

August 1999



A Review

The Ultimate Game Player's Guide

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SOUL REAVER

PLAYSTATION'S BLOODY VAMPIRE-FEST

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GAMES
REVIEWED!

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Star ratings

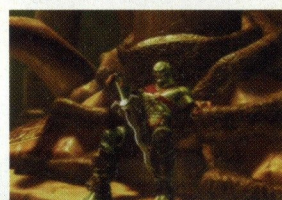
***** Simply the best. A game you really must play.
**** Excellent. Definitely worth your money.
*** Good stuff. Not a world-beater, but fine within its genre.
** Strictly average. We say: don't buy it.
* Awful. Avoid at all costs.

New PlayStation Games

Arcade
PlayStation
Game of
the Month

ALL A FLUTTER

TAKE THOSE BROKEN WINGS AND LEARN TO FLY



■ **Combat's not quite as visceral as the enemy impaling possibilities would suggest. More often than not, multiple adversaries are dispatched with lengthy sword swishing.**

Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver

■ Publisher: **Eidos** ■ Developer: **Crystal Dynamics**
 ■ Release date: **June** ■ Players: **1** ■ Extras: **memory card, Dual Shock-compatible** ■ Other formats: **PC**

American developers are coming up with some nasty stuff at the moment. What's to blame? It couldn't really be Marilyn Manson's fault, could it? Even Gex creator Crystal Dynamics is in on the act.

Soul Reaver is a gothic 3D adventure which combines the blackest moments of HP Lovecraft, Clive Barker and Bram Stoker in one gooiily ectoplasmic gore puddle. Typically for a game with both horror and RPG connotations, the storyline is hideously complex. An evil vampire king, named Kain, has taken over the kingdom of Nosgoth, enslaving its human population and enlisting several vampire clans to help him create a Utopia for the undead. However, Raziel, a former member of a vampire clan who was cast into the Lake of the Dead for growing wings (don't ask), has been recruited by an ancient spirit named the Elder to defeat Kain and rid the world of blood-suckers forever.

You, of course, take on the role of Raziel, and it's your job to wander the ravaged world of Nosgoth looking for Kain and his minions. The level design is what you would expect from a 3D arcade adventure – loads of platforms, chasms, passageways, doors to the unknown and monsters (20 different kinds to be exact) who parade about waiting to suck your blood out. To cope with these adversities, Raziel can jump, he can fight and he can fly – thanks to a threadbare set of wings – which is just about enough to get you through the first few realms.

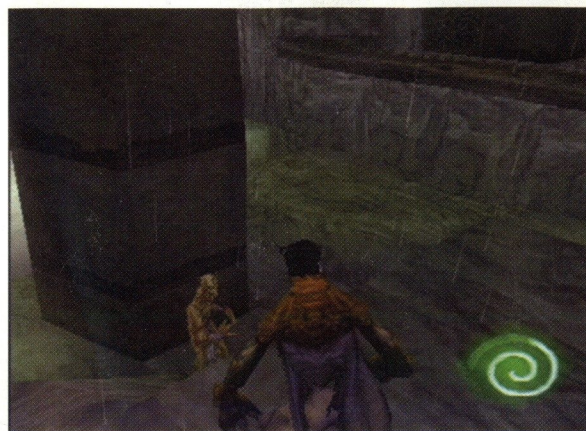
As the game progresses, however, you get new abilities. For example, hidden around Nosgoth are seven spells (or Glyphs, as they're inexplicably known here) which kill whole rooms full of monsters in a variety of unpleasant ways. You can also get your hands on the eponymous Soul Reaver – a great big shiny sword which can be imbued with a variety of different powers. Finally, as you pick off the several level bosses in the game, you are given new skills such as climbing, passing through solid objects and swimming, all of which enable you to explore parts of the world you were

previously cut off from. This smart little design feature not only keeps you avidly exploring, but it also prevents the game from becoming totally linear. Because of this there is a lot of going backwards and forwards through the world and, although there are a number of warp gates to speed you on your way, you soon begin to feel very much a part of this desolate, beautifully realised kingdom.

As Raziel, you're neither alive nor dead. Or even undead. You're sort of un-undead. A grotesque, ravaged parody of your former brilliant self – a George Best with fangs, if you will. While it sounds hopelessly contrived, this hazy metaphysical state is useful as it means you cannot be killed in the game. When you run out of energy, you're transported to the spirit realm – a dark and distorted mirror image of the material world. Here, things are ever so slightly different to the spirit version of each room: platforms which were once out of reach slide invitingly toward you, and whole new areas become obvious and accessible. Handily, you can transport to this spooky realm any time you like by selecting the right spell from the menu, so death actually becomes a tactical manoeuvre.

Puzzles-wise, *Soul Reaver* has some real corkers. While you will come across the standard tools during the course of the game – pulleys, levers, switches and the like – they've been employed in imaginative ways. For example, instead of

YOU SOON BEGIN TO FEEL VERY MUCH A PART OF THIS DESOLATE, BEAUTIFULLY REALISED KINGDOM



■ **You'll want to explore *Soul Reaver's* gothic levels. As well as containing a multitude of secrets, they help create the game's back-wibbling atmosphere.**

↑ Uppers & Downers

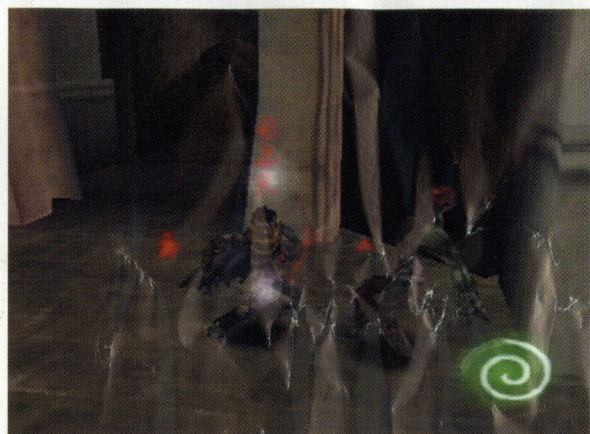
Fangs for the memory

- The spirit realm
- Atmospheric environments
- Mind-bending puzzles

Fangs for nothing

- Foggy at times
- Convoluted story
- Lots of running about





■ The blood flows like a shaken-up can of Vimto. Thankfully, Razi, despite his vampiric tendencies, doesn't stop to collect it in his Mr Men mug, preferring to get on with the job in hand.

it's all here for the exploring. Everything is beautifully lit and fleshed out with thoughtful detail. There is the odd polygonal shudder here and there, and the fogging can push into Razi's personal space now and again, but this isn't a big problem.

Other good stuff: the character design and animation are magnificent (watching Razi glide over the landscape with his tattered, fluttering wings is very affecting), the storyline, although convoluted, is hammy and exciting, and the sound is chilling. The only faults are an uninvolved combat system, whereby you spend most of your time standing swishing at baddies with anything you can pick up – swords, poles and the like – and then hit @ to perform a terminal move when they're knackered, and the lengthy journeys you have to make between realms in order to make progress, which is the price of a non-linear game.

If you despise *Tomb Raider*, *Duke Nukem Forever* and other third-person adventures you may not be turned on by *Soul Reaver* which, at its heart, is still doing the same things as its brothers in genre. However, if you love to fight and think through a vast, exciting adventure you'll soon find yourself hooked or more appropriately, considering the fate of Razi's enemies, impaled. ★★★★★ **Keith Stuart**

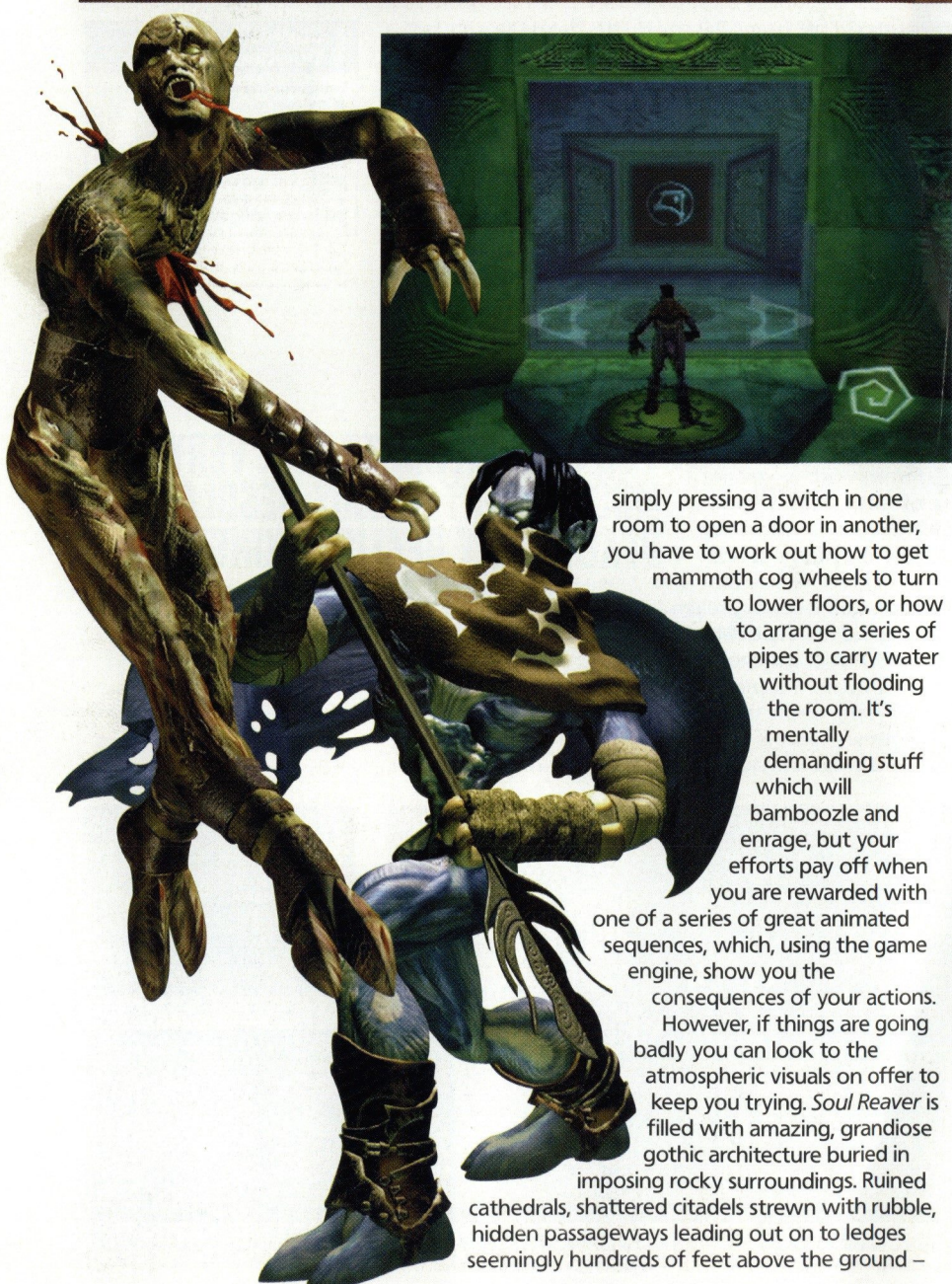
Or you could try...

Tomb Raider III
Eidos ★★★★★
Lara's greatest adventure yet has a compelling puzzle-to-action ratio.

Resident Evil 2
Capcom ★★★★★
Genuinely scary, third person adventure viewed from a series of brow dampening angles.



■ Chinless, but long of tooth, Razi's tougher than Lara.



simply pressing a switch in one room to open a door in another, you have to work out how to get mammoth cog wheels to turn to lower floors, or how to arrange a series of pipes to carry water without flooding the room. It's mentally demanding stuff which will bamboozle and enrage, but your efforts pay off when you are rewarded with

one of a series of great animated sequences, which, using the game engine, show you the consequences of your actions.

However, if things are going badly you can look to the atmospheric visuals on offer to keep you trying. *Soul Reaver* is filled with amazing, grandiose gothic architecture buried in imposing rocky surroundings. Ruined cathedrals, shattered citadels strewn with rubble, hidden passageways leading out on to ledges seemingly hundreds of feet above the ground –