

MDK

(Shiny Entertainment)

System: PC

By Jeff Kitts

Just when you thought the 3D shooter genre had reached its peak with such groundbreaking works as Duke Nukem 3D and Quake, along comes MDK from Playmates Interactive/Shiny Entertainment to reset the standard by which all other PC games of this ilk are measured.

Combining all the explosive shoot-first-ask-questions-later gameplay of Duke or Quake with an over-the-shoulder Tomb Raider-like perspective, MDK is truly a revolutionary concept in 3D gaming.

In the game, players assume the role of Kurt, a young protege of a scientist currently on an outer space mission. While the scientist is away, Earth is overtaken by aliens who plan to bulldoze and strip-mine the planet's surface, obliterating anything in their path. Armed with an assortment of destructive weapons and a few neat tricks up his sleeve (mainly the scientist's inventions), Kurt must stop the alien invasion by picking off the extraterrestrial bastards one by one.

But while the storyline is certainly nothing new, MDK does take 3D gaming to the next level with some truly unique features. Instead of the typical run-and-gun action of most 3D shooters, MDK challenges the player to accomplish some very difficult tasks--in addition to the mass killing--in order to proceed. Not exactly Myst-like puzzles or complex brain-benders, but things like figuring out how to get past a seemingly impenetrable wall, or how to grab a grenade powerup floating high above. Almost right from the game's opening sequence, you'll find yourself stumped with frustrating--though rewarding--regularity.

Another of MDK's unique innovations is the "sniper helmet" Kurt uses to target and annihilate enemies from long distances. Hit the space bar to toggle the helmet view mode and you can locate, zoom in and launch rockets at far-off aliens. It's an incredibly accurate and effective way of clearing out the hordes of enemies that lie in Kurt's path. As for Kurt's movement, he can run, jump, climb, look up/down and even swoop down off high ledges via his built-in parachute.

While the riveting gameplay alone would be enough to give MDK an edge over most 3D shooters, it is the graphics and the sound that put the game in a class all its own. The futuristic cityscapes (six mobile cities, 60 areas in all) are all dimly-lit and eerie, with exquisite light sourcing effects and realistic structural detail. Coupled with a booming, ever-changing

orchestral score, playing MDK is like being immersed in your very own sci-fi movie.

With attributes like these, there's no question that MDK is currently the PC blaster of choice.