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LEGACY OF KAIN
SOUL REAVER

Meet Raziel...
Undead, unhappy,
unholy and unlikely
PlayStation hero

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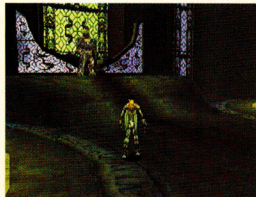Turok 2 • South Park • FIFA 99 • Virtua Fighter 3tb

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By John Davison
Photography By Michael Sexton

Legacy of Kain

Soul Reaver

When the original Kain game was released a couple of years ago, it's arguable that no one really noticed its significance. Despite being impaired by some nasty little problems, it was the closest thing the system had to an RPG for some considerable time. The sequel has been hot news now since it was previewed at E3 in May '98. Taking a dramatic change in style, it has been cited as revolutionary both in terms of the way it's presented and designed. Many believe the game was instrumental in Eidos' decision to invest in Crystal Dynamics back in September as the rapidly growing software giant is keen to increase its number of influential and important franchises. If Soul Reaver is as successful as everyone seems to believe it can be, don't be surprised if it gets the full-on Tomb Raider treatment in the future.

Ironically, one of the major changes between the original game and Soul Reaver is the adoption of somewhat more Tomb Raider-esque gameplay and presentation style. The new game uses a vastly enhanced revision of the Gex 3D engine and offers some of the most impressive visuals on the PlayStation so far. Imagine a cross between Tomb Raider and Metal Gear Solid, and throw in some more supernatural imagery and you'll have a rough idea of the visual direction the game is taking. Moody lighting and beautiful texture maps are the order of the day here...just scan through some of the screenshots in this feature and you'll see what we mean.

To get a more detailed look at the first big game of 1999, we visited Crystal Dynamics' studios in Mento Park, Calif., to speak with the team. Headed up by Amy Hennig, the lead designer on the previous game, the team is nearing completion on the project in time for its release early in the year.

Loading the latest version of the game on a test station, it's immediately obvious that it has come a long way in recent months. Numerous preview screenshots have been released since May, but the project is finally coming together.

Hennig picks up the story from the beginning. "The FMV at the beginning of the game takes place centuries after the
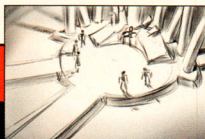
Goth's Will Love This...
The Story of Raziel

(As Told Through the Developer's Storyboard Sketches)

A full millennium has passed since the end of the first game (Blood Omen) and Lord Kain has set his capital in the ruins of the Pillars of Nosgoth (for those of you not "in the
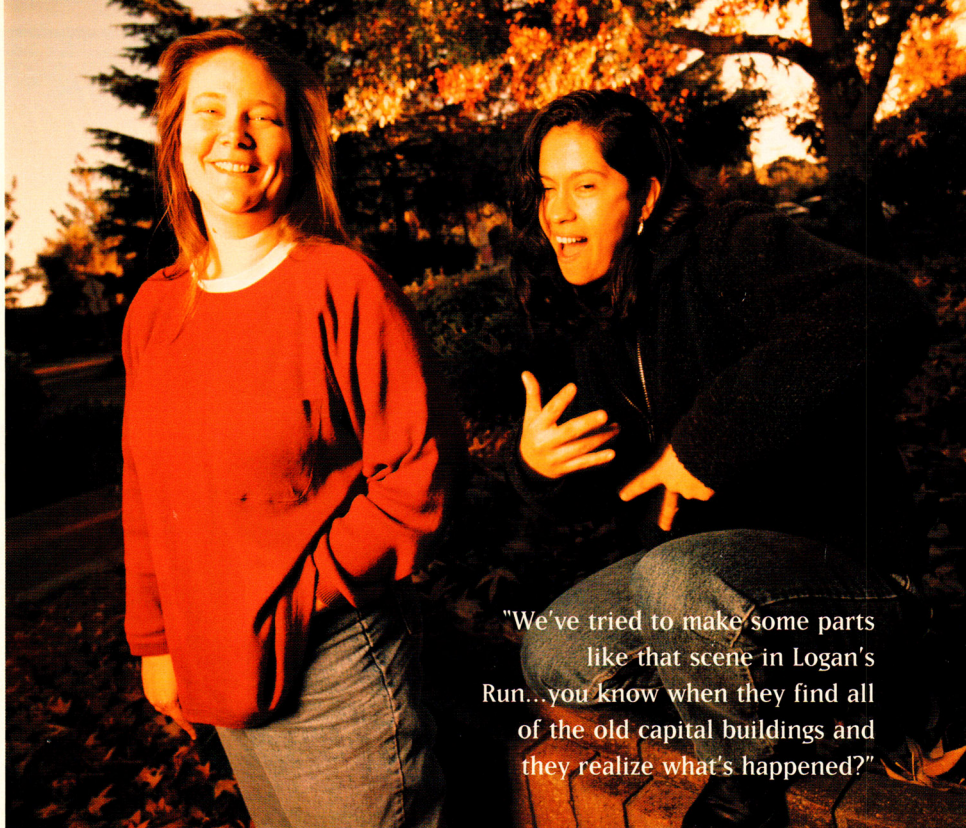
> "We've tried to make some parts like that scene in Logan's Run...you know when they find all of the old capital buildings and they realize what's happened?"

events of the first game and you see that Kain has taken over like some kind of god. When the game starts though, even more time has passed and Raziel emerges in his mutated form. Now Kain's empire has pretty much crumbled and all of the vampires have degenerated into more monstrous forms.

"Raziel falls from being cast out by Kain and when he hits the bottom of the pit he just

thinks that, like, five minutes have passed or something. The basic idea is pretty much like Spawn when he's cast into hell...a number of years pass in what seems to be a short space of time. He thinks he's just tumbled through the vortex and woken up, so when he re-emerges in the real world he sees places he thinks he only recently saw in all their glory now reduced to rubble. Part of the exposition of the story is

Raziel discovering what has happened in the intervening centuries. We've tried to make some parts like that scene in Logan's Run...you know when they find all of the old capital buildings and they realize what's happened?"

Early portions of the game have been around for some considerable time. *EGM's* sister magazine, *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*, even ran a demo of the first section

Amy Hennig, producer/director (above, left): lead designer on the original Kain. Interviewed in main text.

Rosaura Sandoval, producer (above, right): a Crystal veteran of over four years. As an associate producer, Rose's previous projects include Blazing Dragons, Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain PC, and Slam 'N' Jam PC.
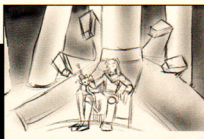
know," this was a key location in the original game). After recruiting six lieutenants from the Underworld, of which Raziel was one, he set about destroying all of the major human kingdoms so that he could re-arrange the world to be

Altered Reality

Shifting between the material world and the spectral world is an extremely important gameplay mechanic. Very often, the shift to the spectral plane distorts objects so that Raziel can use them to reach otherwise hard-to-reach areas of the levels. The morphing from one state to the other is one of the many impressive effects in the game.

"Because of Raziel's undead status, he effectively exists within two different planes of reality...the 'spectral' world and the 'material' world."

Raziel=Grouchy Smurf

As is becoming the norm for games these days, the quality of the voice work throughout Soul Reaver is topnotch. Just before *EGM* went to press, Hennig and the team informed us of how the voice recordings had gone, saying, "Gordon Hunt and Kris Zimmerman are our directors—I noticed that you had featured Kris in your Slick 50 last issue, for her work on MGS. Gordon is a veteran, and an amazing director. He's done a lot of TV directing including *Mad About You* (he's Helen Hunt's dad) and *Frasier*. We had a lot of the same actors back, including Simon Templeman doing Kain and Tony Jay as the voice of the "Elder God," as well as Anna Gunn and Neil Ross. The actor we're using for Raziel, Michael Bell, has been doing voice work for years, and he did a wonderful job with the script. He's got a long resumé. (You can check it out on the Internet Movie Database: http://us.imdb.com/Name?Bell,+Mich ael). He's done all kinds of stuff over the years, from the *Smurfs* (he's the voice of Grouchy, Handy and Lazy Smurf, but you'd never know it to hear him read Raziel) to the *Transformers*, *Voltron*, *Aladdin*, *Rugrats*, etc. He's got an incredibly versatile voice. We got some hilarious stuff of him reading our script in all his different characters' voices. It doesn't sound quite as dramatic when he reads it as Lazy Smurf! I think people are going to really like the voice he's given Raziel—it's got a wounded quality to it, but it's hard-edged at the same time."

more suitable for vampires. You know the deal, all terribly Goth...black paint, Sisters of Mercy and Siouxie and the Banshees music on every radio station, jewelry with skulls, black hair dye and lipstick. Using human slaves he set about

a few months ago (where a location from the first game was clearly visible...a large skull that acts as a doorway). But one of the big questions that many people want answered concerns whether the new game is in fact an RPG, or whether it's been simplified to accommodate the 3D engine.

From sitting down with the team, and from playing a series of versions of the game, it's clear things are very different this time. Gameplay is obviously geared around the opportunities presented by a 3D environment. There's plenty of action, and in fact one of the most important elements of the game is Raziel's ability to kill creatures and then absorb their souls. This is a fundamen-

tal building block of the entire game, and it ensures there's always lots of fisticuffs amidst the more cerebral areas.

Because of Raziel's undead status, he effectively exists within two different planes of reality: the "spectral" world and the "material" world. In order to keep himself in the material plane, he has to ingest souls to sustain his energy. Failure to do so shifts him back into the spectral plane which is a dark and twisted version of the real world, infested with the dead. Shifting between the two dimensions is yet another gameplay mechanic though, and becomes increasingly important as Raziel's quest continues. Early in the game he shifts planes only when he

is weak, or when he finds a portal. However, as he defeats more adversaries and absorbs their abilities through their souls, he eventually reaches
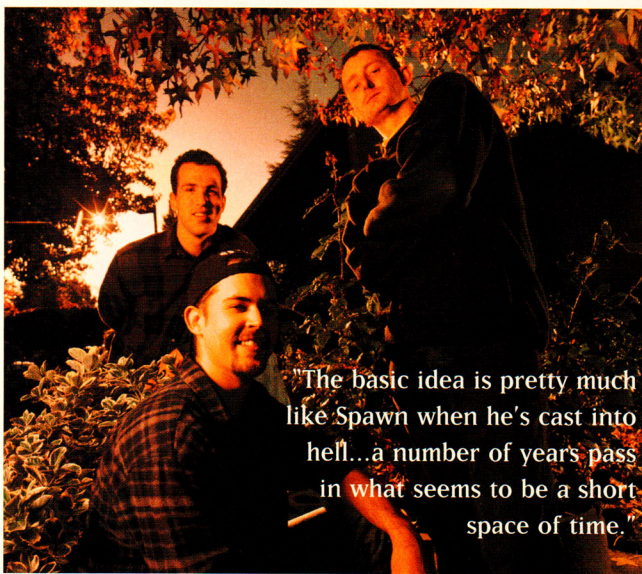
Riley Cooper, designer (left): When he's not being abused on the lacrosse field, Riley can be found designing levels for Soul Reaver. Riley has been with Crystal for four years, taking some time off to finish his college education. A former tester, he rose to the designer position on the action shooter Solar Eclipse.

John Dumala, designer (middle): John has been with Crystal for a year now as a designer on the Soul Reaver team. John also lent his design expertise to the Unholy War and Bandai projects.

Richard LeMarchand, designer (right): Richard is a Crystal veteran with gaming experience dating back to his designing duties on the original GEX for the 3DO. Richard has also lent his design talents to Pandemonium!, GEX: Enter the Gecko and Pandemonium 2. Richard came to Crystal from Microprose where he worked on such games as F-15 Strike Eagle.

"The basic idea is pretty much like Spawn when he's cast into hell...a number of years pass in what seems to be a short space of time."

the construction of huge furnaces to belch out smoke that would block out the dangerous effects of the sun so that the vampires could hang out all day and all night. Then, as he kills everyone off, he steals their souls and turns them into
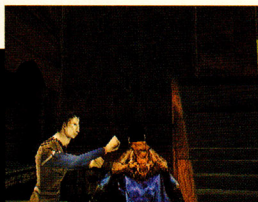
James Guilford, lead animator (left): James has been with the Soul Reaver team for the last year. Previously, James was an animator for Sega of America and Disney.

Marc David, programmer (right): Marc has been with Crystal for a year. Before joining Crystal, he was a programmer at Konami in their arcade division. Interestingly enough, Marc spent time at the Naval Research Laboratory in the Electronic Warfare Division programming radar defense systems...you know, spy satellites and all that fun stuff.

"Although his abilities change, Raziel stays the same physically throughout. "Character morphing is something we'll probably do in the next incarnation of the engine."
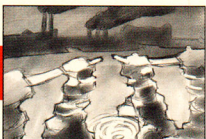
vampires. As time passed, Kain and the lieutenants began to evolve into "Dark Gods." Kain—being a big show-off—would always evolve first, with the others following a decade or so later. Unfortunately for Raziel though, he turned up

a point where he can hop between realities at will. This has a number of benefits. First, and most apparent as far as gameplay is concerned, the architecture mutates between the two planes and very often presents him with opportunities to reach areas in the spectral world he can't reach in the material world. Second, time has no meaning in the spectral plane...so Raziel can perceive the world in "freeze frame" by shifting planes. Machinery appears to stop, objects stop moving—Raziel can even throw things and switch planes so they appear to hang in midair. Finally, there are completely different characters in the two different planes—and very often Raziel will have to perform differently in order to defeat certain adversaries.

Hennig provides us with an example. "One of the bosses actually starts off dead," she says, "so he resides in the spectral plane. The story tells you that the humans rose against him, killed him and then wiped out everyone in the town. As a result, spectral is completely infested with vam-

pires. The boss himself is impaled with lots of spears and stakes in the material world so he's dead—but in spectral he's incredibly powerful. Raziel actually has to force him back into the material world by pulling all of the stakes out of him."

Each boss Raziel must face poses a different set of problems, but by defeating them Raziel becomes more and more powerful. Hennig explains, "To use just one example, Raziel can climb walls in a lot of sections of the game, but like a lot else, this is an ability he can only acquire by ingesting a soul—in this case, that of one of the bosses. The different boss characters are the mutations of the vampire clan leaders seen in the intro of the game, and each one has taken on certain characteristics. By ingesting the souls, Raziel eventually learns to climb, swim and even phase through barriers."

Although his abilities change, Raziel stays the same physically throughout. "Character morphing is something that we'll probably do in
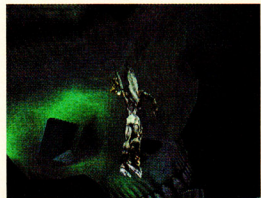
Carl Stika, lead programmer (above): An avid Green Bay Packers fan, Carl has been with Crystal Dynamics for the last two years as the lead programmer for Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver. Prior to joining Crystal, Carl spent four years at Raven as a lead programmer/programmer on Necradome, Shadowcaster and Cy-Clones.

at a lieutenants' meeting sporting a rather fashionable set of new wings. Understandably Kain, being the egomaniac that he has become, is somewhat pissed and rips them off. Not satisfied just with that, he also sentences Raziel to being

the next incarnation of the engine," Hennig says, "but at the moment it's just too much for the PlayStation to handle." *EGM* has already reported in the past that the design documents for Kain 3 are under way deep within the creative bowels of Crystal, but this would indicate that it won't be a PlayStation project.

Obviously, as you'd expect at some point, Raziel must face Kain, and he in fact does so twice. The first encounter provides an explanation for the name of the game. "The first time Raziel meets Kain he earns the Soul Reaver," explains Hennig, "which in its basic form is a sword that is his constant weapon in the material world, we tried to make the sword work like it does in Zelda where you can use it when you have full health. The health meter is always draining throughout the game (much like the blood meter in the original game), because Raziel is exerting energy simply to

sustain his physical form. However, once he draws the Soul Reaver it sustains him, so then the only way it drains is if he takes damage from an enemy." Hennig shows us an early version of the sword within the game environment, and it's a nasty-looking thing that adds yet another dynamic to the gameplay. But will it over-simplify combat too early in the game?

"The default Soul Reaver is simply a really tough weapon...if you attack the bad
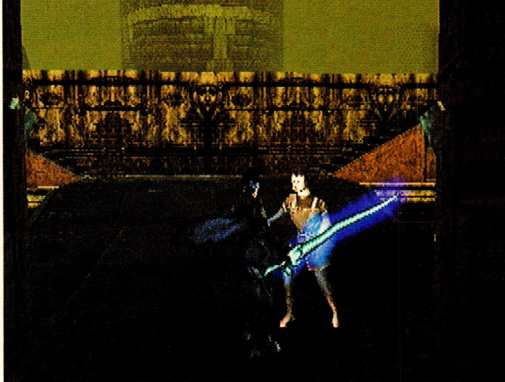
He Looks a Bit Like Dracula, Don't He?

When Legacy of Kain: Blood Omen was released way back at the beginning of the PlayStation's life, no one was really expecting it to become the huge franchise it now has the potential to be. At the time it was the closest thing to an RPG on Sony's system, and despite some crip-

pling load times, massive slowdown and awkward game-play, it established itself as a quiet classic. Boasting 100,000 screens, 170 different enemies and multiple weapon and armor power-ups, it was

quite the tour-de-force.
For those of you who never got the chance to check it out, the game was a top-down scrolling RPG in the "tradition-al" mold that told a very Dracula-esque story of Kain—a chap murdered outside a

pub who is offered the chance to exact vengeance on his attackers by returning as a vampire. Foolishly accepting this he returns, kills everyone and then w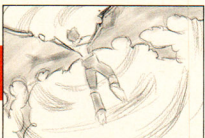anders the land (ironically, like Kain...in a bit of a gag from *Kung Fu*), realizing he has made a terrible mistake. The game then deals with his ongoing quest that is linked with an arrangement of mystical pillars.

At the end of the quest, Kain was faced with the final task, that of the "Pillar of Balance," where he was faced with one of two options—either returning balance to the world and relinquishing his, um, "vampireness" or taking his position as a Dark God and ruling the world. The sequel, Soul Reaver, obviously assumes the latter choice was made.

cast into the "bottomless vortex"—a big swirling watery vortex, which, as its name implies, apparently has no bottom. Those of you who are either Goths, interested in vampires, or someone who's seen the *Lost Boys* will know that vamps

guys with it, it makes a big impact on them so you can dispatch them quickly. However, it's not just that simple, as later in the game you find a number of forges that allow you to imbue or baptize the sword with different abilities. These forges each tie in with the different elements that you also acquire as spells in the game. Once the sword is baptized in an element, Raziel can re-imbue the Reaver simply by passing the blade through something of the same element. For example, once imbued with sunlight, simply passing the blade through a ray of sunlight allows you to turn it into the Sun Reaver. The elements for the sword and the spells are the same, but the effects are different. The sword is either hand-to-hand or projectile-based, so it's always focused on individual characters. The spells are environment-based though and only affect enemies if they are standing in the area that you have cast the spell. Obviously different characters are susceptible to different characteristics of the sword. For example, vampires are going to take a lot more damage from the Sound Reaver than humans are because they have far more sensitive hearing. Water-based creatures won't take damage from the Water Reaver, etc., etc."

Thankfully, the game isn't just all about confrontation though. The vast majority of the gameplay is puzzle-based, often requiring some serious spatial reasoning skills. The best way to illustrate this is to simply give an example, so Hennig takes us through a typical puzzle. "One of the more complex puzzles deals with a derelict lighthouse. If you look in through the translucent windows you can see that there's like a wick, or a gas jet in there. You need to get that lit to solve the first part of the puzzle. The


Jason Bell, programmer (left): Jason is Crystal's very own Aussie import courtesy of Beam Software, making the trek to the U.S. over a year ago. Prior to joining Crystal, Jason helped Beam Software bring the original GEX and Total Eclipse to the PlayStation. As a member of the Beam Software team, he also worked on games such as Norse by Norsewest and Super International Cricket.

Scott Krotz, programmer (middle): Scott is a huge

Chicago Bears fan, poor guy. He is a newcomer to the Crystal family arriving just six months ago. Previously, Scott was a programmer at CES and Konami, contributing to such titles as Enemy and Broken Helix.

Hong Park, programmer (right): Another newbie to Crystal Dynamics, Hong has been there six months. Before joining the Soul Reaver team, he was a programmer for two years at 3DO where he worked on Uprising.
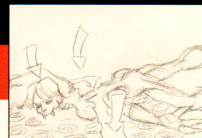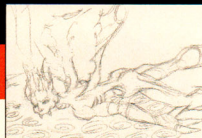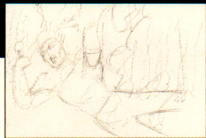

have a bit of a problem with water. As Raziel tumbles into the vortex, the water burns away at his body like acid and strips away his spookily androgynous looks to reveal a horrible demon creature...without a bottom jaw. Eventually

Soul Sucking

The ingestion of souls is what keeps Raziel fit and healthy. Having killed an opponent, he removes his cowl to reveal a soul-sucking orifice where his jaw and throat should be.
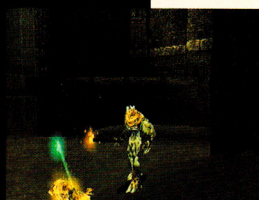
whole area is geared around a broader objective though...as you explore the surroundings you see through the iconography on the walls that there is a connection between the lighthouse and another room. Basically what you'll need to do is introduce light into the room by making the lighthouse work properly and shine in through a hole in the wall."

Hennig then takes Raziel to another key room in the puzzle. "You've got this big wheel in a large chamber which is just sitting there when you walk in," she begins. "When you flick a switch though, the wheel starts cranking up and you see lots of gas jets around the chamber and in the corridors lighting up. As it continues to crank, more of the gas jets light...but then eventually the wheel slows down and they all go out. Obviously at this point the player should realize there's a connection between the two and you'll have to stop the wheel cranking down somehow. Our hope then is the player will be tempted to explore and figure

out that you can jam the wheel by moving a block in the way—so the lights should stay on. Now, if you run back outside of the room, you realize the lighthouse light is on...but it's not facing the right way—so you need to move to the next section of the puzzle which is where you work out how
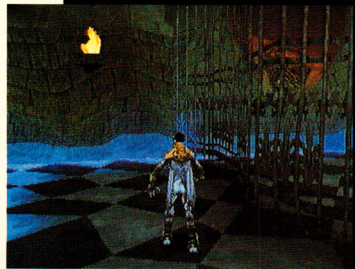
> ""The FMV at the beginning of the game takes place centuries after the events of the first game and you see that Kain has taken over like some kind of god...""

Raziel actually hits the bottom of the vortex, exploding the myth that it was in fact bottomless. Once there he encounters The Elder who tells him of "creation, death, souls and hunger" and how he used to feed on the souls of Nosgoth

to rotate the lighthouse light to shine into the room."

Moving down through some very realistic-looking environments, Raziel is faced with another complex piece of architecture. "If you move to the bottom of the lighthouse," Hennig continues, "you realize the whole thing is driven by water. There are a series of pistons and pipes following the route through all of the machinery. There are bellows and pistons and obviously some kind of water trough... drain holes in the floor and stuff and as you explore further you realize how the whole thing is supposed to work. You need to get the water through the pipes, and as you look around you see there are push blocks lying around with pipework cut through them. If you look at all the blocks and how the holes through them fit, you can then push them and rotate them so they connect." So...not only is it an RPG hybrid with Tomb Raider-esque leanings—it's also a 3D version of Pipedream (remember that?).

As we go to press, Soul Reaver is still a few months from completion, but a number of things are assured. You'll hear a lot about this game in '99. It has the collective might of both Eidos and Sony—who's pushing it as a showcase for the PS—behind it, and the cool characters have assured a multitude of merchandise. Keep an eye out for a toy line, possibly by summer, and other developments, too. ◼

The Kain Team:
Back row (left to right):
Marc David, John Dumala, Daniel Cabuco, Richard LeMarchand, Stephen Trusty, Jeff Morgan, Jason Bell, Mike Gonzales, Steve Papoutsis, Cory Stockton, Caroline Trujillo, Fred Lee, Paul Vernon, David Reyes.

Front row (left to right):
Hong Park, Troi Depts, Fred Mack, Carl Stika, James Guilford, Scott Krotz, Rosaura Sandoval, Mark Meier, Jurjen Katsman, Eric Elliott, Casto Vocal, John Hood, Jonah Stich, Tim Linn, Riley Cooper, Amy Hennig, Charles Martin, Adi Taylor, John Guilford.
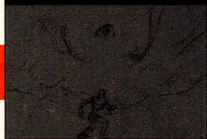
before Kain claimed them for himself. The Elder offers Raziel the opportunity to return to the material world as long as he is prepared to collect souls for him. So now Raziel has a big, ugly, soul-sucking hole where his throat used to be.