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by Brandon Miquel

This month's Vs. column is unique. Instead of comparing games, I'll actually be comparing Plug-Ins for the popular new game, Escape Velocity (also reviewed in this issue). Because of this, you won't see the normal ratings, like graphics, sounds, etc., there will just be a short description and review of the Plug-in. At the end there will be a normal conclusion, where I weed out the bad and highlight the good. Since there are just so many Plug-ins, I couldn't cover nearly as many as I would have liked to, and as a result, this may be a monthly feature. If you would like it to be continued in the next issue of GameRate, e-mail me at GRBrandon@aol.com or mjdevil@fast.net and let me know. If I get enough responses, I'm sure the editor will let me do another column on EV Plug-ins.

The contenders...

Avichai

This plug-in contains ships for both blood-thirsty pirates/system dominators and average traders. Because of this, it is a plug-in that you will use continually, not just when you get enough money to buy the powerful ships. Unfortunately, the most powerful ship, the dreaded War Cruiser (The most powerful ship out of the three in the plug-in) is way too slow for everyday use, and is way too expensive to buy when it's needed. The freighter is a good ship to use to raise the money needed to buy the War Cruiser, but it is also slow, and it is hard to defend against attacks with only one turret and no guns. The third ship, the Asp Heavy Fighter is nothing spectacular, it's just an average fighter with a lot of shields. It doesn't have enough weapons space to make it a good fighter, and it is way too expensive to use until later in the game. Overall, this is a good plug-in with great graphics, but the ships need to be modified in order for it to be used more often.

DeathStar

This plug-in brings three new ships and four new weapons to the Escape Velocity universe, all of which are very powerful. Way too powerful. The DeathStar comes with an "Annihilation Ray," which is capable of taking out a Confederate Cruiser with one shot, and 8000 Super Torpedoes (launched from the 20 Super Torpedo Launchers). It also has 3200 shields and armor, more than anything else in the game (so far). All for only 100

Million credits. If you think that's too powerful, the DeathStar Hangar is even more powerful. It comes with and "Annihilation Beam," which is capable of destroying an Alien Battlecruiser with one shot, as well as 40 Super Torpedo Launchers and 16,000 Super Torpedoes. So, why is it called the DeathStar Hangar? Because it can load and launch up to 5 regular DeathStars. All of this for the even more amazing price of 350 million credits. That may sound like a lot, but when you subtract the cost of the two DeathStars it comes with (Total of 200 million credits), the DeathStar Bay (50 million credits), and the extra Super Torpedoes and Launchers (about 10 million credits), it's not really much more expensive than a regular DeathStar, and you get many advantages, like 6 times the crew size, 5 times the free mass, much more fuel, and the much more powerful Annihilation Beam. The only ship that has reasonable stats is the SuperFreighter. It holds a little more than a Bulk Freighter, and is faster and more armable. It isn't cheap, though (25 million credits), so its usefulness is questionable, because by the time you get the credits, you'll be beyond trading. To sum up what I've said, the ships in this plug-in are way too powerful, so I wouldn't recommend for serious EV players.

Enterprise

This plug-in adds only one ship — the Starship Enterprise. Since it is in the same price range as a Kestrel, I'll compare it to that for reference. It has twice the cargo space, it is nearly twice as fast, it is more maneuverable, has nearly twice the fuel, twice the weapons space, three times the armor, the shields regenerate twice as fast, it has three times the crew, and it is available just about anywhere. How much more than a Kestrel is it? Actually, it's 1.5 million credits less. If your a real Star Trek fan, and you don't mind being a little too powerful for the money you paid, go ahead and try this out, but I wouldn't recommend it for die-hard starship captains.

Galactic Express

None of the ships in this plug-in have truly original graphics- they are gray versions of normal ships. But that's okay, as long as the ship is good, who cares about the graphics? Well, the ships aren't good. One of them, a freighter, holds way too much (1000 tons) and is too maneuverable to be realistic — at least for the price (a whopping 5 million credits). Now, there is one more ship you can buy (and use yourself), but that one is just the opposite. It would have a hard time standing up to the weakest enemies, (with 30 shields and 20 armor), and since it is based on the design of a Defender, it is not very expandable. It would make a horrible fighter and an even worse freighter, so I would avoid it at all costs. The remaining two ships are carried ships, like Lightnings and Mantas. One of them is based on the regular fighter I just described, and the other looks remarkably like a Manta. Despite its looks, it is much, much worse than a Manta (if that's possible). First of all, it doesn't move. OK, it does have a top speed of 1, but where's that going to get you? Second of all, the only weapons they have are three Tractor Beams. If they had missiles or torpedoes, they might make good defensive ships, but they don't, they just have tractor beams. They may be cheap, but I wouldn't take these if they gave them away.

LIBE #1

This plug-in contains one very fast, very weak ship based on the Confederate Gumboat. The ship isn't what makes this plug-in really shine though, so I'll just go on to the good (well, better) stuff. I have found some of the weapons in this plug-in to be rather useful, and some to be rather useless. The Proton Repeater is one of the most useful weapons in this plug-in. It combines the firing power of three proton cannons and puts them into a package the size of two. It is especially useful for small ships, where every extra shot helps, but is also quite effective when used with larger ships, which can carry more of them (And it sure beats using Laser Cannons when you reach the limit for Proton Cannons). The Plasma Turret would have been more appropriately called the Particle Beam Turret, because it is essentially a Particle Beam on a Turret. The only major differences are that the Particle beam does slightly less damage to shields and much, much more damage to armor. The Plasma Turret also doesn't push the enemies back as quickly, which I think is a good thing.

The next new weapon is spear-head missiles. Don't let the name fool you, these aren't really missiles, they have no propulsion and act like a much weaker form of the Space Bomb. They are pretty much useless in my experience. Caltrops, the next type of weapons are for use against stupid AI ships, because it would take a real idiot to get hit by one of these. They just drift along in space until some unsuspecting ship wanders along and runs into them. Then they blow up with massive force (okay, not as good as missiles, torpedoes, etc., but still pretty powerful). The final weapon, called Chaff, is basically the same as a Decoy flare, but it fires much more quickly.

Velocity Plus

Velocity Plus adds more ships than any other plug-in reviewed- a total of 6 ships, plus 2 ships meant specifically for launching from a bay. Unfortunately, two of the ships are meant to be "Carriers," only for loading and launching large quantities of Fighters to do your fighting for you. They can not carry any guns, which makes them hard to use for people who like to pound their opponents with Proton Cannons and Turrets. The other ships, however, are pretty good, although they could use some custom graphics — only two ships and one ship meant to be launched as a weapon had custom graphics, the rest were recycled from ships already in the game (and one of the new graphics was a modified graphic from the game). One ship, the Super Manta, is, as its name implies, a modified Rebel Manta. Changes include increased speed, acceleration, weapons space, cargo space, shields, armor, maneuverability, and decreased shield regeneration rate (The author may have intended to increase that too, but the way the shield regeneration rate works is a little confusing). The next ship is similar to a Rebel Cruiser, but with extra speed, acceleration, maneuverability at the expense of some cargo space and a lot of shields and armor. It still costs the same, and is a good alternative to the Rebel Cruiser for people who hate the slow speed. The next ship is a modified Argosy intended to be used to capture other ships. By sacrificing over half of your cargo space, one-third of your weapons space, and twice the money, you can get a ship with more maneuverability, acceleration, shields, armor, and much more crew. The final ship, Airforce One, is a modified Executive Transport (go figure) in the price range of a Kestrel. Why so much? It has six times the cargo space, eight times the

shields, one-third higher speed, acceleration, and turn rate, four times the fuel, three times the weapons space, it can hold nine guns (Executive Transport's can't hold any), 6 turrets (Executive Transport's can't hold any), and its shields regenerate nearly five times slower (again, I think the author meant to make it faster). All this for only 9 times the cost. Some people think it is a great ship, but I think I'll pass. This plug-in also contains a number of weapons, but none of them are really anything you haven't seen before (with the exception of two), so I won't describe them to save space. I think this plug-in would be much better if it had custom graphics, but even without graphics, it is still great. It adds a wide variety of ships and weapons, for beginning captains and experienced admirals alike. You'll get the most bang for your buck (actually, it's free) by using Velocity Plus, because for now it is hard to use more than one plug-in at a time.

Conclusion...

Which one to download? Well, they are all great, but it is hard to use more than one plug-in at a time, so you can't really use them all. If you want the most ships and weapons, Velocity Plus is best for you. In fact, I'd recommend Velocity Plus in just about any case, unless you want to be God (DeathStar), you are a real Star Trek fan (Enterprise), or you want a really powerful battleship/really big freighter (Avichai). If one of those cases applies to you, download the plug-in mentioned, try it out, and if you don't like it, then go to Velocity Plus.