

ferent screens visible at any one time. The screens to choose from are Destination, Examine Target, Report Damage, Cargo Manifest, View Object, Weapons and Guns Loadout, and Communications.

If you are familiar with any of the Wing Commander games then you know how combat operates. If not, the displays are very helpful and the controls fairly easy to learn. There is also an *Invulnerability* and an *Unlimited Ammo* option that helps to make learning a bit less painful. The catch is that you do not get paid for missions flown with these options on.

Like many simulators, you must become accustomed to reaching for the keyboard to switch weapons or cycle through the different MFD's. Besides the usual steering controls and firing of weapons with the joystick, you can also control the ship's speed and roll by holding down button #2 and moving the joystick up or down or from side to side instead of using keyboard controls.

Probably the most unusual part of the ship is the Radar Display because it shows ships everywhere around you. Ships in front or to the sides of you are displayed as they would appear on a vertical plane in front your ship. The further a ship moves to being behind you, though, the closer it gets to the border of the plane. There is a ring around the outside of the display that shows ships which are actually behind you. It might take some time to get used to but once you do, it is a great 3-D display.

If you choose to become a pirate yourself, there is a tractor beam that you can buy to collect the flotsam of ships you destroy. Though pirating is a risky occupation since you will probably have a bounty on your head and plenty of hunters eager to collect it, playing the game with more than one alias is easy by saving your game at any time. Therefore, you can play however you



**If you destroy a friendly merchant ship there will be more than just flotsam drifting through space. But then if you did, you probably don't care.**

want depending on your mood, or whichever way seems to be the most successful.

## Plot Presence

Glancing back to the beginning of the "Planets and Bases" section, there is a reference made to the "main game." The reason is that *Privateer* has a story which continues from the incident at Sheol. Even after you complete the plot, you can still go on flying missions and running trade if you like, or try the Righteous Fire add-on which picks up the story a year later and lets you import your ship from the original game so you don't have to start all over again.

Following the story is not absolutely necessary, but to experience the whole game you might as well. One of the best aspects of *Privateer* is that you can virtually play for

ever and continue building on your privateer business. Likewise, you can form alliances with other groups and races or try to regain the trust of old ones making the privateer life even more dynamic and compelling.

Unlike some games where your character seems to be the center of the universe, in *Privateer* you are nothing more than an anonymous pilot with an out-dated *Tarsus* that is looking to make a buck. You can stay that way if you like, but you can also be the hero; the choice is yours. The way you make your living will determine the kind of game you play by affecting your standing with different groups.

Included on the CD is the Speech Pack add-on that would cost an additional \$24.95. Adding it to the \$79.95 MSRP for the disk-based game, plus the extra \$29.95 for Righteous Fire and the CD version becomes a great value, all of which only takes up about one to two MB on your hard drive.

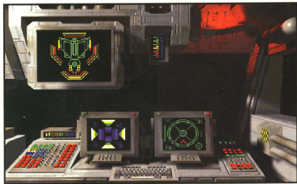
*Privateer* is so attractive not only for the space combat simulation, but because you can build your own Privateer business and explore an enormous universe. The CD version is a plus since you'll want to have the game readily available for a LONG time without having to sacrifice the hard drive space.

## The Final Analysis

*Privateer* consists of a great space combat simulator in a vast universe with a lot to see and explore. The environment is intriguing and all of the characters are dynamic and entertaining. The Speech Pack and Righteous Fire add-ons make this CD a great value with many hours of gaming. It will be a hard drive mainstay for quite a while.

Tasos Kafafas

**Grade: A-**



**The ships that are designed more for running goods and not for combat have a limited field of view. The MFD at the top displays the type of ship and the damage it has suffered.**