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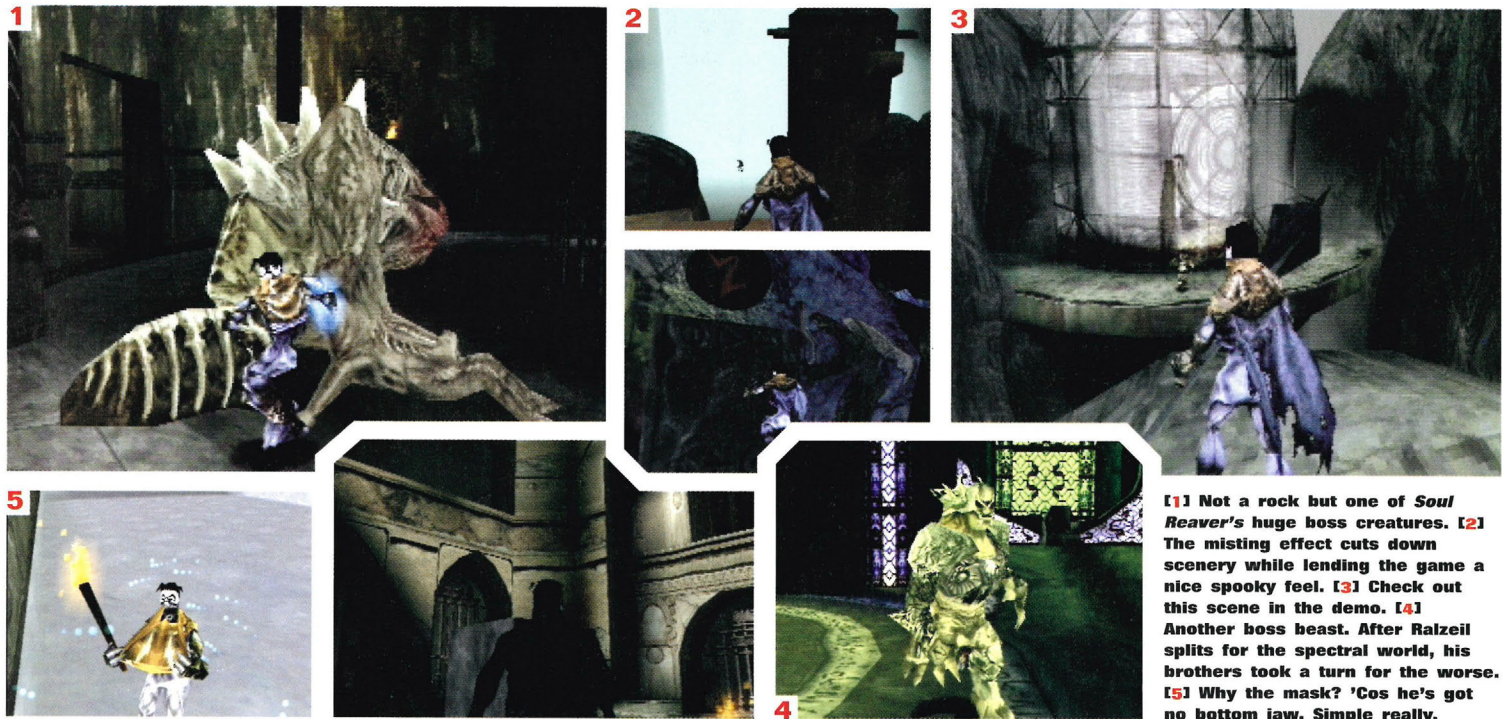
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GRAN TURISMO 2 • METAL GEAR TIPS • PARAPPA 2 • AND, ER, APHEX TWIN?



[1] Not a rock but one of *Soul Reaver's* huge boss creatures. [2] The misting effect cuts down scenery while lending the game a nice spooky feel. [3] Check out this scene in the demo. [4] Another boss beast. After Ralzeil splits for the spectral world, his brothers took a turn for the worse. [5] Why the mask? 'Cos he's got no bottom jaw. Simple really.

Legacy Of Kain

Soul Reaver

Imagine if Lara had never succumbed to the lure of the leotard and had opted for teenage death-metal angst wear. And was actually a vampire. Welcome to Goth Raider...



So it's *Tomb Raider* with vampires right? Well, yes, and at the same time very much, no. While comparisons are inevitable given the game's vast size and third-person bum-watching viewpoint, they must end there. After the guns-plus-switch-plus-door *Tomb Raider* formula *Soul Reaver* is one very queer fish indeed. Prepare to have your mind widened very largely indeed. This is *Tomb Raider 3* with the following alterations:

Number one – It's not just a sequel. Alright, there was a previous Crystal Dynamics game called *Legacy Of Kain* that did the business on PlayStation a year and a bit ago but this was a chunky, almost 16-bit looking RPG affair, with an *Alundra*-style almost top-down view (PSM17, 7/10). *Soul Reaver* hoofs it's forebear soundly in the fangs.

Number two – There are no levels. Rather than traipse from beginning to end of a chunk of the game the world of *Soul Reaver* is one huge uninterrupted map. Set off running east and – provided you pass the obstacles in your path and aren't blocked by a chasm or mountain –

half an hour later you're still running. The game pulls off this trick by loading the next chunk of scenery as you're playing the current one. But you don't need to know that. All you need to know is that *Soul Reaver* flows like no other game, the only interruptions being occasional FMA cut-scenes which use the exquisitely powerful game engine to further the game's tail of hellish betrayal and evil doing.

Number three – Your character is not a girl. Or, for that matter, a man. The game's hero, Ralzeil, was one of five lieutenants who ruled the world alongside the original game's anti-hero Kain. Ralzeil, however, falls out of favour after daring to grow wings and is cast into the spooky Spectral world. There the Elder God gives Ralzeil the chance to get back to reality so as to seek his revenge.

THE ENTIRE WORLD OF SOUL REAVER EXISTS ON TWO SPIRITUAL PLANES: THE MATERIAL PLANE AND THE SPECTRAL PLANE...



■ PUBLISHER: Eidos Interactive ■ DEVELOPER: Crystal Dynamics
 ■ RELEASE DATE: April ■ AGE RESTRICTION: 15 and over
 ■ PRICE: £39.99 ■ STYLE: 3D action/adventure



[1] Watery boss bloke spits balls of gunge. [2] Squeeze between the bars.

SOUL REAVER IS LIKE AN ENORMOUS OTHER-WORLDLY PLAYGROUND PACKED WITH SPOOK BEASTS AND UNREAL OBJECTS.

Unfortunately aeons have passed and upon his return Ralzeil soon discovers that the previously decadent and vampiric world of Nosgoth is a shambolic set of sheds. What happened? Where is Kain and the other lieutenants? And what's in it for the Elder God? Hmm.

Number four – You can't die. Bit tricky to get your head round, this one. The entire world of *Soul Reaver* exists on two spiritual planes: the **Material plane (like real life)** and the **Spectral plane (an evil alternative universe bearing all the elements of the Material plane but in a twisted, demented form)**. Ralzeil, being to all intents and purposes as dead as a doorstop, is a creature of the Spectral plane. Therefore, while in the Material plane his energy is slowly depleted with the strain of manifesting himself. In order to remain in reality he must fight and kill the evil creatures, sucking their souls to supplement his strength. When he suffers damage in fights, crushings or other inconveniences he's transported to the ▶



IN THE BEGINNING

While *Soul Reaver* is clearly based on the events of the best-selling (though ruddy ugly) *Legacy of Kain: Blood Omen* it is clearly a whole new kettle of gore. *Soul Reaver* assumes that players of the original opted for the evil ending of *Blood Omen*, placing star-of-the-show Kain on the throne as ruler of Nosgoth. Looks like things have got a whole lot more evil since...

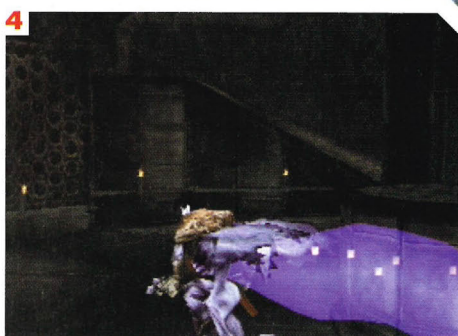
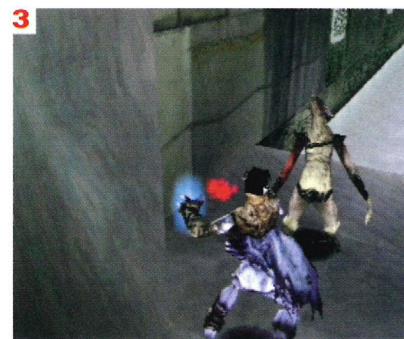
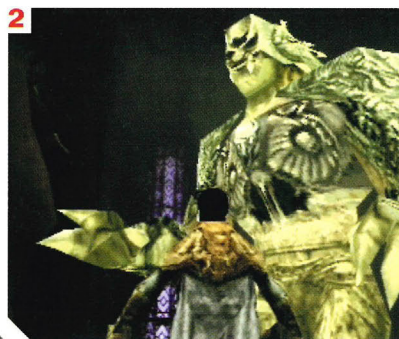


If only all game sequels made this kind of gameplay and graphics leap. Mind you, the fact that *Legacy Of Kain: Blood Omen* looked bloody awful means that it wasn't a particularly hard act to follow.



[1] Come and have a go, warlock scum. [2] Our grizzled hero in all his tea-towelled glory. [3] Select a glyph to let fly. [4] Ah... Can't we talk about this?





[1] The water effects and lighting here are breathtaking. **[2]** Somehow you just knew that statue was going to come to life. **[3]** Matey-boy takes it on the chin. **[4]** Your blue whiz-line can tie-up baddies. **[5]** Luscious lighting.

between the two existences. Huge buildings bend and discolour, previously impossible jumps become possible as rocky ledges lean together and the Material world's water turns to pools of Spectral green gas.

Also, time stands still in the Spectral plane so, having pushed a block off a cliff in the Material world it's possible to switch over and find it suspended in mid-air, forming a stepping stone to a higher level or other such unreachable treat.

Throughout the game you're invited to experiment, mess around, and see what happens. *Soul Reaver* is like an enormous other-worldly playground packed with spook beasts and unreal objects. **It's fanciful, weirdoid setting is an excuse to incorporate all the outlandish ideas that the game's makers have been harbouring for years** into a single bizarre whole. The result is a game literally like no other.

Number five - There are no weapons in *Soul Reaver*. Oh alright, there is one. The mighty *Soul Reaver* sword is back and this time it can be powered up with different abilities by plunging it into the water, fire, stone, sunlight, sound and spirit of various Forges dotted about the game. The souped-up sword can launch projectile-like fireballs



THERE ARE A NUMBER OF TRULY BRILLIANT GAMEPLAY SIDE EFFECTS THANKS TO THIS PLANE-SHIFTING BUSINESS.

► Spectral world, appearing in the same place where he met his demise. There, he can exist ghost-like with all the other ghouls and, to a certain extent continue his adventure. However, in order to dent the quest properly you must guide Ralzeil to a portal which will zap him back through to the Material world. Alternatively, should you have attained the required plane-shifting spell or 'glyph' (see Glyph Riches) and have full energy you can make this jump back to reality whenever you like.

There are a number of truly brilliant gameplay side-effects thanks to this plane-shifting business. For a kick off the two planes look rather different, Spectral being a literally twisted and darker version of the Material plane. And, rather than merely blacking the screen out and switching over, the game morphs the scenery in real-time



MORTAL KOMBAT

Soul Reaver's fighting is quite a grisly, hands-on affair. After the sanitised remote shootings of Ms Croft the opportunity to get your hands dirty with a spot of face-whupping is most welcome. Handily placed objects allow Ralzeil to literally stick it to 'em and once the battle is over, re-use his new-found weapon for icing another bad guy later on. Brutal.



First of all get toolled up. That railing will do the job.



Now give Sunshine here a thorough thrashing with it.



Ending with a tap of Triangle to pull off the finishing move.



Now hit Circle to suck his soul and top up your energy.

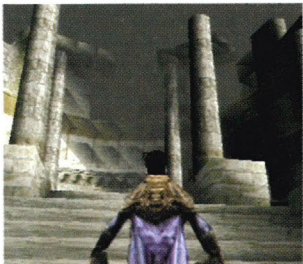
[1] Anything with faces on its knuckles is very bad indeed. **[2]** Major fracas ahead. **[3]** Religious imagery rules. **[4]** Perhaps they haven't seen you... Er.

Legacy Of Kain: Soul Reaver

SPECTRAL VS MATERIAL

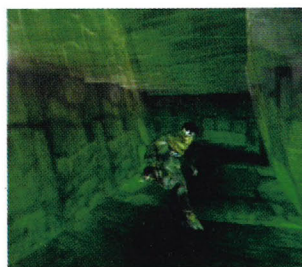
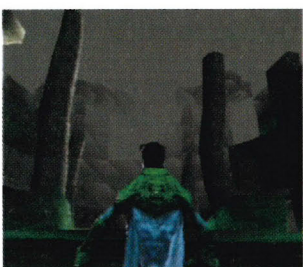
It's quite literally a game of two halves, but the Material and Spectral planes aren't just an excuse to re-use scenery and double the game size. They're vital to *Soul Reaver's* other worldly plot and puzzle devices. The game is constantly treating you to new skills which trigger memories of 'that weird bit back there.' Perhaps you can climb that slippery rock wall now, or swim up that formerly gas-filled fissure?...

MATERIAL

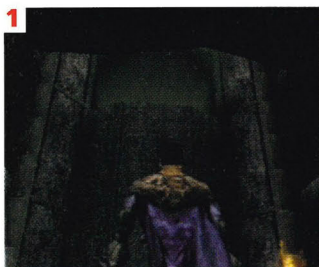


The Material world: Where buildings are straight and water is wet.

SPECTRAL



Spectral: Where buildings are bent and water is, err, green gas...



[1] The buildings in the game were designed by an ex-architect. [2] This curious structure is important. It means something. [3] Step into the light!



Another zombie shuffles into frame and another bout of beating commences.

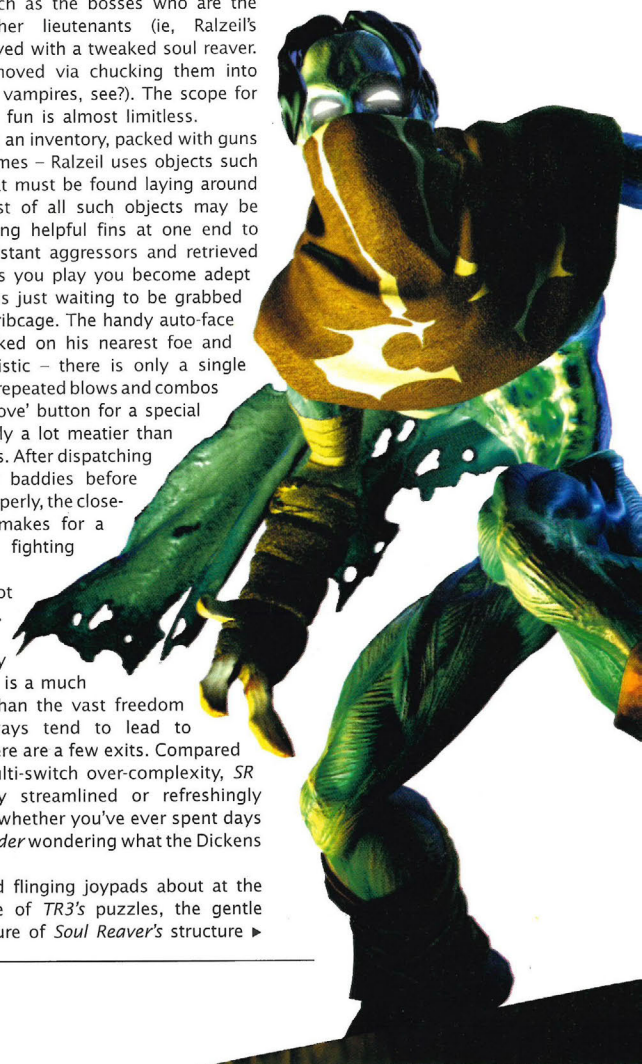
BADDIES COME IN TWOS AND, OCCASIONALLY THREES, MEANING THAT FIGHTS ARE FUN WHILE NEVER BEING FRANTIC.

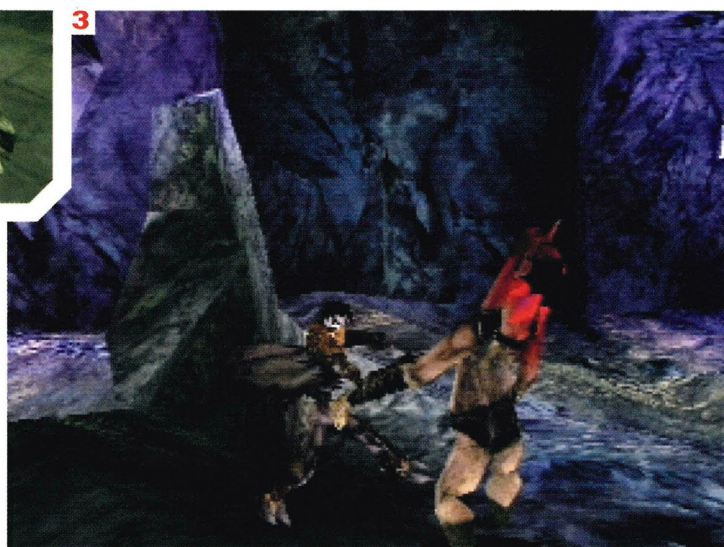
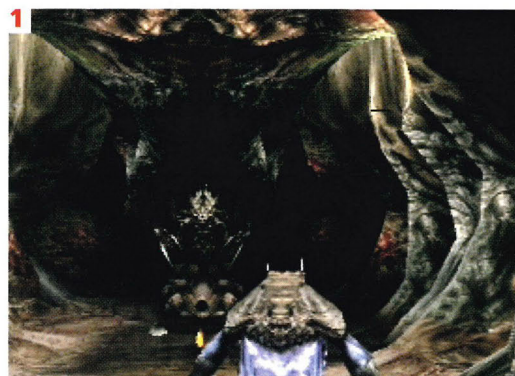
and blast waves allowing the disposal of distant enemies. Also, certain baddies, such as the bosses who are the hideously deformed other lieutenants (ie, Ralzeil's brothers), are best destroyed with a tweaked soul reaver. Other beasts can be removed via chucking them into water or sunlight (they're vampires, see?). The scope for torture and death-dealing fun is almost limitless.

Rather than employing an inventory, packed with guns and guff – as in other games – Ralzeil uses objects such as spears and torches that must be found laying around to fight off his foes. Best of all such objects may be hurled (the spears sporting helpful fins at one end to allow guided flight) at distant aggressors and retrieved later for a second use. As you play you become adept at spotting these weapons just waiting to be grabbed and shoved up a ghoul's ribcage. The handy auto-face feature keeps Ralzeil locked on his nearest foe and the combat, while simplistic – there is only a single attack button, dishing out repeated blows and combos plus another 'finishing move' button for a special death attack – it's certainly a lot meatier than Lara's auto-pilot shoot-outs. After dispatching half of *Tomb Raider 3's* baddies before you've even seen them properly, the close-combat of *Soul Reaver* makes for a much more exciting fighting experience.

Number six – It's not infuriatingly complicated. *Soul Reaver's* vast, open world, while frequently widening to huge arenas is a much more channelled affair than the vast freedom of *Tomb Raider*. Pathways tend to lead to chambers from which there are a few exits. Compared with *TR's* multi-level, multi-switch over-complexity, *SR* is either disappointingly streamlined or refreshingly simplified depending on whether you've ever spent days running around *Tomb Raider* wondering what the Dickens to do next.

After tearing hair and flinging joypads about at the obvious cruelty of some of *TR3's* puzzles, the gentle coaxing and leading nature of *Soul Reaver's* structure ▶





[1] What evil lurks ahead? **[2]** The adage 'never disturb an animal when it's eating' has never proved more true. **[3]** Boof! Ouch. **[4]** Leap, flap and fly.

THE GENTLE COAXING AND LENDING NATURE OF *SOUL REAVER'S* STRUCTURE... IS A BREATH OF FRESH AIR.

► with its complexity introduced by the constant stream of new abilities and spells – is a breath of fresh air.

That said *SR* very nearly fumbles the cosmic ball with its quite awful in-game camera. Turn and run towards the beast and the camera will slide backwards keeping you in shot while not giving you so much as a hint as to what it is you're actually running towards, and so actually controlling the game camera manually with the shoulder buttons becomes as much a part of the game as moving Ralzeil.

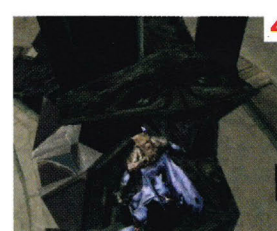
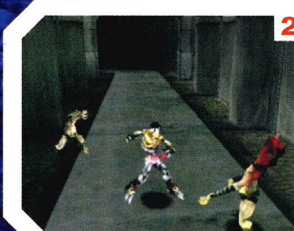
Also there is none of the *Tomb Raider*-style packs of wolves or teams of guards. Baddies come in twos and, occasionally threes, meaning that fights are fun while never being frantic.

GLYPH RICHES

A vital part of the *Soul Reaver* action is the seven different spells (here known as glyphs) that can be garnered throughout the game. Each is dished out at different Glyph Altars hidden throughout Nosgoth. These take the form of screen-clearing 'smart bomb' attacks, ideal for dispatching multiple assailants. However, they are powered by glyph points which must be found and hoarded.

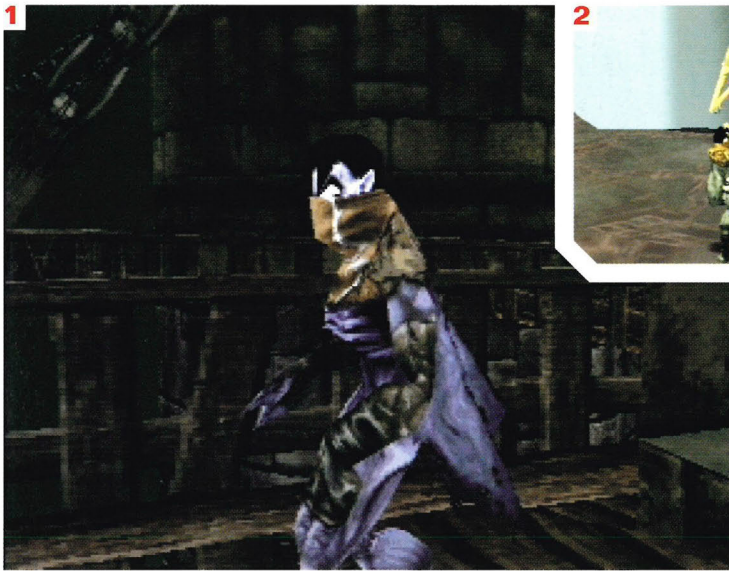


The fire glyph will immolate any flesh beast within a vast radius. Ice blast-waves do much the same. But they're colder. Select shows the glyphs you've found. Select one then hit Square to fire it.



[1] The Spectral world is a creepily colourful place. **[2]** Holding R1 keeps you locked onto your nearest assailant. **[3]** One of the vast mechanical puzzles. **[4]** Fly life. Ralzeil can curl and leap then stick to walls fly-like.

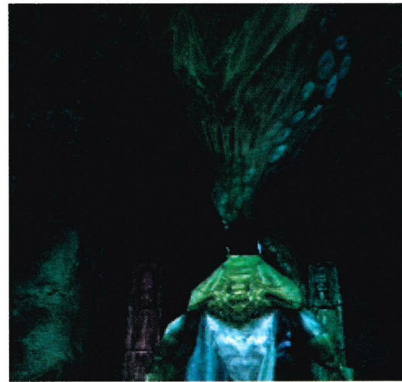
Legacy Of Kain: Soul Reaver



[1] The ability to fly the camera gives Ralziel great close-ups. [2] That'll teach you. [3] Take that, liederhosen beast. [4] It's spookily 'organic' non?

WARP FACTOR

In addition to the portals between the two different game planes there are also warp portals, used to zap Ralziel between locations in the game. As a new portal is found (huge *Stargate*-style rings) it is added to the warp arena and you can choose to hop out there whenever another ring is entered. This is a smart move, allowing easy backtracking to try out a new skill at a previously impassable, er, impasse.



Despite being able to save wherever you like you always start at the beginning then use the warp portal nearby to zap you back to where you were.

And the question we know you are all wanting an answer for: is *Soul Reaver* better than *Tomb Raider 3*? Well, it's almost too close to call but *Tomb Raider 3*, with its sheer size and masterful level design must clinch it. If you'd never played either game go for *Tomb Raider* first. This provides the firm bedrock onto which *Soul Reaver's* wacky, almost subversive gameplay builds. *Soul Reaver*, so obviously an alternative *Tomb Raider*, changes just about everything about the classic while miraculously remaining just as playable and being – we have to say it – even better looking. Fed up of *Tomb Raider*? Play *Soul Reaver*.

Daniel Griffiths



[1] Not really very nice at all. But bloody impressive. [2] Swim for it. [3] Sock him with the torch.

Alternatively...

<i>Tomb Raider 3</i>	10/10	PSM40
<i>Tomb Raider 2</i>	10/10	PSM26
<i>Tomb Raider</i>	10/10	PSM13
<i>Soul Reaver</i>	9/10	PSM43

VERDICT

- GRAPHICS: Chock to the gills with jaw-dropping vistas. **10**
- GAMEPLAY: A whole new *Tomb Raider*-inspired experience. **9**
- LIFESPAN: Nosgoth is huge but Lara's world is bigger. **8**

While Lara remains the queen of the 3D explorers the gorgeous graphics, new gameplay tricks and structure of *Soul Reaver* make it a bloody close second.

9
OUT OF 10

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Magazine 43