



Legacy of Kain 2: Soul Reaver

Publisher: Eidos/Ozisoft
Developer: Crystal Dynamics
Release date: April
Origin: US
Style: 3D adventure
Price: \$89.95

So it's *Tomb Raider* with vampires right? Well, yes, and at the same time very much, no. Prepare to have your mind widened very largely indeed...

Yes, while *Tomb Raider* comparisons are inevitable given *Soul Reaver's* vast size and third-person bum-watching viewpoint, they must end there. Indeed after you get beyond the guns-plus-switch-plus-door *Tomb Raider* formula, *Soul Reaver* is one very queer fish indeed. The game is in fact *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. The game sold badly here. *Soul Reaver* luckily hoofs its 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.

No sex please, we're vampires

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 Spectral world. There the Elder God gives Ralzeil the chance to get back to reality so as to seek his revenge. Aeons have passed, though, and upon his return Ralzeil 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? What's in it for the Elder God?

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





analog



memory card



number of players



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 for 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.

Sucking their souls

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 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' and have full energy you can make this jump back to reality whenever you like. Confused? In fact, you won't be. As soon as you've played the game for the first time it will be very clear – and is likely to become a feature of many future 3D adventures. It's perfect fodder for the Next Generation of PlayStation.

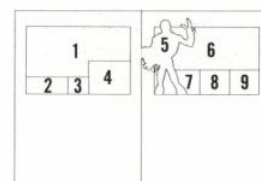
Twisted and altogether darker

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 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.

Experimentation is a good thing

Throughout the game you're invited to experiment, mess around, and just see what happens. *Soul Reaver* is like an enormous other-worldly playground packed with spook beasts and unreal objects. Its 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.



- 1 The ability to fly the camera makes for great close-ups.
- 2 The game has a very spooky feel throughout.
- 3 The interiors in the game were actually designed by an ex-architect.
- 4 Face to face with Ralzeil. In other words, yourself.
- 5 Our hero. Or is that anti-hero?
- 6 The Spectral World is a colourful and creepy place.
- 7 Time he got a new cape.
- 8 In fact the fashion police will be on his arse for his outlandish outfits.
- 9 Church-style settings always prove creepy.

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	14			16		17	18	19

- 10 We can't imagine Ralzeil's merchandise catalogue is going to be quite as extensive as Ms Croft's.
- 11 Fights are fun but the absence of huge packs of opponents means they are rarely frantic.
- 13 It's too quiet around here.
- 14 The ability to move the camera gives a cinemagraphic feel...
- 15 ...but the in-game camera can often be unhelpful.
- 16 There is no inventory, so Ralzeil must use objects such as spears and torches left lying around the place.
- 17 Scary! The game is packed with atmosphere.
- 18 It's spookily organic.
- 19 Transferring between planes is a treat for the eyes.
- 20 Like a fly, Ralzeil can leap and stick to walls.
- 21 Our hero ready to strike.
- 22 The spectral world effectively doubles the size of the game.

We come in peace, sort of

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 throughout the game. The souped-up sword can launch projectile-like fireballs and blast waves allowing the disposal of distant enemies. Also, certain baddies, such as the bosses who are the hideously deformed other lieutenants (that is, 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 onto his nearest foe and while the combat is 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 and exhilarating fighting experience.

Simple pleasures

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 *Tomb Raider*'s multi-level, multi-switch over-complexity, *Soul Reaver* is either disappointingly streamlined or refreshingly simplified depending on whether you've ever spent days running around *Tomb Raider* wondering what the heck to do next.

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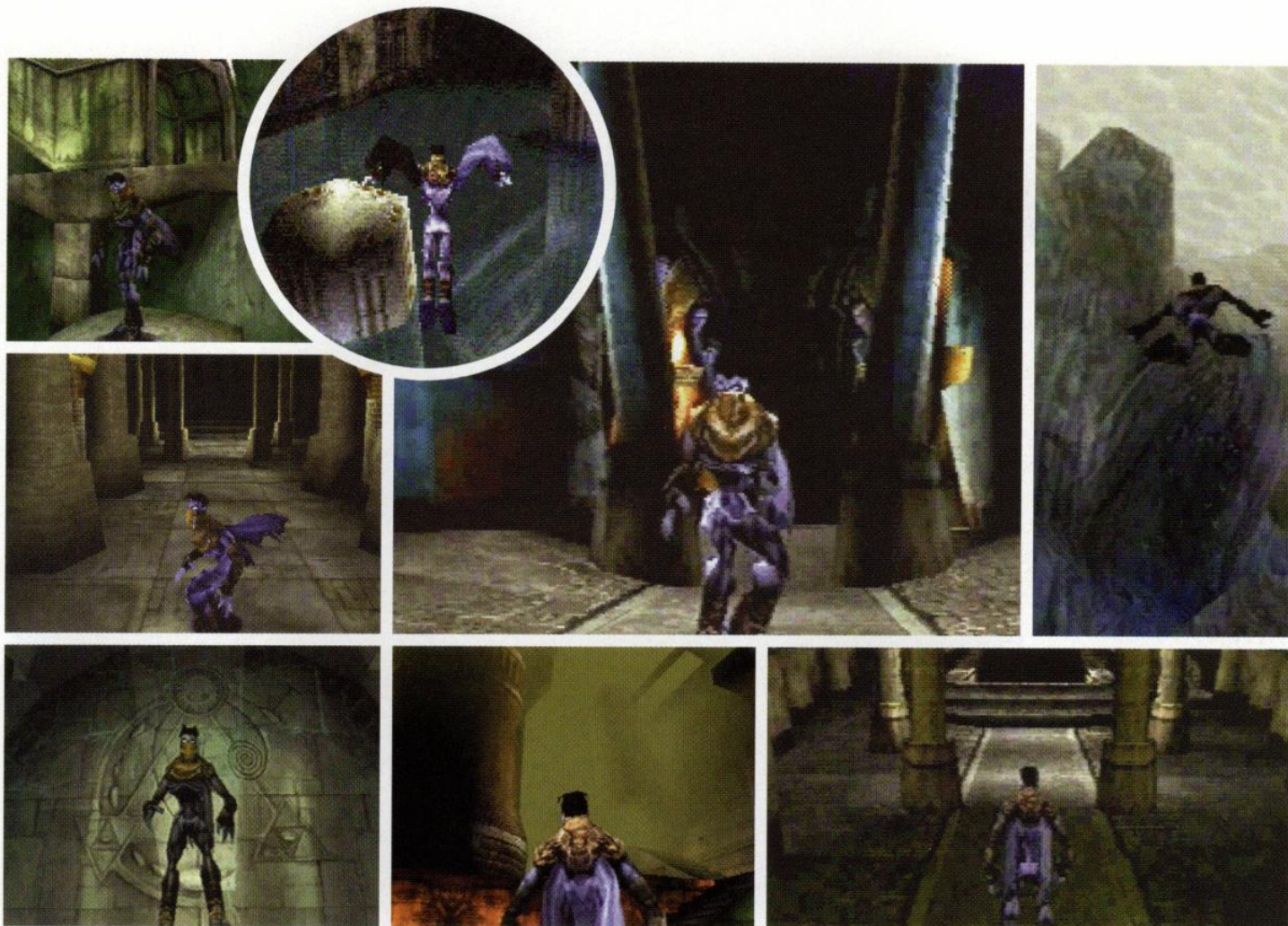
analog



memory card



number of players



***Soul Reaver*, so obviously an alternative to *Tomb Raider* and its various incarnations, changes just about everything about the classic while miraculously remaining just as playable**

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

A different view

That said, *Soul Reaver* very nearly fumbles the cosmic ball with its quite awful in-game camera – that's something it could've learned from Lara's outings. 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 the job of controlling the game camera manually with the shoulder buttons becomes as much a part of the game as moving Raziel about the worlds.

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.

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*. You really won't regret it.

Daniel Griffiths



ALTERNATIVELY

<i>Tomb Raider 3</i>	9/10 PSM 18
<i>Tomb Raider 2</i>	9/10 PSM 6
<i>Tomb Raider</i>	9/10 PSM 2
<i>Resident Evil</i>	9/10 PSM 15

VERDIOT

9

GRAPHICS	10 Some of the best effects ever seen in a game
GAMEPLAY	10 One of the best 3D adventures to date
LIFESPAN	8 Huge, but at the same time very manageable

While *Tomb Raider* remains the best 3D adventure game on the PlayStation, *Legacy of Kain 2: Soul Reaver* runs it a very close second. Very much a 'must-buy' title, it's like no other game there has ever been before