

= Descent : FreeSpace ? The Great War =

Descent : FreeSpace ? The Great War is a 1998 space combat simulation IBM PC compatible computer game developed by Volition , Inc. when it was split off from Parallax Software . Published by Interplay Entertainment , it is also known as Conflict : FreeSpace ? The Great War in Europe . In 2001 , it was ported to the Amiga platform as FreeSpace : The Great War by Hyperion Entertainment .

The story places the player in the role of a human pilot in the Galactic Terran Alliance , as it engages in war with the alien Parliamentary Vasudan Empire . This war is interrupted by the appearance of the enigmatic and militant Shivans , who begin slaughtering Terrans and Vasudans alike . Putting aside their differences , the Terrans and Vasudans form an alliance , and the player is assigned to missions to stop the Shivans ' genocidal advance . The player pilots a starfighter , and alongside competent AI wingmen , completes these missions to determine the fate of two races . Important battles in the story feature capital ships , which dwarf the fighters piloted by the player , and explode spectacularly when destroyed .

Descent : FreeSpace was well received as a single @-@ player space simulation that integrated all the desired features of its genre , but its multiplayer mode was plagued by lag and inaccurate tracking of statistics . Its expansion , Silent Threat , which comprised additional missions , was also released in 1998 . Its sequel , FreeSpace 2 , was released to critical acclaim a year later in 1999 .

= = Gameplay = =

Descent : FreeSpace ? The Great War puts the player in a starfighter flying out on missions to investigate , protect , or destroy certain targets . Some have categorized it as a flight simulator , since it has more controls and commands than a typical arcade game . However , its flight model is simple , akin to that of the game TIE Fighter , though it incorporates some elements of Newtonian physics such as precise collision physics . In the single @-@ player mode , the player flies through a series of missions in a campaign .

Before flying a mission , the player goes through a briefing , which details relevant information and objectives . Ships and weapons are selected following the briefing , adding an element of strategy to the missions . When flying , the game 's perspective is a first @-@ person view from within the cockpit , but the only visible interface is that of the head @-@ up display ( HUD ) . The player can customize the HUD by changing its color , or by toggling the information displays .

Missions must be successfully completed for the campaign to advance . However , not all objectives must be met for a mission to be considered successful . Results of a mission can affect later missions ; for example , an enemy capital ship allowed to flee in a particular mission may return in a later mission . Completed missions can be replayed on the in @-@ game mission simulator . Training missions are mixed in with the regular missions ( and can be skipped ) , gradually introducing players to advanced commands and techniques as the missions become more sophisticated . The game has been said to be easily playable with the keyboard alone , or together with a mouse or joystick .

The game features multiplayer matches online or over a local area network ( LAN ) . Players can either band together to complete cooperative missions , or split up into teams to battle against one another . Voice chat is available , although reviewers advised it to be used only on broadband or LAN . Online gameplay was free over the services offered by Parallax Online , which also kept track of players ' statistics and rankings .

= = Setting = =

FreeSpace takes place in the 24th century when humanity has discovered interstellar travel by using interstellar subspace jump nodes which function the same way as wormholes , and have spread among the stars as the Galactic Terran Alliance ( GTA ) . The player character , a pilot in the GTA navy , is thrust into the game during the fourteenth year of war ( 2335 ) between the GTA and

the alien Parliamentary Vasudan Empire ( PVE ) .

= = Plot = =

The story begins in 2335 , 14 years after the start of the Terran ? Vasudan war . A lone GTA pilot , Lt. Ash , calls out for aid while being chased by ships belonging to an unknown race of aliens , who attacked both the GTA and PVE without warning , yet despite his best efforts to alert anyone in the GTA , the unknown ships jump in and promptly destroy his fighter and the nearby GTA space station , Riviera .

GTA command tries to cover up the incident as nothing more than an unsubstantiated rumor , as the player character is assigned as a fighter pilot to the Terran Orion @-@ class destroyer Galatea . The player is tasked with engaging Vasudan forces in the contested Antares , Ribos , Beta Cygni and Betelgeuse systems . During these engagements between the GTA and PVE , the prototype of the Terran " Avenger " cannon is stolen by a rogue Terran officer , Lt. Alexander McCarthy , who promptly attempts to defect to the Vasudans . The player subdues McCarthy but as they attempt to return the prototypes to the GTA , the same unknown ships attack again . The unknowns ' attacks intensify and with their energy shielding technology making their fighters virtually invincible , the GTA and PVE are forced into a ceasefire , as the two sides attempt to reverse @-@ engineer the shield technology for their own purposes as well as adapting their pre @-@ existing weapons to be more effective against the shields .

This new species is dubbed " Shivans " , and the GTA has squadrons embark on several missions , alongside the Vasudans as allies , to catch up with the Shivans ' technological superiority by capturing Shivan supply depots , acquiring Shivan shield generator technology in the process , while fending off a Vasudan death cult , the Hammer of Light , who worship the Shivans and refuses to accept the peace between the GTA and PVE . During operations , the GTA @-@ PVE alliance manage to capture a Shivan cruiser , the SC Taranis . But its capture is only celebrated for a short time , as a Shivan warship , a super @-@ destroyer dubbed the Lucifer , suddenly appears , destroying the captured Taranis and many other allied ships , while spearheading an invasion into the Vasudan systems and Terran outer colonies . To the shock of the alliance , they find that the Lucifer utilizes a powerful shield that makes it immune to all conventional weaponry . While continuing to do what is possible to stop the Shivans and eliminate the Hammer of Light , a Shivan fighter , dubbed a Dragon , is captured , and used to scan vessels entering a Vasudan controlled system , providing much intel on the super @-@ destroyer . Yet despite all efforts , the GTA fail to stop the Lucifer 's journey to the Vasudan 's homeworld , losing the GTD Galatea in the process . The Lucifer enters the Vasudan home system and soon bombards the species ' homeworld into oblivion , killing 4 billion Vasudans .

However a small Vasudan refugee fleet that managed to escape , sends out a transmission revealing that they were forced to land on an uncharted planet in the Altair system where they had discover the remnants of an extinct alien civilization dubbed " the Ancients " which were destroyed by the Shivans long ago ; their backstory is told through cutscenes at various points in the game . The Vasudans discover that the Ancients knew how to penetrate the Lucifer 's shields as well as how to track ships travelling through subspace . Learning that shield systems do not work in subspace , but that the Ancients could not capitalize on this and were wiped out , the GTA and PVE launch a desperate assault on the Lucifer .

As the Lucifer begins heading for Earth through a jump node between the Sol and Delta Serpentis systems , squadrons of fighters and bombers follow it into subspace and manage to destroy the super @-@ destroyer while its shields are offline , by hitting its reactors . While the plan works , the destruction of the Lucifer in the jump node causes it to collapse , along with the other jump nodes in the system , cutting Sol off from the rest of the Terran colonies .

The expansion Silent Threat continues the story in a straightforward manner . The player joins the Galactic Terran Intelligence ( GTI ) while the Terran ? Vasudan alliance is in a fragile state , and is told to preserve the alliance by ruthlessly pacifying rebellious elements and fending off remnants of the Shivan forces . However , it all turns out to be a cover @-@ up , as the GTI is plotting a coup ,

and has constructed a Terran ? Shivan hybrid superdestroyer of their own , the GTD Hades , which the player must destroy .

= = Development = =

FreeSpace was Volition 's first project after the split from Parallax Software , which also spawned Outrage Entertainment . It is not part of the canon of the Descent computer game series , and contained none of its ideas and only small portions of its code . It was only prefixed with Descent to avoid trademark issues with Mijenix Corporation 's " FreeSpace " , a disk compression utility . Volition also used the term " FreeSpace " in the game to initially describe what became later known as subspace . The game was conceived by Adam Pletcher , with all the features of space simulator games his team had found to be fun . The games TIE Fighter and Wing Commander were their primary inspirations , and those influences made their way into the game 's flight model , along with the influence of historical WWII dogfights . Themes from the fiction of Star Wars , Space : Above and Beyond , and Ender 's Game form a part in shaping the background and story of the FreeSpace world . The chaotic battles between masses of ships commonly found in science @-@ fiction anime became one of the features of FreeSpace .

Begun with a crew of five , the project grew to a staff of 17 . The game 's code was built from scratch . Most of the software modules were interlinked with each other , increasing the job 's complexity and difficulty . The code incorporated small portions of Descent 's code for specific functions . Kulas , who had worked on several versions of Flight Simulator and Descent , brought his experience into the game 's artificial intelligence ( AI ) . The game 's difficulty levels are based on advancing the enemy AI , rather than simply increasing damage and " hit points " of enemies . Some realism was incorporated into the game 's physics , such that an impact on one part of a starfighter 's body will send it spinning appropriately , unlike sphere @-@ based collision detection , in which an impact would simply ' push ' the starfighter in a particular direction . Due to time and budget constraints , many of the initially planned cutscenes and stories were cut from the final product . Examples of such cuts include a campaign path where the Terran @-@ Vasudan alliance goes on a retreat , and scenes of racial tension within the alliance . Despite the promise of a deathmatch mode for multiplayer , it was cut from the final product . The expansion Silent Threat also suffered the same fate of cuts due to budgetary and time concerns .

Apogee Software announced on December 12 , 1997 that they would be exclusively publishing FreeSpace for the first three months before handing the publishing rights back to Interplay Entertainment . This was part of their agreement with Interplay for the latter 's purchase of the rights to Descent , and Apogee decided to release FreeSpace as shareware , with themselves as the merchant of the registered version . Interplay , however , bought the full rights to FreeSpace from Apogee in late April , 1998 , keeping the ownership of the game solely to themselves .

Volition aimed for a quality release , and promised to deliver a product without major bugs . Minor bugs would be fixed in a prompt manner . The shipped game , however , had deficiencies admitted by the team , such as problems with the multiplayer code , and a few design issues . The game underwent four patches , which resolved most of the bugs , and improved the multiplayer performance . Complaints about an online mission giving unfair scores led to Volition removing the mission from scoring play . Another patch allowed EAX capability to be enabled for Creative Sound Blaster sound cards . Interplay played its part in drumming up the community 's interest by holding contests , and expanding material for the FreeSpace universe . Meanwhile , Volition created official star maps , and released Vasudan voice clips and story development notes . Interplay hired science @-@ fiction writers such as Fred Saberhagen , Simon Hawke , and Jeff Grubb to write weekly FreeSpace stories for two months . Preparing for Silent Threat 's release , Interplay held a contest from July 28 to August 25 , 1998 , in which the submitted fan @-@ designed missions could win their authors prizes such as free copies of Silent Threat , FreeSpace apparel , and gaming hardware . Entries were judged by a panel from PC Gamer , and qualified entries constituted half of the missions in Silent Threat .

On December 14 , 1999 , Hyperion Entertainment announced their acquisition of the license to port

FreeSpace to the Amiga system . The publisher was changed to Haage & Partner Computer on October 18 , 2001 . Despite the game 's official release being announced for December 2001 , the approval to do so could only be gotten on January 7 , 2002 . The game was shipped without a printed manual , but had additional German and French language support . Hyperion had stated they would port over Silent Threat if the FreeSpace port sold well . To date , Silent Threat has yet to be ported over to the Amiga platform .

= = Reception = =

FreeSpace ? which was placed 20th in PC Gamer UK 's 1999 Top 100 Awards ? was frequently compared to Wing Commander : Prophecy and X @-@ Wing vs. TIE Fighter in its reviews , and stood up well against them . It has been said to be a combination of the two games , possessing the better qualities of each ; the plot is fairly epic , but the player is still just a pilot caught up in it all , fighting amongst fleets of starships . As the game took inspiration from space simulation classics and offered comparatively little of its own innovation , it was called unoriginal by a few reviewers .

Most reviewers glossed over the game 's story , but a few found it lacking the depth needed to captivate the player . Some suggested that the game would have been better if the player had a greater role in controlling the outcome of the story . Without this impetus , these reviewers found themselves simply playing a " very sweet looking arcade title " , and felt detached from their wingmen and environment . This feeling was made worse in Silent Threat with its " cold and inhuman " briefings and non @-@ player characters .

Several reviewers praised FreeSpace 's graphics , claiming asteroids are realistically rendered against softly glowing nebulae , while galaxies and stars of varying colors lay in the background . Others felt differently , stating the 3D effects were less spectacular than those of the software rendered version , the nebulae were unconvincing , and the ships ' textures were blurry and lacking detail . However , reviewers unanimously agreed the explosions in FreeSpace were the most spectacular they had ever seen , and were impressed with the many small details of capital ships breaking up . Sharky Extreme was dismayed by the game 's inability to go beyond 640x480 screen size . The game 's AI also received praise from reviewers , as the player 's wingmen were competent on their own and could be trusted with orders , even to the extent of co @-@ ordinating attacks on capital ships . Likewise , the player 's enemies acted in concert with each other to achieve their squadron 's objectives .

Despite one reviewer 's glowing praise for the FreeSpace 's online multiplayer over cable modems , the majority at that time were on dial @-@ up access and roundly condemned the online multiplayer mode . The chief complaint was lag . GameSpot 's Desslock was amazed the game dared to advertise as being able to support 16 players online when it could not even support two players on 56k modems . Combatsim.com 's Fitzgerald called the multiplayer " bug ridden " after experiencing many of his shots not registering hits or kills on enemy ships after over 40 minutes of play ; all of it due to lag . Other reviewers found their situations similar with their guns only firing seconds after depressing the trigger , and their ships randomly jumping over the playing area .

Silent Threat was judged to be a decent but uninspired add @-@ on . The campaign missions were either standard escort or destroy missions , and offered no new equipment which were unable to compete against the older equipment . The stand @-@ alone missions , however , were toasted for the way they were conceived . The contest @-@ winning entries gave breadth to the game 's variety of missions . This was made possible with the free editor FreeSpace Editor , or FRED for short . With the ability to import personal audio and 3D animation files , the editor allows users the same capability as Volition to create their own missions . The possibilities offered by the editor resulted in a call to the community to stop the flood of " Battle of Endor " -type missions , and to design missions following Volition 's Jason Hoffoss ' Zen philosophy of accomplishing more with less .

= = See Also = =

