



■ The reflections on Ulala's clothes happen in real-time

“Ulala is a leggy pencil of a girl, decked in an orange PVC miniskirt, matching gloves and knee-length boots”



# Space Channel 5

**Gloria Estefan pretty much got it right. In the end, the rhythm is gonna get you**



**DETAILS**  
 Publisher: Sega  
 Developer: Sega  
 Price: £39.99  
 Release date: October 6  
 Players: One  
 Extras: Vibration

**F**or all people who love music, dance and games. This is the very last thing you read when you complete *Space Channel 5*. Tetsuya Mizuguchi, the man behind the game in question (as well as *Sega Rally*) has described his rhythmic tour de force as portraying “...the message of love and peace and happiness.” And we’d be inclined to agree. As camp as Christmas and funkier than James Brown on an adrenaline drip, *Space Channel 5* is an amalgam of toe-tapping music and groovy style wrapped in a garb of irresistible 60’s psychedelia. Get ready

to hit the dance floor, big time. In a future torn from the Austin Powers’ design book, TV ratings are everything and the bad guys are super-cute aliens not too far removed from Dipsy, Po and crew. Having hypnotised the tourists on board a luxury space station, the invading Morolians, as they’re known, attack through the medium of dance, cutting their moves and shooting their ray guns in time to the music. Stepping in to save the day is Ulala, a super-cool reporter with an unfazeable desire to out-scoop her rival reporters. She’s determined to get to



■ Morolian Monroe is a twin-headed blob that bursts through the TV screen to attack you

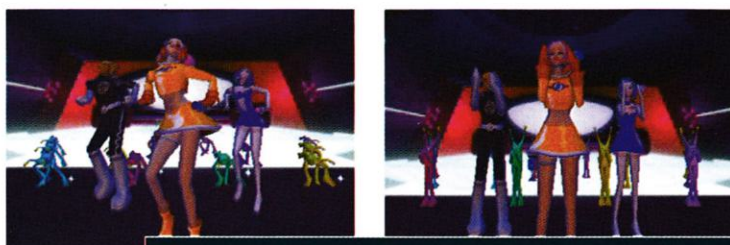


## BIG BOSS

The Morolians, like every other videogame enemy, dispatch a huge boss to see you off at the end of each level. However, their idea of striking terror into your heart is a shade different, being more Dr Robotnik than Metal Gear Ray. Fear of the Morolians is akin to a fear of sock puppets. Only kids will be affected. Clock this freaky four ■



■ Ulala is joined by her former rivals, Pirate DJ Jaguar and Channel 42 reporter Pudding



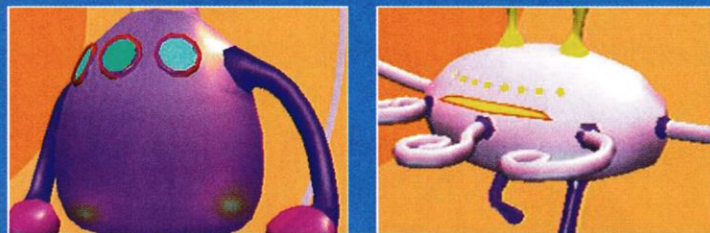
■ More poses from the hippy shaky era get an airing, as you can see here



■ This enormous explosion chases Ulala through the tunnel. Fly as fast as you can!



■ Mr Blank – Station Head and evil genius behind the Morolian invasion



■ Coco Tapioca: giant tricloptic marshmallow. Dirty Dancebot: big-tongued ballet dancer



■ Evila, the robotic alter-ego to Ulala. She is superseded by the fat, bloated, Ultimate Evila

“Space Channel 5 sets a new standard in sheer enjoyment”

the bottom of the mysterious Morolian invasion and is on a mission to rule the airwaves by outdancing the pesky ETs, Wacko Jacko-style.

Game mechanics aside for a moment, it's the sense of flair that really sets *Space Channel 5* aside from most other games. Ulala is a leggy pencil of a girl, decked in an orange PVC miniskirt,

matching gloves and knee-length boots with bright pink hair that tops the outfit off. The level designs are equally sexy, with all the bright colours and swirly patterns you'd expect from the palette of a 60's painter while the musical numbers are brass-reinforced big band for the hippy era, bordering on disco and house in places. Set your ears

to funky! and you'll be right at home.

**So how does the chick move?**

Well, very easily, in fact. She has four directions, Up, Down, Left and Right and two shoot buttons – A to zap the Morolian marauders, B to free the kidnapped tourists. All you need to do is follow the moves set by the aliens, then

replicate them using the d-pad on the Dreamcast controller. This method has been employed in just about every other dancing game and there's good reason for it: you'll soon become one with Ulala, the pad reduced to an invisible interface between player and machine. The simpler the controls, the easier the interaction. ▶



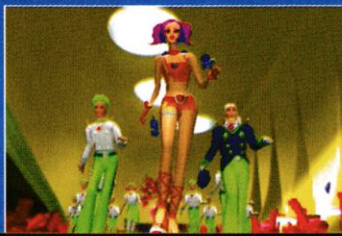
■ Shake that booty! Those multicoloured squirts are no match for a Ulala's wobbles

## THE REAL THING

Aside from spookily realistic animation, Ulala's dance routines take their influences from a variety of genres. A mix of modern funk, with street and jazz techniques, you can expect to see a Sixties edge as well, given the game's design era. That said, the routines are very typical of modern pop videos. See if you can spot the yellow aliens that join the first boss by doing the Can Can! ■



■ This is a typical Sixties pose - the camp, hip-swinging, limp-wristed feel



■ Hip isolations - very jazzy (left) A hip hop-style running-on-the-spot move (right)

► Your first encounter with the mini monsters will be a cinch to pass. The moves start right at the bottom and get progressively tougher as the game waltzes through its four large levels. Initially, three button presses hardly tax the old brain, let alone the fingers. However, trying to recall the reverse of a seven-button combo is frighteningly hard and will leave your virtual alter ego lolling around the screen like a neanderthal buffoon. The last boss is an absolute marathon requiring the dexterity of a concert pianist and the memory of an elephant. But don't let that put you off. The learning curve is gentle and once you're over any opening-night jitters, you'll find yourself settling in nicely, able to hold long rallies against the TV-faced enemy.

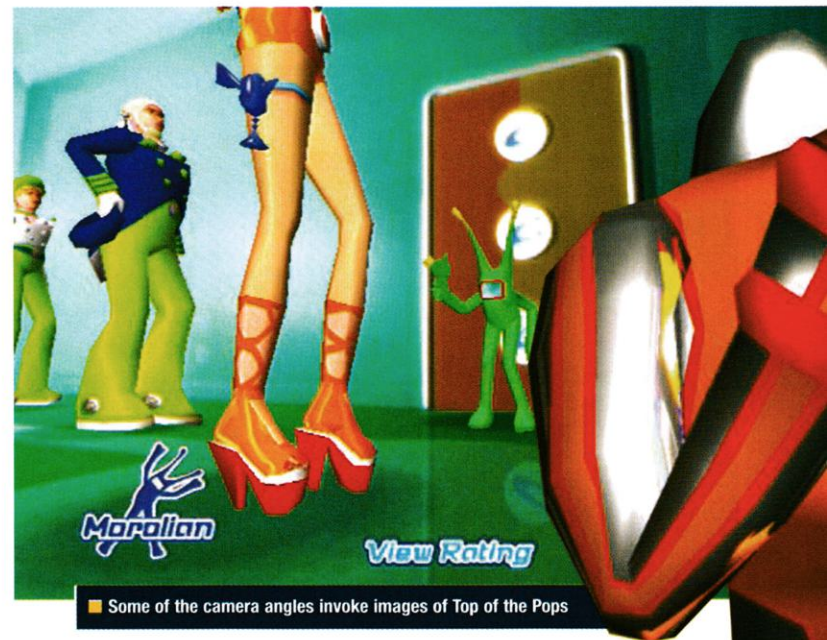
In order to deal with the alien shorties, Ulala has a health bar made up of eight hearts. Each time you miss a single move, you lose a heart until your bar is completely depleted, whereupon you lose the game. Over the rather meagre four levels, information is fed to the strutting star through her headset, with Ulala's success measured by the Viewer Ratings counter that rises or falls in conjunction with her performance. Each level has a minimum rating that you have to achieve in order pass onto the next, but there is help in the form of freed hostages, rival reporters and sub-bosses, all of whom join you to form a large entourage of dancers and backing musicians. They will all help the ratings soar and should you have the skill to rise to 95 per cent or above, Ulala



■ Mr Blank morphs into an enormous TV Man that towers over Ulala



■ Now we're really in Trip City - pure acidic psychedelia strikes back!



■ Some of the camera angles invoke images of Top of the Pops

“Set your ears to funky! and you'll be right at home”

literally catches fire, she's so hot.

**Unfortunately,** *Space Channel 5* has one fundamental flaw in its timing. Through most of the game, Ulala's actions are synchronised to the music and making her move accurately is problem-free. However, if you miss any

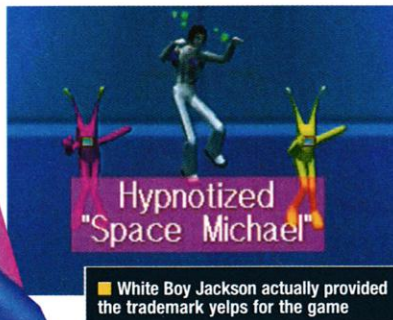
part of a button combination, the music speeds up in order to increase the difficulty level. It's during these moments that the gap between the player inputting the command on the joypad to Ulala reacting widens enough



■ The meteor stage is very fast and requires Ulala to blast a path through the rocks



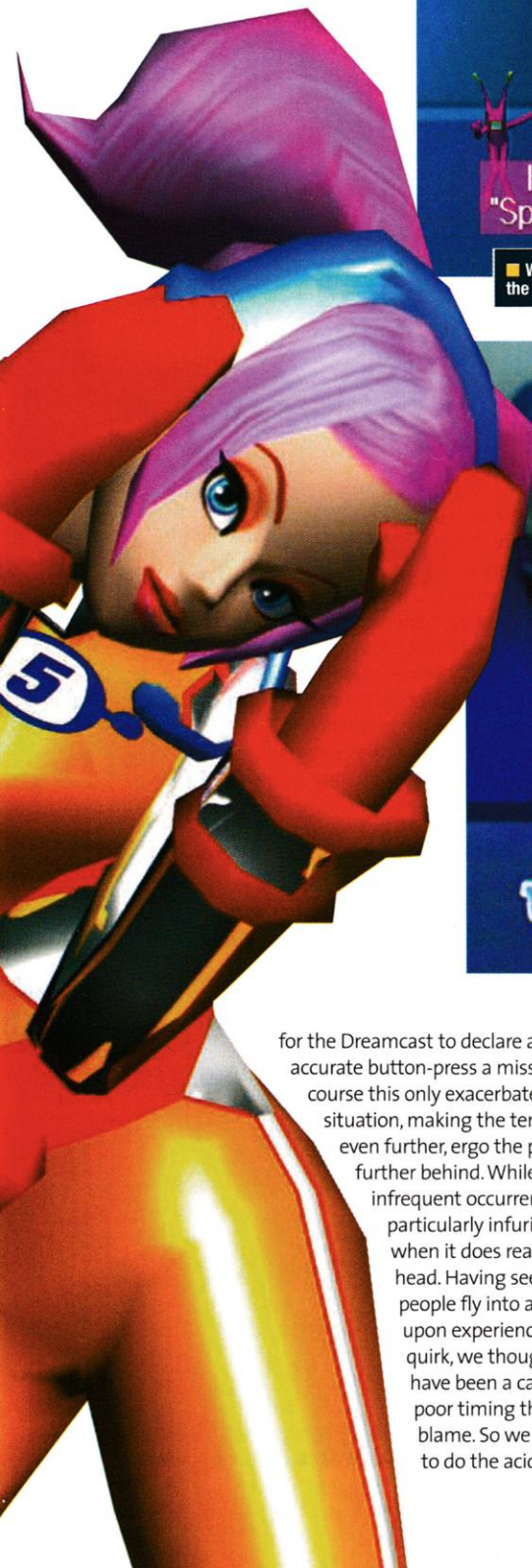
■ Shoot the Morolians as they come at you. Watch out for hostages, though



■ White Boy Jackson actually provided the trademark yelps for the game



■ We think it'd be more fun to hoof the little beggars than shoot them. But you can't



■ What a surprise – the women are all leggy birds with less meat on them than Chicken McNuggets

for the Dreamcast to declare an accurate button-press a miss. Of course this only exacerbates the situation, making the tempo rise even further, ergo the player falls further behind. While it's an infrequent occurrence, it is particularly infuriating when it does rear its ugly head. Having seen several people fly into a rage upon experiencing this quirk, we thought it may have been a case of our poor timing that was to blame. So we decided to do the acid

test by inviting two timing specialists to give *Space Channel 5* a whirl; namely a drummer and a dancer. Alas, they both complained of exactly the same imperfection, confirming our fears. Whether it be a case of sloppy programming, (which we doubt, given Mizuguchi's stature) or a more hardware-based flaw, about ten per cent of the game is spoiled by it. As worrying as this idiosyncrasy sounds, you simply learn to live with it, pre-empting the moves in order to adjust to the inaccuracies. It really only happens during the few speedy moments of the game and doesn't completely detract from the overall quality.

*Space Channel 5* sets a new standard in sheer enjoyment and although you may be tempted to skirt a dancing title such as this, you'd be doing yourself a great disservice by ignoring its beauty. Easy to pick up and play, deliriously upbeat and vivacious, you'd have to be stone-hearted not to get caught by its rhythmic lures and fresh-faced verve. With an overdose of bloodletting in many recent titles, Ulala and Co are a welcome respite and we defy you to play *Space Channel 5* and not feel the corners of your mouth rising. They say it takes 15 muscles to smile. All 15 of ours are still aching ■

**Neil Randall**

## DC-UK VERDICT

**GRAPHICS**  
Awesomely stylish, brash and vivid, with some of the weirdest characters ever

**SOUND**  
As important as the visuals. Stomping acid jazz numbers, cheesy house and more horns than a lorry-load of rhinos

**GAMEPLAY**  
A complete blast. Bet you never thought you could move and shake like that, huh?

**OVERALL**  
A triumph that misses the coveted 9 mark by inches due to a timing flaw and questionable longevity. Other than that, the Dancing Queen of all rhythm games. Buy it

**8**  
OUT OF TEN