= Terra Nova : Strike Force Centauri =

Terra Nova : Strike Force Centauri is a 1996 tactical first @-@ person shooter video game developed and published by Looking Glass Technologies . Set in a science @-@ fictional depiction of the 24th century , the game follows a faction of humans who colonize the Alpha Centauri star system to escape from the Hegemony , a totalitarian Earth government . The player assumes the role of Nikola ap Io , the leader of an Alpha Centauri military unit , and undertakes missions against pirates and the Hegemony .

Terra Nova has been cited as one of the first squad @-@ oriented games with three @-@ dimensional (3D) graphics ; the player is often assisted by artificially intelligent teammates who may be given tactical commands . Conceived by Looking Glass after the completion of their first game , Ultima Underworld : The Stygian Abyss , Terra Nova was subject to a long and difficult development process , caused in part by the production of its full motion video cutscenes . The game 's engine can render 3D outdoor environments and simulate physics ; the latter enables such effects as procedural animation .

Terra Nova 's critical reception was highly positive . Reviewers praised its tactical elements , and several compared it to the 1995 video game MechWarrior 2 : 31st Century Combat . However , reception of its graphics was mixed , and many noted the game 's steep system requirements . Despite critical acclaim and sales in excess of 100 @,@ 000 units , the game was a commercial failure : it did not recoup its development costs . While it was intended to be the first in a series , its low sales led the company to cancel plans for a sequel .

= = Gameplay = =

As a tactical first @-@ person shooter , Terra Nova focuses on combat and takes place from a character 's eye view in a three @-@ dimensional (3D) graphical environment . The protagonist wears powered battle armor (PBA) that features lock @-@ on targeting , jumpjets for limited flight , infrared and zoomed vision , and a rechargeable energy shield that protects against attacks . The player uses a freely movable mouse cursor to aim weapons and manipulate the heads @-@ up display (HUD) interface . As with Looking Glass Technologies ' earlier game System Shock , the HUD contains three " Multi @-@ Function Displays " (MFDs) . These screens may be configured to display tactical information , such as squad command menus , maps and weapon statistics .

The player is usually accompanied by up to three artificially intelligent squadmates , who may be given tactical orders such as holding a position , taking cover or rushing enemies . Squadmates may be commanded as a group or individually ; for example , one half of a squad may be used to distract enemies while the other half attacks an objective . Each squad member specializes in weapons , reconnaissance , repairs , demolitions or electronics . Those in the latter four categories may be given special commands , such as repairing a teammate 's armor or setting explosive charges . During missions , squad members radio in enemy sightings and status assessments .

The game takes place in 37 missions . Each begins with a briefing that describes such details as objectives , squad size and enemies . Objectives range from rescues and assaults to reconnaissance photography . Additional missions ? whose contents may be selected by the player ? are available through the game 's " Random Scenario Builder " . Before undertaking missions , the player outfits the squad and protagonist with PBA suits and equipment . The three types of PBA ? Scout , Standard and Heavy ? vary in ability ; for example , the Scout armor is fast and light , while the Heavy armor is slow and powerful . Each may be fitted with weapons and an " Auxiliary Suit Function " (ASF) ; the latter ranges from increased jumpjet power to deployable automatic turrets . Only a small amount of equipment is available at the outset , but more becomes accessible as the game progresses . Between missions , the player may read e @-@ mails , news and military files , and a " library " that details the game 's setting .

= = Plot = =

Setting and characters

Terra Nova is set in a science fictional depiction of the year 2327 and takes place in the Alpha Centauri star system . The setting 's early inspirations were the novels Starship Troopers and The Forever War , and PC Gamer UK compared it to that of the 1986 action film Aliens . Over two hundred years before the beginning of the game , Earth is subsumed by a world government called the Hegemony , whose " Publicanism " philosophy PC Zone summarized as " communism without the economic restrictions " . The Hegemony annexes colonies throughout the Solar System , but the inhabitants of Jupiter 's moons reach an agreement that allows them to relocate to Alpha Centauri , where they settle on the Earth @-@ like NewHope and the frozen Thatcher planets . The settlers divide into twelve " Clans " ? each with a military " Strike Force " to defend against bandits ? and create the Centauri Council to govern the system . Trade is established with the Hegemony . As the game begins , an elite Strike Force called Strike Force Centauri is formed in response to increasing pirate activity .

The protagonist of Terra Nova is Nikola ap Io , the squad leader of Strike Force Centauri . His older brother , Brandt ap Io , is one of his subordinates , and the two share a mutual animosity . Other members of the squad include Sarah Walker , the daughter of a Centauri Council member ; Ernest Schuyler , who is known for his sense of humor ; and the frank and abrasive Simon Ashford . Each member was given a personality so that the player would form connections with the squad . Commander Arlen MacPherson assumes overall charge of the squad , and he has regular dealings with Hegemony ambassador Creon Pentheus . Live @-@ action full @-@ motion video cutscenes depicting character interaction occasionally play between missions .

Story

As the game begins , pirates steal a shipment of highly destructive " Petrovsk grenades " . A reconnaissance mission by Nikola identifies the grenades at a heavily defended pirate base , and they are recovered en route to a transport ship . Without the grenades , the base is assaulted by Strike Force Centauri , and Hegemony equipment is found there . When MacPherson confronts Pentheus about the incident , he denies involvement . Proof of the Hegemony 's intentions is later found at a Thatcher smuggling base , and Pentheus declares war on the Centauri colonies . Now knowing the pirates are funded by the Hegemony , MacPherson suspects that a previous information leak was in fact the work of a Hegemony spy ; Nikola questions Brandt , who responds with indignance . After a series of missions against the Hegemony , Nikola 's aircraft is ambushed and shot down , and he is captured by Pentheus . During this time , Pentheus tells him that a traitor within Strike Force Centauri is responsible for the ambush . The squad rescues Nikola , but Schuyler is killed in the assault . At his funeral , Ashford accuses Nikola as the traitor .

It soon becomes clear that MacPherson is being poisoned . Nikola believes that Brandt is responsible , because of his recent disappearances , but is proven wrong . After MacPherson dies , Sarah Walker takes his place as commander of Strike Force Centauri . Walker sends Nikola , disguised as a pirate , on an espionage mission to discover the traitor 's identity . Nikola finds information that incriminates Ashford , who , when confronted , boasts of his actions and leaps to his death from a docking bay . The squad continues the war , and the Hegemony is eventually forced to gather its remaining forces at a base on Thatcher . The squad destroys the facility by detonating a highly explosive fuel tank inside it . Following its defeat , the Hegemony denies involvement in the war , declares Pentheus a rogue agent and appoints a new ambassador to the system . While angered by the announcement , Strike Force Centauri celebrates its victory as the game ends .

Development

Terra Nova was conceived in 1992 , around the time that Looking Glass Technologies ' first game , Ultima Underworld : The Stygian Abyss , was completed . Company co @-@ founder Paul Neurath

wrote a design document for a tactical , squad @-@ based game with a science fiction setting , and he helped the team initiate its development . Artist Robb Waters created concept art . It was originally titled Freefall , because of the way the soldiers enter combat by dropping from aircraft . Development was initially led by a newly hired programmer who envisioned the game as an exact simulation , in which every element was as realistic as possible . Programmer Dan Schmidt created the game 's artificial intelligence , and he attempted to make squadmates intelligently follow orders and provide assistance , instead of merely " staying out of your way " . Schmidt hired Eric Brosius and Terri Brosius , then @-@ members of the band Tribe , to compose the game 's music , which was called " orchestrally flavored " by the Boston Herald . As with their 1995 video game Flight Unlimited , Looking Glass Technologies self @-@ published Terra Nova .

 The game began production alongside the company 's second project , Ultima Underworld II : Labyrinth of Worlds , and remained in development after that game 's 1993 release . It then continued through the creation of their titles System Shock (released in 1994) and Flight Unlimited . The game was subject to numerous delays , which Schmidt later attributed to its lack of a set deadline . He stated that the team was " trying to go with the same philosophy " as the company 's earlier games , in that they would " develop the systems and the game would come out of it " . However , the team 's development priorities regularly changed , and the programmer who led the project left several years into production . According to Schmidt , his departure meant that " there was no @-@ one left who was psyched about making this really [realistic] simulation " . Despite this fact , the team continued using the idea , even though serious difficulties were involved in achieving it . Schmidt said that the game 's development status was uncertain after the programmer left , and that he inherited the role of lead programmer around that time merely because the position had to be filled . He later assumed the role of project leader . In January 1995 , Looking Glass showed Terra Nova alongside Flight Unlimited at the Winter Consumer Electronics Show , under their " Immersive Reality " marketing label .

 In the team 's original plan , Terra Nova consisted of missions that were bookended by simplistic cutscenes , akin to those of the 1990 Origin Systems video game Wing Commander . However , in 1994 , Origin released Wing Commander III : Heart of the Tiger , which features live @-@ action full @-@ motion video (FMV) cutscenes . This pressured Looking Glass into incorporating FMV into Terra Nova . Schmidt later said , " Lots of A @-@ list games were including more and more FMV , and it was felt by management that if Terra Nova didn 't have any , it would look second @-@ rate . " The decision to include it came when the game was already overdue , and a large portion of the game 's funding was redirected toward cutscene production . A scriptwriter from outside the company was hired to write the cutscenes ; because of the interplay between the cutscenes and missions , the script underwent numerous rewrites . The game 's delays and large budget resulted in the removal of a planned online multiplayer component , and the FMV cutscenes , which were expensive to produce , increased the number of sales needed to recoup development costs . A patch was planned to add the online multiplayer functionality after release , but it did not materialize . Schmidt called the cutscenes a " giant distraction " for the team and himself as project leader : he later described them as " cheesier than most " of those from the period and noted that " I wince a lot looking back on [them] " . Schmidt believed that they were likely an error from a business standpoint , as they further increased the game 's budget and production length , but ultimately did not increase sales .

 Roughly a year before its release , the team concluded that Terra Nova 's realistic , simulation @-@ style gameplay was not enjoyable . However , Schmidt said that the game 's already lengthy development meant that it had to be released ; otherwise , he believed that it would be canceled , or that its high cost would bankrupt the company . As a result , the game was completely redesigned to be " much more arcadey " only a few months before release . Schmidt said that , in the new game , " you were going around blowing people up " and " your enemies have brackets on them showing their health and it 's very bright and glowy and green " . He believed that these elements drastically increased the game 's enjoyability . He summarized , " Six months before it shipped the game wasn 't fun at all and we actually ended up shipping something that was at least somewhat enjoyable to play " . The game was released on March 5 , 1996 ; by this time , its graphical technology had been

surpassed by other video games , according to Schmidt . Lead programmer Art Min later expressed dissatisfaction with the game : he believed that , while the team coalesced at the end of development , they shipped the game too soon because of " an overexcited VP of Product Development " .

= = = Technology = = =

 Unlike Looking Glass ' previous first @-@ person games ? Ultima Underworld , Ultima Underworld II and System Shock ? Terra Nova takes place in outdoor environments . The game 's engine supports weather conditions , day and night environments , real @-@ time water reflections and moving clouds , among other effects . Most of the work on the outdoor renderer was done by programmer Eric Twietmeyer ; however , contemporary computers were not powerful enough to display fully three @-@ dimensional (3D) outdoor environments . The problem was solved by programmer James Fleming : the game 's engine renders and applies textures to foreground objects in full 3D graphics , but ? according to PC Gamer US ? it displays a " bitmapped background in the distance " to provide the " illusion of detail " . As with Flight Unlimited and the CD @-@ ROM release of System Shock , Terra Nova was designed to support head @-@ mounted displays . The game features QSound technology . Describing QSound 's effect before the game 's release , Suzanne Kantra Kirschner of Popular Science wrote that " you 'll hear the rustle of leaves from the right speaker a split second before you hear it in the left [,] signaling you that the enemy is approaching from the right " .
 The game 's characters are procedurally animated via simulated physics models and inverse kinematics (IK) ? a system designed by programmer Seamus Blackley . Basic physics are used to move character models through the environment , and the models are animated by the IK system in accordance with this movement . Designer Richard Wyckoff later compared the character physics to those of a marble , and Schmidt described the technique as akin to putting each character in a hamster ball . The system 's imperfect nature can result in animation glitches . A more realistic simulation of bipedal movement was originally planned , but it was simplified before release because of coding difficulties . Schmidt later said that the original method " almost always worked " , but that " every thirty minutes someone would put their foot down slightly wrong ... and then go flying off across the map " . A physics model is also used to simulate weapon recoil , the arc of projectiles and the gravity of each planet ; for example , projectiles travel farther in low gravity environments .

= = Reception = =

 Although Terra Nova sold more than 100 @,@ 000 units , it was a commercial failure because it did not recoup its development costs . Designer Tim Stellmach later characterized its performance as " a disaster " . Despite this , the game was acclaimed by critics , and several publications drew comparisons to the 1995 video game MechWarrior 2 : 31st Century Combat .
 John Payne of The Washington Post wrote , " Depending on your point of view , Terra Nova is either a stripped @-@ down Mechwarrior or a souped @-@ up Doom . " However , he stated that it was enjoyable regardless of which perspective was taken . While he described the game 's animation as " fluid " , he found its graphics in general to be " fairly blocky , even at a distance " . He finished his review by stating that the game " requires more practice than action fans are used to " but provides " a nice payoff " . Next Generation Magazine wrote , " Looking Glass has always been known for breaking the barriers of conventional gameplay , and it has done it again with Terra Nova " . The magazine considered the game to be " an all around stunning effort " .
 The Sunday Star @-@ Times ' Peter Eley found the game to be extremely complex , and he noted the originality of its " real @-@ time , full motion and 3D combat simulation " . He called its sound and music " stunning " but found that its graphics " aren 't as crisp as some other games " , and he described performance issues . Lee Perkins of The Age also found the game 's performance and graphics lacking , but he said , " In spite of its visual shortcomings , Terra Nova has the same level of inherent player appeal as System Shock " . He concluded that the game 's " tactical demands ...

are probably its strongest point " , and that it " isn 't quite up in the Mechwarrior 2 league , [but] it 's making some very loud noises with avid mech @-@ combat fans " . Computer Games Strategy Plus ' Tim Royal offered similar praise for its strategic elements ; however , like the other two , he noted the game 's performance issues , and he called its graphics " above average , but not mind @-@ boggling " . He finished , " I ... won 't say it beats System Shock . It doesn 't . ... But Terra Nova offers a wonderful variety of terrain , mission types , and scenarios " .

William Wong of Computer Shopper called it " a great game that is backed by good graphics and sound , and will keep you going for hours " ; he also praised its cutscenes . He concluded , " If the [upcoming] multiplayer pack is as good as the standalone version , Terra Nova could be a strike force to be reckoned with . " PC Gamer UK 's James Flynn praised the game 's graphics , sense of realism , and free @-@ form missions ; about the latter , he wrote , " There 's no right or wrong way to complete any of the missions in Terra Nova , and this is one of its strongest assets . " He noted that it was " virtually impossible to recommend " the game to those with lower @-@ end computers , but he believed that it was also " impossible to condemn Looking Glass for programming the game this way , because it feels so real , and its authenticity is what makes it so much fun " . Daniel Jevons of Maximum approved of the graphics but disliked the focus on long @-@ range combat and the use of the mouse to move a crosshair rather than the entire viewpoint . However , he concluded that the game " has a degree of depth that most robot combat games lack , the plot is strangely involving and despite the initial control difficulties , with perseverance most competent gamers will soon be stomping around the battlefields " . Michael E. Ryan of PC Magazine praised the game 's artificial intelligence and called its graphical quality " spectacular " , but found its movement controls to be " awkward " . He concluded , " Terra Nova is an exceptional game that combines frenetic , fast @-@ paced action with real @-@ time squad @-@ level tactics . It doesn 't get much better than this " .

= = = Legacy = = =

The New York Times has cited Terra Nova as one of the first 3D games with squad @-@ oriented gameplay . GameSpy 's Bill Hiles said that the game " preceded the ' tactical squad @-@ based , first @-@ person shooter ' action genre by a full two years " , and that " In 1996 , ... Terra Nova didn 't feel like any other game out there " . Hiles called Tribes 2 " a spiritual descendent of Terra Nova if there ever was one " . Project leader Dan Schmidt later said that he had " a bit of a negative experience overall because the thing dragged on forever " , but he noted that " there are people who regard it highly so it can 't have been that terrible " . The 1998 video game Jurassic Park : Trespasser features a procedural animation system very similar to the one used in Terra Nova .

While Schmidt said before the game 's release that the team wanted to develop " a whole series of games that take place in the Terra Nova world " , the game 's poor sales made the creation of a sequel " impractical " , according to Paul Neurath . As the game 's publisher , Looking Glass took on the full burden of its commercial underperformance , which contributed to the company 's bankruptcy and closure in May 2000 . Neurath later said , " If we could do Terra Nova over , I would have dumped the cinematics and done online team play instead . Who knows , maybe then the Tribes II and Halo teams would be talking about the influence of Terra Nova on their games " .