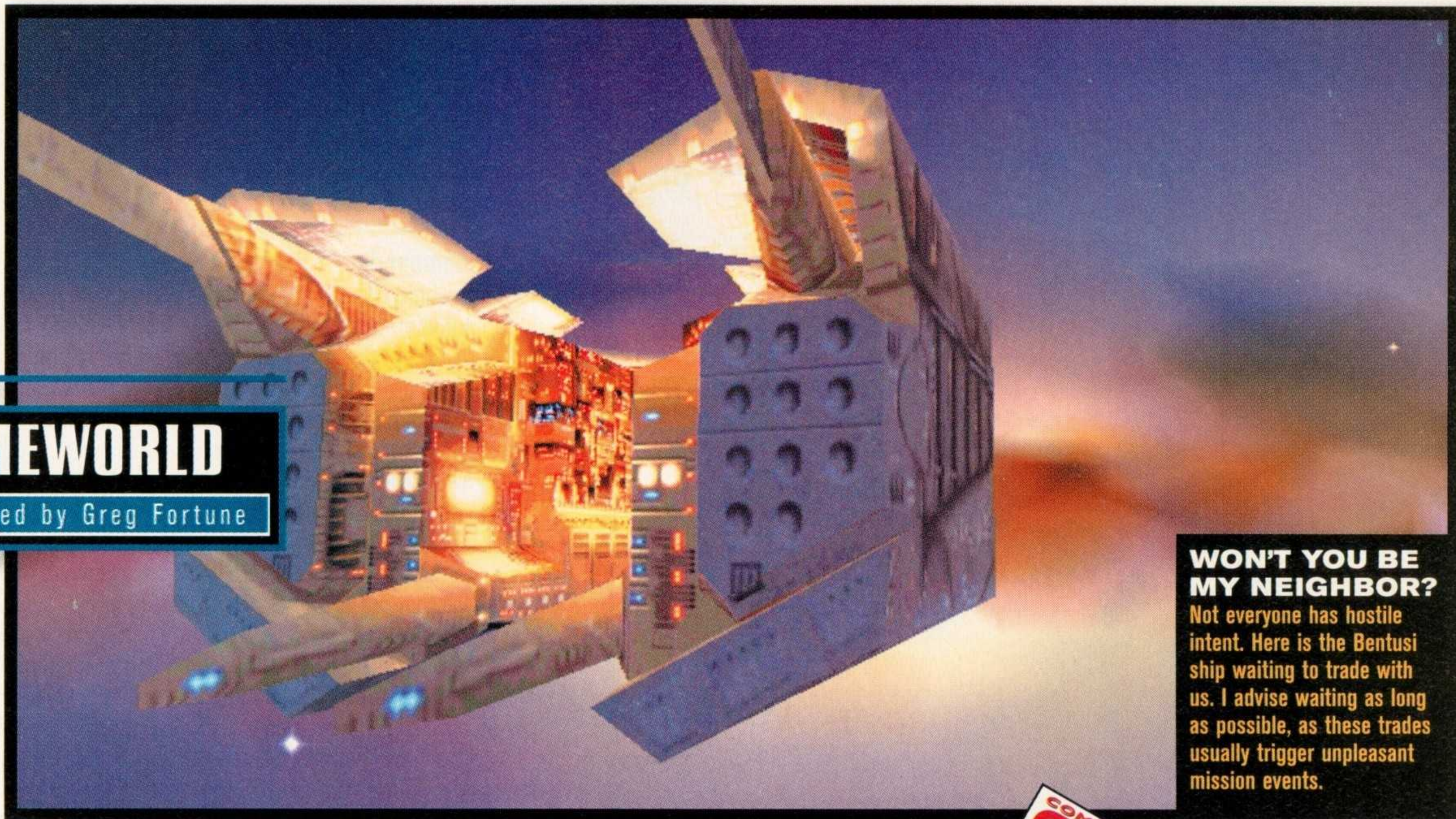


HOMEWORLD

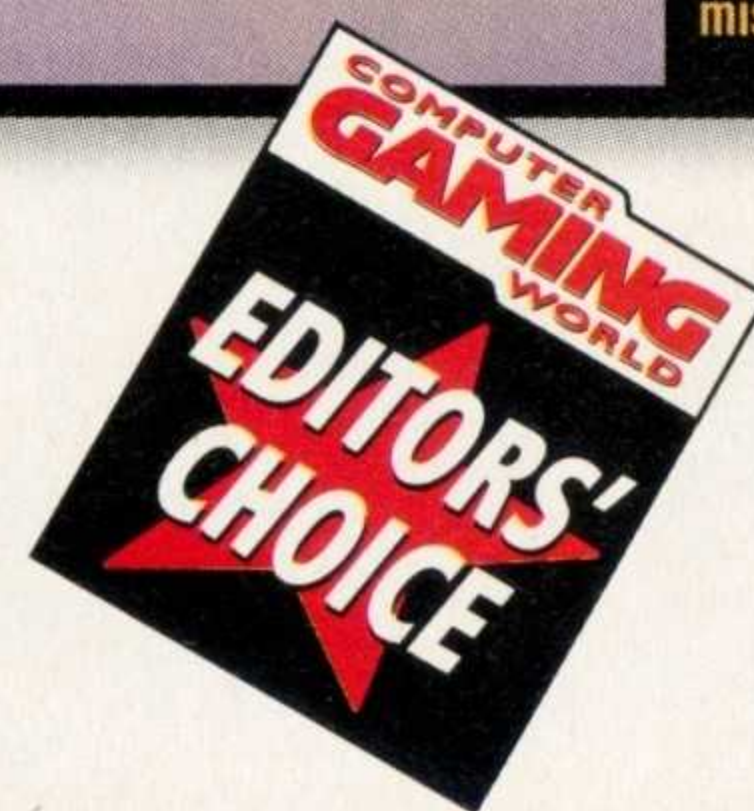
reviewed by Greg Fortune



WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?
Not everyone has hostile intent. Here is the Bentusi ship waiting to trade with us. I advise waiting as long as possible, as these trades usually trigger unpleasant mission events.

HOMEWORLD Is a Bright Spot in the RTS Sky

A Star Is Born



Have you ever wanted to command a huge fleet of warships, complete with fighter waves and support vehicles? If so, the game you've been waiting for has arrived. I'm speaking, of course, about HOMEWORLD – a real-time fleet management game set in deep space. What's most impressive is the way the design team recognized the flaws in most real-time strategy (RTS) games on the market, and avoided them in HOMEWORLD. This game is a breath of fresh air for anyone who is tired of the horde rushes, repetitive tech trees, and endless resource gathering found in most RTS games.

Once Upon a Time...

The premise is simple. Your race lives on a barren world at the fringe of your galaxy. Deep in the desert a discovery is made, one that brings to light the fact that this planet is not your home – your true home is far away, near the center of the galaxy. Generations labor to construct

a huge orbital platform, a framework for the massive mothership that will carry your people home. I'll not tell you much more of the plot, as the story is one of the beautiful elements HOMEWORLD has to offer. As you set out on your journey toward a distant planet your race has long forgotten, there is a tangible feeling of isolation and the despair that comes from being all alone in an unknown galaxy. The story is nicely accented by brief cut scenes, many occurring in the middle of a scenario to help advance the plot, or to bring new developments to your attention.

The graphics also work to set the mood;

THANK YOU SIR, MAY I HAVE ANOTHER?

The factories in the mothership and aboard your carriers can build multiple unit types simultaneously. You can even issue build orders for multiple ships from this single interface.



the backgrounds give the feeling of being adrift in a vast ocean of space. Everything is nicely detailed – very smooth – and presents the proper sense of proportion. In order to give you access to all of your ships throughout the huge mission areas, an inventive view, zoom, and scroll system was put into place. This camera system is one of the real joys of the game, giving you total viewing control of the action, while creating an impressively sweeping cinematic feel. You may view any ship or group of ships from any angle, zoom in and out, and jump to

CGW RATED

PROS

Shining example of how to do RTS right; awesome gameplay and engine.

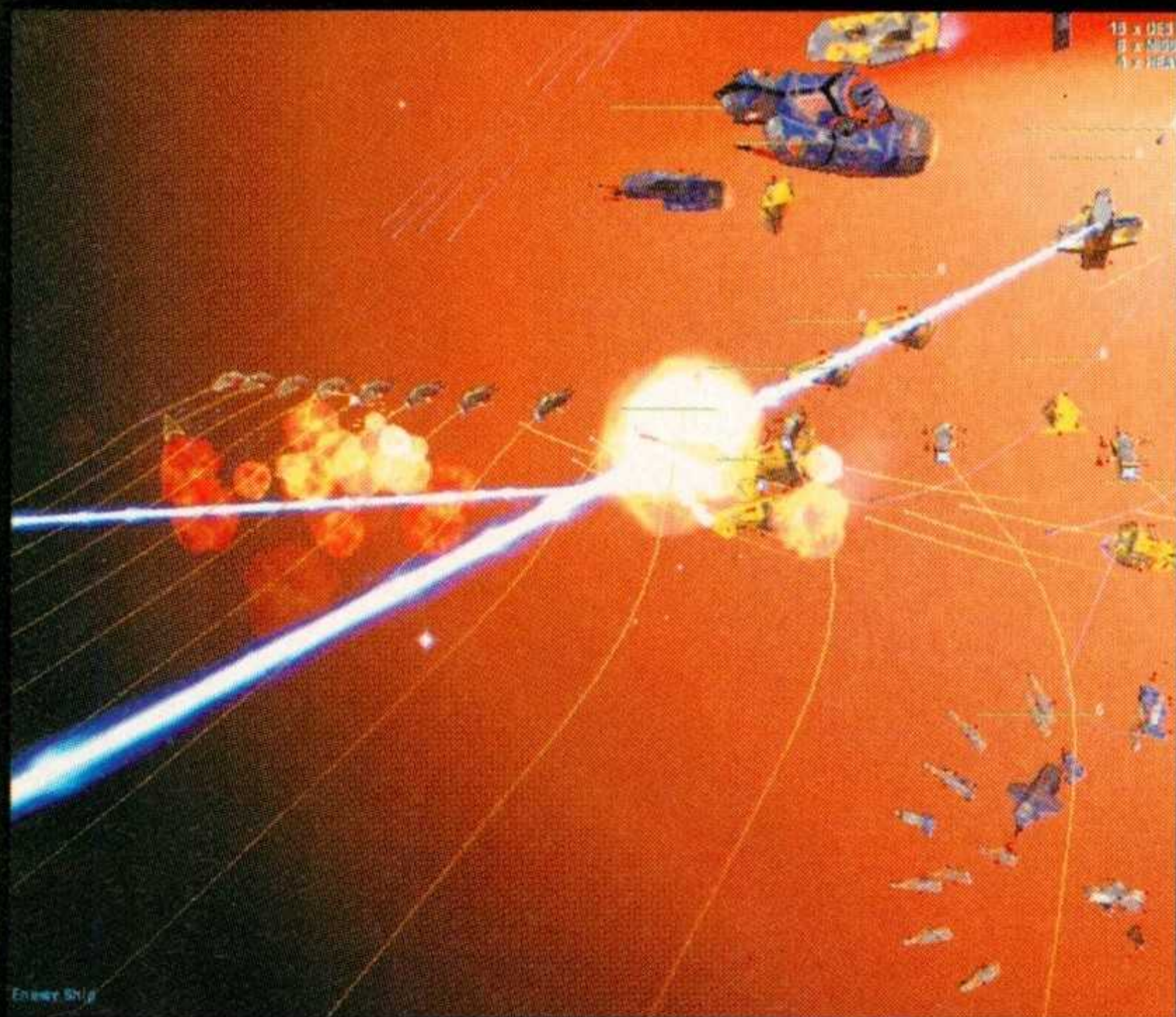
CONS

No time compression; mothership stuck in single-player.

Requirements: Pentium II-233MHz, 32MB RAM, 100MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II-350MHz, 64MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space, 12MB 3D card. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (2-8 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: Sierra Studios • Developer: Relic Entertainment • \$50 • www.sierrastudios.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

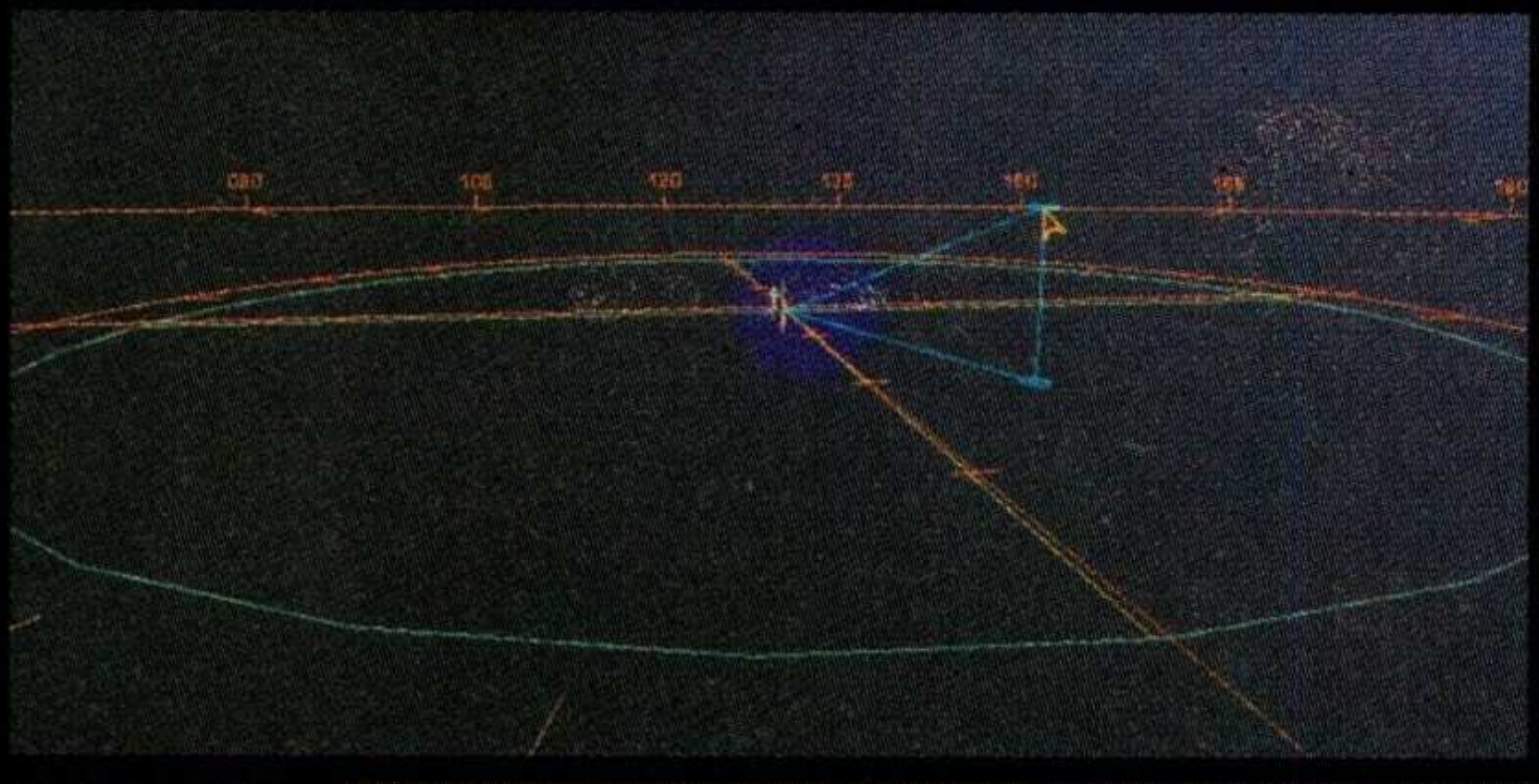
NICE LIGHT SHOW This shot not only shows off the beautiful effects offered by the HOMEWORLD engine, it shows why fighters hate engaging large groups of capital ships.



RAINING FIRE AND BRIMSTONE Missile destroyers are particularly useful, as they can attack multiple targets at once. They also make really quick work out of enemy fighter formations.



SPINNING PLATES The Sensor Manager's dish-shaped navigational map lets you move your fleet anywhere in space, whether it be above, below, or right on the primary plane of movement.



DROP YOUR STUFF NEXT DOOR Among your support ships is the Resource Controller frigate. When told to guard your collectors, it keeps you from having to haul all that rock back to the mothership.



grouped ships via hotkeys. There is also a long-range sensor screen that gives you an overall look at all friendly and enemy ship positions; it also allows you to zoom the focus to any area where friendly ships can be found. I discovered that even with over 200 ships at my command, directing multiple strikes on multiple targets was still fairly manageable.

Fleet Commander

What would all of this control be worth if you were confined to only a couple different ship types? Not to worry – there's plenty of variety to choose from. You can build everything from fighters to heavy cruisers and carriers, and just about everything in between. Of course, a fleet is not made up solely of combat vehicles. You will also command research vessels, cloak generators, sensor arrays, resource collectors, and gravity well generators, just to name a few.

But don't think for a second that you'll be building swarms of ships to throw at enemy formations in hopes of overwhelming their defenses. Your unit management will more likely swing toward the MYTH paradigm than that of C&C or STARCRAFT. Try those "lasso and throw" tactics in HOMEWORLD and you'll quickly find yourself with no resources, no ships, and a serious butt-kicking on your doorstep. Amen! You'll need to preserve every ship you can – and employ formations composed of multiple ship types – if you ever hope to see the final battle.

Another improvement over the usual RTS games is the resource collection model. Instead of forcing you into an endless campaign of resource collection, the development team has actually balanced the amount of resources available for collection with the cost of building ships. The end result is that you will get to spend most of your time engaged in tactical engagements, and less time managing your supply lines.

Your resources also carry over from mission to mission, as does your technology tree. No more will you be forced to research the same tech advances over and over, simply because you've advanced to the next area. In HOMEWORLD, your technology advances are all

done through your research ships, and are spaced out throughout the game.

All Hands to Battle Stations!

Believe me, you are going to need every bit of technology, resources, and strategy you've got to overcome the obstacles ahead of you. Combat does not take place on a flat plane, but in a cubic volume of space; merely ordering your units to move in two dimensions will not be enough to win the day. You'll be attacked from above, below, and behind by formations of fighters, corvettes, frigates, and capital ships. Your task is to respond with your own formations and to protect the mothership at all costs. There are many tactics that you can use to defeat the enemy in a given situation, as long as you complete all of your objectives. You might decide to create a fleet of huge capital ships, or to build carriers and tons of small strike craft, or devise a fleet that is somewhere in between.

Regardless of which ships you choose for your fleet, you will be treated to some of the best fleet battles ever seen in a computer game. Whether you've just obliterated a wing of enemy fighters with a group of heavy corvettes, or held off a wave of frigates and destroyers attacking your mothership, your victories will be satisfying because they were hard fought and well won. You won't even be able to use the same formations and attack methods throughout the game, as there are perils for each ship class around every corner. This constant

Tips from Fleet Command

Using all the ship types at your disposal is key to winning decisive battles. Here are some uses for your non-combat ships that might be the difference between a hyperspace jump and rigor mortis:

Proximity Sensors: Keep a couple of these guarding any large formation of ships. They're fast enough to keep up with fighters and will foil any cloaked enemies in your path.

Cloak Generators: Too slow for fighter escorts, these beauties are perfect for cloaking destroyers, cruisers, and frigates. My favorite use for them, however, is in conjunction with salvage ships.

Salvage Corvettes: These are arguably the most useful ships in the game. In one level alone, I managed to steal eight destroyers, three missile destroyers, a heavy cruiser, and a carrier. Now go check this month's Gamer's Edge for advanced ship theft techniques.

need to use your existing ships in new combinations keeps the game alive and entertaining all the way to the end.

Houston, We Have a Problem...

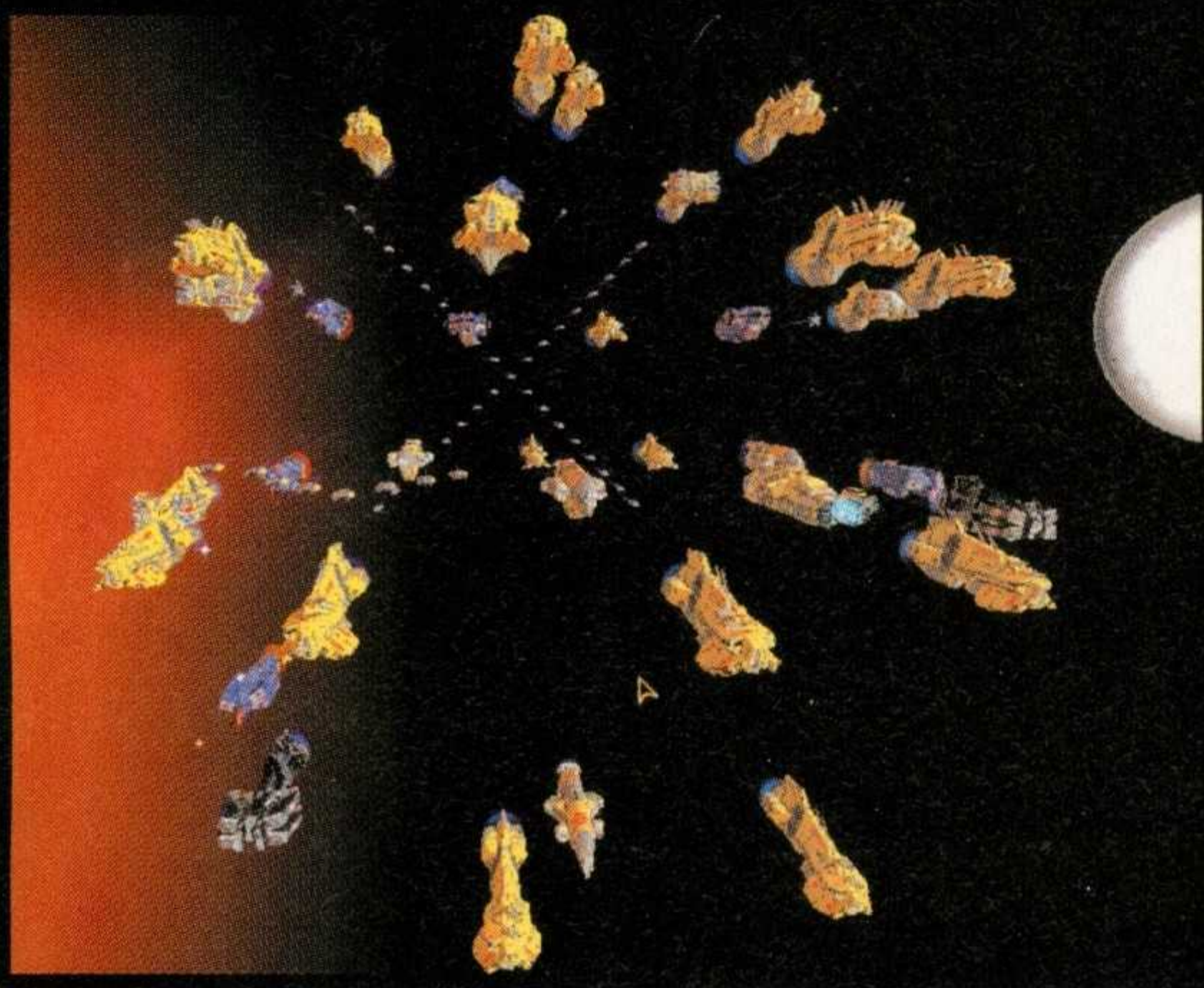
OK, you may ask, if this game's so brilliant, why didn't it get five stars? Well, there are just a couple of minor issues standing between HOMEWORLD and a perfect score. The most glaring of these is the lack of a time-compression feature. After completing all the objectives in a particular area, you are faced with two options: Harvest or leave. You won't want to leave resources floating around in space, so I'm betting that you'll choose to harvest. That, my friend, could take a while. I frequently left the game running while I went to bed, because watching resources being collected is as entertaining as watching Defrag run. In these cases, the best option would have been a time-compression feature, allowing the resources to be harvested quickly. This would also have been a very useful feature when slow ships had to travel long distances. The other annoyance is that you will be unable to move the mothership around the level unless you are engaged in a multiplayer game. There were many times I wished I could move the mothership a few measly kilometers, but could get nothing more useful out of it than "Drives offline."

The multiplayer aspects of HOMEWORLD are very good, as long as you're not looking for a twitch-fest. With cloaking generators, cloaked ships, the ability to steal enemy ships, and a couple of gravity wells thrown in, you have the making of some great naval battles. You can decide what technology will be available, how many resource points each faction will have, and more. It's all the same gameplay that makes HOMEWORLD great, but with (hopefully) trickier opponents.

Bringing the Fleet Home

HOMEWORLD is an outstanding tactical fleet game, and an example for future RTS games of how to handle resources and tech trees. It's one of those rare titles that uses some of the better aspects of similar games while dodging most of their pitfalls. If you think that you'd make a great admiral, then HOMEWORLD may be just what

ANYBODY WANT SOME OF THIS? It's possible to acquire massive firepower in HOMEWORLD. This mixed fleet is a big ball o' death.



you've been looking for. While it doesn't have lots of really fast action, the action this innovative game does have is definitely worth checking out. **CGW**

Look For More HOMEWORLD in
GAMER'S EDGE
On Page 188

DID I DO THAT? Once you've gotten the knack of the formations, enemy ships will drop like flies. Here, a couple of heavy cruisers find out why the sphere formation is so effective.



SPACE GHOSTS The use of cloaked fighters can really ruin an enemy fleet's day. They may not be big and powerful, but they can suddenly appear in the most inconvenient places...



SPACE (FUR)BALLS Some of the battles in HOMEWORLD can involve hundreds of ships engaged in various attack maneuvers. Notice how all the action isn't taking place on a horizontal plane – but actually involves all three axes present in space.

