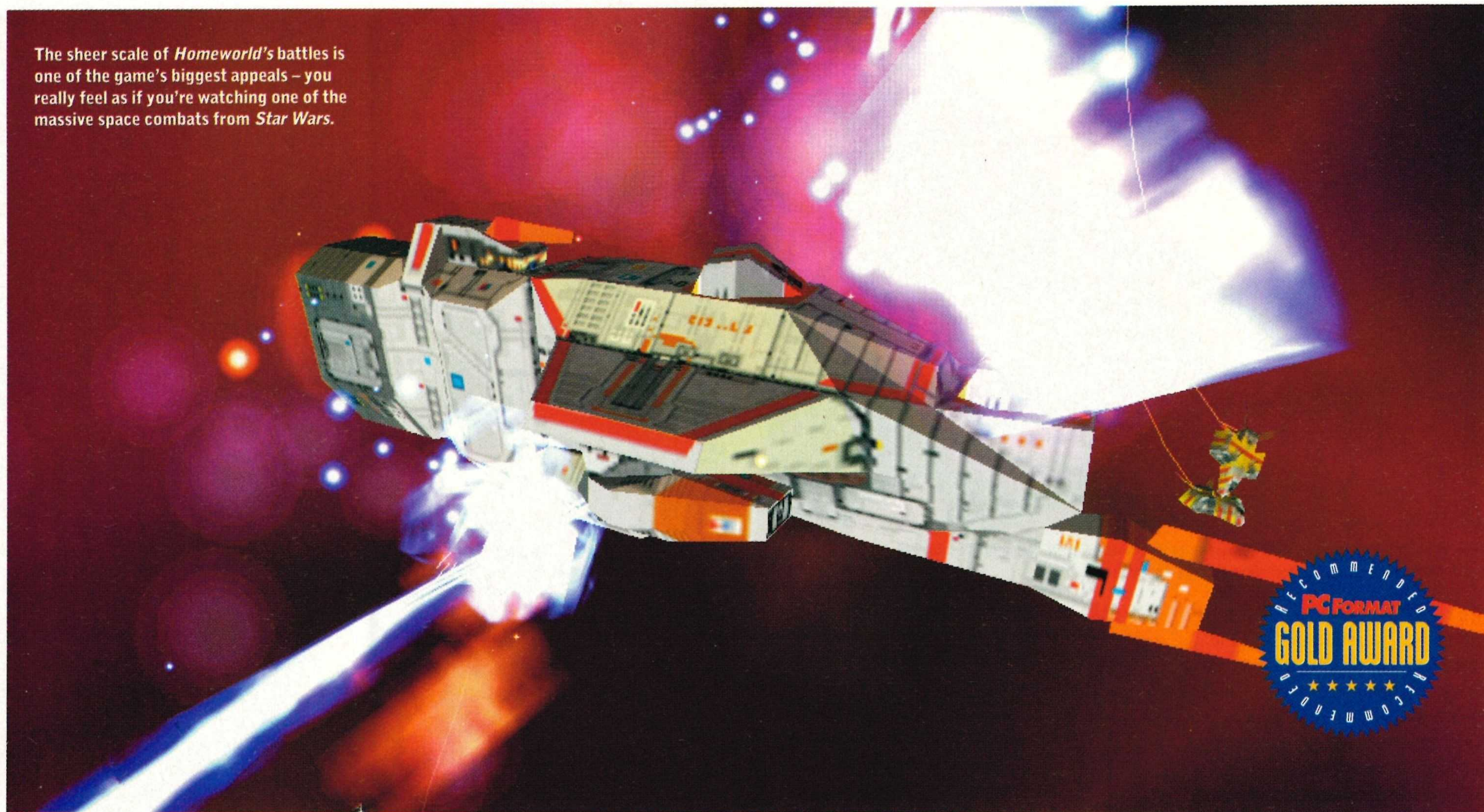


The sheer scale of *Homeworld's* battles is one of the game's biggest appeals – you really feel as if you're watching one of the massive space combats from *Star Wars*.



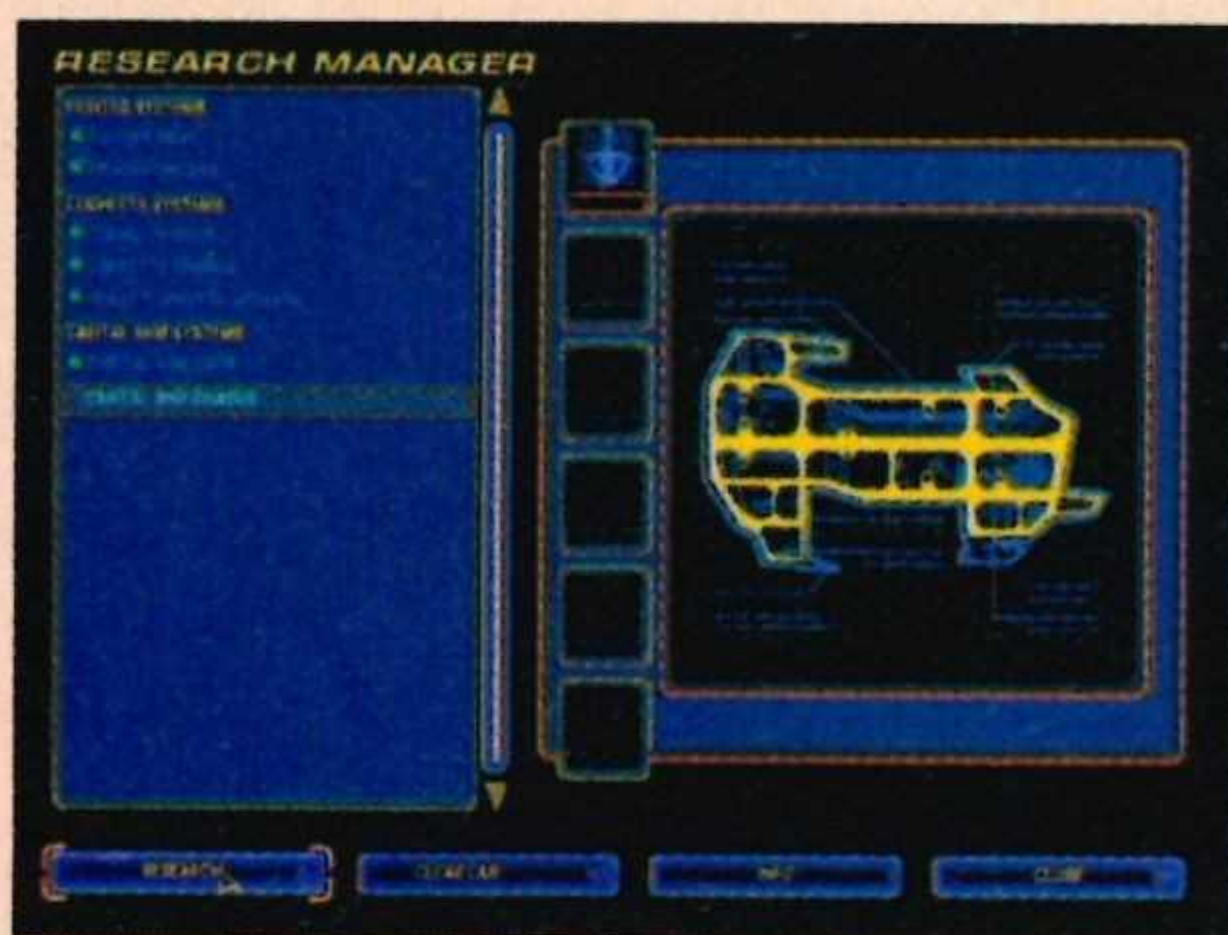
# Homeworld

Lawks a-mercy! Not another real-time strategy game? Ah, but *Homeworld* has taken the concept a huge stride forward. Right out into space, in fact.

## What's the story?

**R**emember *Battlestar Galactica*? In a nutshell, *Homeworld* is it in reverse. For 1,000 years, your race has fought to survive on the world of Kharak. When an archaeological expedition to the equatorial deserts uncovers the remains of an ancient city built around the carcass of a massive starship, the question of your people's origins is answered.

A starchart recovered from the ruins points the way to your original homeworld, and you are selected to command the massive, self-sufficient mothership built to carry thousands of your people to their ancestral home.



The mystery of your people's history drives your thirst for knowledge ale.

**S**INCE *COMMAND & CONQUER* WAS released back in 1995, the real-time strategy game has become one of the most popular and successful PC gaming genres. Major new titles and sequels to already-successful lines are now one of the mainstays of each year's release schedule.

The problem recently, though, is that the RTS has been in danger of running out of steam. There are only so many refinements that can be made and new features that can be added to the basic *C&C* model. The superb *Warzone 2100* pushed back the limits a little further, but it's getting harder and harder for developers to come up with anything new. Even the long-awaited and much hyped *C&C: Tiberian Sun* (PCF 101, 90%) relied more on excellent level design than anything truly new or innovative. While more and more games are adopting real-time elements, or combining them with more traditional genres, it's looking like the days of the pure real-time strategy game are numbered. Or at least they were.

## The final frontier

Quite simply, *Homeworld* is perhaps the

first major step forward in real-time strategy games since *C&C* arrived. While almost every other title since has been an evolution of Westwood's basic idea, *Homeworld* is a revolution. It's also challenging, compulsively playable and a brilliant game in its own right.

As with so many great ideas, what developer Relic has done seems so obvious that, in retrospect, you can't help wondering why no-one had thought of it before. *Homeworld* takes the basic real-time strategy concepts and moves them to a new environment; rather than taking place on the surface of worlds, *Homeworld's* action occurs in the space between them. The entire game takes place in the icy void of a vacuum, pitting your expanding fleet of spacecraft against a variety of foes as you struggle to save your entire civilisation from destruction and discover the location of the planet that gave rise to your race.

On the face of it, this might not seem to be that big a deal. After all, it's still a real-time strategy game, right? You're still collecting resources, researching and building units, and using a mouse-driven point and click interface to send them off to attack the



You begin your journey with a very limited selection of ship types, and must construct research ships to develop more.

enemy. What's so new and innovative about that?

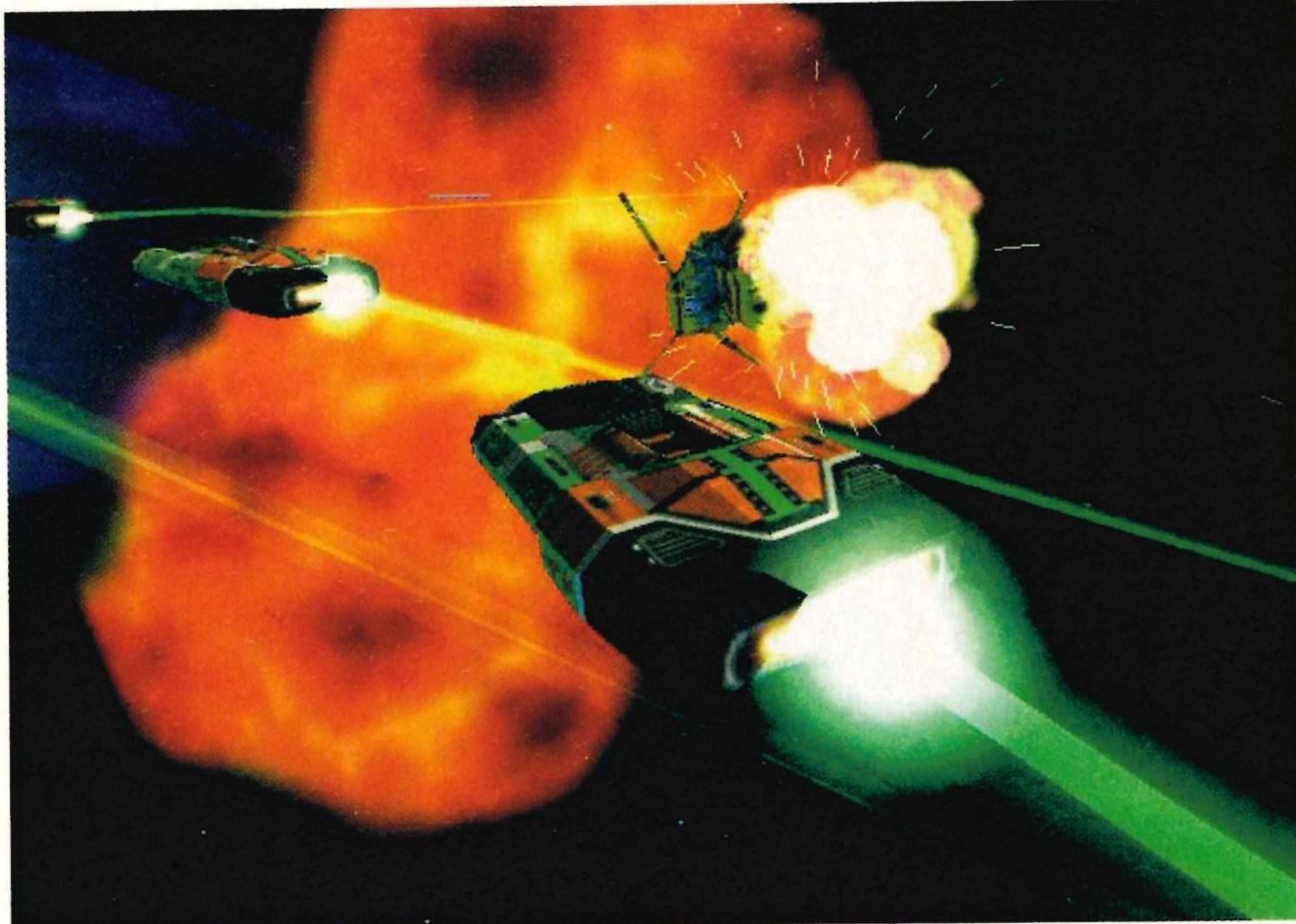
The answer lies in the nature of space-based combat. *Homeworld* is a truly three-dimensional game – it's not just the graphics that are 3D, it's the entire environment. All previous real-time strategy games have effectively taken place on a two-dimensional plane. More recent games have featured elevation, but your units have still been fixed to it – even air and submarine units. Subs have been nothing more than cloaked units, and aircraft have functioned simply as land-based units that can ignore terrain.

As a result, terrain has always been the single most important tactical

## Home truths



**✓** The instant appeal of *Homeworld* comes from the absolutely gorgeous graphics, which make almost every other real-time strategy game look somewhat primitive in comparison, and put to shame most other 3D space combat simulations too. And the best thing is, they just get better and better as you progress through the game, adding extra impetus to your quest for success.



The vapour trails left by each ship's engines are used to identify different factions and races by their colour. This is very useful in multiplayer games, where you need to see which ship is which.



Each ship type has its own strengths and weaknesses. The assault frigate is fairly fast for its size, and groups of them can make short work of larger, slower capital ships.

consideration in real-time strategy games. Large areas of the battlefield could be captured and controlled by blockading key choke points, and your options for attack and defence have been dictated largely by the routes open to you.

*Homeworld* is different. The terrain is still important – specifically the locations of resources such as asteroids,

defensive installations such as turrets have formed the backbone of defending it. In *Homeworld*, everything can and does move and change position – including your vast mothership, the game's equivalent of your base. In addition, many of the larger craft have hyperspace engines, enabling them to jump from one point to another almost instantaneously, at a cost in resources.

## In *Homeworld*, everything can and does move and change position – including your mothership, the equivalent of your base

and other unique areas such as dust clouds – but the battlefield is essentially open. Attacks can come from literally any direction, and controlling an area of space is a very different prospect to controlling a valley by positioning units at one end.

The other major impact of the three-dimensional space environment is one of mobility. In most previous real-time strategy games, your base has consisted of fixed buildings, and

The combination of the 3D environment and mobility of all your units and buildings results in a very different style of combat to any previous real-time strategy game – combat in *Homeworld* is fluid and ever-changing. You must constantly be on the alert for attacks and try to both locate the enemy and work out what they're likely to do next. You can never simply sit back and start churning out a huge force, content in the knowledge that your position is

unassailable. The entire situation in *Homeworld* can and does change in an instant.

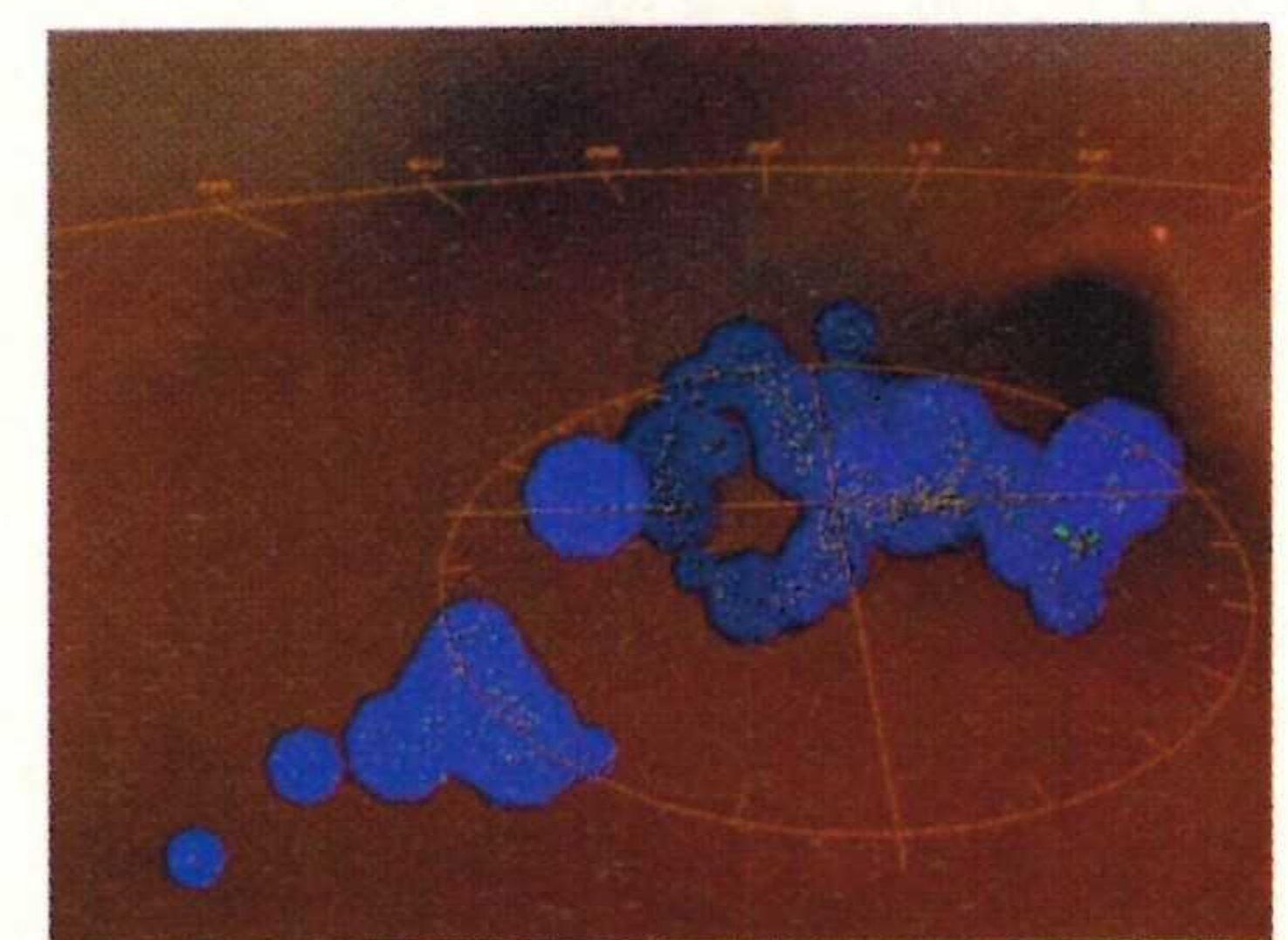
### Awaiting orders

Of course, all of this is fine in theory, but the space-based environment is not only more challenging for the player, but also for the programmers. Without an effective and intuitive interface, finding and controlling your units in a huge three-dimensional space would be almost impossible, and without superb AI routines, both your units and those of the enemy would be ineffective.

Fortunately, *Homeworld* makes it all look easy. The interface is based on the standard point-and-click style used in almost every other real-time strategy game, making it simple to get to grips with, but it seamlessly integrates several new features designed to cope with the unique demands of the 3D environment. It takes a while to get to grips with the differences between this system and its predecessors, but the process is made almost painless by the superb tutorial, which introduces each element in a logical, step-by-step

fashion. Before you even realise it, controlling both your ships and your view of the action is a doddle.

The intuitive nature of the controls is complemented by equally impressive AI, both for your ships and enemy. By altering the formation and aggression orders of your ships, you can decide on their basic behaviour patterns, then simply give them orders and let them get to it. A group of Scouts, for example, if set to Evasive orders and ordered to engage a large force, breaks formation and splits into pairs, using their high speed and manoeuvrability to tie up



You gain new technologies from captured enemy craft and sometimes you're even able to buy them from friendly alien races.



✓ Perhaps the most impressive aspect of the game design is the interface. Based on the standard real-time strategy game point-and-click model, it incorporates several additional features to make changing view and moving units in 3D a veritable breeze. A wide variety of overlays, such as this movement disc, help make everything as clear as a beautiful mountain lake.



✓ The cunning mission designs keep things interesting, providing you with multiple mission objectives and complex situations that allow for a wide variety of different tactics and approaches. In this tricky mission, as well as protecting the cryo-trays holding thousands of your frightened people in suspended animation, you must capture at least one attacking ship.



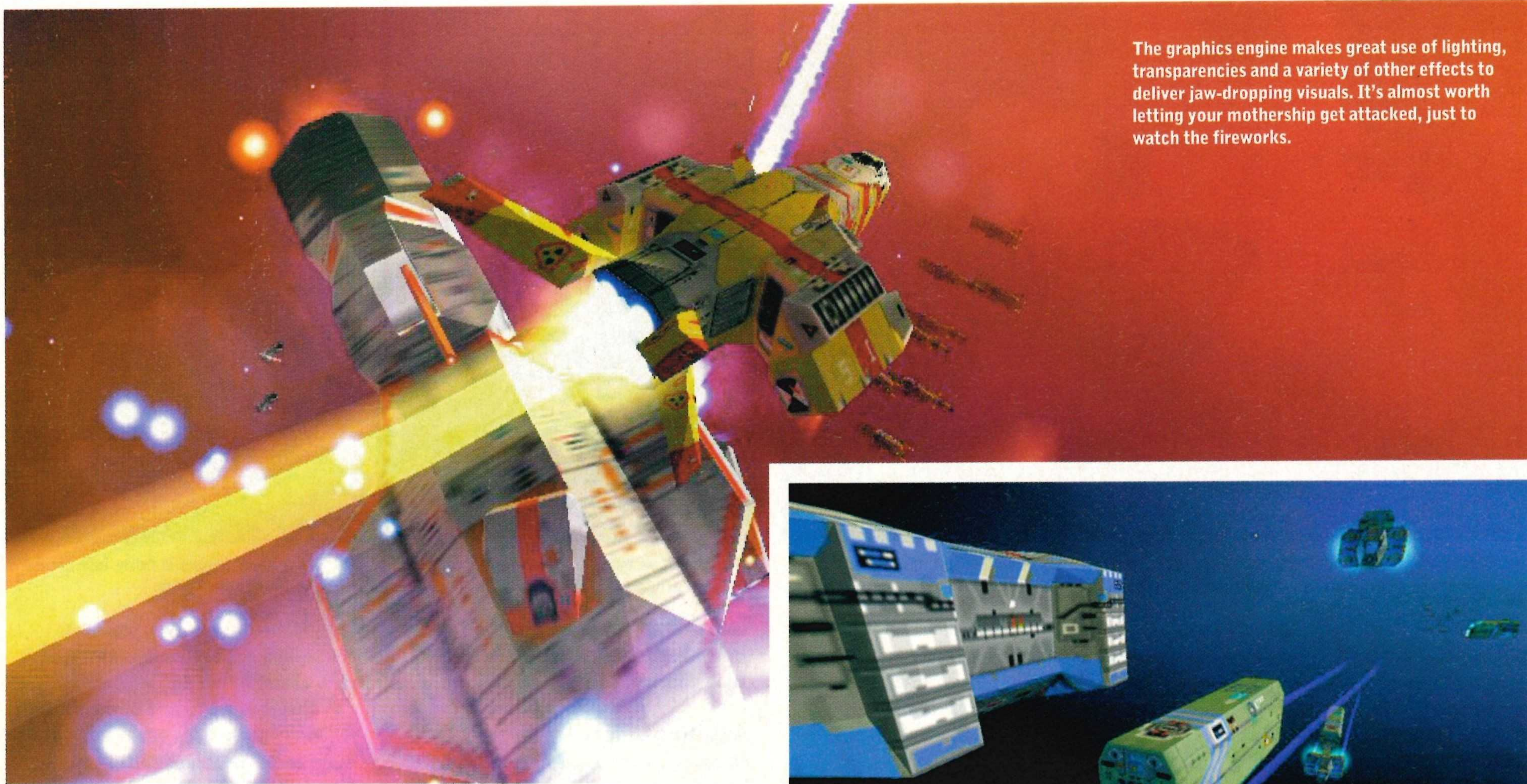
✓ The missions also make great use of the wide variety of ships. As well as an impressive selection of straight combat craft, including scouts, interceptors, corvettes, frigates and destroyers, you must also learn to use salvage craft, cloaking devices, gravity-well generators and these mine layers, to name but a few. *Homeworld* demands that you become master of many skills.



✓ Tying everything together is the gradually unfolding story of your race's search for its origins, which is told using a combination of varied voice-overs, inter-mission animated sequences and stunning in-game cut scenes such as this flight recording recovered from an enemy ship. The fact that the whole extraordinary tale is told gradually in such a non-linear fashion adds to the mystique.



✗ Despite its near-perfection, *Homeworld* does lack a couple of features that dedicated real-time strategy gamers may have come to expect. For example, while there is a variety of support vessels, such as this one that can refuel and repair fighters and corvettes, there's no way to order your ships to automatically withdraw at certain damage levels. A minor niggle.



The graphics engine makes great use of lighting, transparencies and a variety of other effects to deliver jaw-dropping visuals. It's almost worth letting your mothership get attacked, just to watch the fireworks.

► the enemy ships. If you then set a group of Interceptors to X formation and Aggressive orders then send them into the fray, they pick targets for themselves, maintaining formation and pouring fire into each enemy until it's destroyed before moving on to the next.

Being able to give basic orders to large groups of ships and leave them to their own devices is vital in *Homeworld*, because you're often forced, either by the enemy or your own strategy, to fight on many different fronts at one time. Luckily, the AI stands up well but you have to be careful, because the enemy ships are never passive and often come up with their own tricks.

**A new beginning**

By taking a familiar concept, moving it to a unique and challenging new environment and backing it up with an excellent interface and great AI, Relic has laid a solid foundation for a superb game. Fortunately, the developer has also taken the time to flesh out these bare bones and create a finished game that more than lives up to the promise of its basic structure.

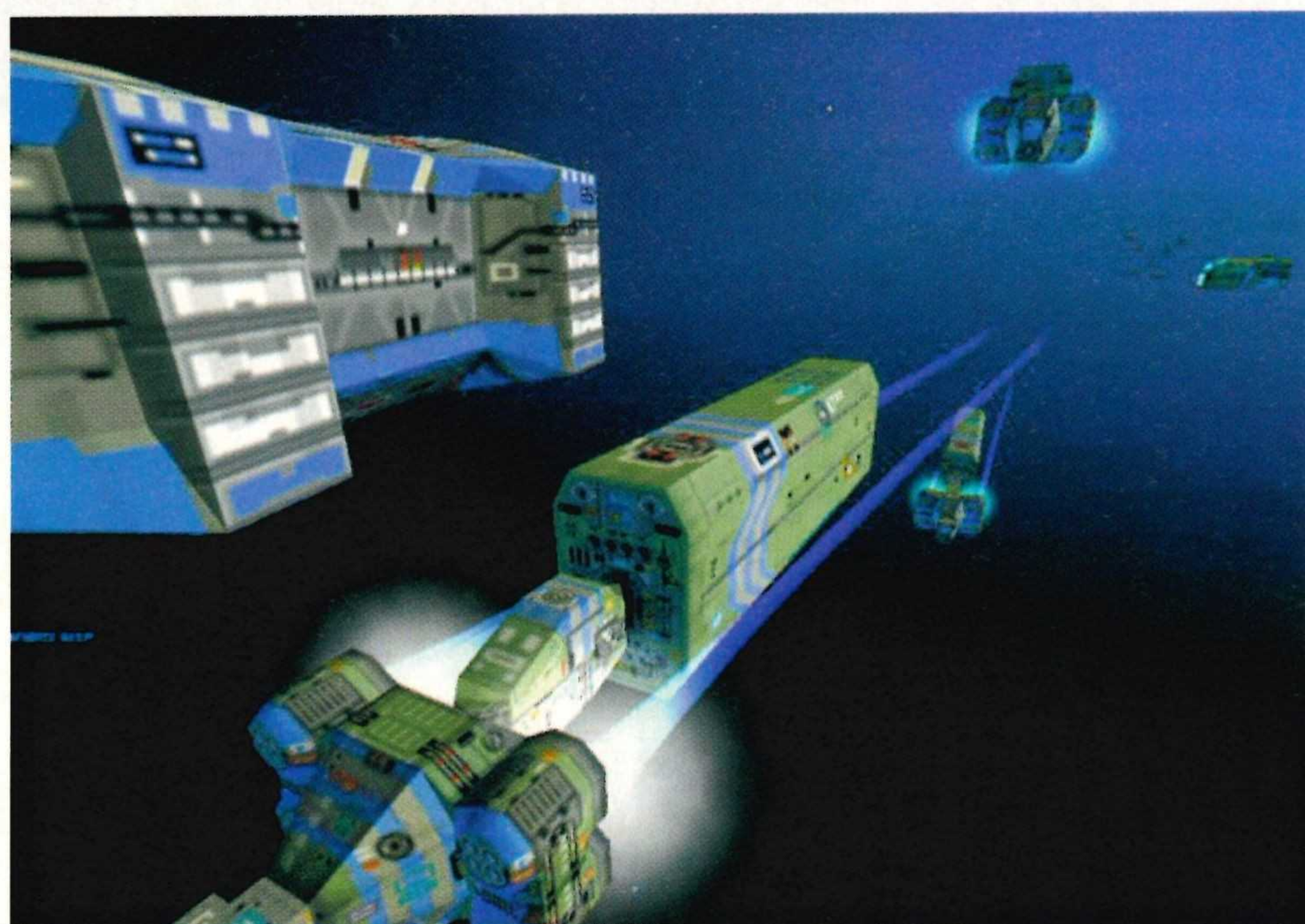
The graphics are a perfect example of the amount of time and effort that has gone into polishing the game. Each and every ship – from the scout fighters to the massive heavy cruisers and vast motherships – is both gorgeous to look at and incredibly detailed, right down to the barrels of its guns. Combined with the stunning use of effects and transparencies, *Homeworld* is the best-looking real-time strategy game ever. In fact, it's among the best-looking space combat games of any type the PC has seen, easily the match of any of the *Wing Commander* or *X-Wing* lines.

More importantly, the gameplay has had even more attention lavished on it. Whether in the single-player

**Homeworld is perhaps the first step forward in real-time strategy games since C&C**

campaign mode or multiplayer, the balance of the dozens of different ship types has been almost perfectly tuned, ensuring that each and every one has its uses. There is no single supership that does everything – all have their own strengths and weakness. Success requires cunning, plans and the use of combined forces of different ship types, each performing a specific role.

The campaign is also excellent, using varied mission structures, cut scenes and dialogue to involve you in the unfolding story of your race's long



Learning to use formations and tactical orders is vital to your success. The sphere formation, for example, is perfect for defending non-combat vessels from attack by nasty space foes.

and dangerous journey through the galaxy. Never does the game devolve to the 'another mission, another map, another group of enemies to kill' monotony that plagues so many real-time strategy games.

In fact, the only real criticisms that can be aimed at *Homeworld* are concerned more with what's missing than with the game as it stands. A little more automation would have been appreciated – in particular, the option to have your ships automatically withdraw at a given damage or fuel

level. Likewise, more variation between the two types of fleet on offer – which only have a few different types of ship each, most being different designs that are functionally the same – would have made the whole shebang much more interesting and challenging.

But these are little more than minor complaints. *Homeworld* is a stunning game in almost every respect, and a firm contender for *PC Format* game of the year. Whatever your taste, you owe it to yourself to check it out. **PCF**

**Andy Butcher**



Being able to focus the camera on enemy ships enables you to get a view of the action from their perspective.



The bigger they are, the harder they fall... and when a capital ship in *Homeworld* bites the dust, you're in for a real show.



Although the larger ships use efficient power plants that are self-sustaining, the smaller fighters have only limited fuel supplies.

<p><b>Homeworld</b> £35</p> <p>Sierra/Havas 0118 920 9100 www.sierrastudios.com</p> <p>Minimum System: P200, 32Mb, Win 95/98 Recommended: PIII-266, 64Mb, 3D card</p>	<p><b>How does it rate?</b></p>		<p><b>For and against</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Unique, challenging twist</li> <li>✓ Intuitive, flexible interface</li> <li>✓ Jaw-dropping visuals</li> <li>✓ Superb mission design</li> <li>✗ Some automation lacking</li> </ul>	<p><b>Rating</b></p> <p><b>90%</b></p>
	<p><b>Homeworld</b></p>	<p><b>C&amp;C: Tiberian Sun</b> PCF 101 <b>90%</b></p> <p><b>MechCommander</b> PCF 85 <b>90%</b></p> <p><b>Warzone 2100</b> PCF 94 <b>89%</b></p> <p><b>Age of Empires</b> PCF 75 <b>84%</b></p>		