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Those Smarmy Aliens

Kyle Kennedy | The Ledger

This week I'm previewing an obscure PC game because there's honestly not a ton of new releases coming our way right now.

But don't let that discourage you, because if you belong to that ever-shrinking sect of PC owners who enjoy turn-based strategy games, then "UFO: Extraterrestrials" might seem like a godsend.

'UFO' (rated Everyone) is being likened to the PC classic 'X-COM: UFO Defense' but it should also appeal to those who have played the "Jagged Alliance" and "Fallout" games.

The sci-plot puts you in control of a counter-alien force made up of soliders, scientists and engineers who must battle an alien menace threatening a human colony on the planet Esperanza. Starting with a single base, you oversee various combat and research operations in an effort to accumulate funding and expand your domain by constructing additional bases.

After shooting down alien spacecraft with your ships, you'll want to venture to the crash site on foot for mop-up duty. At that point, you'll switch to a turn-based combat mode where your team gets a chance to move or attack based on their number of available "action points," before giving the aliens their chance to expend their allotted points.

As said before, if you've ever played the "Fallout" games you'll be instantly familiar with this style of play. It favors those who like to plan and pace their attacks, but can seem awkward or slow if you're used to real-time strategy games like "Command & Conquer" or "Supreme Commander."

In the wake of land-based skirmishes in "UFO," you'll gather up whatever alien loot you find and head back to base to heal your troops and upgrade their abilities. Those role-playing elements sound awfully good to me, as does the ability to blow through walls to create your own entrances to alien structures when necessary.

Again, this type of game isn't for everyone, but it's refreshing if you've been looking for a little variety on the PC.

Besides, when's the last time you got to exterminate some aliens in game? That was a joke, chief.

(Note: As I was writing this column, the developers of "UFO" delayed the game's release until May 1.)

"RED STAR"

Another new game that might be worth a shot is "The Red Star" (PlayStation 2, rated Teen). This futuristic side-scrolling action game is set in an alternate-history Russia and blends melee attacks and shooting.

"Red Star" has been delayed for an awfully long time, however, so while the screenshots look colorful and decent enough, I'm not exactly sure how fresh this game will feel.

It does have an advertised price of \$20, however, so that should count for something in this era of \$60 games on the newer consoles.

MY BLOG

Finally, if you didn't catch my interview with Mulberry's Steven Clark a few weeks ago I'll post it again today on my blog at videogames.theledger.com. Clark is a freelance designer/programmer who has worked on several "Final Fantasy" games. Ledger TV also put together an excellent video segment with Clark comparing early sketches with how they appear in digital form.

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