

SpaceChannel5

Q: What could one of Sega's finest racing game producers bring to a Dreamcast rhythm-action game? A: A whole new slant on the genre. Oh, and see-through dresses...





Space Channel Five revels in retro sci-fi pop kitsch. The game had a special stand at the autumn Tokyo Game Show, where it commanded an insane amount of attention



At the outset, the game appears all too simplistic, and it's certainly not a mainstream title, but it's an appealing taste once acquired

Few Edge readers will need an introduction to **Tetsuya Mizuguchi**. He produced *Sega Rally*, one of the finest driving games ever created, plus the likes of *Manx TT* and *Sega Touring Car Championship*. But Mizuguchi-san recently abandoned the world of the coin-op to set up Software R&D#9 at Sega and take control of a rhythm-action game for Dreamcast.

Set in the 25th century, *Space Channel 5* follows a slinky reporter named Ulala whose goal in life is to dance – and get everyone else to dance with her. Players will be faced with two game modes. In the dance phase, you beat out the tempo of the music with one finger while executing different dance commands with the other hand – the closer you get to following the instructions in time, the more characters join in the dancing. In the shooting phase, you still have to keep the tempo, but now use your free hand to play a shoot-the-aliens-style game. It's a simple command interface and that's what the team wants. *Space Channel 5* is aimed at 'light users', not hardcore otaku. It's a lot easier than *Bust A Groove* and Mizuguchi-san describes it as "a totally

different game to *PaRappa the Rappa*."

So what drew Mizuguchi-san to create a console title rather than an arcade game, and of creating a game for allcomers, not just coin-op obsessives? Edge took a trip to Shibuya to find out...

Edge: *Space Channel 5* looks unusual. How would you describe it?

Tetsuya Mizuguchi: It's difficult to explain. 'Dance, fight and drag' is perhaps the best way to describe the gameplay. The funniest thing is dragging people behind you. Ulala's power, passion and love draw other characters in and synchronise their movements with her. As more people join in, the atmosphere becomes more tense and the rhythm goes faster.

Edge: Is it strictly a oneplayer game?

TM: Yes, but I think it's much more fun to play it with a group of people around you. We still do not know if we will support the modem or VMS. We'll decide when the core of the game is finished. I don't know whether our target audience will be interested in these features. I need to do some more research.

Edge: What is your target audience?

TM: I want to target people who don't

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usually play games. Recent titles have featured quite tough gameplay, which puts a lot of newcomers off.

Edge: What sort of difficulties have you encountered during production?

TM: To make it interesting. We changed the game system to improve the gameplay feel, because I did not want to make a game that only offered style and atmosphere. I think it is more complex than that – the game needs to be fun.

Edge: Did you have an international audience in mind when you were



The trippy backgrounds are reminiscent of sci-fi imagery from the '60s and '70s. *Star Trek* meets *PaRappa the Rappa* – a distinctive combo



Mizuguchi-san owns the last word in limited-edition Dreamcast hardware

developing *Space Channel 5*?

TM: Not particularly. For *Sega Rally* or *Manx TT* we were aware of the foreign market. This time I think we're concentrating on 'pure fun'. We aren't really thinking of a specific market. We simply follow our inspiration.

Edge: You've now worked on both coin-op and console games. How different are they to develop?

TM: There are different ways to explain it. I believe it's like the difference between movies and television. In a movie theatre the audience stays for about two hours in the same environment. Television's viewing sessions are shorter, and there are commercials, etc. It's similar with

Ulala starts each dance alone (above) but as the game goes on, she drags bystanders into the proceedings (top right). Mizuguchi-san loves this element

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games. As for which is most fun to develop, I enjoy both. In arcade games, there is a physical feeling that players do not get with console games – like sitting on the bike in *Manx TT*. However, it's frustratingly difficult to transmit a message in arcade games – you only have three minutes.

Edge: Where does your inspiration come from? Do you still go clubbing now that you live in Shibuya?

TM: [Laughs] Now that I live in Shibuya, I don't go to clubbing any more. I walk in

the park or sit on a café terrace. I also watch people. I go out of the office and sit in a café and speak with people. I've been doing that a lot recently.

Edge: Why did you decide to move to Shibuya rather than stay in Haneda?

TM: Inspiration. Things go smoothly here. It is a good place for people to gather. I think Shibuya is a good place for writing console games. Shibuya is maybe the only town in Japan which has a strong culture of its own.

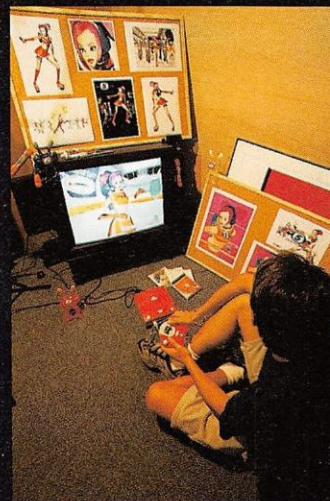
Edge: There aren't many games like *Space Channel 5* in Sega's lineup. Do you think the Dreamcast needs new ideas like this?

TM: There haven't been many interesting games recently. I don't know why, exactly. Better graphics and music are not enough. If the gameplay does not really change from what is available already, the market may shrink.

Edge: Did you set out to create what some might term a sexy character on purpose?

TM: I think we thought about it. With Ulala, okay, you can see her panties under the skirt, but it is not aggressively sexy – the impression is very light. We

did not set out to make a sexy game. The action takes place in the 25th century and we tried to imagine what clothes would be like in the 25th century. We felt that, in 500 years' time, it would not be such a big deal to have visible panties. Ulala looks very real and



Mizuguchi-san kicks back in the comfort of his Shibuya office

Format: Dreamcast
 Publisher: Sega
 Developer: Software R&D#9
 Release: Winter (Japan)
 Origin: Japan



The visuals are rather simple for a Dreamcast game, but the team is focusing on making an enjoyable and playable title rather than impressing graphical fetishists



sexy, she moves with passion in a very sexy way. We worked a lot on it. However, Ulala does not use 20,000 polygons – in fact she uses very few. I think the sexy aspect comes from the way the character moves.

Edge: What new possibilities does Dreamcast offer in gameplay terms?

TM: Well, I have another title in pre-production. I'm researching how far we can use the Dreamcast as an image and audio synthesiser. On this project, I'm taking into account the worldwide market and I think my experience of arcade games will be very profitable. I'm

trying to incorporate the essence of an arcade game into a console game. It will be a kind of 'toy' using music and sound.

Edge: What do you think of Dreamcast's performance in Japan?

TM: I believe it's been doing well recently because of the *Seaman* influence. The number of people wanting to play *Seaman* is really important, and it's particularly popular among girls. Before the game was released, everywhere you went, everybody was talking about *Seaman*. People were saying, 'It sounds fun, I want to buy it'. Now, if you go to any game store in

Shibuya, the game is sold out.

Edge: What do you think are the main advantages Dreamcast has over other forthcoming consoles?

TM: I think the Dreamcast is easy to handle. The libraries and tools are good. It is quite easy to get into developing for it. Of course, other hardware specifications will be higher, but Dreamcast can do things that other platforms can't do. But I don't think in terms of hardware at all. I think in terms of content.

Edge: Under what sort of conditions are you developing Space Channel 5?

Were you asked to create a more massmarket title?

TM: Sega did not order anything in terms of creativity. In fact, Irijimari-san just told me to gather a team of 50 in Shibuya. He was impatient and excited to see the results.

Edge: Do you think your move from Sega HQ to Shibuya was some kind of test for you?

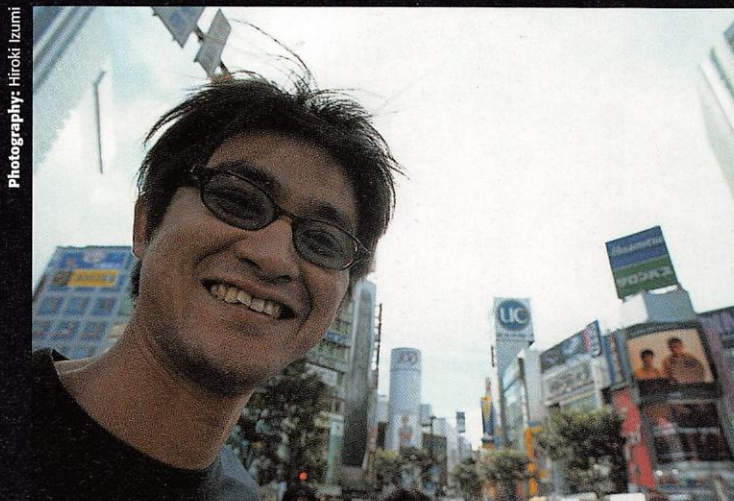
TM: I think it is in part a test. Some time ago, another development team moved out of Sega but it was a failure. It's a big gamble for the company. But Sega executives have been positive about the project. Regarding creativity, I think they are quite open-minded. Irijimari-san or Hisashi Suzuki sometimes come here, we have a chat and a laugh.

Edge: And what did Irijimari-san think about the game?

TM: He played it and laughed. He had a lot of fun.



Along with the dancing mode, there is a shooting phase where the player has to blast incoming aliens using rhythmic key presses



Photography: Hiroaki Izumi

Having created *Sega Rally*, it's not difficult to see why Mizuguchi-san was given the freedom to leave Sega HQ and set up a new facility in the heart of Shibuya

