

LAUNCH No. 22

Temple Of Twitch: Game Reviews

SPICE WORLD

(Psygnosis)

System: PlayStation

Okay, you're 28, you listen to Radiohead, you read *Alternative Press* magazine and your favorite pastime is body piercing and maybe a little multiplayer *Quake II*. So it goes without saying that you and your ultra-hip alterna-rocker friends are not exactly the intended audience for the new *Spice World* video game for the PlayStation. And while it's easy for an adult to spend five minutes with this empty-headed game and walk away thinking it's stupid, remember-- you are not the intended audience. Young girls, however, will devour this "interactive music experience" quicker than Baby Spice can down a chocolate éclair.

There are four segments of *Spice World* you must work your way through. The first is the Mixing Room, where you remix various Spice Girls tracks, including "Wannabe," "Say You'll Be There," "Move Over" and others. The different pieces of each song can be shuffled around in any order you choose, then recorded and saved for future playback. From there, it's off to Dance Practice, where you get each Spice Girl to wiggle around to the hideous mess of a track you just recorded. Next is the Dance Record area, where all five Girls--yes, Geri is all over *Spice World*--rehearse their moves for the last and final segment: the TV show! Once the Girls make it to the Television Studio, they go through their routine while you get to play director, controlling eight different cameras and recording the whole affair.

Admittedly, this game may have been more appealing to the older crowd had the Girls been blessed with detailed, Lara Croft-like bodies--but unfortunately, they're all rather bland looking, with giant heads and stick-figure bodies. The final segment of the *Spice World* disc is perhaps the most intriguing: the Spice Network. Here we're treated to an endless supply of Spice Girls interview clips (all wearing plain clothes and looking particularly unglamorous, truth be told), video clips, concert footage, *Spice World* movie out-takes, and even the infamous Prince Charles butt-grabbing incident. Stupid, maybe, but at the same time brilliant--just like the Spice Girls themselves.

--Jeff Kitts

GRIM FANDANGO

(LucasArts)

System: PC

LucasArts' new *Grim Fandango* adventure game mixes familiar elements and rolls them up into a wholly unique gaming experience. Imagine a world inspired by Mexican Day Of The Dead folklore, graphics similar to those in Tim Burton's film, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, and characters who all speak like the Taco Bell doggie, and you have *Grim Fandango*. Well, sort of.

As the game begins, you take on the role of Manny Calavera, a travel agent in the Land Of The Dead. Employed in the Department Of Death, Manny must pick up people in the Land Of The Living, bring them to the Land Of The Dead, and send them on a four-year journey across the underworld--an excursion all souls must make before they come to their eternal resting place. But as the game progresses, you'll discover that Manny's job isn't so simple, and that he's in a hopeless predicament that you have to get him out of. Navigating through *Grim Fandango*'s creepy, surreal world--a world where most of the game's 55 characters have a skull for a face--is pretty simple and should be familiar to anyone with adventure gaming experience. A joystick or the numeric keys maneuver Manny in the 3D environments, and the E, P, U, and I keys give Manny the ability to Examine, Pick up, and Use items and place them in his Inventory. Beyond that, making progress in *Grim Fandango* requires Manny to interact with all the characters (there are over 7,000 lines of dialogue) and solve various puzzles. Adventure gamers with lots of time on their hands will no doubt relish an innovative title like *Grim Fandango*.
--Jeff Kitts

MORTAL KOMBAT 4

(Midway)

System: PC, Nintendo 64, PlayStation

Difficult to believe sometimes that the *Mortal Kombat* series is still going, but it's obvious when you see games like *MK4* for the Nintendo 64 that it's still the king of the fighting games! But that's not to say that *MK4* is loaded with revolutionary new features or drastic changes in gameplay: No, the beauty of the *Mortal Kombat* series is that it continues its winning formula with each installment. Aside from the use of weapons (knives, bolts of lightning, spiked clubs, etc.) and some nifty new wrestling-style moves like piledrivers, backbreakers, and bodyslams--as well as

the new 3D arenas in which you can move forward and backward as well as side-to-side--the combat between such *MK* regulars as Liu Kang, Goro, Sonya, and Scorpion, plus the seven new characters, is pretty much the same as it's always been: But who's complaining? The *Mortal Kombat* series may have lost a bit of its panache after all these years, but it's still a blast to mash buttons and mix it up.--Jeff Kitts

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE

(Ocean)

System: Nintendo 64

Hard though it may be to believe, the *Mission: Impossible* video game for the Nintendo 64 is almost as confusing as the disjointed Tom Cruise movie it's based upon. But while the movie leaves you feeling empty no matter how many times you suffer through it, the game gets clearer as time goes by until it ultimately becomes a pretty engaging affair. Though getting to that point can be an exercise in pure frustration.

There's a storyline here, to be sure--but what it is exactly, I have no idea, nor is it really of any importance. Something about international espionage, murder, terrorism, whatever. What does matter is that you have to work your way through 20 difficult scenarios without having your true identity discovered, or worse, being arrested or shot. Each mission has a certain number of objectives which you must complete--in order and to perfection--then make a quick getaway. A multitude of high-tech gadgets, communication devices and powerful weaponry are at your disposal. The puzzles are difficult and rarely obvious--though figuring them out can be quite rewarding.

If the programmers of *Mission: Impossible* really slipped up in any areas, it's in the graphics and control--two important aspects that undoubtedly detract from the game's overall appeal. The graphics are far too soft and flat-functional, but rather unappealing. The control is even worse, which becomes abundantly clear as you spend time punching thin air or firing bullets in the complete opposite direction of your target. These glitches and the confusing nature of the game certainly take their toll here, but otherwise *Mission: Impossible* is a pretty absorbing spy game.

--Jeff Kitts

NFL GAMEDAY '99

(989 Sports)

System: PlayStation

Ah, yes, it's that time of year most wives and girlfriends detest--football season! Seventeen weeks of barbaric, bone-jarring Astroturf war. But pro football only takes place on Sundays, Monday nights, and Thanksgiving Thursday, right? Maybe so: but thanks to the you-are-there realism of modern day football sims like the new *NFL GameDay '99*, the latest from Sony's new 989 Sports division, now football can be enjoyed by beer-swilling couch potatoes 24/7. Sorry, ladies.

With *NFL GameDay '99*, the programmers have clearly focused all their attention on the two aspects of a sports sim that matter most: graphics and control. The players all look and move like the real thing, with impressive uniform detail and realistic behavior on the field (particularly the minor details, like the quarterback moving his head from side to side before the snap--one of many nice touches the game offers). Like other 989 offerings, the control is intuitive and natural; love that icon passing where the buttons on the PlayStation controller correspond to each of your receivers. Okay, so the game looks good and plays even better: but that isn't to say that *NFL GameDay '99* is perfect.

The more you play, the more you encounter minor annoyances that can hinder your overall enjoyment. For instance, while the game thankfully supports a gamepad with an analog control stick, all menu screens must be navigated using the standard digital directional pad--and the same goes for the kicking meter. The upshot of this is that you have to toggle back and forth between the analog stick and digital pad throughout the game, and there's really no call for that. The play-calling screen is also a bit cumbersome; it's easy to get lost in all the plays, and cycling through them seems to take forever. And while the in-game commentary is mostly standard fare--if a little boring--I thought I was hearing things when I heard color-man Phil Simms say, "Glenn Foley: he's one of those guys who always has time for kids." Please, is this a head-bustin', in-your-face video game or an infomercial?

There are more minor grievances--like no Pro Bowl option in preseason mode--but they are easily forgotten once you get wrapped up in the stellar gameplay that *NFL GameDay '99* has to offer.--Jeff Kitts

REDLINE RACER

(Ubi Soft)

System: PC

Redline Racer is one of those rare games that actually looks better than it plays, which pretty much makes the in-game demo one of *RR*'s best features; watching it is a thrill, but playing the game leaves a bit to be desired.

Redline Racer was clearly designed as an arcade-style racing game, which means that realism is not exactly its strongest point. As you whip around hairpin turns at 220-plus k.p.h. (excuse me, European programmers, but where's the miles-per-hour?) with ease, you'll notice that the control is good, but almost too good--one quick tap of the directional button on your gamepad and you're right back in the middle of the track, clear of danger. The driving physics are simply not realistic--though it does make for some pretty intense racing action.

Redline Racer also comes up short in the personality department. Aside from some fairly neat qualities, like riding through the waves that lap up on the beach, the game is in serious need of jumps, shortcuts, cops, or whatever else gives racing games like *The Need For Speed* and the new *Viper Racing* their impressive character. Basically, it's just you against 15 opponents on 10 winding street courses, and that seriously hurts the potential for any long-term replay value.

But oh, the graphics: *Redline Racer* offers some of the most detailed, picturesque surroundings you'll ever see, which is why the game is as much fun to watch as it is to play.--*Jeff Kitts*