ORIGIN

110 Wild Basin Road
Suite 330
Austin, Texas 78746

TEL. (512) 328-0282
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*Others write
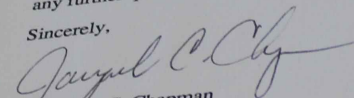software . . .
We create
worlds!*

February 4, 1991

George Sanger
The Fat Man
7611 Shoal Creek Blvd.
Austin, TX 78757

Dear Mr. Sanger,

Enclosed please find copies of the reviews for Wing Commander as of January 1991. The copy quality on some of them is not great but it is the best that I could hope to get out of some of the originals.

If you would like future articles just let me know. Please feel free to call me if you have any further questions or requests.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline C. Chapman
Marketing Coordinator

TO: Greg Malone, Media Relations Manager
FROM: Hartley G. Lesser, *Dragon* magazine
SUBJECT: Wing Commander review
DATE: 12/07/90

Hi Greg,

The following review is the lead review for issue #166 of *Dragon*. I continually try to reach by phone, but the 512 number seems to be continually busy. Origin might think about a trunk line with switching, otherwise folk are going to be frustrated trying to call you or others within the firm.

As you can see, Wing Commander is our very first review to receive SIX STARS. Origin has done very well with this offering. Congrats!

The Role of Computers (Dragon #166)
by
Hartley, Patricia, and Kirk Lesser

The number of games being received for review is becoming quite staggering. As we *really do* try to review each *good* game we obtain, we are cutting back on our new products section and simply announcing the products themselves. We need the space for actual game reviews and hints.

We are now starting to assign reviews to some of our readers. If you are interested in such an endeavor, please send us a review of *no more* than six paragraphs of your favorite game. We'll read your review and, those who best meet our criteria as reviewers, will be sent a test game to play and write about for this column. We only want to hear from readers who are quite serious about the job of reviewing and not simply intrigued by the prospect of receiving software. We are seeking those who game on PC/MS-DOS computers, the Atari ST, Commodore 64/128, and Commodore Amiga. This is a serious effort on our part to find unpublished writers who are looking for an opportunity to break into print. Thanks for your interest.

Wing Commander: * * * * * * (Yep, our FIRST six-star review!)

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Publisher: Origin (512)328-0282
Reviewed on a PC/MS-DOS clone with a Roland LAPC-1 sound board and
VGA graphics

There is no doubt in our minds that Wing Commander is the finest space
flight adventure/simulation ever to come to PC/MS-DOS machines. The
animation and the stirring theme music blasting from the Roland sound
system makes Wing Commander more like participating in a movie rather
than playing a game.

Wing Commander is suprisingly easy to learn and provides many
challenges for even the best gamer. You start your career as a
Confederation 2nd Lieutenant on a space carrier named Tiger's Claw.
From the carrier, you are sent on various missions against the Kilrathi
enemy. Your missions range from simple strikes to escorting, patrolling,
or defending Confederation territory or ships.

The action begins in a bar on the Tiger's Claw where you are apparently
about to engage the enemy in a flight simulator. You are asked for your
last name and a code name. After entering the information you exit the
simulator and view the surrounding bar. Please don't forget that when we
say 'you see' or 'you view,' we are talking about simply the finest graphics
we've ever seen on a VGA display. You actually feel as though you have
become one with the action.

You can talk to Shotglass, the bartender, or any of the patrons. Sometimes
parlaying with fellow officers will give you a hint or a tip on how to beat
the Kilrathi. A chalkboard on the back wall of the bar lists the names of all
pilots on the Tiger's Claw, the number of sorties each has flown, and
number of Kilrathi kills for each pilot. Finally, you can actually practice
missions against the Kilrathi on the training simulator without risking
bodily harm. This is by far the best way to learn how to pilot your ship and
to study Kilrathi tactics.

When you are done in the bar, you can enter the barracks. Here, you can
save or load games. The save game slots are represented by bunks, eight in
all. Saved games are represented by people resting in their cots.

You can also view earned service medals. The display reveals your rank,
any fighter qualification ribbons, performance service ribbons, graduation
service ribbons, and any medals for exceptional behavior. Such medals
include a Bronze Star, Gold Star, and Silver Star for exceptional bravery

under fire and successfully facing overwhelming opposition. Also included are the Terran Confederation Medal of Honor, the highest medal awarded to military personnel, and the Golden Sun that is awarded for surviving the destruction of one's ship through ejection.

Should you feel qualified to try a mission, you exit the barracks and enter the briefing room. Here, Commander Halycon assigns you your mission and shows you, via a map, where you will need to travel in order to accomplish the scenario. He also advises you of any ships, mines, or asteroids, so pay close extra attention to his words.

This scene reminded us of finely-crafted Japanese cartoons and it is just as well animated. The seriousness of Halycon's face during the briefing, and the close-ups of individual pilot's asking questions about the mission, all add to the excitement of the yet-to-be experienced scenarios.

Following the briefing, the screen shows pilots scrambling to their fighters and you climbing into your fighter. These animations are extremely well detailed, even to the point of showing small dents and paint chips on your fighter craft. Again, the animation is exceptionally smooth and happens to be some of the best we've seen on *any* computer system.

Once you are ready to go, you switch to a first person perspective and the action begins.

The fighter screen reveals your front view as well as all of your ship's instruments that indicate speed, radar, blaster indicator, armor and shield indicator, as well as two video display units. On the left, the display shows your current weapons, guns and missiles, as well as a damage display for registering internal hits to your ship. The right video display unit shows targeting screens, range to your navigation point, and also has a communication screen. Each of the various fighters you *may* eventually pilot have different locations and configurations for this instrumentation.

Other available views include battle, tactical, chase plane, and missile views.

Completing your mission requires you to fly to the navigation points, as Halycon ordered. In order to accomplish this, you line up your ship with the navigation crosshairs on the screen, or you can allow the autopilot to take care of things for you. The autopilot will continue on to the nav point until you reach a hazard, or encounter the enemy. At that point, you regain control of your ship.

When flying near a hazard, a mine, or asteroid field, you must use your flying skills to manuever around these dangerous objects. This requires practice and, perhaps, several lives before you get the hang of it. The animation shows the detailed asteroids or mines as well as portions of same should you happen to destroy an incoming object.

If you sustain damage by asteroids, or enemy gunfire, your shield indicator visibly reduces. It will regenerate slowly if you receive no further hits. If you have been unlucky enough to allow all of your shields to be reduced to nothing, your ship's armor starts to absorb damage. If the armor is totally destroyed, you'll start to lose the ship's systems. This damage is displayed in another, finely-detailed animation—panels or wires blow up, leaving scarred remains on the console. If enough hits are sustained, your ship will blow up. You will see your own funeral, complete with gun salute as your casket-encased body is launched from the carrier into space, complete with heart-rending funeral music.

Encountering the enemy is what makes this game totally unique and so much fun several dinners have been missed. From the moment you spot the enemy on radar to seeing the explosion and debris flung throughout space as you make kills, this is definitely the best animation in the game.

When you spot the enemy, the targeter locates them and shows you what type of ship(s) you are facing and its range from you. Your weapon capabilities depend upon the ship you are piloting. For the light-classed Hornet, you are limited to laser cannons, two Dart dumb flying missiles, and one heat seeking missile. At the other extreme, the awesome Raptor has neutron guns as well as a mass driver cannon. These can be used separately or in tandem to create havoc among the enemy. The Raptor also possesses two heat seeking missiles, an Image Recognition Missile (it goes after one target after locking in on its image rather than following heat patterns), a FF (Friend or Foe) Missile (locks onto any enemy because it doesn't broadcast a certain sound which all Confederation ships send out), and a mine. All the other Confederation ships have some of those weapons alone or in various combination.

Firing at a ship with a gun and hitting it shows the explosion. Possibly some debris will explode from the wounded ship if you have penetrated its armor with your shot and have managed to damage vital internal systems. The targeter on your viewscreen shows the status of the enemy ship by

shading damaged or destroyed parts of the ship's shields or armor. Some of the enemy ships have better shields and armor and take many hits to destroy. However, these ships do have weak spots and a well-placed (or lucky shot) to a certain part may injure or even destroy the ship. The enemy doesn't take kindly to you firing at them and they will attempt to return fire. Each enemy ship has different maneuvers and is armed with different weapons. Some will dodge and try to out-maneuver you, while other, heavily-powered ships will fly straight at you and try to knock you out fast. Some are also equipped with missiles and will fire these at you. It takes a well trained flyer to out maneuver them. These hostile aliens also are not idiots and, if they are in trouble, may try to escape. Also looming out in space are Kilrathi aces that are better flyers and are harder to kill. If you manage to kill one of these aces, you are a really good pilot. Your wingman can also help. You communicate with him or her and give orders and your wingman can break off and attack, stay by your wing, return to formation, return to base, help against an enemy that's attacking you, or even co-attack a target that you have in your targeter. Each wingman has a different personality and it shows in their flying and combat techniques. Some will ignore your orders and fly into combat, trying to become the hero, while others are smart and only engage the enemy at a prime moment. Wingmen are not only a diversion—they also destroy enemy ships. You'd better watch out for what you are targeting as it could be your wingman chasing and firing at the same target. It wouldn't do anyone any good to be firing at each other. We have also found ourselves suddenly coming eye-to-eye on a wingman and accidently ramming them, sometimes resulting in our demise. Origin did an excellent job of actually giving the enemy and your wingman individual and unique personalities.

After completing the mission, whether success or failure, the player lands at the Tiger's Claw. Here, you'll visibly see how badly beat-up your ship got during the past mission. Afterwards Halycon will scold or commend you at a debriefing. He will also tell you how many ships you were able to destroy. Sometimes you will be asked to see Halycon later where he will promote you, or reassign you to a new ship with a new wingman. Also, you may be given a medal. With Star Wars victory type music, you will go

through the acceptance of a cherished medal. From that you will re-enter the bar.

Wing Commander is a great, fantastic, absolutely top-notch simulation. The graphics and animation are extraordinary. The objects in space are not polyogn filled, but beautifully drawn, colored, and animated. Every section of the game is painstakingly detailed, from the battle-scarred ship returning from combat, to the barracks where the flouresecent lights flicker and water drips from the ceiling.

The game is not complicated and will keep you glued to your IBM for hours and hours. Wing Commander is worth far more than its cost of mission and is certainly one of Origin's finest works. We simply cannot for Origin's expansion missions to be released. If you want the best PC/MS DOS in your software library, there is no choice...you absolutely have to purchase Wing Commander.

Spectacular and elaborate dogfight scenes are the most dramatic feature of Wing Commander, but its quieter virtues are impressive as well.

Wing Commander
WILLIAM R. TROTTER

Like a cinematic experience, Wing Commander lets you see the action from multiple points of view.

I see you made it back. . . barely.

Here's the Skipper. He's tough but fair, caustic but lovable, and you've met him before in a hundred war movies.

O n March 15 in the year A.D. 2629, the Terran exploration vessel *Iason*, engaged on a routine survey mission in the Vega Sector, encountered a spaceship of unknown origin. The *Iason*'s skipper beamed a standard signal of greeting and non-belligerence, then waited for a response from the alien. After 20 minutes, the reply came — a blast of firepower that vaporized the Earth ship and her entire crew.

That was humankind's first encounter with the aggressive and pitiless Kilrathi, a warrior race that resembles giant tabby cats, refers to humans as "monkeys," and has an insatiable appetite for interstellar conquest.

Now, 25 years later, the war is stalemated, with both sides waging a costly all-out campaign to wrest control of the Vega Sector. The manpower and resources of the Terran Confederation have become stretched almost to the breaking point. If the Vegan campaign is lost, the Kilrathi will roll forward with renewed vigor and the fate of humanity itself may hang in the balance.

This is where you, the game player who has just booted up Origin's spectacular *Wing Commander*, come in. You're a young rookie pilot assigned to the *Tiger's Claw*, a 7,000-meter-long *Bengal*-class strike carrier with a complement of 104 fighters. You hardly have time to meet your squadron mates before you're sent out on your first mission.

Your first few missions are flown in a Hornet light fighter — fast, maneuverable, but somewhat lacking in punch. You'll learn that, until you develop your own flying style, and the controls of the Terran ships become an extension of your own hands, brain, and will, you'd be wise to fly by "The Book." You'll also learn that the Kilrathi are skilled, fanatically brave adversaries who outnumber the Terran pilots by about three to one.

If you survive your first few missions, and rack up a respectable number of kills, you'll be transferred out of Hornets and into a Scimitar-class medium fighter. It's at this point that the missions become really difficult, as you are sent into Kilrathi formations whose ships not only outnumber your party but are also more powerful than your own ship. You'll also be sent after strategic targets — transports full of munitions and reinforcements, always guarded by swarms of escorts. You'll wish, over and over again, for a faster, better-armed ship, but until you prove yourself in the Scimitar — a "fighter designed by a committee" in which all the factors of firepower, speed, and armor are dictated by

ALERT

The scramble sequence is very dramatic. Like all the animated narrative scenes, however, you have the option of skipping it once you've seen it enough.

compromise — you won't be able to advance to a better class of ship.

The mid-level missions in *Wing Commander* are a "branching" program — i.e., the results of certain critical missions dictate the path the game scenario will take in subsequent missions. It's possible to play and save, play and save, and just bash your way through to ultimate victory by sheer persistence, but if you do, you'll miss some of the dramatic and creative high points of the game.

If, for example, the campaign starts to go badly, you'll actually see the interior of the *Tiger's Claw* grow lonelier and dingier. Kilrathi raids get closer. Cut-away vignettes show bloody Kilrathi victories at various Terran bases in the Vega Sector. And eventually you'll have to scramble to repel a massive attack on the *Claw* herself. If the worst happens, you'll see a horrific sight — your ship being blown to pieces by a horde of taunting "furballs," leaving you and your surviving mates to drift helplessly in space until the oxygen runs out.

ANGST INCLUDED

If *Wing Commander* were only a dogfighting game, a kind of super-arcade extravaganza, it would still be one of the most gripping computer simulations ever released — but it's a lot more than that, for the heartstopping combat sequences are embedded in a solid role-playing context. You get to know the other pilots (several of the deadliest ones are female, be it noted to Origin's credit), each of whom has a personal style of flying and each of whom
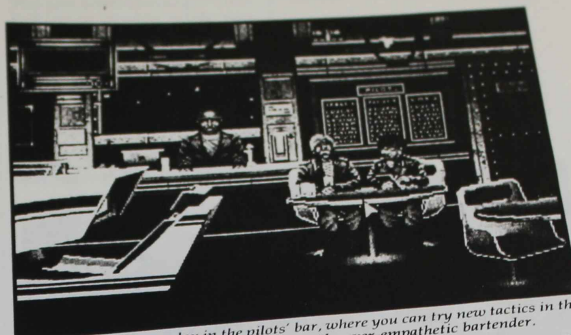
In between missions, relax in the pilots' bar, where you can try new tactics in the training simulator or chat with Shotglass, the ever-empathetic bartender.
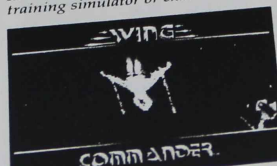
You'll go out first in a Hornet. Not heavily armed, but fast and nimble, the Hornet will get you into range and out of trouble very quickly.

On escort missions, you'll have to hang around in dangerous areas until the transport you're escorting jumps into hyperspace. You'll know the instant that happens.
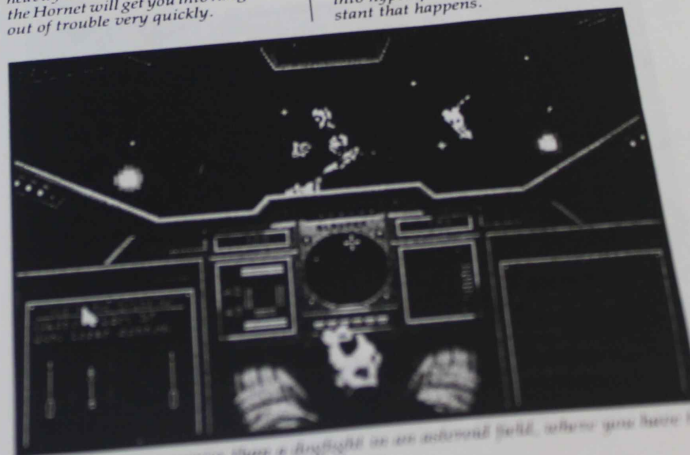
Few missions are scarier than a dogfight in an asteroid field, where you have to worry about the rocks as well as the enemy.

Although *Wing Commander will doubtless find its biggest audience among males, it is not a sexist game — some of your best "wingmen" are females.*

can give you some pointers. You even get to know the enemy, since you will occasionally encounter Kilrathi aces whose flying styles and personalities are part of the whole gestalt.

Especially poignant is the moment when you finally shoot down a worthy foe such as Bahktosh Redclaw. As your neutron cannon rounds rip pieces from his engines, he cries out over the open radio channel, "You shall not put me in that vacuum!" And then with your final burst causing his vessel to erupt into a boiling cloud of plasma, you hear him scream: "Aiee! The Void! The Voi...."

One of the more common enemy craft is the saucer-shaped "Dralthi" fighter. It's a big target, and it's vulnerable too...unless it's coming at you head-on.

Fail in a mission, and you'll get chewed out by the C.O. Lose a wingman, and you'll have the sad experience of viewing his or her funeral in space — *Wing Commander* is filled with dramatic animated sequences that give it genuine role-playing depth. You even get to witness your own death (from two angles, no less) and funeral.

Not all of your colleagues will be totally reliable or safe to fly with — another realistic touch. One in particular, a hot-blooded young buck nick-named Maniac, will disobey orders sometimes just to rack up more kills for his personal glory, and thereby jeopardize the mission. He may even shoot *you* down if you get in his way while he's diving at

the enemy. Although your first instinct may be to go to the aid of your wingman whenever he or she calls for help, you may get so fed up with Maniac that you just leave him to get himself out of trouble, while you continue on with the mission. Just as in real life, it's your call, and the variables in the program make some of the choices pretty tough.

In contrast to Maniac, there are pilots who are so steady and reliable that you want to keep flying with them throughout the whole game.

And when one of them gets blown into kitty litter, you may feel a surprising pang of loss — quite a tribute to the role-playing gestalt of *Wing Commander.*

INTERACTIVE CINEMA

Wing Commander shamelessly — indeed, gleefully — borrows many of its design elements and much of its imagery from *Star Wars* and a host of lesser space operas. And goodness only knows how many thousands of feet of real dogfight
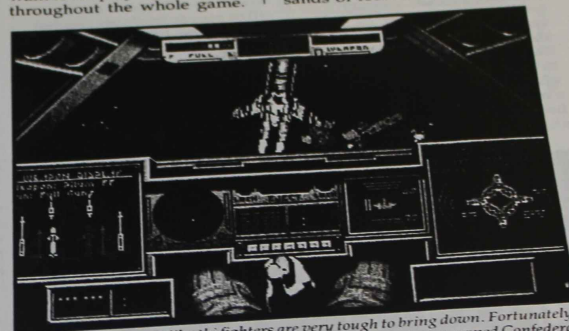
The heavier classes of Kilrathi fighters are very tough to bring down. Fortunately, you rarely meet them until you've graduated to one of the better-armed Confederation ships.
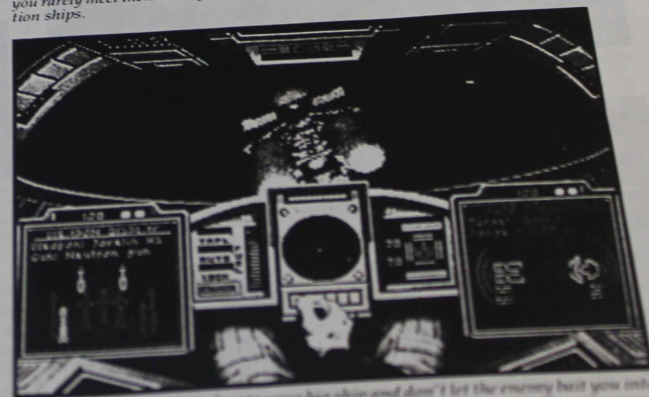
When flying escort, stay close to your big ship and don't let the enemy bait you into a long-range pursuit. Once the transport has "jumped," you'll be free to engage at will.

Wing Commander

Keep track of your ranking within the squadron by checking in periodically with the pilots' scoreboard.
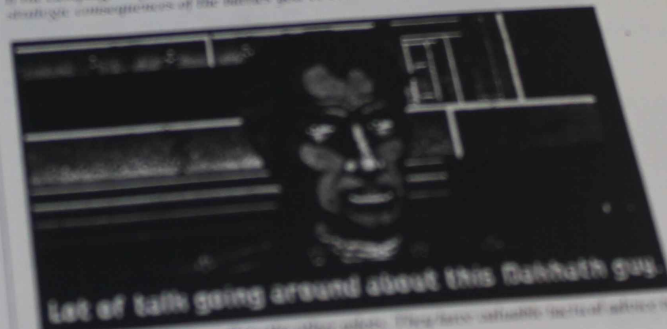
footage designer Chris Roberts must have viewed when planning the combat missions. The cinematic look of the film is fully complemented by a thundering musical score. According to Origin, one of the design goals of the program was to create the closest possible analog to a big-screen movie experience, with the player as the star. This is a goal many simulations aspire to — and none comes closer to being a true interactive movie than *Wing Commander*.

When searching for adjectives to describe the graphics, this reviewer must fall back on a word that is overused and seldom truly deserved: awesome. The illusion of flying through a three-dimensional void is at times quite spooky (try cutting off the lights while you play) — nebulae twist in cold blue vortexes, suns flame against a velvet, star-dusted night, and asteroids loom in front of your ship like wrecking balls hanging in space.

Missiles, laser blasts, damage effects, explosions — all of these are handled with

ishing degree of seeming intelligence. You'll have to become one hot pilot to survive most of these missions, able to hit a target even while zigzagging and spinning wildly, able to know just when and how long to use your afterburners and when to break off action to let your weapons recharge.

Players who have become frustrated with high-tech flight simulators — in which you spend most of your concentration just keeping the plane in the air and on course — need have no fear. These space fighters are about as easy to fly as a World War I Spad: a joystick, a gun sight, a fuel gauge, a weapon-selector switch, and that's about it. The computer even takes care of navigating, take-offs, and landings. You're free to fly and fight. Learning how to survive, much less emerge from some of these

bloodbaths with your skin intact, is a much tougher proposition.

Some of the melee scenes, in which six, eight, or even more spacecraft are twisting, firing, exploding, and rolling, are simply breathtaking. Origin provides several function-keys that allow you to view the action from different angles — and an updated edition of the game, due out in early 1991, will even have a "tape" option that will let you record your most satisfying victories and play them back.

Despite the size and epic scale of the program, *Wing Commander* is gratifyingly easy to play. The basic commands and functions are quite small in number, as are the moves and tactics necessary to fly your space fighter. Origin's documentation — presented in the form of the *Tiger's Claw's*

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...its (VDU) or sec-
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...and execute the human scientists and soldiers who defended them.

If the campaign begins to go badly, narrative screens will appear to illustrate the strategic consequences of the battles you've been losing.

Lot of talk going around about this Bakhath guy

In between missions, talk to the other pilots. They have valuable tactical advice to give, including tips that could save your life.
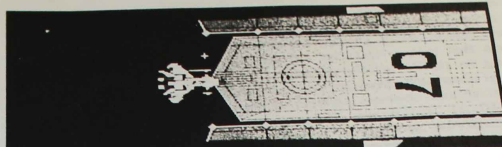
Be extra careful during the big, swirling melees — you'll really feel bad if you shoot down one of your comrades (and worse, if one of them shoots you down).

Don't worry about landings — no matter how badly shot up you may be, the computer will bring you home. Just navigate to one end of the carrier and request landing clearance.

The amount of damage you sustained on each mission can be seen in the hangar sequence that concludes a mission. Your mechanic may also say a few choice words — he's great at stating the obvious.

In the exhilarating attack Vega campaign, the game finals is a dizzying swirl sequence. Do these space Harriers look familiar?

own daily newspaper, "Claw Marks" — is as well-designed as every other element of this precedent-shattering game. There are valuable discussions of tactics, weapons, and personnel, along with the basic instructions.

One small quibble emerges from the tactical discussion: "The Book" recommends using "Sit-n-Spin" or "Sit-n-Kick" maneuvers in which you must suddenly shut off your engines and let the enemy shoot past you and into your waiting gun sights. Fine in theory, perhaps (these tactics were used with great success by British Harrier pilots during the Falklands War, in fact), except for one small problem: The program provides no keystroke that will let you shut off your engines suddenly. All you can do is decelerate over a period of several seconds. And every time we tried it, we were turned into cat food by the enemy. Perhaps this feature will be added to subsequent editions.

Readers should note that *Wing Commander* was designed to take maximum advantage of the fastest and most powerful home computers. To get the most from the 3-D graphics, sound, and stunningly good animation, you really do need VGA, a sound board, and the best joystick you can find. Ideally, you should also have a 386/16 computer too. But if you don't mind a certain amount of jerkiness in the more complicated melee battles, a 286/12 will do fine.
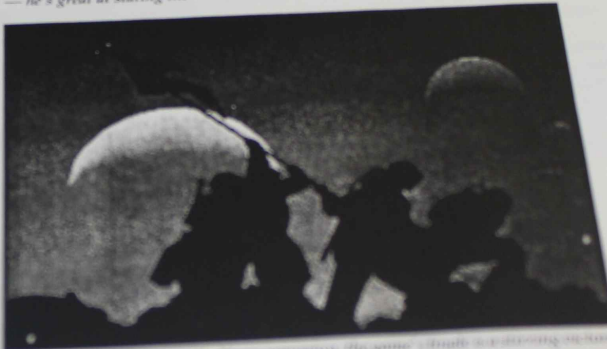
Wing Commander uses as much free RAM as possible on

the player's system. Any memory-resident programs will compromise the action, and regardless of the amount of memory on your machine, you must have at least 560K free in order to run the simulation.

Origin has created the finest dogfight simulator ever developed, no matter what genre. Wedded to the white-knuckled combat scenes is a

role-playing framework of glorious, Walter Mitty melodrama and surprising depth. The whole concept is carried out by means of stunning graphics and animation. It is, in short, a unique, leap-frog sensation, and the breathtaking art is a genuine interactive movie for your PC.

GP

COMPUTER GAME REVIEWS

Wing Commander

ORIGIN
Versions: Amiga ($69.95),
IBM PC ($69.95)

GRAPHICS	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 **9** 10	
OVERALL	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 **9** 10	

Every once in a while a game comes along that instantly seizes the attention of every electronic gamer. In the past, games like *Defender of the Crown* (Cinemaware), *Test Drive* (Accolade) and *Tetris* (Spectrum Holobyte) have, for various reasons, occupied that lofty position. The latest in this noble line is Chris Roberts' red-hot science-fiction shooter, *Wing Commander*, a program that defines audiovisual state-of-the-art in the IBM PC universe.

The player in *Wing Commander* is one of the elite corps of pilots on-board the *Strike Carrier Tiger's Claw* fighting for the Terran Confederation against the Empire of Kilrah. The game goes to great lengths to enhance the illusion of reality. Players can visit the *Carrier*'s bar, for example, and collect the latest scuttlebutt, check the chalkboard to see how well the other Terran pilots are doing or fine-tune their combat skills on the *TrainSim* video game. The bar connects to the ship's barracks, where the user can save a game, quit or continue on to the Mission Hangar, where heavy duty action awaits.

Terran Confederation pilots live and die by the buddy system. Every pilot is cast either as a Wingman or a Wingleader, and the various pilots are profiled in the superb documentation. The Wingleader's job is to execute a mission. A Wingman's job is to protect the Wingleader.

The player is always cast as the Wingleader and can give various orders to Wingmen, including one to "attack my target." In this scenario, the Wingman and Wingleader temporarily ex-

In addition to stunning bit-mapped graphics, *Wing Commander* offers some delightfully cinematic bridging sequences.

change roles, though the player continues to give the orders.

The cockpits of the four different confederation fighters are visually distinctive, but each contains a viewscreen and head-up display (HUD); radar; left and right video display units (VDU) or secondary viewscreens; armor/shields indicator; fuel indicator; speed; blaster indicator; and eject warning. In-flight systems include targeting, navigation, autopiloting and communications (for giving orders to Wingmen).

In addition to stunning bitmapped graphics, *Wing Commander* offers some delightfully cinematic bridging sequences, such as the pilots scrambling for take-off and fighters being launched from the *Tiger's Claw*. The sound, for those PC owners with enough RAM to run both the game and a sound board (Ad Lib, Roland or Soundblaster), is brilliant. The problem for many potential users, however, is that they simply will not have enough power to run this game at anywhere near optimal levels. The game *plays* at 640K and 12 Mhz, but a meg, 20 Mhz and a sound board is necessary for a true *Wing Commander* experience.

On the other hand, for anyone with a loaded PC who's been looking for software that takes the machine to its limits, *Wing Commander* is the game you've been waiting for.

—Bill Kunkel

Origin Systems, Inc.
P.O. Box 161750
Austin, TX 78716
(512) 328-0282

Spot

VIRGIN MASTERTRONIC
Versions: Commodore 64 ($39.99),
IBM PC ($39.99)

GRAPHICS	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10	
OVERALL	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 10	

Spot is an intriguing new strategy contest from Binary Magic starring the

Computing 1990's best and worst

By Dennis Lynch

For computer lovers, 1990 was the best of times and the worst of times.

If you're one of the millions of people who own a Commodore 64, an Apple II or an Atari ST, 1990 was a terrible year, as the software pipeline virtually dried up. Instead, the new titles were intended for these machines. Instead, I suspect, most companies cut their efforts on higher-end Apples. Apple did the same with its Macintosh line, and Atari bet most of its chips on its handheld game machine, the Lynx.

For owners of IBM computers and compatibles, however, 1990 was a very good year indeed, as Microsoft finally got its Windows act together and as the IBM share of the market remained strong. As a result, most software companies continued to come out with IBM versions of programs first, giving IBM users the widest choice of software options.

But no matter what computer you own, potentially the most important event of 1990 occurred late in December, when a federal judge ruled that Ashton-Tate's copyright on the DBASE software program is invalid. If the ruling stands, expect all sorts of hassles for 1991 for companies like Apple and Lotus that are engaged in copyright disputes.

For now, though, here are my picks of the best and worst home computing products and events of 1990:

Software Program of the Year: Windows 3.0 (Microsoft; IBM; $149). Sure, this program arrived years late, but it finally provided a working environment for IBM users that equals or surpasses anything in the Mac world. Now software developers everywhere are rushing to get Windows-compatible products on the market.

Bill Gates, Microsoft chairman, says: "Windows 3.0 puts the personal look back into computers. We wanted to make personal computing accessible and approachable, so that users can get more out of their PCs—and have more fun using them." The program delivers all this and more. If you're an IBM user, now's the time to jump on the Windows bandwagon.

Hardware Product of the Year: The Macintosh LC (Apple; $2,400). At last, a color Macintosh at a halfway decent price. The system is a snap to install, and its online tutorial will have you working competently within minutes. Moreover, the microphone attachment that comes standard with the model is a gas.

Best Game System: The TurboExpress (NEC; $249). A hand-held game machine that boasts high-quality color graphics and super sound. Even better, it uses the same cartridges as the NEC TurboGrafx-16. An optional attachment turns the unit into a TV that fits in the palm of your hand. Unfortunately, the system has proved to be so popular that you might have to be patient to get your hands on one; stores sell out their stocks quickly.

Worst Game System: The Nintendo Entertainment System ($89). The venerable NES is finally showing its age. Compared with its competition, the NES offers inferior sound and fuzzy graphics. In Japan, buyers are being treated to Nintendo's Super-Famicom, an awesome new game machine, but no plans have been made for the U.S. debut of this system. Come on, Nintendo: How about equal rights for American buyers?

Best Adventure Game: Ultima VI (Origin; IBM; $59.95) packs the great graphics, superb sound and intricate plotting that players have come to expect when they shell out $30 for a graphics adventure. But unlike most of its competition, Ultima VI discourages random violence and rewards the player for virtuous actions. Its surprising plot also has a moving message of brotherhood and understanding.

Best Simulation—IBM: Sid Meier's Railroad Tycoon (Microprose; IBM; $59.95) is a lovingly crafted re-creation of the great days of U.S. railroads. It's educational, intellectually challenging and great fun. An extra treat is the manual, an eminently readable history of railroading.

Best Simulation—Mac: SimEarth (Maxis; Macintosh; $69.95) gives players control over the evolution of life on a planet. This program is an absorbing introduction to James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis concerning Earth's ecological balance. Brian Rotborough, the president Earthwatch, an environmental group, calls the program "a triumph of imagination and technology."

Best Action Game: Wing Commander (Origin; IBM; $69.95) is a spaceflight simulator that requires quick reflexes to survive its various scenarios. Hook this game up so that the sound plays through your stereo system and be prepared to feel as if you've dropped into the middle of Star Wars.

Best Two-player Game: Command HQ (Microprose; IBM; $49.95) allows two players to hook up by modem or cable for exciting contests of grand strategy and tactics.

Best Sound Board: The LAPC-1 (Roland; $495). The price tag is steep, but this sound board gives MIDI power to your PC and provides for superb stereo sound from a variety of games.

Best Sequel: King's Quest V (Sierra; IBM; $59.95). The latest in the line of Roberta Williams' delightful graphics adventures, this stunningly beautiful work will charm your entire family. This spring will see the release of a CD/ROM version of this game in which characters speak to each other using real voices.
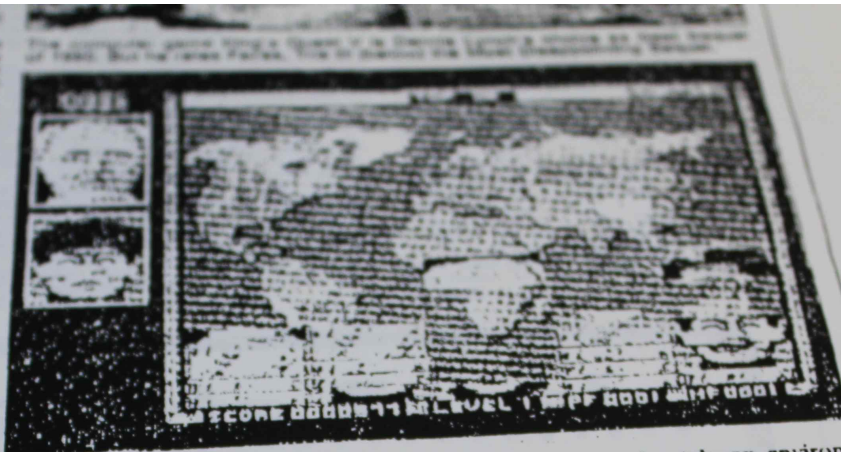
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Computing

Continued from page 49

little in the way of playability.

Best Cartridge: Klax (Tengen; $49.95). One of the few video games available for all three leading dedicated game machines—the Nintendo, the Sega Genesis and the NEC TurboGrafx—this colorful and easy-to-learn game offers challenging fun for players of all ages.

Best Brain Teaser: 3 in Three (Cinemaware; Macintosh; $49.95). A mind-bending series of logic puzzles, this package offers 80 challenges to your brain power. Its creator, Cliff Johnson, was the author of A Fool's Errand, a top logic game of a few years back. This one surpasses its predecessors with superb animation and intricately interconnected puzzles.

Best CD/ROM: The Library of the Future (World Library; IBM; $695) packs the full text of almost 500 great literary works—including the Bible, "Moby Dick," "War and Peace" and the complete works of Shakespeare—onto a disk that fits in the palm of your hand.

Toughest Computer Opponent: The first time I played Scrabble (Virgin Mastronic; IBM; $59.99) against the computer, while I was coming up with words like "dog" and "enter," the first five words the computer came up with were "pruritic," "zloty," "farad," "echidna" and "doss."

Strongest Reaction to Piracy: When copies of their new software program starting showing up on electronic bulletin boards three days after its release, officials of Sir-Tech Software contacted the FBI, the Mounties and Interpol to bring the pirates to justice. The name of the program the pirates were so eager to get their hands on? Freakin' Funky Fuzzballs (IBM; $44.95).

Most Expensive Game: The Limited Edition of Ishido (Publishing International; Macintosh), packaged in a custom-handcrafted wooden box, had a list price of a whopping $495. Even more amazing is that the entire manufacturer's stock of 1,000 was sold out within three weeks of its release.

Best Money Saver: Andrew Tobias' Tax Cut (Meca; IBM; $89.95). This easy-to-use program saved thousands of buyers a trip to the local accountant to help prepare tax returns. If the calculations aren't accurate, Meca pays any penalty.

Best Public Relations Move: To celebrate Halloween, Origin, makers of graphics adventure products, converted the Austin estate of company president Richard Garriott into a haunted castle, complete with a moat, hidden passageways and a dungeon. To make the 45-minute trip through the castle, visitors were required to climb, run and swim.

Worst Public Relations Move: When several members complained about Prodigy changing its rules about online mail, the telecommunications service cracked down on the group by reading their private electronic mail, closing down some of their users' forums, and threatening to kick the protesting members out.

Worst Trend: 900 number hint lines. In an ideal gamers world, makers of graphics adventures would include online hints to help players through especially difficult passages. But most companies make their games so hard that they can't be solved without us shelling out an extra $15 or so for a hint book. And even worse are hint lines like Accolade's 900-990-HINT which charge by the minute. Hey, guys, have a heart.

Worst Title: Chamber of the Sci-Mutant Priestess (Data East; Amiga, IBM; $49.95).

Runner-up: Princess Tomato in the Salad Kingdom (Hudson Soft; Nintendo; $50).

Most Unoriginal Title: Anything with "Dragon" in it. Last year saw the release of D.R.A.G.O.N. Force, Dragon Strike, Rise of the Dragon, and Dragon's Eye. For variations on a theme, there were Draconian and Drakkhen.

Dubious Plot Award: In Elvira, Mistress of the Dark (Accolade; Amiga, IBM; $59.95) your goal is to find Elvira's chest. Based on the looks of things, that should be easy.

PC COMPATIBLES

PC Game of the Year
Railroad Tycoon
MicroProse

Railroad Tycoon

Best Arcade Action Game
Wing Commander
Origin

**Best Fantasy
Role-Playing Game**
The Savage Empire
Origin

**Best Graphics
Adventure Game**
Circuit's Edge
Infocom

Best Puzzle Game
The Fool's Errand
Miles Computing

Best Simulation Game
LHX Attack Chopper
Electronic Arts

Best Sports Game
PGA Tour Golf
Electronic Arts

Best Strategy Game
Ishido: The Way of Stones
Accolade

Best War Game
Harpoon
Three-Sixty

**Game Player's PC
Excellence Awards**

ABC Monday Night Football
Data East

Bad Blood
Origin

Balance of the Planet
Chris Crawford Games

Blue Max: Aces of the Great War
Three-Sixty

Budokan: The Martial Spirit
Electronic Arts

Centurion: Defender of Rome
Electronic Arts

Command HQ
MicroPlay

Conquests of Camelot
Sierra

Countdown
Access

Dark Heart of Uukrull
Broderbund

DragonStrike
Strategic Simulations

F-15 Strike Eagle II
MicroProse

The Game of Harmony
Accolade

Hero's Quest
Sierra

*Jack Nicklaus Unlimited Golf
& Course Design*
Accolade

Knights of Legend
Origin

Leisure Suit Larry III
Sierra

*Les Manley in:
Search for the King*
Accolade

Links
Access

Loom
Lucasfilm

*Moonbase:
Lunar Colony Simulator*
Wesson International

Populous
Electronic Arts

Prince of Persia
Broderbund

Scrabble, Deluxe Version
Parker Brothers

Second Front
Strategic Simulations

Secret of Monkey Island
Lucasfilm

Silent Service II
MicroProse

Starflight 2
Electronic Arts / Interstel

Sword of the Samurai
MicroProse

Test Drive III: The Passion
Accolade

*Their Finest Hour:
The Battle of Britain*
Lucasfilm

TV Sports Football
Cinemaware

*Ultima VI:
The False Prophet*
Origin

*Where in the World is
Carmen Sandiego?
(Deluxe Edition)*
Broderbund

Wonderland
Virgin Mastertronic

GP

COMPUTE CHOICE

RICHARD SHEFFIELD

GROUNDBREAKING
3-D GRAPHICS
COMBINED WITH
REALISTIC
CHARACTERS
MAKE THIS A
HEAVY FAVORITE
FOR BEST GAME
OF THE YEAR

was terrified. It's still hard to admit, but I almost lost my wingman, and it would've been my fault.

Things just happened so quickly. It was just a routine mission, if there is such a thing. We knew that the Kilrathi had been dropping into the Vega system through one of the jump points in the area, so Spirit and I were out making the rounds, checking the possibles. Then—boom!—out of nowhere, we found ourselves in a swarm of Dralthi-class medium fighters. I gave the order to break, and Spirit kicked in the burners and headed into a group that was coming in low. I lit 'em up, too, and headed straight into two fighters dead ahead.

We traded laser blasts during a head-to-head pass. Then I took a chance and guessed that one of them would break straight up. I got lucky and slid neatly onto his tail. Playing the afterburners just right, I managed to stay behind him until his shields wore down, and I sliced right through his ion drive. Such a pretty explosion. A similar blast off to the right told me that Spirit was doing her thing, too.

Meanwhile, a loudmouthed furball had come around behind me and was heating up my shields with his lasers and heating up the comlink with a steady stream of insults. I had had it up to here with his "monkey boy" comments, so I honked the stick back into my lap for a quick loop and acti-

vated a heat-seeker. We fought to a stalemate for several minutes as both our shields got weaker and weaker. Then the fleabag made a mistake; he got predictable. I anticipated his move and cut in behind him. Dead meat. They don't call me Catskinner for nothing!

Two blasts took his shields down to nothing, but some fancy flying kept me from finishing him off. That's when the first call for help came in from Spirit. She had been my wingman on my very first combat mission; we were compadres. I knew she was rock-steady but quiet—if she called for help, she really needed it. But just one more shot would finish off this arrogant cat-head in front of me. I really wanted him. I missed with another

... Hurricane's planetary defenses head off a last-ditch Kilrathi assault.
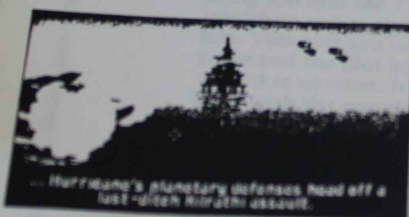
Star systems are divided into those controlled by the Terran Confederation and those controlled by the Empire of Kilrath.

shot, and Spirit called for help again. Another shot was lining up nicely, but it would take a couple of seconds— time Spirit might not have. And I owed her, big time. So I gritted my teeth, whipped my fighter around, and headed off to help her, burners blazing.

She was really in a heap of trouble by the time I got there—no shields, no guns, and two Kilrathi on the hunt. I caught the first one by surprise and splattered him with a missile, but the other was lining Spirit up for the kill. I fired my laser at him till it overheated. His shields were down, but I couldn't finish him. I was desperate and could only think of one thing to do. My shields were strong, and his were down; so I lined him up in my sights, hit the burners, and flew right through him. The crash knocked my shields totally out, but my ship held together. His didn't.

Spirit and I managed to beat feet back to the Tiger's Claw, but I was

badly shaken. I had almost let my wingman get killed because I let a fight get personal. I vowed not to let that happen again.

Right there. That's when you know a game has got you. When you start to think about the game characters as real people. When you start to get an emotional attachment to them. Wing Commander's characters get to you better than those in any other game I've seen.

In Wing Commander, it's the year 2654. After a peaceful expansion and colonization of space, mankind has run into the Kilrathi, a race of cat-like warriors intent on our destruction. You're a new fighter pilot, just assigned to the carrier Tiger's Claw. Things aren't going well for the home team, and your performance in battle could swing the tide from defeat to victory. How's that for pressure? ▷
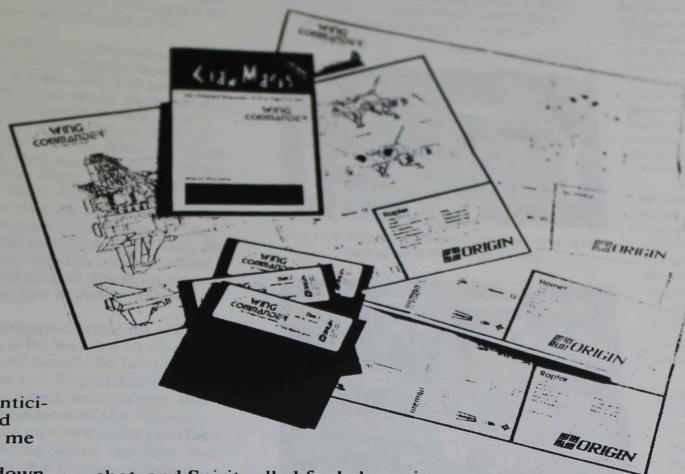
Flying your fighter is easy and pretty straightforward. The controls are simple, and the cockpit displays give you enough information without giving you too much. The ship is controlled with a mouse, keyboard, or joystick; but the joystick seems to have the best feel. Just to make sure you get off to a good start, there's a walk-through of your first mission and a simulator to hone your flying and fighting skills. The manual is well written and very entertaining. It's made up to look like the ship's magazine, *Claw Marks*, and is designed to put you right into the plot of the game.

As a pure flight simulator, *Wing Commander* is among the best. Everyone is raving about the 3-D graphics, which are without doubt the best of any simulation game, period. But that's certainly no accident. The game's designer, Chris Roberts, wanted to get the look and feel of the space combat in *Star Wars, Battle Star Galactica*, and *Buck Rogers*, but he realized early on that the current state of the art just wasn't good enough. High levels of detail aren't possible with the filled polygons used in most combat sims. And bitmapped graphics look jerky and take too much storage space.

Still, bitmapped graphics seemed the way to go if he wanted to display a great amount of detail. So his team developed a new 3-D graphics driver based on ray-tracing technology and engineering diagrams of the fighters. This new driver can not only produce smoothly-scrolling space fighters, but it can do it with the proper shading, reflectivity, and textured surfaces. Something totally beyond anything we've seen before.

But this still wasn't the gaming experience Roberts was after. There was something lacking—involvement. So the team linked the combat sequences together with cinematic sequences that take place on board the ship. Created from a digitized videotape of live actors, these sequences bring you into the *Tiger's Claw* and introduce you to some of the characters. This gets you involved with the game and the plot before you get involved in combat. It's these conversations with the nonplayer characters in the bar and during flight that are the key to the emotional involvement that marks a first-rate game.

Interwoven with the cinematic sequences and the combat portion of the game are an absolutely superb musical soundtrack and sound effects.

The soundtrack sets the tone for the sequences on board the ship, as well as in combat, where the mood of the music changes with the action on the screen. The sound is so important in this game that playing without a sound board greatly reduces the experience.

Which brings me to another point. Hardware. This all sounds like the perfect game, right? Give me two! But all this performance comes at a stiff price, and that price is hardware. To use the musical score throughout the game and to use all the great
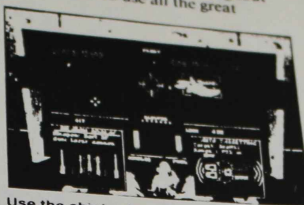
Use the ship's simulator to practice your flying and fighting skills.
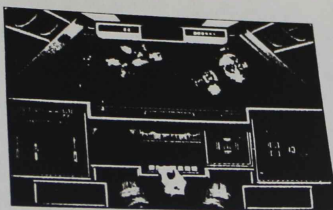
The *Rapier* is one of four Confederation spacecraft with an array of weapons.

graphics features, you need a very high-end system. According to Origin, the optimal platform for playing *Wing Commander* is a 16+ MHz 386 with 1+ MB expanded memory; a hard drive with 6.5MB free; a Roland, Ad Lib, or Sound Blaster sound card; VGA graphics; and a joystick. Not your average home machine, at least not yet. Origin has chosen to program the best games it can, even if that means leaving those of us with less powerful systems behind.

Of the items on that list, the most important is VGA graphics. The game is much more enjoyable on a 12-MHz machine with VGA than it is on a 25-MHz machine with EGA. The EGA graphics are functional but nothing special. The detail is lost, and at times you can't tell which way the enemy

ships are heading. I couldn't tell one end of the *Tiger's Claw* from the other with EGA. Once you've seen this game in VGA, you won't be able to look at your old EGA monitor the same way again.

Unlike simulators that generate a new scenario each time out, *Wing Commander* has a story line that takes you through a single campaign. However, the path you take from the beginning to the end depends upon your performance in battle. There are 39 unique missions set up in a sort of tree structure. According to Origin, you can actually win the entire campaign and finish the game in as few as 10 or 11 missions—if you do very well on each flight. But there would still be a bunch of missions that you wouldn't have seen, so there's a good degree of replay value. Just botch a mission or two, and you'll find yourself on a completely different mission path.

The biggest complaint anyone seems to have about this game is that there should be more. Origin is listening. A *Secret Mission* disk is available directly from Origin for $19.95 with a whole new campaign that takes you deep into Kilrathi territory. (Any characters lost in the original campaign will be reborn!) Coming in late spring will be a completely new and improved stand-alone sequel that will include new ships and features.

If you really want to push your computer to the limit, *Wing Commander* does it better than anything else on the market. So heat up your laser cannon and show those feline fleabags that the "hairless apes" of earth know more than one way to housebreak a cat!

Playability	★★★★★
Documentation	★★★★
Originality	★★★★
Graphics	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★

Wing Commander

IBM PC and compatibles; 640K; 12 MHz or faster processor; dual floppies or hard drive; EGA, VGA, or Tandy 16-color graphics adapter; optional mouse or joystick; optional Roland, Ad Lib, or Sound Blaster sound card—$69.95

Package includes a 48-page manual, an installation guide, a command reference card, four space-fighter spec sheets, a disk-exchange form, and three high-density 5¼-inch disks.

ORIGIN SYSTEMS
P.O. Box 161750
Austin, TX 78716
(800) 999-4939

WING COMMANDER

COMPUTER GAME of the MONTH

William R. Trotter

Origin's *Wing Commander* is simply the best space-combat simulation ever made for PCs. It combines the tense excitement of a great arcade shooter with a role-playing story of surprising depth and swashbuckling melodrama.

Designed from the ground up (primarily by Chris Roberts) to take maximum advantage of the power, speed, and memory of high-end PCs, *Wing Commander* offers graphics and animation that will make your jaw drop in astonishment.

Missions take place against a deep, velvety void sprinkled with ice-blue nebulas, pitted asteroids, and flaming suns. Enemy warships — from sleek, light fighters to huge, wallowing transports — are modeled, scaled, and animated with uncanny realism and detail. The space battles are fast, furious, deadly melees. The illusion of battling against an intelligent, aggressive foe is at times quite unnerving.

In contrast to the usual simple-minded arcade shooter, in which victory usually goes to the strong of thumb, victory in *Wing Commander* goes to pilots who learn how to evade, how to maneuver at high speeds without ramming other vessels, and how to think two steps ahead of the enemy. When all the jinking and turning is done, you'd

The launching sequence is impressive, but you can skip any or all of the animated scenes once you've seen them a few times. This speeds up the game considerably.

better end up with your foe's exhaust pipes in your missile-lock instead of the other way around.

Strategic thinking, improvisation, and initiative are important, too. As in real combat, the unexpected often happens and a judgment call must be made. Do you ignore those apparently easy kills lurking behind that asteroid belt and get on with the mission, or do you try to score a couple of quick victories?

Or suppose you're attacking a big Dorkir transport that's loaded with reinforcements for a besieged enemy base. Your wingman — a reckless kid who's more concerned with racking up kills than following orders — gets into trouble and cries for help. Do you ignore his pleas and dive on the transport, hoping you can dodge its flak and put your missiles into its belly before the kid gets shot to pieces? Or do you break off your attack and come to his rescue?

In *Wing Commander*, these are not trivial decisions. If your wingman dies, you have to watch his funeral on the screen. On the other hand, if the enemy transport gets through, an important battle could be lost.

Wing Commander is an elaborately branched program. The outcome of your seventh mission determines not only what your eighth mission will be, but also has an impact on the entire cam-

...you fail too many ...s, the tide will turn ...or of the enemy. Once ...happens, you'll have to ...and shoot like a winged ...emon to wrest the initiative back again.

Your enemies are the Kilrathi, a ruthless, fanatically brave race of aliens who resemble a cross between lions and tabby cats. Their goal is the enslavement or extermination of the human race. As the game begins, the Terran Confederacy is stretched thin and both sides have thrown everything they've got into the strategic Vega Sector.

To the Kilrathi, humans are nothing more than "monkeys." Humans, in turn, disdainfully refer to the Kilrathi (with a touch of grudging respect) as "hairballs" or "fleabags."

The Kilrathi are a notch above the usual computerized opponents. Origin has created a number of deadly Kilrathi aces, each with his own style of flying. You'll meet them during the course of ferocious one-to-one dogfights

in deep space. Some of these encounters take place inside asteroid fields, where you have to keep one eye on the enemy and one eye on the great pockmarked boulders tumbling through space all around you. During combat, your Kilrathi opponents will sometimes direct personal taunts and insults at you. If your computer has extended memory, you'll even be able to see their faces as they jeer.

This attention to detail, fitted seamlessly into the context of an ongoing campaign, gives startling depth

to the role-playing aspect of Wing Commander. Make no mistake. This game draws you in and doesn't let go until the Terrans either defeat the Kilrathi or go down in balls of flaming plasma after an epic last-ditch stand.

By using the save-game feature to mark your place, it's possible to play straight through to victory — if you don't mind refighting the same missions over and over again until you win. But a more entertaining method is to play several careers at once, letting the victories and defeats dictate the

Your first assignment is to fly a Hornet fighter — fast and maneuverable, but lightly armed and shielded.

Learn new tactics on the training simulator, located on the left side of the pilots' bar.
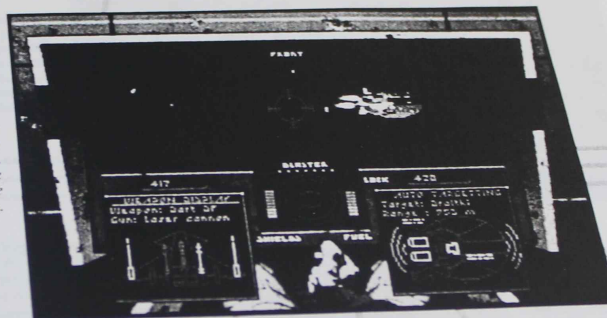
Dramatic narrative sequences — such as this "assembly" scene — do a lot to enhance the role-playing depth of Wing Commander.

Some of the most reliable pilots you'll fly with are female. In fact, Wing Commander is refreshingly non-sexist, especially for such a swashbuckling kind of game.

Wing Commander unashamedly borrows much of the imagery from the Star Wars saga (although by now those images have surely become cultural archetypes).
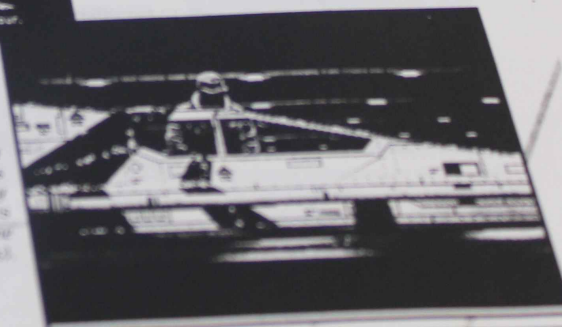
Those who have an aversion to complicated flight simulators need not be shy about taking control of a Terran fighter in *Wing Commander*. Origin has made this aspect of the game as simple as possible, consistent with realism. You will spend most of your time and concentration on flying and fighting, not punching keys and watching lots of

Origin says that one of its goals in *Wing Commander* was to "advance the state of the art in computer games." As a result, the breathtaking experience of the game is best savored on a fast 16-megahertz computer with 256-color VGA graphics and a good sound board. If you have such a system, your reward will be the smoothest animation, the lushest

Wing Commander also runs well on 12-megahertz computers, although some of the more complex scenes may be a bit jerky. The VGA graphics are so terrific, however, that playing the game with EGA graphics is recommended only as a stopgap measure.

It's only when you see a

pelling, and this virtuosic that you realize how thin is the line which separates computer entertainment from a genuine interactive movie.

In *Wing Commander*, the art of computer gaming has been not merely advanced — it has taken a quantum leap.
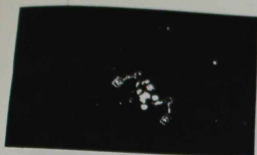
Large Kilrathi targets may take many hits to bring down, but when they do start to explode, the screen fills with fireworks.

Back inside the pilots' bar, you can pick up some pointers, practice maneuvers on the training simulator, or banter with Shotglass, the friendly barkeep.
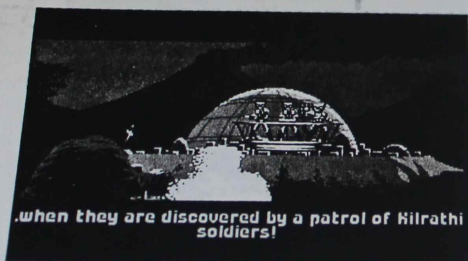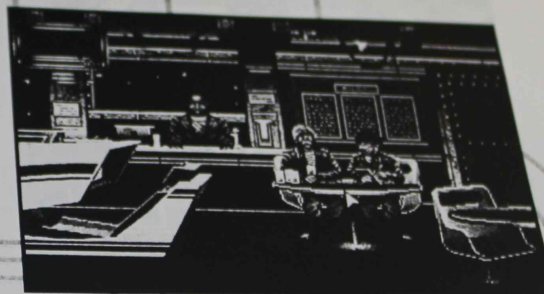
...when they are discovered by a patrol of Kilrathi soldiers!

If the Vega campaign starts to go badly, you'll see dramatic news flashes from other locations, inspiring you to redouble your efforts.

Whenever you or one of your comrades is killed, you have the option of viewing a poignant burial-at-space ceremony.

Here's a frightening sight: The Terran mothership Tiger's Claw is under heavy attack. If you don't save her, the game ends with you drifting helplessly in space.
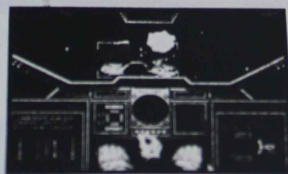
Escort missions are tricky. The enemy tries to lure you away from the ship you're protecting, and the temptation may be overwhelming.
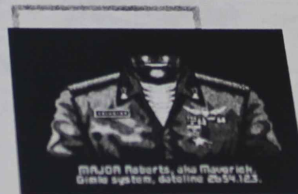
Whenever you need an ego-boost, you can always call up a view of your medals and decorations. Go ahead — nobody's looking!

Between missions, be sure to talk to your colleagues in the bar. You can pick up some good tactical tips as well as advice on other pilots' personalities and styles.

If you're hemmed in by asteroids, you may be able to gain some maneuvering room by pulverizing the bigger ones with your cannon.

Keep up with your ranking on the barroom scoreboard. If you perform even moderately well, you should advance rapidly.

This is Maniac, a fearless pilot but a glory-hound. He can get you into serious trouble if you don't watch out for his tendency to go wild in combat.

All right! Some serious action!
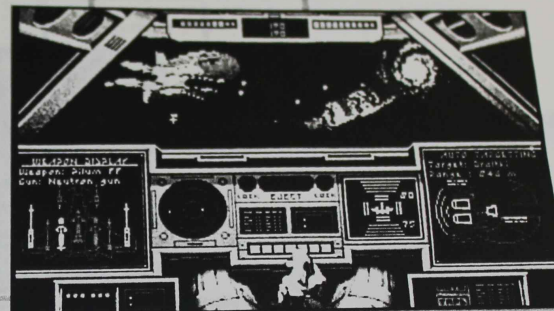
The wilder the melees, the more careful you must be. It's quite possible to shoot down (or be shot down by) a friendly pilot.
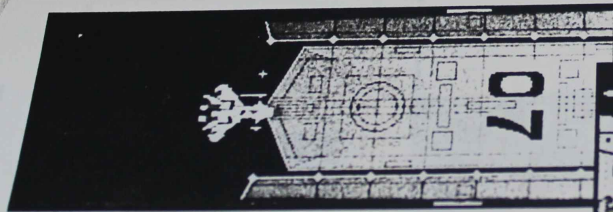
The computer handles the landing sequences. All you have to do is get your spacecraft back to the Tiger's Claw and request clearance.

Once you've landed, check the amount of damage your ship has sustained. Sometimes it'll look even worse than this!

Put the controls on autopilot to save time on longer missions. If you encounter the enemy or a navigational hazard, the controls automatically revert to real-time cockpit mode.

The Skipper praises you when you perform well, and gives you a tongue-lashing when you foul up. He'll debrief you after every mission.

Always try to get behind your target — that's where his shields are weakest and where a shot up his exhaust vents can do critical damage.

WING COMMANDER™

An enemy Dralthi-class fighter. You'll engage a lot of these, and you'll find that their Frisbee-like design renders them extremely vulnerable.

The Tiger's Claw manages to jump out. Barely.

When a spaceship makes the jump into hyperspace, the graphics — in the best tradition of Star Wars — are dazzling.

WING COMMANDER™

One of the last and most crucial missions involves an attack on an almost-impregnable Kilrathi star base. Save all your missiles for this target.
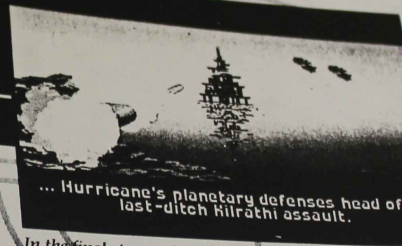
... Hurricane's planetary defenses head off a last-ditch Kilrathi assault.

In the final stages of a victorious campaign, Kilrathi attacks become more desperate and less successful. If you're losing at this stage, however, this picture will have a different caption.
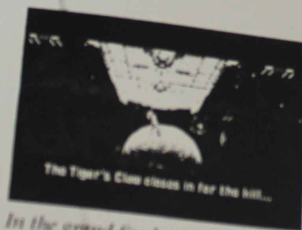
The Tiger's Claw closes in for the kill...

In the grand finale, the Tiger's Claw herself sails magnificently into battle, all guns blazing.

Hangar Deck, 17.00 hours, 2654.110

Medals are given to the bravest and most resourceful fighters at an impressive awards ceremony.
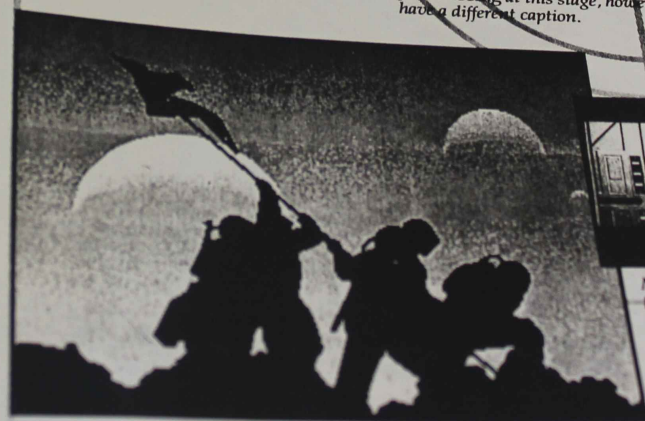
Victory! This familiar scene is one of the rewards for success in the Vega campaign.

GP

BEAMSCOPE

GAME OF THE MONTH

Every once in a while a game comes along that really changes the entire scale upon which gaming is judged. *Wing Commander*, from Origin Systems, is such a game. Although *Wing Commander* resembles previous games such as Electronic Arts' *Skyfox* and Sir-Tech's *Deep Space*, it goes far beyond earlier implementations of the space-fighter scenario.

Wing Commander, essentially, puts you at the controls of a small space fighter, similar to the X-Wing fighters of *Star Wars*. It also envelops you in a series of truly cinematic animated bridging sequences that (for once) add immeasurably to the enjoyment of the game.

You are stationed on board a space destroyer, the Tiger's Claw.
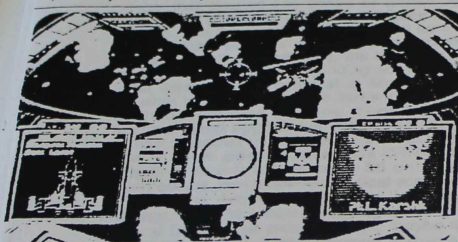
Starting in the bar, you can speak with various persons who may be present, gaining valuable clues to effective battle tactics. You can also fly in "training mode" — by sitting down at a video-game machine in the corner of the bar! This game-within-a-game lets you practice your skills without fear of destruction.

Next door, in the barracks, you can save campaigns by pointing to an empty bunk; restarting a campaign, you "awaken" a sleeping figure. From the barracks, you proceed to the briefing room, where you start each new mission. Your commanding officer presents the details of your coming assignment. He indicates a wall map, and the view zooms in to show you what's coming up. The selection of missions is excellent, and well organized to match your increasing skill.

When the briefing is adjourned, you see jogging heads, then cut to pounding feet, as you and the other pilots scramble to their fighters. Pulse-pounding music blares — provided you've got something like an Ad Lib, Roland or Sound Blaster card — accentuating the feeling of mounting excitement.

You can bypass the animations by pressing *Esc*. However, *Wing Commander* is just about the first game we've ever played in which you *don't* want to turn off the music — ever. Not only is it reasonably well-written; it's actually keyed to the action, exactly the way a film score is keyed to the action on the screen. When you start your attack run on some enemy ships, the music plays an ominous, tension-building intro. When battle commences, the music chimes in with flourishes and crescendos. When you emerge victorious, you get a fanfare.

The most difficult thing for novices to master is the "radar" screen on the fighter's instrument panel. It shows not range, but orientation. Objects in the center of the radar screen are dead ahead; objects at the edge are directly behind you. One of the best features of Wing Commander, the radar screen actually makes it possible to dogfight in three-space while viewing only a flat computer display. The usual multiple views are available: front, sides, chase-plane and so on.

On many missions you'll have a "wing man" flying with you. You'll have to use the communications link to give him (or her!) directions. Some wing men are more hindrance than help; but many will die valiantly covering your flank.

Then there are the asteroid fields...

If — no, when — you die, the screen reverses view,

showing your shocked face illuminated by a flare of energy. Then you see your ship from the outside, exploding into fragments. Finally, you witness a solemn burial-in-space.

If you successfully complete your mission, you may be in line for promotion, a better ship, and more complex missions.

As you might expect, Wing Commander is hardware-hungry. It will use up to six megabytes of hard drive space, although it can use less if you're willing to wait while files are decompressed during play. The software will use expanded memory, if it's available. However, Wing Commander should play adequately well on a moderately fast 286. If you have trouble, there's an option allowing you to reduce the number of frames in the animations, reducing the load on the processor at the expense of jerkier animation. Graphics, naturally, support 256-color VGA; you can get by in EGA or Tandy modes.

By doing what it does phenomenally well, Wing Commander takes electronic entertainment to a new level, creating an experience so involving that it's really impossible to describe. Origin Systems, previously noted chiefly for static adventure role-playing games, has made an astounding entry into arcade-action gaming. Hardware considerations aside, if you were to buy only one game this year we'd probably have to say that this should be it.

Distributed by **Beamscope Canada Inc**, 35 Ironside Cr, Scarborough, ON M1X 1G5; phone (416)291-0000; Fax (416)291-5721.

Circle Number 71 on Action Card

BEAMSCOPE TOP TEN FOR THE PC

1.	King's Quest V	Sierra On-Line
2.	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami
3.	Battle of Britain	Electronic Arts
4.	Silent Service II	MicroProse
5.	Days of Thunder	Electronic Arts
6.	Railroad Tycoon	MicroProse
7.	Oils Well	Sierra On-Line
8.	Bill & Ted's Excell't Adventure	Capstone
9.	Wolf Pack	Broderbund
10.	Duck Tales	Walt Disney

PSYGNOSIS

First there was Shadow of the Beast which was a tremendous hit over in the UK due to its fantastic sounds and graphics, not to mention its incredibly tough game challenge. Now comes the sequal, Shadow of the Beast II, due out on the Amiga in mid-August. This one should totally satisfy the previous Shadow enthusiasts and make a few more besides, what with its 3D high speed parallax scrolling, arcade-quality animation and sounds, plus new intelligent monsters (I do hope they keep the chorus line of bouncing eyeballs- made me feel like I wasn't the only insane person left in the world) and inventory control. The company also promises to include a limited-edition SOB t-shirt (I'm sure it doesn't say SOB on the shirt). The traps and puzzles are going to be just as challenging as ever, so start working on those codes soon, gang.

INNERPRISE

When Paul Lombardi (the president of Innerprise) first told me about The Plague, I thought he was talking about my mother in law. Anyway, this project is a reunion of the team that created The Sword of Sodan. An advanced genetic experiment has gone very wrong, and the resulting infection has turned the normal residents' offspring into crazed, mutant killers. And naturally, the only way to cure those infected is by finding some powerful weapons and going at it. Most of the fig-ures in The Plague are large and well-defined, with fluid scrolling. Look for the nearly-X-rated aggressiveness of the flying demon-creatures (sure looks X-rated to me). The Plague also features six different weapons, four levels of play, 30 unusual sound effects, and a special musical score.

Globulous, another new release, is unlike anything I've seen before. The player manipulates a Q-bert-type creature (well, maybe it does remind me of Q-bert, I guess) across a screen filled with spikes, rotating blocks, sliding squares and the occasional black hole. To make things interesting, your character can only move downhill, so it's necessary occasionally to flip the screen by pressing the fire button. This action creates all upward walls into downward-sloping cliffs that you can jump down. You also can pick up bombs and smart bombs to do away with the baddies that threaten your advance.

Innerprise's Globulous (left) and EA's Centurian (below and right).

three-dimensional maze, and the addiction level is quite high. If you think arcade games are all alike, take a look at Globulous and judge for yourself.

ELECTRONIC ARTS

Lucasfilm (an affiliate of EA) is working hard on doing a "Secret" trilogy. They've got two titles already lined up: The Secret of Monkey Island and Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe. All they need is a Secret Agent Man release and they'll be all set.

The Secret of Monkey Island is a fourth generation SCUMM product (where SCUMM stands for Script Creation for Maniac Mansion). Monkey Island is a humorous pirate adventure, with a graphic style reminiscent of Zak McKracken. Ron's appraisal of the game is as follows: "It's like stepping off the boat on the Pirates of the Caribbean ride at Disneyland, walking around that unique little world, and having fun with all those guys." Except these pirates won't leave shore, and it's not until you discover their fear of a ghost pirate ship on the seas that your real adventure begins. But the "secret" in the title is even more mysterious (no, I'm not going to give you any hints). Make sure you see the ghost dog on the ship- it's a howl!

Larry Holland, creator of Their Finest Hour: The Battle of Britain, is currently at work on Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe. Set during the final days of WWII, it covers the first use of jets and the height of the Allied bombing effort. The availability of planes includes some of the best of the war: the P-51, and P-47 fighters for the U.S. Air Force, along with the B-24 and the incomparable B-17 Flying Fortress, as well as the Me-262 jet and the FW 190 for the

What is the Secret of Monkey Island? Is it the night life?

Germans. Don't be put off by the title; it's an even better version of Battle of Britain, one of the best flight simulators ever produced. You now have, in addition to the fantastic detail in BOB, the rapid creation of bullet holes, broken canopy glass, oil leaks, engine fires and more. Release dates for both of these "Secret" games are late third quarter or early fourth quarter.

ORIGIN SYSTEMS

Hot on the heels of a super year, one that

Origin's Wing Commander
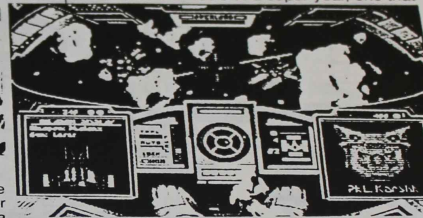
showed Origin was going to be a company to watch, coupled with the blockbuster success of Ultima VI, came an expected game a totally unexpected game. The expected release shown at CES was the first in a series of Ultima spinoffs called The World of Ultima. Savage Empire looked sharp and quite interesting, set as it is in the Aztec era. But the unexpected release was one of the most talked about games of any company at CES, that being a totally bof flyer (as the Brits like to say) called Wing Commander. Using some of the best 3D bit map graphics ever (and looking far better than any current sim using filled polygons for their 3D effect) and sporting a sound track so cool that the booth attendees kept cranking it up to the limits of the neighbors' patience, Wing Commander got a hot reception, to
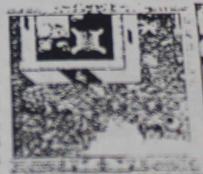
Origin's Savage Empire
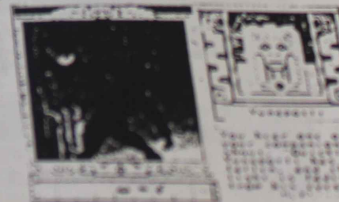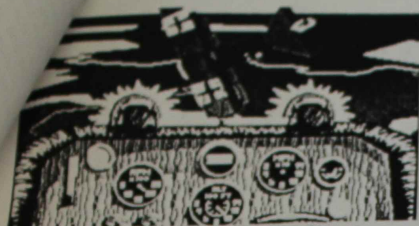
Microprose's high-flying Knights of the Sky

say the least. Chris Roberts is the creator, he of the *Times of Lore* and *Bad Blood* fame. Though *Wingcommander* is not a true flight simulation (more like an arcade/action title), it does contain some awesome 3D arcade graphics, where the pilot has to deal with deadly asteroids, numerous types of enemy ships, son on and so forth. Players can also fly back to starbases and refit their ships with a variety of weapons, shields, etc. A number of watchers expressed a desire to hop right into the game because of its fast moving action and the different scenarios available.

Believe it or not, *The Savage Empire* is a real departure from the *Ultima* as we know it. This is a first installment in a new series entitled *The Worlds of Ultima*, which will take the Avatar and others to different worlds and time periods. *Savage Empire* drops our heroes in a valley where time stands still. Edon is a land where giant dinosaurs, primitive tribesman, savage lizard men, and intelligent ants can do their own thing. However, that doesn't mean it's a peaceful coexistence. As the series continues, our heroes and heroines will travel to other exotic locations outside of Britannia. To find out more about the future of *Ultima*, check out the interview with Richard Garriott

Microprose's space game, Lightspeed

elsewhere in this issue. By the way, the confusion over the title (it was known at the convention as *Wingleader*) is because of problems in the title search. There was also a late change right before CES, and the unofficial nickname at Origin is now "The Wing Thing."

MICROPROSE

Knights of the Sky is the second World War I flying sim to preview at CES. Our sources tell us that Microprose was hot for the title *Red Baron*, but Dynamix' lawyers got there first, so they came up with *Knights*. Actually, I like that title even better (truth be known), as the initial pilots were truly knights, with a strong code of honor and chivalry among them. *Knights* seems to also have more of an authentic feel to it than the other two entries, as it uses WW I posters as backgrounds for the static screens, as well as the best looking control panel of the three so far. And with Microprose's leadership in the field of flight simulations (F15 comes immediately to mind), they'll be tough to beat.

Along with *Knights*, Microprose also showed two new models of old favorites, *Silent Service II* and *Universal Military Simulator II* (hereafter known as UMS II). *Silent Service* was a big hit, and is even in production for the Nintendo, and the second version is even better. More detail, greater realism, and a "war career" that spans the entire Pacific theatre, as well as the overall improvements to be expected in the five years since the original, make it a real blast.

The original UMS was an interesting grabbag for wargamers, as they could recreate any time period and battle, albeit with some limitations, like 60 units per side. Well, hold onto your seats, because UMS II can create up to *32.00 units*, as well as allowing for 127 computer-controlled or human players fighting for control of 525 provinces. Well, sounds like we'll final get that definitive battle for Normandy in, with counters for each platoon and ship. Time periods can include anything from Greek to Roman to Napoleonic and both World Wars, or create your own world's forces.

Lightspeed is the first flight simul from this company, but it looks like it's come from a long line of thoroughbreds. Designer Sandy Peterson has

Silent Service II, The Punisher, Universal Military Simulator II and Command HQ

created a system that allows the player to choose a different star cluster to explore, thereby allowing a difficulty level choice at the same time. *Lightspeed* also will contain elements of role playing, and the enhanced 3D graphics are said to be four times more complex than any on the market now, and it will also contain an incredible original soundtrack.

Microprose is also working with designer Dan Bunten, responsible for the new title *Command HQ*. Players can be their country's supreme commander for either WW I, II II or future wars (somehow I just can't picture World War IV). With modem capability, three players can be involved, or the computer can be your opponent. According to Dan, "players can make pacts at anytime, or just curse each other out." Combat brings up short animated sequences detailing the battles, like a movie.

The Punisher is a superhero familiar to many. Acting as a one-man vigilante force, he exacts revenge on the ever-present criminals in the Big Apple, either in his powerfully armed van or on foot, carrying and blasting away with any weapon he can get his hands on. Earning money for each successful mission, The Punisher moves closer and closer to finding the location of The Kingpin, the real baddie behind the crime in the streets.

The Punisher is being created for Microprose by Paragon Software, who's also doing the very interesting-looking *Space 1889*. Based on the GDW boardgame, it uses the
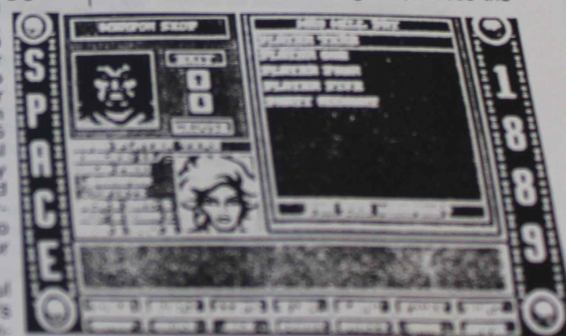
Maybe we could get Doug McClure for Space 1889?

The Claws of the Tiger

Origin's Wing Commander

by Dennis Owens

TITLE:	Wing Commander
SYSTEM:	IBM with 640K
	Hard Drive Recommended
SOUND:	AdLib, Roland , Sound Blaster
PRICE:	$69.95
DESIGNER:	Chris Roberts
PUBLISHER:	Origin
	Austin, TX

From the opening scene with the conductor tapping his podium for the attention of his orchestra to the closing moments of the final mission's dynamic battle, *Wing Commander* offers a stirring display of stylish pacing, stunning graphics, inspiring sound and exhilarating space combat action. Pushing the envelope to the very edges of the galaxy, the latest in a long tradition of space combat simulations—stretching back before even **Rainbird**'s *Elite*—is a swirling, zero-G dash through blazing space cannon, dazzling plasma blasts and missiles going "zing."

Beautifully designed graphics, a storyline almost cinematic in scope, and a musical score alternately inspirational and laden with the *angst* of being far from home and isolated in deep space all combine to create a *stellar* warfare adventure in every sense of the word.

Wing Commander shares characteristics of *Star Fleet I* and *Deep Space*, but surpasses both—and indeed, all space flight warfare simulators—in every way imaginable, from variable views of the inside of different starfighters, to the explosions of enemy targets, the handling of space flight, and the amazingly poignant comments from NPCs as the player's character advances or ends up being demoted.

The soundtrack shifts from location to location, event to event and even intensifies or lessens during battle, according to the circumstances or to how the solar winds blow.

Wing Commander's fiction seems simple and fairly standard,
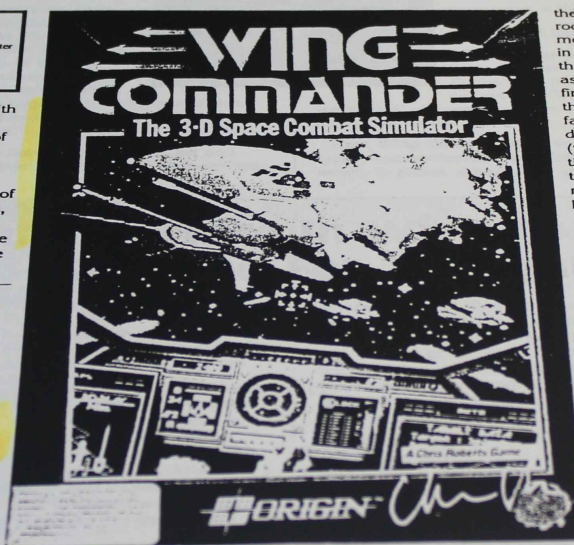
the player's character begins as a rookie starfighter assigned to the most decorated spacecraft carrier in the Terran fleet. However, after the player names his character, assigns his "pilot" a callsign, and finds himself in the bar, everything standard about the fiction falls away. Familiar gaming devices such as the saved game (to be discussed later in the article) are so neatly tucked into the gameplay that, instead of interrupting the suspension of disbelief, they frequently add to it.

For instance, training in handling a starfighter, at which the character is already supposed to be, at least, minimally proficient, is afforded to the player through the use of a flight training simulator. Essentially, a video game within the larger fiction of *Wing Commander* (set up in the bar, no less, a la *The Last Starfighter*), the trainsim does serve a valuable purpose. It is there where, for a bargain price (free!), the character can ostensibly bone up on the latest tricks and moves of the enemy he will be facing (while the player is, in actuality, familiarizing himself with the basics of starfighter flight). But *Wing Commander* supports that fiction, because it is, after all, better to learn in the trainsim than flying unshielded and unarmored into the teeth of a Gratha.

In other areas, as well, the game ingeniously combines the needs of the player with the fiction of the character. The barracks area, for instance, is the only location in the game where the player's game can be saved. *Wing Commander* allows the player to access any of the game's eight save positions by pointing and clicking on any of eight beds arranged in the room. Clicking on the foot of the bed indicates that the player wants to sleep/save and clicking on the head of the bed indicates that the player wants to awaken/restore. *Wing Commander* is loaded with such inspired and player-friendly touches.

..., however, are just the peripheral charac-
ters of *Wing Commander*. At its heart, of
course, is the spaceflight and the combat. It is
when the starfighter leaves the carrier that the
game really begins.

The enemy cat-like creatures called Kilrathi
are good, shifty fliers, determined, maniacal
and hostile. In fact, there can be no questions
of politics in *Wing Commander*. The enemy
are the enemy. They *will* destroy a character's
starfighter without a moment's hesitation, given
the opportunity. Their starships are powerful—in
some instances, more powerful than any in the
Terran fleet—and their pilots are generally
skilled and well-disciplined.

In combat, combat in that cold, deep, dark
and unforgiving space, ships' engines keen and
wail as they pass. Thrusters hiss. Electrical sys-
tems spit as they burn out. Missiles and incom-
ing laser blasts do, indeed, flash as they hit.
Weapons have their signature noises as they
are fired and Kilrathi ships (alas, unfortunately,
Terran ships as well) explode in huge balloons of fire and shrap-
nel. The action is all bit-mapped and, at least at 16 Mhz and
higher, is smooth and responsive.

The starfighter screen, variable between front, back, left and
right, features all the necessary information: speed, weapons sys-

tems, enemy targets, a type of radar, com-
munications videos (for machines with ex-
panded memory) and, interestingly enough
(again, almost an intuitive design decision), a
display of the pilot's hand on the joystick which
moves in conjunction with navigation and firing
instructions (another "expanded memory" only
feature).

Although combat is frequent, it is not always
desirable, especially when a distant transport
needs an escort. Lest *Wing Commander* be per-
ceived as little more than the video game dis-
guised in the training simulator, it should be
pointed out that the valued officer also displays
good judgment. That is, he knows when to fight
and when not to. So *Wing Commander* is, in
some ways, a strategy game, as well.

After-Action Report

Both George Sanger and Dave Govett must
be commended for their moving musical score.
Further, this is the first of many games to be
released by **Origin** which make use of branch-
ing musical phrases dependent upon game performance, a truly
innovative feature. *[Ed. — We call it "subliminal interfacing."]*

Thus, *Wing Commander* is an innovative, intense, graphically
lovely, and aesthetically pleasing game with enough action and
variety to please almost every gamer. **CGW**

The Human Interface In Wing Commander: Some Food For Thought

One of the interesting features in *Wing Commander* is its fic-
tional "campaign". The strategic map of Terran- and Kilrathi-
controlled space, gives players a solid visual frame of reference
for where the battles are taking place and how close they are
to the heart of the empires in conflict.

This "strategic situation" is an important element in the game.
Which star the *Tiger Claw* settles at determines the nature of
the missions which the player will conduct there. Are there
friendly bases there to protect or enemy ones to attack? Is this
a major jump point which must be secured? The significance
of one's strategic location is described at two locations in the
game: in the bar (as the player garners the latest scuttlebutt)
and in the briefing room (where the missions are assigned).

This star map of the Vega Sector represents the skeletal
bones upon which the entire storyline of *Wing Commander*
hangs. No doubt *Wing Commander II* (rumor, rumor) will fea-
ture a different sector of space, new enemies which threaten
humanity, and the thread of a new storyline running through it,
giving the game its own life apart from the original.

It is at this point where one must take a good look at the
Vega sector map included in the game, and notice that it is ap-
proximately two-thirds Terran space, and one-third Kilrathi
space. The detectives out there will have probably deduced
that there is a reason for this, and they are correct. There is a
"tolerance" factor built into the game. New players, it is as-
sumed (as this game has appeal beyond hard-core flight

simulator fans), will make mistakes early on, fail in several mis-
sions, and want to keep campaigning to set things right. It
speaks well of **Origin**, therefore, to include in their game a cer-
tain amount of "beginner fall-back positions" from which to
keep playing. Another indicator of Origin's prediction of what
player skills will average can be garnered from the Mission
Board in the bar. Notice the different pilots ratios of missions
flown to kills scored.

Now, let's talk about the real world. Too many players will
cheat themselves out of discovering the *entire* campaign game
that is *Wing Commander*. They do this every time they restart
a saved game after a less than successful mission. It is the na-
ture of many players to repeat a mission over and over "until
they get it right" in order to garner all the medals and get the
better fighters (and wingmen) right away. These people are
*missing out on the extraordinary depth designed into this
game!*

What does CGW propose for the countless times this situa-
tion is presented in these sorts of games? An "auto save" fea-
ture after returning home from each mission would do the
trick. Before the mission debriefing, the game would automat-
ically save over that player's previous position, without the op-
portunity to repeat the last mission. In this way, an "honest"
campaign is assured, and players will have to fight their own
learning curve with the different elements of the game, as well
as the computer enemy in space.

Mutants abound in Fountain of Dreams.

lorida used to be a garden paradise, but now it's a radioactive, post-nuclear nightmare. Your destiny of sun and fun has changed as well — you're slowly mutating into a beast, and the water from the legendary Fountain of Dreams is the only thing that can save you.

As a result of nuclear blasts to Atlanta and Georgian military bases, the peninsula of Florida is jarred loose from the rest of the charred United States. Individual communities have formed city states, and after 50 years a certain social order has manifested itself. Except for the vigilantes and Killer Clowns, it wouldn't be such a bad place to live.

You, of course, aren't searching for the Fountain of Dreams to benefit just yourself — you're hoping to unite the people of the former Sunshine State and destroy the renegade beachcombers, mutant dolphins, and voodoo vigilantes that fill the world of *Fountain of Dreams*. Electronic Arts' fallout follow-up to *Wasteland* is a quest-adventure in which you can play one of five character classes, from survivalist to hood.

You can create as many as those characters to form your party, and there are other characters you must recruit along the way. Your mutant band can be skilled in medicine, lock-picking, mechanics, pharmacy, gunsmithing, linguistic, or several other fields. Even active mutations such as paralytic touch or camouflage can be handy in a pinch.

The Sunshine State isn't what it used to be.

YOUNGBLOOD OUT FOR MORE BLOOD

f you enjoy doing your fighting from behind the security of a 30-foot-tall metal war machine, check out the second installment in Infocom's *BattleTech* series.

BattleTech: The Crescent Hawk's Revenge, returns to the FASA universe, picking up where its predecessor left off. You once again play Jason Youngblood, a young warrior searching for his kidnapped father. But once Jason locates his father, the game jumps two decades into the future where the Inner Sphere of the five Successor States is threatened by the Clans.

The game includes the BattleMech war machines found in the original adventure, but introduces the OnmiMech assault vehicle and assorted hovertanks, aerospace fighters, and dropships. The game's 20 scenarios are set on five different planets, and multiple endings guarantee many hours of game play.

WINGLEADER
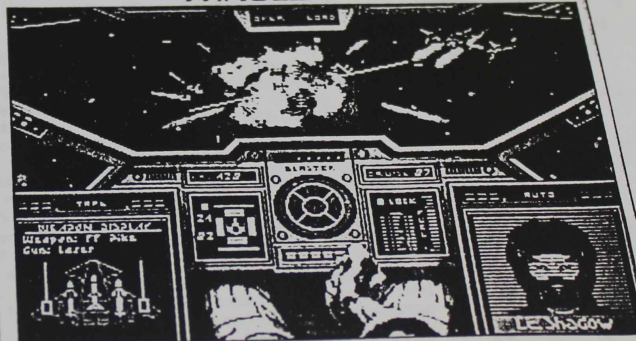
Wingleader: The 3-D Space Combat Simulator

rigin swears that *Wingleader: The 3-D Space Combat Simulator* is a revolutionary entertainment product. It's supposed to "look, sound, and play more like an interactive, multi-dimensional theatre experience than any conventional computer game."

Certainly the story has a familiar ring to it: you're a hero protecting Mankind from invading aliens. As you gain experience, you move up in command through four levels of starfighter.

Wingleader combines flight simulation with arcade action. You'll be blowing up Kilrathians, but if you don't understand your starfighter's controls, you'll be blasted to stardust in a milli-second.

Eight different wingmen, ranging from old veterans to by-the-book novices, are on hand to help you during your different missions.

FAST FORWARD

NEW ORIGINS

Paul Rigby got savage with the Lord and found out what he had in mind for Christmas this year

THE SAVAGE EMPIRE

Richard Garriot, Origin VP & self-proclaimed Lord British:

"There must be other worlds out there, somewhere, beyond Britannia – worlds of science-fiction, mystery, historic exploration, horror, time travel, espionage... why, the possibilities

■ *The Savage Empire is the first in a new line from Origin collectively known as The Worlds of Ultima.*

are endless! Could *Ultima* take us there?"

Erm... What Lord British is trying to say is that a new series of games, based on the *Ultima VI* game-system and called *The Worlds of Ultima*, is about to appear on the PC. The first game in the series, *Savage Empire*, takes you to a world "time forgot" full

of ancient mysteries, jungle romances, cliff-hanging cliffs (?), long grass, smelly swamps and mosquito bites (a bit like Florida on a bad day).

Up against all odds you must rescue Professor Rafkin, Aiela the jungle princess and Jimmy Malone, hardworking, dedicated, honest and true journalist. A forthright man, virtuous, trustworthy, sincere in his duty, dependable... is they man within our employ? (You must be joking!)

Encounter prehistoric monsters, lizard men, the lost underground city, the intelligent giant ants (uurrggh!). Check out Toporu the Mad, this guy thinks his mind is a little blue rock, and have intellectual discussions with Ugyuk the Neanderthal (he has

a small brain but a big club).

With the promise of VGA 256-colour graphics, a new Origin FX graphics and music system, lots of animation, intelligent characters with sophisticated interactive conversations, *The Savage Empire* looks like Origin could have a winner on their hands. I'll be getting the first UK review copy as soon as poss.

■ *If another world existed, Origin would like to think they have included it in The Savage Empire.*

WING COMMANDER PREVIEW

Taking a cinematic theme, *Wing Commander* promises sparkling 3-D action in the classic Star Wars style. A war rages with the dreaded Kilrathi Empire (the baddies) and the Terran Confederation (the goodies – hurrah!). Millions have perished in this bitter struggle and now it's your turn. No, no – not to perish! I mean, to fight the foe, to vanquish the bounders, to conquer the dastardly devils. You'll start your career flying small and under-armed Hornet-class ships. Over time you'll improve your lot by piloting better and better ships until you lock yourself into the ultimate Raptor-class ships, the mean machines of the star clusters.

You'll undertake numerous missions, from simple patrols to extended assaults against multiple targets. All of these missions make up an extended campaign. If you rack up victory after victory the climactic battle of the campaign will be a last, victorious assault against the Kilrathi sector command. On the other hand, if you are repeatedly defeated you'll find yourself with a backs to the wall defence of the Tiger's Claw carrier base.

Between missions you can hone

your skills in the flight trainer on Tiger's Claw, select your ship and opponent. A novel idea this – a flight sim within a flight sim!

When you fly as wing commander, you'll command a flight of ships against the enemy. Each one of your ships will be piloted by individual characters – each with their own name and personality, favourite tactics and so on. The enemy will be the same. In fact they will greet you on contact. You can even trade insults during combat. Errol Flynn, eat ya heart out!

With umpteen cinematic effects, complicated and extended animation sequences, a new sound and effects generator, 256-colour graphics (on IBM PC), extensive sound board support, and, oooh, lots of other wonderful things, *Wing Commander* looks like a candidate for game of the year!
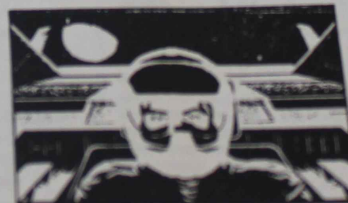
■ *Wing Commander is quite a departure from the usual Origin fare, employing some superb graphics and action interaction.*

CONSOLE ACTION

Many thanks go to Console Quest and Console Concepts who supplied all those rad import games this month. They both stock the very latest and greatest console crackers and can be contacted at these addresses.
Console Concepts, Unit 18, The Village Shopping Centre, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire ST5 1QB. Tel: (0782) 712759.
Console Quest, 1 Ashacre Mews, Offington, Worthing,

WING C

Battle beyond the stars with this cinematic space-sim from ORIGIN and MINDSCAPE...

Could this be the game of the year? Exclusively revealed in ACE 35, *Wing Commander* (then called *Wingleader*) certainly impressed us with its "Groundbreaking 3D graphics, spatially realistic stereo sound and cinematic game experience". Now we've had a chance to play a beta-test of the game, we're even more impressed. With its combination of revolutionary new graphics techniques and film-like presentation and audio, *Wing Commander* is one of the most exciting games ever released.

...st a fancy 3D shoot 'em up in other... Commander is a complete futuristic flight simulation with four different spacecraft to fly and over 35 missions to com... ...y spacecraft is equipped with tasty ...gets and weapons, from a useful com... ...tion system to mass driver cannon. As a *Wing Commander* you not only have to fly your own bird on a mission, you must also lead your fellow pilots to victory and the next roll-call.

"Your actions in every mission affects the way the game swings," says Phil Harrison, Mindscape's product development manager. Missions vary from escorting convoys to suppressing intensive alien attacks. You'll perform both offensive and defensive missions depending on your performance.

Wing Commander uses one of the most advanced and ingenious graphics systems e... ...ised for a computer game. It's the

first time this type of three-dimensional graphics have been seen outside of the arcades. Everything about *Wing Commander* makes you think you're playing a movie. Ray-traced bitmapped images provide the most realistic graphics yet seen in a micro-based release. Fighters zoom out of the distance till they fill your entire cockpit window — these are just waiting to be blasted to bits in a multi-coloured cloud of space junk. The ensuing action can be viewed through the cockpit windows or outside using a multitude of pseudo-camera positions.

Attractive animated in-between screens provide an interesting respite from the action and help create the cinematic feel of the game. The attention to detail is very impressive. Pictures of naked girls hang on the lockers in the barracks as a bucket soaks up the water leaking from a broken pipe.

Professionally composed soundtracks alter with the pace of the game, adding another dimension to the gameplay instead of detracting from your enjoyment like the forgettable Europop efforts found in most games. Using *Commander* even ...
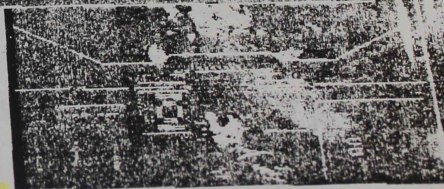
(including missile tracking you, severely damaged, intense combat and ally killed), eight flying songs (such as strike type mission and triumphantly returning to the carrier) and rescued or lost in space ejection sequence music.

It's very easy to end up writing ... when describing this latest release from the Tex... based creators of Ultima. *Wing Commander* breaks so many new ... in computer gam... ...that Origin has probably just invented a com...

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...aren't going to s...

The Claw has a restless bartender and amateur psychologist

COMMANDER

pletely new genre of game. It really is like playing a movie! In fact, Origin is promising more games using the *Wing Commander* mix of movie graphics, gameplay, sound and presentation.

We were expecting to be able to bring you a complete review of *Wing Commander* in this issue, but it turned out that the version we received was still at beta test stage and as such wasn't quite ready for a definitive ACE rating. There's no doubt, however, that this is a definite candidate for Game of the Year and we've been promised the full reviewable version for next month.

● Rik Haynes

TAME THE GAME

ACE PREPLAY

7611 Shobi

Navigating a dense asteroid field

"**G**roundbreaking 3D graphics. Spatially realistic stereo sound. A new cinematic game experience." that's what the guys at Origin and UK distributor Mindscape are promising with their new game, *Wingleader*. And they're not joking either. *Wingleader* was the hottest game on display at the recent Summer Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago.

Origin already has thousands of role-playing fans thanks to its highly successful series of *Ultima* fantasy games. Now the leading Texas-based software developer has set its sights on the shoot'em-up player looking for something special and a little more sophisticated. *Wingleader* is the result. It combines three dimensional space shoot'em-up action with the audio-visual feel of sci-fi movies like *Battlestar Galactica*, *Star Wars* and *The Last Starfighter*.

Sadly, the screen-shots shown here completely fail to convey the cinematic experience of the game. "*Wingleader* has to be seen and heard to be believed."

WINGLEADER

LEADING THE WING

"In the 27th century, personkind is locked in a deadly war with the Kilrathi, a vicious, militaristic alien race. Leading the fight are the daring pilots of the Terran Confederation, meeting Kilrathi warships in their fast, well-armed one-person starfighters. With faithful wingpeople flying by their side, the fearless Wingleader battles with Kilrathi aces in heated deepspace dogfights for the future of humanity." You play that Wingleader.

"In the game you lead daring missions against Kilrathi fighters and warships, transport ships and space stations. You're not alone out in space. On every mission, you have one of eight trusty wingpeople at your side. Each with their own personality and flying style, individual quirks and priorities. Your wingperson is an invaluable ally, guided by your commands and the mission objectives."

"During the campaign you fly four different Terran Confederation starfighters. The Hornet,

Cinematic launch and docking sequences hurl you into the action

ORIGIN/MINDSCAPE hit hyperspace with the world's first cinematic 3D space combat simulator

Scimitar, Rapier and Raptor each have their own unique armament and flight characteristics. You face a similar assortment of starfighters on the Kilrathi side - quick, under-armoured light fighters, reliable medium fighters, and heavy fighters carrying a wide array of missiles and guns."

"As you close with the enemy, you can open up with intelligent missiles - Image-Recognition and Friend-or-Foe - capable of independently tracking a target. Or you could switch to your guns - lasers, neutron cannon or mass-driver cannon. If you can manoeuvre behind your opponent, lock a Heat-Seeking missile on their exhaust and watch it chase them down. And for the killing blow, you might choose a DeadFire missile, which lacks tracking sensors, but packs the most powerful warhead in your arsenal."

Of course the Kilrathi pilots aren't going to sit still while you

engage them in combat. "The enemy starfighters are controlled by advanced artificial intelligence. You see them perform incredible acrobatic manoeuvres - barrel rolls, Immelmann turns, split-Y's - as they close in for the kill."

"But there are more than just starfighters in this game. You attack and defend larger vessels, ranging from small corvettes and transports to huge dreadnoughts and starbases. It's especially important that you defend your own carrier, the Tiger's Claw, against Kilrathi warships. If the Claw blows, you'll be stuck in deep space with only a few hours of air and no place to go."

EXPERIENCE THE CINEMATIC

"Origin has incorporated several cinematic and interactive animated sequences into Wingleader which set the stage and frame the dogfight action. In these sequences, you meet the crew of the Tiger's Claw, as well as visit the hangars, launch tubes, and landing bays of the huge space ship."

"Before each mission, you attend a briefing where your commander outlines your mission
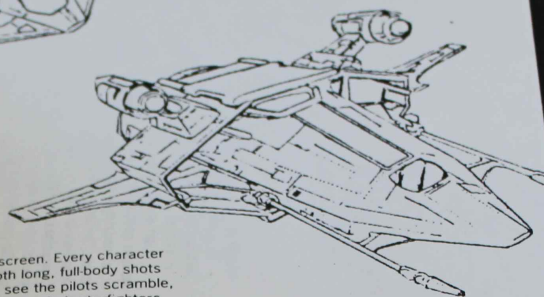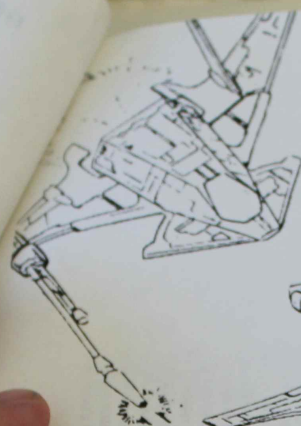
CREATING COMPUTER CELLULOID

objective on a large vid screen. Every character is fully animated, with both long, full-body shots and close-ups. Then you see the pilots scramble, charging down the corridor to their starfighters. The launch sequence shows your starfighter hurled into space at full velocity by a magnetic rail."

"Out in space, animated sequences take advantage of *Wingleader's* unique 3D technology to offer cinematic transitions as well as dramatisations of critical events. If your flight plan includes a lot of empty space to cover, simply engage the autopilot - the scene will cut to a cinematic view of your ship and that of your wingperson, roaring past the camera. When you're at your destination the computer returns control of the ship to you."

"When your ship's taken a fatal hit, you see sparks spout from your control panel. Then the camera cuts to an exterior view, and you see your crippled fighter tumbling out of control. The camera cuts back inside the ship, with a shot of you covering your face against the explosion of your ship."

"To emphasise the cinematic feel of *Wingleader*, Origin used George Alistar Sanger - a professional composer and arranger better known as The Fat Man - to assemble a complete, movie-style score for the game. In addition to the *Wingleader* theme tune, various separate musical

Wingleader is the first computer game to bring you the audio-visual quality of movies like *Star Wars*, *Battlestar Galactica* and *The Last Starfighter*

passages were composed to reflect specific events and conditions in the game. Based on the flow of the battle, the program intelligently selects and plays appropriate background music - for example, the tense chaotic battle theme that accompanies dogfights increases in tempo and complexity as the pace of the action rises. A crescendo marks the death of an ally, and a dirge follows your death."

"Along with the cinematic score, Wingleader also incorporates a wide variety of carefully selected and crafted sound effects for the starships, weapons and explosions. The game also supports full stereo sound effects for players with PC soundboards. Explosions boom from one speaker or the other, depending upon their point of Origin, and the engine noise of enemy starfighters pans from one speaker to the other as they buzz past your ship."
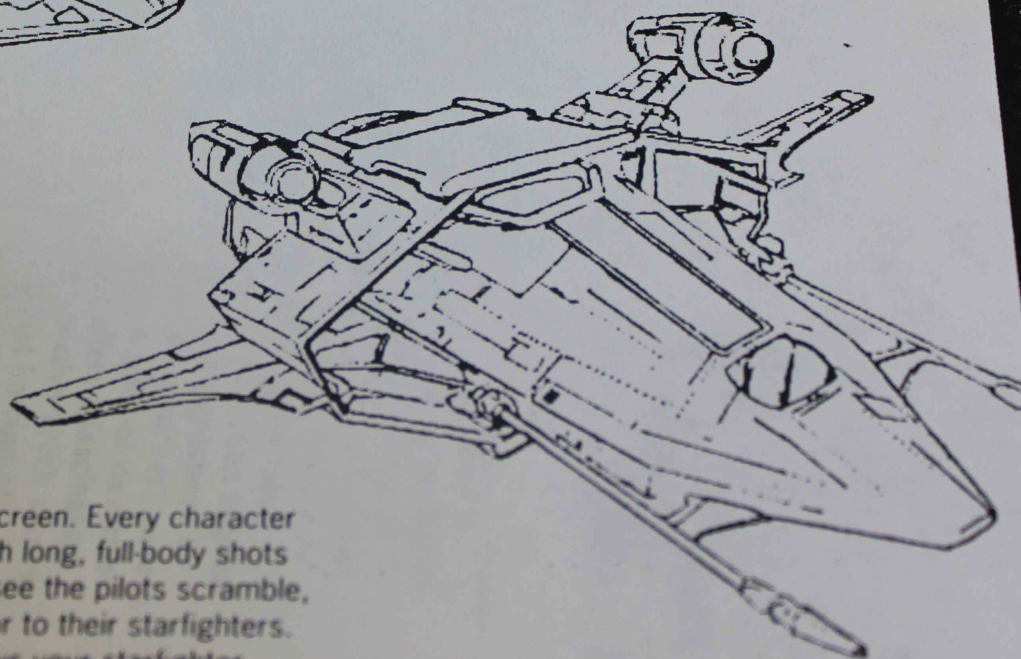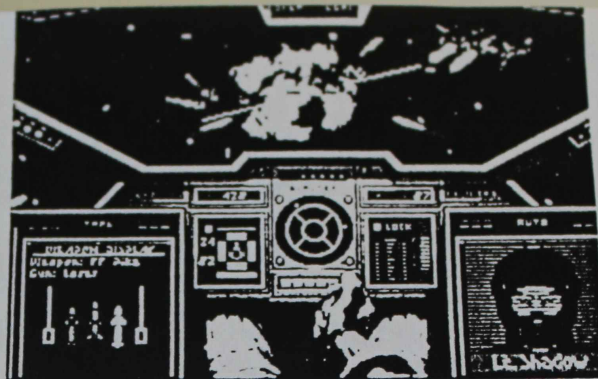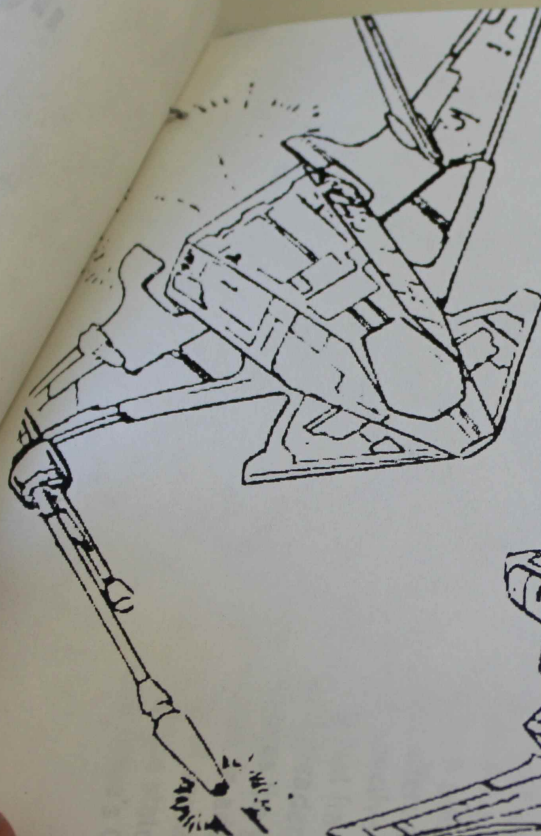
PREPARE FOR LAUNCH

Wingleader will be released on the PC in early autumn. The game comes on seven 5.25" disks or four 3.5" disks. It's compatible with Tandy, EGA, VGA and MCGA graphics cards and AdLib, Soundblaster, Roland MT-32, LAPC-1 and Tandy 3-Voice soundboards. Amiga and ST versions are also planned for later in the year. Playing Wingleader is like playing a film.

objective on a large vid screen. Every character is fully animated, with both long, full-body shots and close-ups. Then you see the pilots scramble, charging down the corridor to their starfighters. The launch sequence shows your starfighter hurled into space at full velocity by a magnetic rail."

"Out in space, animated sequences take

Wingleader is the first computer game to bring you the audio-visual quality of movies like *Star Wars*, *Battlestar Galactica* and *The Last Starfighter.*

CES Report

change with the pace of the game using SOUNDTRAX.

A CINEMATIC SMORGASBORD

Wingleader from Origin is a state of the art 3-D space combat game with a cinematic storyboard with the on-screen action.

Origin's Wingleader emphasizes the "team" aspect of futuristic space combat. Both games feature incredible frame rates during the action sequences (and Lightspeed's "kamikaze rocket", essentially a point-of-view mission perspective which shows this last [framing off], but Wingleader probably advances the genre the most, in addition to the use of sound that advances the state of the art (see last issue's CES report).

Chris Roberts did a wonderful job on the graphics by using supercomputers 3-D ray tracing to develop the images, as well as digitized actual rocks to portray the asteroids in the game. Origin is so excited about the graphics in Wingleader that they plan to use an actual screen shot on the cover of the package rather than the usual painting. Wingleader features a 60 mission campaign with a "tree branching" story so that the player's performance affects the entire campaign.

Origin, perhaps best known for its succession of popular Ultima adventure role-playing games, drew lots of admirers at CES with its new Wingleader: The 3-D Space Combat Simulator. Designer Chris Roberts, of Bad Blood fame, demonstrated some of the 256-color VGA bit-mapped 3-D graphics that are a part of the game. Coupled with these powerful space game graphics is a full-bodied and fast-paced action soundtrack laced with MIDI (musical instrument digital interface) hooks that seamlessly synchronize the soundtrack with the on-screen action. The results are reminiscent of the effects achieved by John Williams' Star Wars motion picture score. This movie-style score was composed and arranged by George Alistair Sanger with just that cinematic purpose in mind.

Wingleader looks like one bad game, both visually and aurally. Origin's director of sales Marten Davies pointed to the demo and said, "Elite 1990," referring to the earlier Elite outer space action/strategy game introduced by Davies into the U.S. market in the mid-1980s. That game took the Commodore 64 market by storm, and Origin believes it has a similar winner on its hands with Wingleader.

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Wing Commander

Nothing less than a major entertainment breakthrough, designer Chris Roberts' Wing Commander is a milestone project that integrates state-of-the-art sound, graphics, and computing power into a fully formed interactive experience.

Built on themes that have become staples of computer games, Wing Commander achieves its innovation by enhancing the familiar. It's a 3-D, point-of-view, space-flight simulator that uses scaling bitmapped images similar to those in Lucasfilm Games and combines them with Cinemaware-like movie interludes and a trace of Origin Systems role playing.

What soars out of these "borrowings" has potent impact. Wing Commander's audiovisuals represent a new high in computer games. By combining vector graphics and bitmaps in the 3-D simulation, Roberts has created a detailed, believable simulated environment. Additionally, the use of rotoscoped animation and digitized images in the mood-setting

briefing sessions and the race to the flight deck gives a tantalizing preview of what the multimedia games of the near future will be.

But Wing Commander adds up to more than the sum of its technology. Clever if limited, character interaction and a wealth of detail depends the player's disbelief as few computer games can.

Ultimately, the experience is not merely believable, or challenging, it is fantastic—it is truth fun.

Fun and fantasy have their price, however. State-of-the-art software can easily be expensive to manufacture and hardware. In order to realize the full impact of Wing Commander, you'll need some pretty impressive equipment, including a 386-based computer (or at least a 12MHz or faster 286), color VGA graphics and at least some kind of MT-32 or compatible. Expanded memory is an asset as well. But that is recommended. But this is the future of personal computing. Even "freeform" instruments have to price (a paltry low-on IBM and its legally equipped PCs).

However improving the requirements, the payoff is just as impressive. By immersing the reader into a interactive, electronic experience.