BLOODY ROAR

Fighting games are something of a bad habit for me; regardless of how bad they are I still wind up playing them all. Yes, I have been criticized for playing *Time Killers* in the arcades for more than an hour (I can hear the cries of "blasphemer!") and even stood in the same room as *Fight For Life* (hey, I used to work there) so it's sad but true to say that there are more bad fighting games than good nowadays... actually, let me rewind and rephrase that... syadawon doog naht semag gnithgif dab erom era ereht taht yas ot eurt tub das s'ti os... so it's sad but true to say that there are very few new, innovative, solid fighters and far more brainless, 'me-too,' beat'em ups. And when something special does come along (i.e. *Tobal 2*), we don't get to see it in the States, <sigh>. So you must realize the relief I felt when it was announced that Sony had picked up Raizing's *Bloody Roar*, a festive feast of frenzied fighting fun (yeah, say that three times fast and I bet ya sprain your tongue!).

Borrowing elements from *Fighting Vipers*, and not a few concepts from *Altered Beast*, *Bloody Roar* (known for a time as *Beastorizer* - ack... thank god for the name change) is one of the best fighting games for the PlayStation, rivaling, nay destroying, *Soul Blade*, the *Tekken* series, and even the mighty *Tobal 2* (the likes of which we'll probably never see). Flexing at 60 fps (frames per second for the abbreviationally-challenged) with some of the most spectacular lighting effects found in any fighting game, *Bloody Roar* is graphically, in two words, da bomb (Ed's Note: is 'da' a word?). Though the backgrounds are a tad boring (except when opponents are knocked into heated, liquid metal pools... oooh, toasty...), but they're fenced-in by WCW-style cages-"RESPECT!" These iron barriers can be broken down depending on the inertia of your opponent, as stronger blows from larger characters will result in wall-shattering blasts. Hence, the harder you pound your opponent against the walls, the more likely they'll be broken. Rending the cages is a visual knock-out and audibly cool as broken pipes and bars clatter around the screen - sort of like wind chimes for the damned. Characters aren't as intensely detailed as some fighting games, and certain character designs are a bit, well, weird (SNK and Capcom should have no fear). Even given that the actual designs won't win any awards, the sheer brilliance of the motion capture just might. And don't forget the incredibly flashy lighting and transparency effects that add gobs to the "WOW" factor.

Gameplay is where you'll find *Bloody Roar* excels; it's an excellent mix of *Fighting Vipers* with some button pattern-pushing of the famed *Tekken*
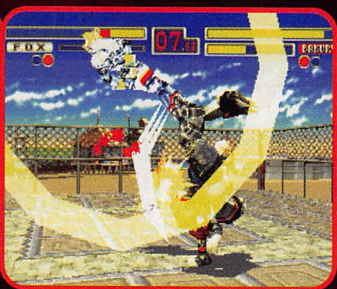
series.

Each character has a different style, though nearly all special moves are performed with some type of standard quarter circle motions a la *Street Fighter*. Set combinations for each character require the proper button pushed at the proper time. Though this might sound restricting, there are more than enough combos to go around. Attacks are performed with either a punch button, kick button, and/or beast attacks button (more on that later), while blocking is automatic. Movement is standard 2D plane fighting, or you can turn on the "Side Step" option for full, no-holds-barred, 3D movement. And for those *Fighting Viper* fans, you'll find a clutch of borrowed techniques. First off, each character has a counter which works nearly identical to *Fighting Vipers*. All counters are performed with a quarter circle back motion along with a punch or kick command. Once performed, your character will charge up and delay his (or her) jaw-shattering strike. During this charging period, any high or medium level attacks will be immediately countered. However, counters are not invincible as low attacks will interrupt a counter, as will a well-timed special move. Hence, the countering system is more balanced than the free-for-alls of *FV*. Also, when your character is launched into the air, instead of helplessly falling to terra firma (making an easy victim of a pounce attack or an ugly juggle combo), you can roll out by pressing both punch and kick.

While the game is pretty hot as it is, it becomes explosively exciting when fighters begin to morph into battling beasts. By pressing the beast button (Circle button on default), a ribbon of light engulfs your character as you 'beastorize.' Once in fauna-form, you'll have more attacks at your disposal, the beast button becomes another attack button, and your character will heal some damage. Remaining beastly depends

upon your beast meter, the indicator of how long you'll stay in anthropomorphic form. By constantly connecting with attacks in human form (or getting the snot kicked out of you), the beast meter will build up. Once in animal form, getting hit from attacks will diminish your beast meter and send you back to being a puny human. If more powerful attacks as a lycanthrope aren't enough, you can ravage the opposition by entering Rave mode. Very similar to the "Hyper" mode in *FV*, once a character is "raved" nearly any attack can be utilized in a combo as the raved character possesses little to no lag

DANGO
"Lions, tigers, and bunnies... oh my!!!"

time between moves. Perhaps the most visually impressive effects are the bloody gore that comes with morphing into beasts armed with wicked claws, slicing fangs, and other sharp, penetrating tools of death. I'm not a big blood and guts fan, but I must say that *Bloody Roar* does it quite, err, tastefully.

Sound effects are quite abundant and well done, but the music might not be everyone's cup of tea. Personally, I didn't mind the hard rock theme of the music but if wannabe Satriani guitar rifts aren't your style, you can change the soundtrack to alternative modern rock; though I found it none too pleasing to mine ears.

The longevity of this game will be tested as eight fighters seems to be too little these days; luckily, there are many options to be toyed with, and even more when you beat the game with each character. Endings are quite disappointing as the CG for the intros are also used in the endings. Mind you, nice CG is a great touch, and *Bloody Roar* doesn't have that touch as the CG fighters look too sharp and detail-deficient.

Without *Tobal 2* in the U.S. (somebody please help us, I beg of you), the fighting game genre is sorely missing one of

the best brawlers going and it would seem that the drought may be over with the intro of *Bloody Roar* and shortly thereafter a hot little number by Namco; what was the name of that one? It finally looks as if we may be seeing a resurgence of quality fighters in the U.S. And while *Tobal 2* may never come to the U.S., *Bloody Roar* gives us a refreshing, complex fighter which has something many fighters are missing nowadays... pure, bloody fun.