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SOUL REAVER



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The Works

Rated

ON TEST

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■ Glorious violence! Pin-sharp graphics!



■ Turn to page 6 and start drooling

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page 43 now!

Aprilia Blag **p52**

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LEGACY OF KAIN SOUL REAVER

p6 The best-looking 3D adventure ever? Believe it!



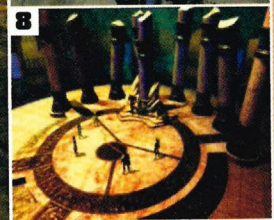
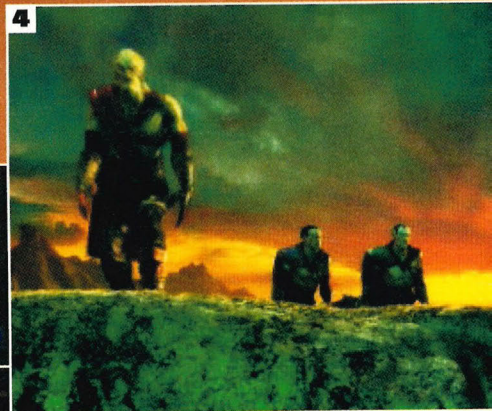
The Works: Soul Reaver first play



BLOOD LUST!

Soul-drinking in plenty. Lakes of the Dead. Magic swords. Vampires. Deep, growly voices intoning stuff about 'doom' and 'fate'. Welcome to Goth central...

Impale a vampire on a stake. Hoist it up and watch it spit bloody froth at you as you suck out its soul. Classic entertainment. Add to that the pleasures of chasing screaming maidens with an eight-foot spear, and since this 3D adventure comes armed with some of the best graphics and gameplay yet seen on the 'Station, you'd have to be nuts to refuse...



■ Slug it out with scum from the Underworld ■ Kill weird spider vampires ■ Kain vs weedy vampire hunter. No contest ■ Raziel about to meet his doom ■ The Soul Reaver sword. Impressive, no? ■ A zombie vampire gets clawed ■ The hollow eyes of Raziel, the soul-sucking hero ■ The court of King Kain, the bad guy



What we like

Children of the night

It's a bit of a trend these days. Games that don't feel like games. Games that have a bit of a film feel to them. And this doesn't just have a bit. This is like the distilled essence of every gothic fantasy film you've ever seen. With added class. And as you can see, it has all the graphical oomph it needs to back it up...



■ Wield magical swords...



■ Big, sinister church windows. Goth central



■ Pursue maidens and eat their souls



■ Any number of weird misshapen things are lurking out there. And they're hungry for the contents of your veins



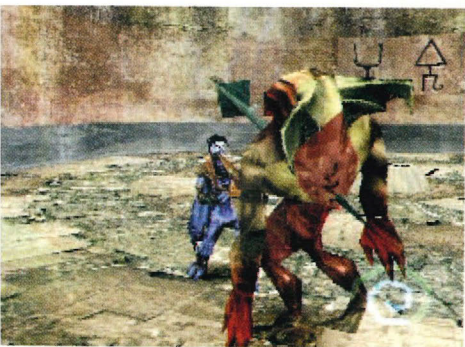
■ ...and of course huge, overblown villains. With fangs

What the...!

Soul Reaver's got loads of graphical icing, but let's talk cake. This plays kind of like Tomb Raider meets Conan. There's the same mix of combat, exploring and puzzle solving Croft finds in those tombs she raids. But unlike Tomb Raider, the combat's actually interesting. And there's much, much more extra stuff to discover.



■ Plus there's cool magic bits to get to grips with



■ The combat's fun. And very, very violent



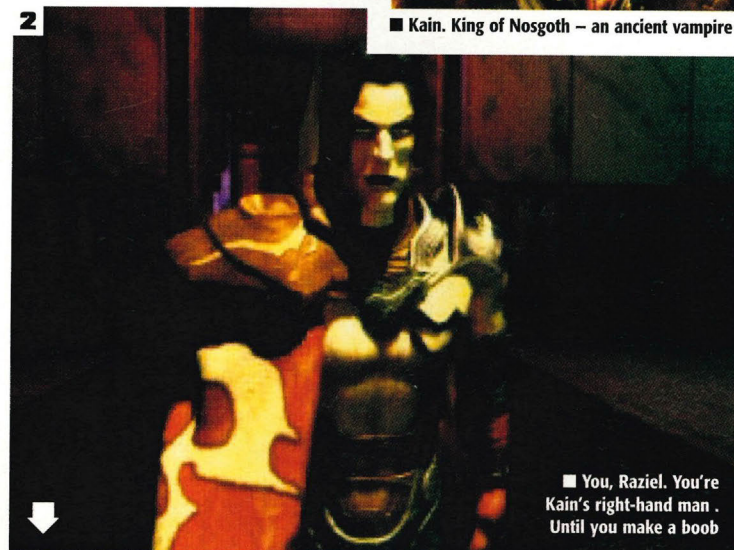
■ But fret not, puzzle fans. Plenty o' levers

Plot

You're a vampire, a member of a court of bloodsuckers who have drained the human kingdom of Nosgoth for 1000 years. Gradually, all the vamps in the court evolve, becoming more powerful, but less human. This 'evolving' bit is led by the vampire king, Kain. You make the error of growing wings before he gives you the say-so. He casts you into the Lake of the Dead. You come back. And you're angry...



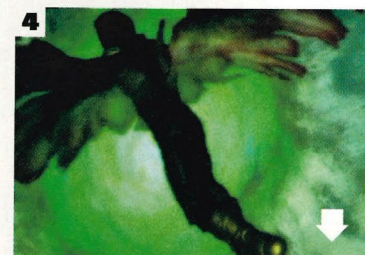
■ Kain. King of Nosgoth – an ancient vampire



■ You, Raziel. You're Kain's right-hand man. Until you make a boob



■ Kain's VERY angry. So he chucks you into the Lake of the Dead



■ Where you burn for a thousand years... until you meet the Elder



■ So he resurrects you, and sends you on your way to kill everything you see



■ Who happens to be an even older evil god. He doesn't much like Kain

Dialogue

Clocking up high scores on the cool front is the dialogue. This fella is one of the first bosses you encounter. He's one of your fellow vampire lieutenants: a sort of half-god type who's degenerated into a being who eats rotting flesh. And before you put him into a meat grinder, here's what he says...



Do you not recognise me, brother? Am I so changed...?



You should have stayed where the master sent you. You will find Nosgoth a less... welcoming place

'Tomb Raider meets Conan!'

They got vamp

This game operates at near-fatal levels of gothhood. Vampires rate high on the gothometer whatever the weather, but here they've been tweaked into new shapes that'd make Marilyn Manson blush. Underground vampires, spider vampires, spectral vampires, zombie cannibal vampires. It's got 'em all...



■ Spider vampires: climbing walls is their signature stunt. Tricky customers



■ Zombie cannibal vamps. They sit around snacking on the flesh of the dead



■ Spectral vampires live in the spirit world eating souls an' stuff



■ Underwater vampires. Evil nasties that sit in cocoons waiting for some idiot to hit them...

Far beyond driven

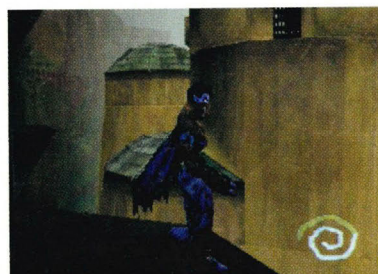
What's cool about this is that the game never stops to load, it isn't divided into levels. So you get a real sense that a drama's unfolding, rather than it just being you plugging through chunks of game. And since you can wander all through the game world, discovering and exploring, it really starts to feel like a whole other world in there. Very nice.



■ Huge open areas are yours to explore



■ As well as the inevitable gothic buildings



■ 'The Dark Eden': HOW gothic?

It's the night for fighting

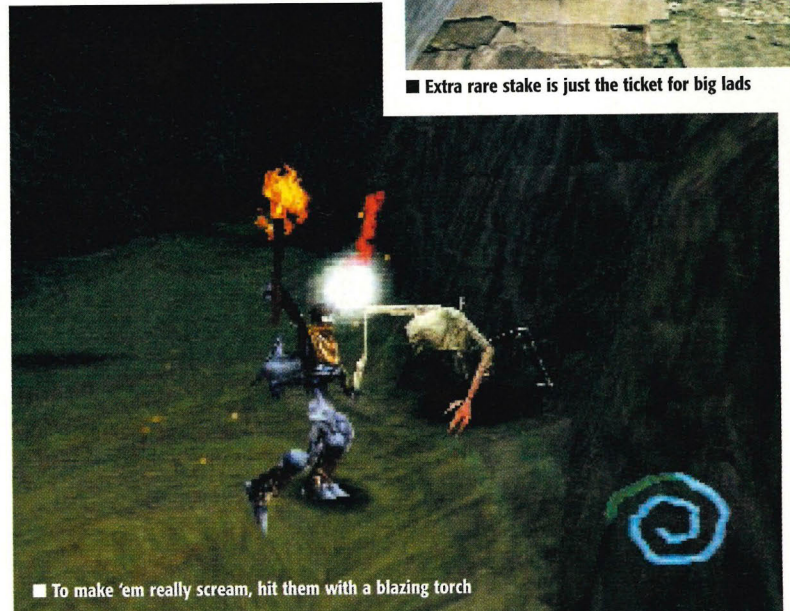
Fights in this are far, far from being the usual X-button-stabbing-fests that you expect from 3D adventure efforts. Most of the folks you fight are already dead, and this complicates things. You've got to stun vampires, and then use things like rays of sunlight, water or stakes in the chest to kill 'em. Which makes for tricky fights when there's, say, ten of them...



■ Grab weaker vampires and chuck them



■ Extra rare stake is just the ticket for big lads



■ To make 'em really scream, hit them with a blazing torch

Ahhh... tricky

Here be puzzles. Sometimes, you'll have to slot things together jigsaw-style to get ahead. Other times you'll have to build things like pipes down which water can flow. But the coolest puzzles are the ones where you have to shift between different planes of existence to solve 'em. 'Planes of existence?' you ask. Just turn the page...



■ Getting through gates can be well tricky



■ Desperate times, desperate measures. Planar shift is the bizz

The Works: Soul Reaver first play

'You get a real sense of a huge drama unfolding'



'It's mind-bogglingly vast!'

Is this real?

There are two different Planes of Existence in operation here. And before you start going 'You what? Enough with the hippy guff already!', we'll explain. Raziel can travel between the real world and the spirit version, which is filled with weird floating souls and stuff. Physical things operate in different ways in the two worlds. Puzzle central.



■ Raziel is a spirit. By using portals or spells he can visit the real world



■ In the real world, the enemies are different, and so's the scenery



■ You can't use weapons in the spirit world, but the Soul Reaper's sword can shift between the two

Ah, souls!

Being a resurrected über-vamp, you can't die. The way it works is that your energy declines all the time you're in the real world, and it goes much faster when you get hit. In the spirit world, it's much easier to get the souls you need to bump up your energy, but there's still plenty dangers awaiting you.



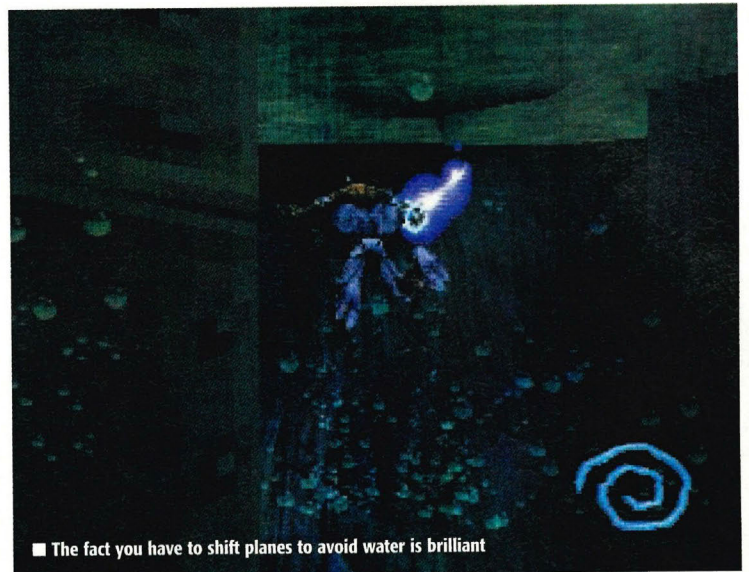
■ If you fall into water, you automatically go spiritside



■ These vamps suck your soul, sending you spiritside double-quick

Variety?

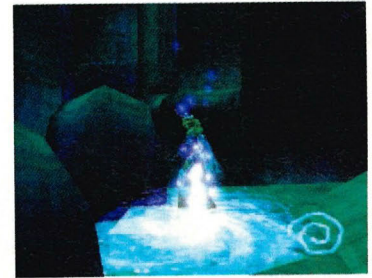
You've got plenty o' spells, a sword that can do tricks, two worlds to travel through, and almost every conceivable kind of puzzle to go up against. Plus you've got a mind-bogglingly vast game world with all sorts of scenery. There is enough here to melt even the hardest of hearts. It maybe doesn't have the sheer amount of 'stuff' Metal Gear has, but it kicks cheeks. Believe it.



■ The fact you have to shift planes to avoid water is brilliant



■ ... and that adds a new twist to the Tomb Raider-esque exploring



■ Portals will help you navigate your way through the vast game world

plus **We'd like to say...**
 It hurts to say it, but this wipes the floor with Lara Croft and her so-called tombs. It kicks her cute little buns. Hard. It's maybe not got the range of something like Metal Gear, but there's enough depth and variety in here to keep you coming back, even when you've got more important real-life stuff to do. You've been warned.

Magic swords

About halfway through, you get the Soul Reaper, a deadly magic weapon you can use in both the real world and the spirit world. By using blacksmith's forges, you can give it more abilities, like the ability to spew fire. It's this level of variety that gives Soul Reaper its edge. Tomb Raider's got nothing on this. Nothing.



■ Each of the elements can give the Soul Reaper new powers. Flames are good for this big fella



■ And you can even use it to fire projectiles at folks. Like, big projectiles

The Works: Soul Reaver first play

Check it!

'Puzzles?' we hear you cry, 'What manner of puzzles are these?' Well, try this one for size. You've got to get to the top of this enormous abyss. Thing is, you can climb walls in the real world, but not in the spirit world. So you start up by climbing in the real world, then switch, jump a bit, switch again and climb. Complex? Oh yes indeedy...



■ First off you have to climb up this sheer face



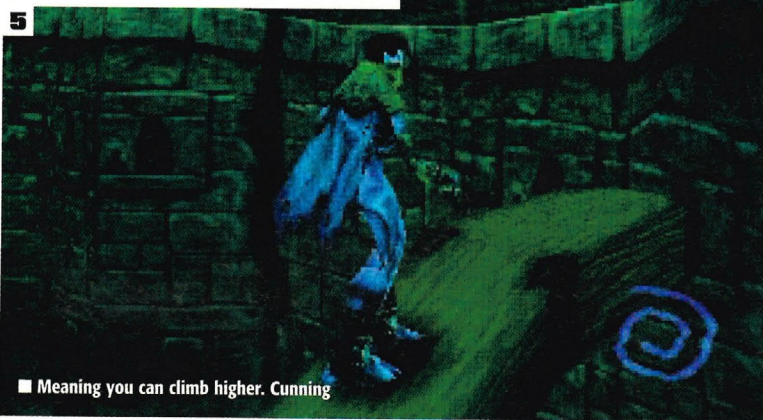
■ Then you get faced with this enormous pit



■ Time for a change to the spirit world



■ And this log thing that was flat before bends



■ Meaning you can climb higher. Cunning

Problems - solved!

One of the areas where this really shines is that it gets over the problems of 3D combat very nicely. See, by holding **R1** you lock to one opponent. By letting go, you can run around and choose a victim. No confusion. No punching the air. No locking on to folks you don't want to. Nice.



■ Lock to one evil bodger and knock 'em dead



■ Or keep flipping between enemies



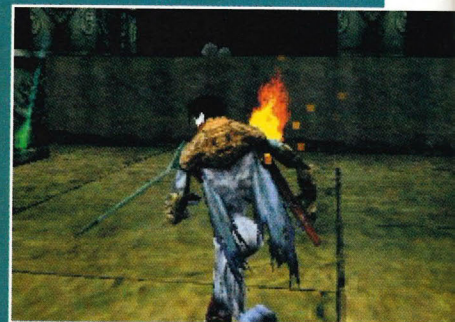
■ Or just blast magical death at them

So it goes, so it goes

How the game fits together is also mucho cool. You get hints and stuff from people about where to go, and then you'll wander through the world, using new abilities to get to new areas, finding things like enormous gothic cathedrals to explore. And it's not like you just go from one place on to the next. Using new abilities, you can revisit old places and get to new bits. Clever.



■ Talk to folks to get hints as to where to go



■ Then you begin to wander through Nosgoth



■ You can use portals to travel large distances

Quality

It's got the looks. And it's sure got style. But does it cut it on the gameplay front? Well, the answer is yes. Mostly. Sometimes, the platformy bits where you're walking on twigs over demon-filled abysses get a touch irritating. Sometimes you get lost. That's bad. But generally, yeah. It's non-stop. It's dripping with come-to-bed gameplay. It lives up to its looks. Phew.



■ The platform bits are made up for by the superb fights



■ Generally this oozes quality. Check out the boss-man here



■ The way these bull-things suck your energy is well cool

winner Big, bold and beautiful. This is probably the best-looking 3D adventure on the 'Station, and it plays like a dream. Buy it. You have no choice. **Rob**

PlayStation plus
RATED 92%