eview: Rebel Assault

by Joshua D. Rothman

Type: Action/Arcade CD-ROM
Publisher: LucasArts Entertainment (415/662-1902)
Retail Price: $79.95
Street Price: $49.00
Requires: Macintosh LC III or higher (including PowerMacs);
256-color monitor; 2.4 MB of available RAM; CD-ROM drive (double speed recommended);
System 7.0 or higher.
Protection: None

long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, LucasArts Entertainment released a ground-breaking game for IBM-PC Compatibles called Rebel Assault.   Now, what is quite possibly the most anxiously awaited port in recent years has finally arrived on the Macintosh.   And as Mac gamers will discover, it was well worth the wait.

Accelerate to Attack Speed!   If you're hoping for X-wing or TIE Fighter, Rebel Assault won't quite meet your expectations.   Rest assured, though, that Rebel Assault displays the same thought and finesse that LucasArts well-known space sims do.

Rebel Assault (RA) is an intense arcade experience set in the Star Wars universe.   The Rebel Alliance, just having won their first victory against the evil Galactic Empire, is on the lookout for sharp young pilots.   This is where you come in.

The player steps into the shoes of Rookie One, a freshly recruited farm hand from the desert planet of Tatooine.   Rookie One can be either male or female, and the character's voice and physique will change accordingly.   Starting out with a series of training runs, you'll soon take on more and more dangerous missions, eventually flying straight into the lion's den in an attack on the Death Star.   Among the challenges that await you in the game are the Imperial Walkers on Hoth, hand-blaster battles with Stormtroopers at a Rebel base, and blazing-fast chases through dense asteroid fields, with TIE Fighters in pursuit.   RA is an extremely difficult game, and even on the easy difficulty level, the most seasoned arcade player will be holding his or her breath.   Game play is always exhilarating and intense, and Rebel Assault provides an arcade experience that the player will not soon forget.

RA is divided into 15 Chapters.   Each Chapter is a level in the game, and can have more than one part; for example, in Chapter 1, Part I consists of a flight through Beggar's Canyon, and Part II consists of target practice in the desert.   Between Chapters you'll receive a passcode, which, when entered into the game, gives you access to the next Chapter.   Although saving your game preserves your pilot's lives and score, using passcodes is easier and more convenient in some cases.   Following the presentation of the passcode, each Chapter is usually followed by a non-interactive cut-scene, which advances the plot.   The cut-scenes, combining 3D rendered animation, video clips from the films and video shot especially for the game, are a joy to watch.   If you tire of them, though, hitting escape will skip over them.

atch that Blaster Fire!   Chapters in RA are played from one of four different perspectives. Each one is unique and offers its own separate challenges.

The first perspective, dubbed "third-person flight" in the manual, is the perspective you start out with.   In this perspective, you fly the ship from outside and behind your craft.   In Chapters with heavy obstacles, you'll often assume this view.   Although some Chapters allow you to shoot from this vantage point, your sole duty will most often be flying.

The second perspective, "third-person bombing" is basically the same as the first, except that instead of being behind your aircraft, you're above it, firing down on ground targets.

The point-of-view most often assumed by the player is "first-person flight," where you are in

the cockpit.   The starfighter usually follows a pre-determined flight path, and you have just enough freedom of movement to avoid obstacles in your path (like the legs of an Imperial Walker, for instance).

Finally, the last perspective is "third-person shooting," where you stand behind your pilot and fire with your blaster at Stormtroopers.

ontrolling Rebel Assault is not very difficult to learn.   During in-the-cockpit and third-person hand-blaster combat missions, you use your mouse, joystick or keyboard to move a red aiming sight around the screen.   As your sight approaches the extreme edges of the screen, you'll move slightly in that direction, but only a few meters, just enough to avoid a bulge along the side of the Death Star trench.   Hitting the fire button (the mouse button, SHIFT on the keyboard or your joystick's fire button) shoots off a single blaster shot from your ship's cannons (if you have enabled the game's RAPID FIRE option, you can hold down the key for continuous fire).   Occasionally, you'll be required to choose a path for your ship to take; simply moving your sight to the left or right part of the screen and hitting option accomplishes this.

During third-person flight scenes, you use your keyboard or joystick (mouse definitely not recommended!) to fly your ship through obstacle-laden environments.   If you have to fire, holding down shift or your joystick button fires blasters at a spot shown   by a red target on the screen.

Having a mouse and a numeric keypad , or better yet, a joystick is a must for this game.   If you want an experience in frustration, try playing Rebel Assault with a trackball, or flying your ship with the side-by-side layout of arrow keys on smaller Apple keyboards.

Stay Close, Here They Come!   Rebel Assault, if played on an able computer, does not seem like a CD-ROM game at all.   On a 68040 machine, such as the Quadra 660av and Centris 610 I tried it out on, load times are almost nil.   However, Rebel Assault can run sluggishly on slower 68030s.   Sound and video can become un-synchronized; odd pauses can occur at strange moments.   If you're running this game on a IIci, you'll have load waits, but the game will run.   If you run it on an LC III, the minimum machine required, you will have problems.   I don't fault the game for this; as the read-me file states, Rebel Assault "pushes

your computer's technology to the limit," and running CD-ROM games like this at the minimum system requirement is never wise.   Lower-end Mac users may have to resign themselves to long loading waits and small screen sizes.   Likewise, I would not recommend playing Rebel Assault with a single-speed drive.

hy is this game so power-hungry?   The answer is that the graphics and sounds in this game are like nothing seen before on the Macintosh.

Simply put, the graphics are probably the best I've ever seen in a Mac arcade game.   Almost totally 3D rendered, the smoothness, speed and fluidity with which they move more than makes up for the 320x200 resolution.   Despite the lower resolution, when you're in the heat of the action, you simply don't notice it.   The only part of the game where the low resolution becomes evident is in the cut-scenes, which are very impressive anyway.

The sound is excellent, obviously sampled from the films.   This game really does need external speakers; the sound and music coming from your Mac's internal speaker sounds a little tinny.   If you hook up external speakers or put on a pair of good headphones, you'll immediately notice the difference.   Unfortunately, the sound is not in stereo, which is kind of disappointing, since the Star Wars films played a key role in changing the way we hear sound in theaters.

The music is excellent, played in the game as performed by the London Symphony Orchestra.   Rebel Assault uses many of the keynote themes which we've all heard in the films, and manages to orchestrate the action so that it falls in line with the soundtrack.

One of the most ambitious features of the game is the dramatic voice-overs.   Actors are recorded reading lines, like "Take it easy through the pass," and those voices are synched with the on-screen characters moving lips.   Although the voices and acting are good, the lip-synching is rather inconsistent.   An unfortunate aspect of the movie business is that LucasArts cannot record lines from the movies as said by the original actors, like James Earl Jones as Darth Vader, without having the game run way, way over budget.   LA does do a fairly good job of recreating the characters' original voices; Darth Vader breathes menacingly, CP30 sounds officious and timid, and Vader's henchmen have the same aristocratic speech they had before.   This is a great improvement over X-Wing, where Darth Vader sounded like Martin Short with a bad cough, and Princess Leia did an impression of Vanna White.

eel the Power of the Dark Side!   Rebel Assault, for all its intense action and breathtaking technology, has a few flaws.

First off, at the time of this writing, Rebel Assault does not run native on PowerMacs.   This makes RA run on an 8100/80 as if it were running on a Quadra 605, an unfortunate situation, since RA would surely run at blazing-fast speeds on PowerPC machines.

Secondly, the game has almost no replay value.   This is mainly due to the fact that it isn't really a flight sim and allows no interactivity past firing and piloting past obstacles.   Once you've played through the game twice, you stop marveling at the fantastic graphics and sounds and start groveling about how boring it is.

I'm Making My Run!   One of the most striking things about Rebel Assault is how much time LucasArts has put into making the game playable on older Macs.   One of the best features is the "Line-Skipping" option, which allows you to have the game skip over every-other line when drawing the graphics, ala AstroChase 3D.   As you can imagine, this greatly reduces the drawing time; it also makes the graphics appear to be higher-resolution than they actually are, as long as you don't squint at the monitor.

Screen sizes can change, from full-screen (13") to a medium size screen that'll fit on a Color Classic or PowerBook to a small screen that is drawn in high-resolution.   You can also "vertically stretch" the picture so that everything appears taller (the same could

accomplished with the vertical hold on some monitors).

May the Rebel be with You.   Ultimately, despite a few problems, Rebel Assault is probably the best all-around Mac game I've played in many, many years.   Combining incredible sound, graphics and gameplay into one smooth, sleek package, Rebel Assault is 391.6 megabytes of intense, heart-pounding action no one will want to miss!

Pros
• Incredible graphics and sound
• Intense action sequences and cut scenes
• Runs fairly well even on slower Macs
• Simple control that only requires practice
• Acting is done well in cut-scenes
• Great all-around; very exhilarating

Cons
• Not PowerPC native (Tsk, tsk)
• It gets boring after a few runs through
• No stereo sound