

y Eileen Mullin

fter a rehauling of the game's concept and technical retooling delayed Total Distortion's release for nearly two years, Pop Rocket's long-awaited debut offering is a slick masterpiece of animated and interactive delights. Almost overwhelming in its absorbing and intricate visual displays, Total Distortion requires a large learning period upfront for players to get into character as a wanna-be maker of music videos. For the imaginative heavy metalheads who persevere, the game is a rewarding mix of interactive entertainment and MTV mastery.

[Brave New Dimension](#)

You've just traveled to an alternate plane of existence called "the Distortion Dimension" hoping to make your fortune making and selling music videos. You've bet the farm in simply getting to this bizarre world so you're stranded until you can earn enough money to vouchsafe your passage home. If you choose, you can also strive to become mega-famous.

Outfitted with your own video camera, you explore your unfamiliar, psychedelic surroundings in search of intriguing footage. Later, you'll be able to edit your footage and embellish it with all sorts of music and sound effects at your personal video editing station. You can save multiple video projects, rename them, and continue editing to your heart's content at any time.

Your Personal Media Tower includes three levels containing extra side puzzles, a kitchen,

your video editing tools, a personal library, and many opportunities for videotaping. As you explore, you'll encounter a number of mazes and secret locations, and when you venture outside, you'll face off against the Metal Lord's henchman, the Guitar Warrior. You'll need to engage in a series of potentially fatal combat scenarios along the lines of "Dueling Banjos"—only in this game it's dueling guitars as you race to out-chord the name-calling Guitar Warrior on your way to conquer the Metal Lord himself.

I have to admit I soon tired of the Guitar Warrior. Engaging the Guitar Warrior in conversation is fruitless unless you like being called a "turd" and responding in kind. Doing battle with the Guitar Warrior is a much more complicated process consisting of listening to the chord the Guitar Warrior plays, then matching it as you approach him. With any luck, your chord will collide with the chord that he played. If the GW's chord is more powerful—that is, if he has a more powerful guitar—then his chord will be weakened by the force of your chord but will still travel toward you. You'll have to strike that chord again and again to destroy it before it reaches you. Bone up on your air guitar before you sit down with Total Distortion!

The game requires you to attend to such personal needs as eating and drinking, recuperating to restore your life force, and getting a good night's sleep (which requires you to play more games as you dream).

[Please Stand By](#)

There is a substantial learning curve upfront; among the background material is a loooooong, three-part animated introduction, plus a number of books you'll need to read (à la Myst) to glean more insights about how to master your surroundings and become a commercial success.

There are several levels of play. It's worth selecting one of the easy levels if for no better reason than to hear the game taunt and jeer at you. Another warning for the thin-skinned: you may not appreciate the toe-tapping "You are dead" song that plays after the player's life is suddenly ended.

There are also several options for game installation which is mainly a matter of deciding how many megs of the game's memory-hogging video and sound resources you want to transfer to your hard drive or reference as needed from the CD-ROM. Gameplay is significantly faster, naturally, if you choose the largest installation, but it's a whopping space commitment for most users.

[Artistic License](#)

The user interface on the video sequencer is very appealing. Even those completely unfamiliar with video editing can quickly learn how to control a video's length, staging, number of scenes, and musical accompaniment.

In a wry example of art imitating life, your ability to command high prices for your video creations depends less on their brilliant content than how well you can deliver to your customers exactly what they want. The bookshelves in your Personal Media Tower are filled with interviews and biographies of the video host/producers you must please. These books' descriptions of what kind of footage would appeal to or disgust the various producers should be followed to the letter if you're to have any chance of successfully pitching your videos to each one.

[Summary](#)

Total Distortion provides many hours of engrossing gameplay with a generous portion of multimedia special effects thrown in. The long learning curve upfront is a definite barrier to play, but if you can get past that you're certain to enjoy playacting as a music video

director, overcoming the game's fatal obstacles, and tinkering with the various gadgets.

Pros

- Long playability with a large variety of puzzles
- Awesome, amazing animations...plus all the other good adjectives that begin with 'A'
- Great soundtrack and amusing sound effects
- A great choice for anyone interested in experimenting with music or video editing

Cons

- Definitely not a game for those who like instant gratification; playing TD to completion will likely take over 50 hours of gameplay,
- Almost impossible to avoid death in several situations (i.e., getting past the Guitar Warrior) without resorting to hints...
- Although onscreen help is indirectly provided in a number of ways, more direct hints for resolving puzzles is sorely needed
- Too much self-promotion for the company is included in the game itself