the USS Enterprise of Star Trek fame) battling each other in the depths of space. Granted the depths were nothing more than a black screen dotted now and then with white specks for stars, and the ships were tiny little vector graphics, and the game was timed... but it was fun!! Years later I can still enjoy the excitement of that game and more in Crystal Dynamics' *Star Control II.*

Star Control II is more than a sequel to its predecessor, which could be played on IBM PC's and the Sega Genesis - it takes the original play mechanics such as <u>Melee</u> and the various scenarios offered and bumps them up to 3DO standards. <u>Super Melee</u> contains all of the original ships including my personal favorite, the Ur'Quan Destroyer ("Launch fighters"), and six new ships with new features: kinetic saw blades, tractor beams, reincarnation ("Hallelujah!"), crew sacrifice for fuel (!), and other options. You or another player can now create and name your own teams of ships and store them for future use in the 3DO's memory - I created one called The Ultimatum and got my butt kicked by the built-in team that sported two of each of the strongest ships!

This would have been a decent game on any other platform, but it shines brightly on the 3DO, taking advantage of memory, graphics, and CPU time. The game play is much faster than Star Control on the Genesis, so upgrading to it will take a little time - I was flying so fast I kept losing track of myself! The greatest enhancement to the game has to be the scaling method used based on ship proximity - the old game would "cut away" to a scene where the ships became larger or smaller, which was slightly disorienting. Now we see that when ships get closer or farther apart the scene scales up or down to show both opponents. The graphics have been improved somewhat, and the

greater color palate gives the ships a more three-dimensional look, but it would have been nice if the ships rotated rather than remained planar, or even better if they had used the computer models seen in the ship descriptions!

The full-blown game is comparable to Electronic Arts' *Starflight*, but has more scale, more action, and a higher level of sophistication. The opening cinema is fantastic, conveying the origins of the Alliance and the Empire (does this sound familiar to anybody?), details of the war, the alien ship's discovery, and the mission ahead for you, the chosen commander. When the game begins, you're in the Sol system (our own) and are heading to Earth when you are intercepted by an Ur'Quan probe which blatantly informs you that Earth is under Ur'Quan rule and a shield has been erected to prevent departures or arrivals. You then travel to the orbiting space station where you have a discussion with its commander, who gives you the lowdown on what's going on - this is very crucial to the game 'cause if you don't talk to him correctly, you won't know what you're doing.

After the de-briefing, you can begin traversing the universe, flying through hyperspace, engaging and battling aliens, and exploring and mining worlds for minerals and life forms. Some important tips:

- Do make sure you have enough fuel to not only get to where you want to go, but get back as well! The navigation map gives you a gray sphere which indicates where you can travel based on your **present** fuel supply.

- Try not to send your lander down to planets close to a sun or where the temperature is above 400° because it will be severely damaged or destroyed. You lose crew, not energy, whenever you sustain damage.

- Negotiate with most aliens you meet, especially if you're low on fuel or damaged. You might make a good ally out of somebody you're ready to obliterate!

- Keep practicing (that's right, *practicing*) in Super Melee - the aliens that you encounter in the main game fight hard and dirty, and they use their secret weapons too!

Star Control II has proven itself to be a necessary compliment to most player's 3DO libraries, and I do expect to see the third installment in the not-so-distant future. For an old Space War fan, this goes far beyond what we could've ever expected a game like this to be back in the 70s!