

VF-X: The Legacy Continues

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Since the good (or bad, depending on how you look at it) old days of 8-bit gaming, quite a few companies have released titles under the name of Macross. Nearly all popular home gaming consoles created after the 1982 Legacy have produced at least one title dedicated to the series. First came the Famicom (Nintendo) version, which had little in the way of originality, but which sold for its name alone.

The Famicom release led to subsequent releases from NEC's Turbo Duo (TG16), which actually incorporated cut-scenes using early CD-Rom technology. Though the cut-scenes could hardly be called animated, they still helped to move the game along.

After nearly a decade, those working at Zamuse, a game company in Japan, released yet another game called Scrambled Valkyrie based on the original series. At the same time, arcade front companies like Bandai and Banpresto produced shooters that followed the Macross story-line, even releasing an arcade machine based on the much disliked Macross II OAV. Since then much has changed, both in gaming consoles and the continuity of the Macross series.

Shortly following the 10th anniversary release of Macross II, two new Macross series appeared, almost at the same time. In late 1994, director Shoji Kawamori worked simultaneously on the Macross Plus OAV and the new 52-episode long Macross 7 TV series. With the influx of new titles came the development of mecha designs never seen before in the Macross world.

While all this occurred, the gaming industry turned from standard Street Fighter II 2D bitmap graphics to Virtua "everything" 3D polygon games made popular by Sega and their massively successful Virtua Fighter. Sony, after this initial step into the gaming industry, then released Macross "Digital Mission" VF-X.

Entitled VF-X, the game incorporates all of the Valkyrie forms ever introduced into the Macross universe, including the VF-4G Lightning III which appeared only for a few seconds during the Macross 2012 Flashback music video. The number of VF crafts

in the game totals to six, not including the Max Type Special Blue VF-1 once you reach 500+ kills.

Each craft comes with its own characteristic capabilities and special moves. All of the fighters are variable in true Macross style and each form also has its own special modes of attack. Aside from the standard gun pod and missiles, each VF craft can execute four special maneuvers per form, many of which are modeled right after attacks shown in the games animated counterpart.

Playing the game with the standard PS pad is tough, in fact without the optional dual handle analog joystick, fighting in fighter form is nearly impossible. However, even without the analog joystick, the VF crafts performed well enough in either gerwalk or battroid form to complete the game. One tricky part to the game is that due to the mech's variability, the controls change as soon as the mech form is changed, so the buttons are constantly switching in function. Because of that, the option of controller reconfiguration serves no real purpose except to confuse the player. In play style, the game is nearly identical to Virtual On for the Sega -- to be proficient in one mech is to be proficient in three of the non-transformable Virtual On mechs.

As for the graphics quality, Macross VF-X falls short. Perhaps I've been spoiled by other 3D titles but after waiting for the game's release for an extra year and a half, I was hoping for a lot more than what I got. In fact, I had hoped that UNiT, the makers of the game, had been delaying the game to make the game more awesome, but I have to admit that, in the end, the only reason for the delay must have been due to UNiT's small size and limited resources.

I also found the way they implemented the graphics annoying. Although some of the scenarios were beautifully selected with variations in terrain, space scenes and cities, the sudden appearance of obstructions made certain parts of the game silly to even attempt. The high-rises in the cities were especially unbearable. Given the PS's polygon output level there shouldn't have been such a large problem, but buildings were literally popping out of nowhere. I often found myself firing at targets behind buildings I didn't even know existed until the missiles crashed into the walls.

Apart from that, the other major flaw I found in the game was in the BGM (Back Ground Music). Reminiscent of low-tech midi tracks, the sound was even less impressive than the original Super Famicom version, with its 8-bit score. In fact the

music was so anti-climactic that there might as well not have been any. However, following in the Macross tradition of fine music, there were three songs that made up for the less than satisfactory BGM. One track "Only You" was actually written by Mari Iijima, the legendary voice actress who played the role of Minmay in Macross. Although she doesn't sing the song herself, the music is nicely sung by "Milky Dolls," a female singing group consisting of the talents of Tomo Sakurai (Mylene in Macross 7) and Kikuko Inoue (Belldandy in Ah! Megami sama).

However, even with these flaws I found myself addicted to the game for nearly a week (that's a long time for me on anything other than a fighting game), as I tested each VF craft to its limit and watched the beautiful cut-scenes. These were, in fact, the best parts of the game, although there were not many of them at first, besides some still shots and moving mouths. At the end, however, they really tended to pick up in quality. And of course, it wouldn't really be Macross if Haruhiko Mikimoto didn't do his usual awesome job designing the characters.

All things considered, I can't recommend Macross "Digital Mission" VF-X to any die-hard gamer who doesn't also happen to like anime. In fact if you don't like "space operas" in general this would be a good title to avoid. But for any fan of Macross, there is no excuse to not add this game to your growing collection!