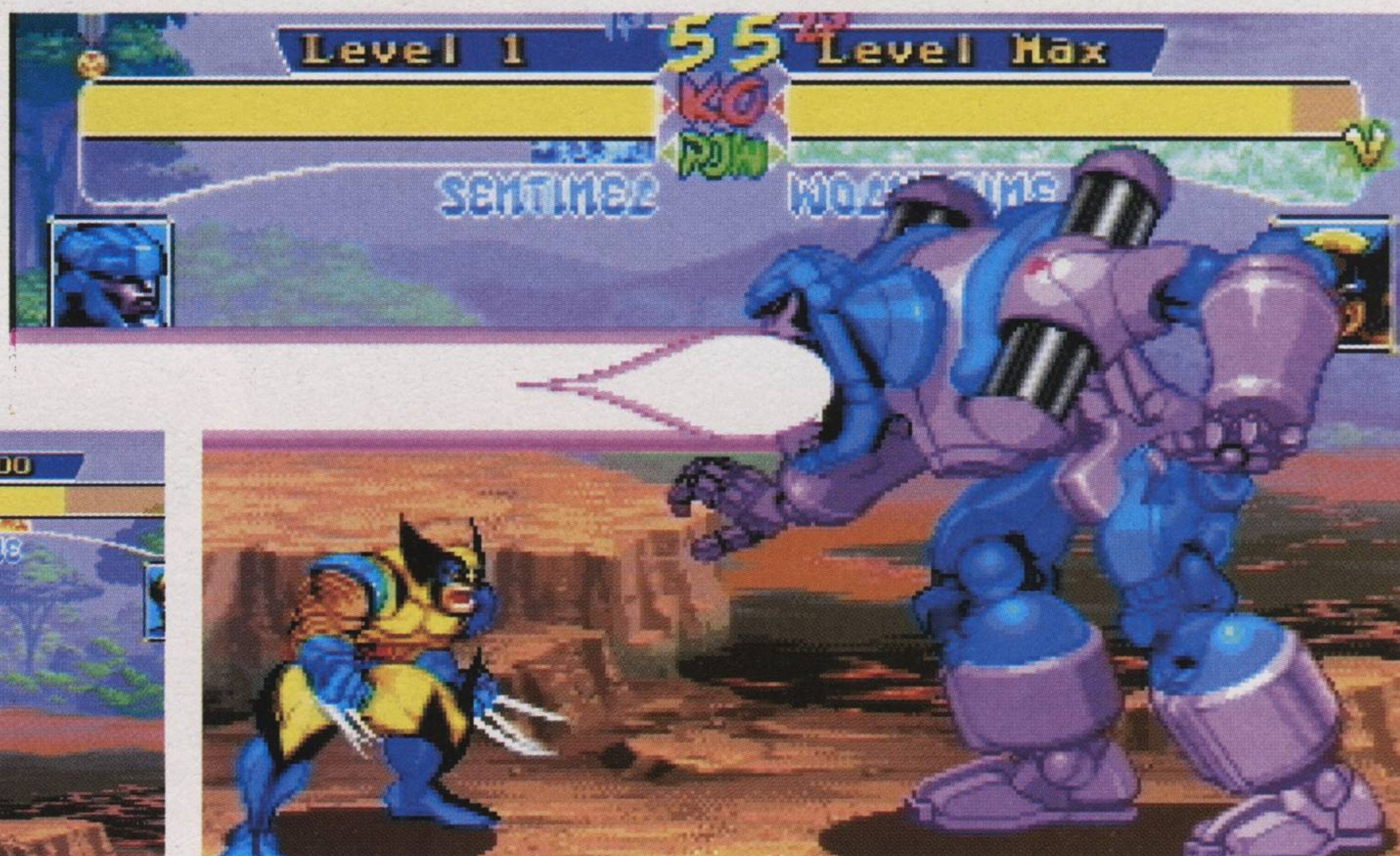


testscreen

X-Men

Children of the Atom

Format: Saturn**Publisher:** Capcom**Developer:** In-house**Price:** ¥5800 (£40)**Release:** Out now (Jap)

Playing *X-Men* is like playing the comic book series, only without the shrouded moral tales and stories of human turmoil. In other words it's 100% action, pure and simple



When Mojo World's floors collapse, play must continue in new scenery

For a long time *Street Fighter 2* was not just the best beat 'em up available, it was the only one worth considering. Everything about the game worked – the crisp, gaudy colours, the flamboyant characters, the extravagant special moves. But then polygons arrived and with them an obsession for realism. You wouldn't catch Jackie Bryant employing a fireball, or Akira electrocuting someone with his bare hands. Has the beat 'em up lost something in this transition? Having played *X-Men*, just possibly.

Based loosely on the Marvel characters, *X-Men* is basically *Street Fighter* for the nineties. The game has the same visual style, vibrant colour schemes and exaggerated fighting set-pieces as *SF*. The contestants, too, are very similar to those in Capcom's classic series. Omega Red, for example, uses extending Mr Tickle-style limbs, very reminiscent of Dhalsim, whereas Colossus employs mostly wrestling moves and lumbers ape-like across the screen in a manner reminiscent of Blanka.

There are other parallels to be drawn between *X-Men* and *Street Fighter*. The former includes a mutant energy gauge for each X person which works in a similar way to the power gauge in *Super SF2*. When special



The Sentinel's spectacular rocket punch is more than Storm can handle (top). Like *Tekken*'s King, Omega Red twists and hurls Spiral (above)



Iceman is the easiest character for non-*Street Fighter* fans to get to grips with. His giant snowball and icebeam moves (left) are simple to pull off and provide him with valuable energy for his power gauge. Wolverine (right) is more of a tactile combatant, benefiting from quick, darting attacks

moves are performed, the gauge rises so that further, more powerful moves can be accessed. Many of these specials are truly incredible and go a long way to accentuate the epic cartoon style of the game. Cyclops fires an incredible surge of red laser energy through his one eye and Iceman can bombard the opposition with frozen shards of ice. All these highly explosive moves would look marvellous splashed over the pages of a Marvel book, and this is perhaps the point. Gone are the controlled pyrotechnics of the *SF* range – *X-Men* washes the screen with huge, noisy detonations, laser blasts and swirling energy clouds, all of which can, if used in combo,

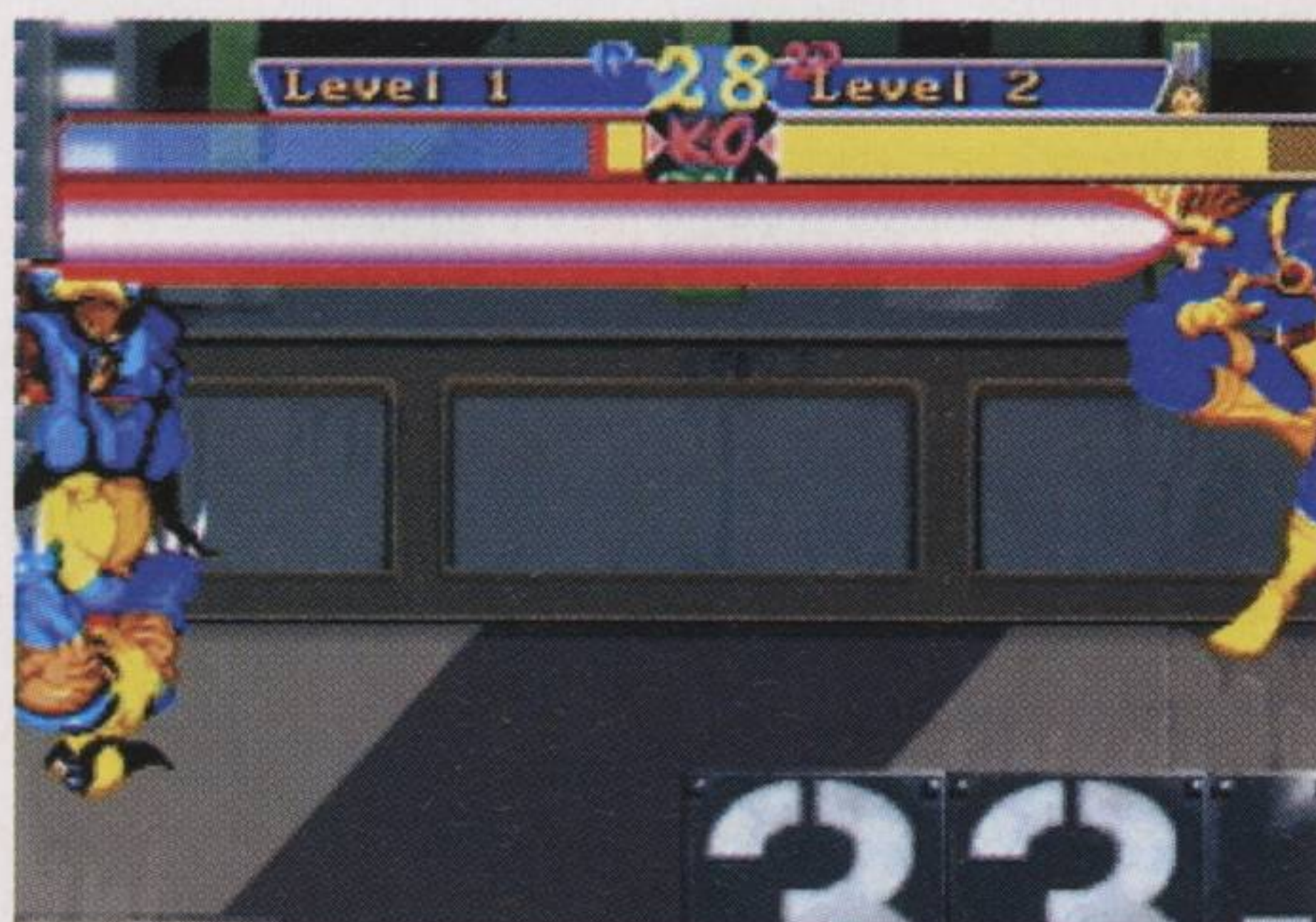
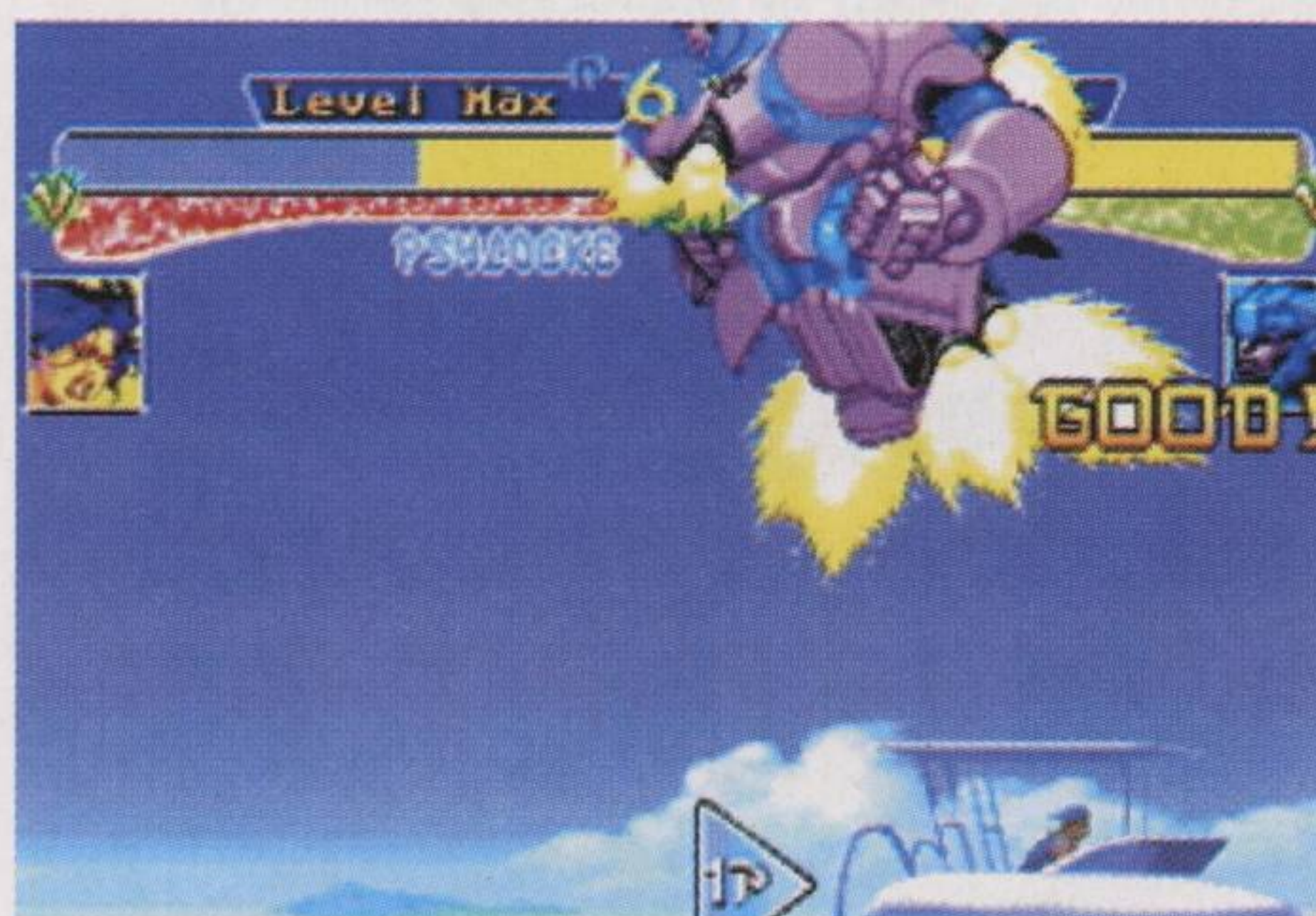


knock out a player in just a few seconds of play.

Away from the *Street Fighter* juxtapositions, *X-Men* is a fine game in its own right, fully capturing the powers and characters of the comic heroes. Iceman, for example, is known for his arrogance and this is caught in the game – on winning he creates an ice carving of himself and puts his arm proudly around its shoulder. *X-Men* purists may berate the absence of Gambit, but there is so much you can do with a character who throws magical playing cards at people.

The interactive and interesting backgrounds add a lot to the game's visual style, and also to the fights themselves (in *Mojo World* battles occur on flimsy bridges which often collapse, sending the players hurtling downwards). There is also a great variety of special moves including tech moves and, best of all, super finishes which are supercharged versions of basic specials. Sacrificed, though, is the beautiful, fluid animation associated with the 3D beat 'em ups. These are 2D sprites and are much larger than life – especially Sentinel who dwarfs the others and must be the world's largest beat 'em up sprite. In fact, in terms of on-screen action *X-Men* is easily the most impressive example yet of the Saturn's 2D abilities. Beautiful parallax backgrounds scroll in a multitude of directions and even morph into one another, while the game's gigantic sprites trundle across the background scenery for no other reason than to show they can.

Ultimately, *X-Men* adheres very strongly to *SF2* protocol and lacks some of the variety and intuition of the new breed of 3D fighting games – bouts are often little more than an exchange of projectiles, rather than physical, skillful conflicts. However, this game fulfils a different role – it is an interactive comic book, that creates a bright, brash invigorating beat 'em up. Reality is overrated anyway.



X-Men's super jump allows fighters to leap three screens upwards, enabling excellent mid-air scraps and cleverly extending the battlefield

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten

Capitalising on the Saturn's sprite chip, *X-Men*'s features massive explosions and bursts of laser fire