

PUBLISHER Sony	DEVELOPER Insomniac	GENRE 3D Platformer	RELEASED Out Now	VERSION UK	PRICE £39.99	PLAYERS 1
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Can Sony's fire-breathing friend scorch the opposition?



Spyro the Dragon

Move over Mario, bugger off Banjo-Kazooie, cancel Crash Bandicoot - there's a new guy in town, and he's ready to set the 3D platform adventure world alight, in more ways than one. Spyro the Dragon is the new creation from the people that brought you the adventures of Crash Bandicoot - but don't let that put you off.

With the looks of a new Disney movie and gameplay that wouldn't look out of place in Super Mario 64, Spyro the Dragon comes to life on the PlayStation. It's a three-dimensional adventure game where you get to take control of a cute little dragon. This guy has stubby little wings, horns on his head and the ability to breathe fire. Plenty of potential for fun and games in a good gaming environment, then. No adventure game would be

complete without a plot. It turns out that all the dragons in Spyro's homeland have been bad-mouthing the dreaded Gnasty Gnorc. As punishment, he has turned them into crystal statues using a dastardly force. There's only one little dragon that escaped this fate, and that's Spyro. He's never been known for his bravery, but now he must summon up the courage to adventure off into the six worlds with six stages in each, freeing the dragons from their crystal cocoons and saving the day.

These worlds cover a range of styles, including The Artisans, Magic Crafters, Beast Makers, Peace Keepers and Dream Weavers, and each has its own boss and secret treasure stages to discover and conquer. The worlds can be accessed once Spyro has met the entry criteria. For some, it's freeing

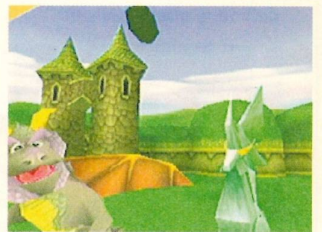
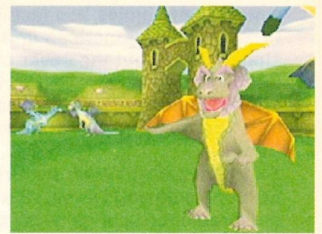
ten dragons, for others it's collecting the right amount of treasure - these tasks change throughout the game. With the task complete, Spyro is free to travel backwards and forwards between worlds using a balloon. The ultimate goal for Spyro is to reach the evil being who cast this spell over all the dragons of the land, and banish him forever.

Flying Tonight...

The 36 stages are a mixture of traditional 3D-adventure à la Mario on the Nintendo 64, with flying sections and treasure bonuses thrown in. The flying stages are reminiscent of an arcade game some of you might have played - Prop Cycle. In this game you had to pedal as hard as you could to keep your vehicle in the sky. Similar physics models have been used in these Spyro levels, where the object is to fly

PERIPHERALS

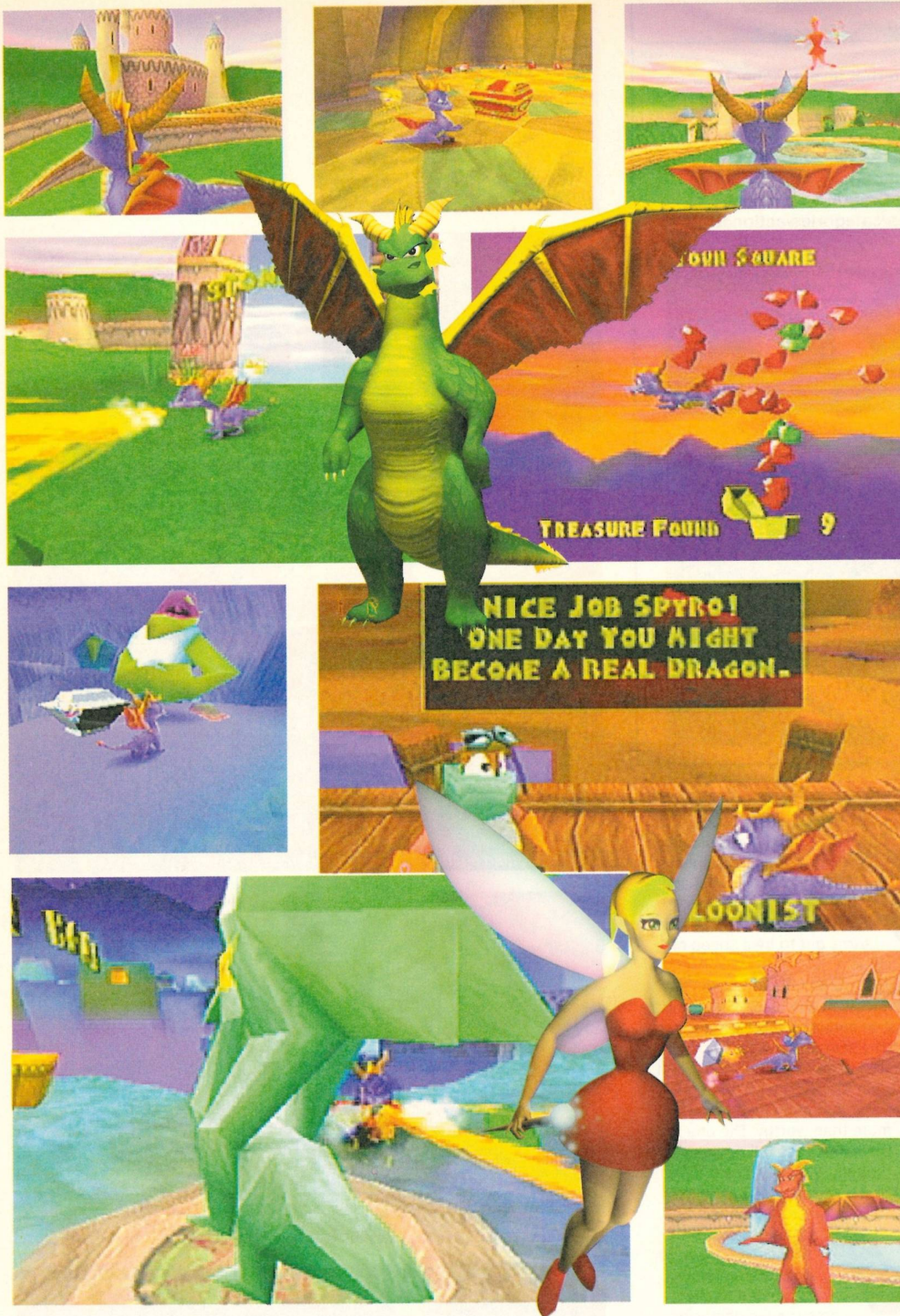
Memory Card Analogue



Insomniac have really paid attention to detail with their new creation.

through rings and collect items to give extra time; you always get the feeling the little dragon could drop out of the sky at any moment.

Continuing the Disney-inspired styling, Spyro has a little buddy who comes along with him in the adventure, Spaxr the dragonfly. This little guy is more than just a friend though - strangely, he actually



HERO AND SIDEKICK...

No review would be complete without a look at the hero of the story, and in this case his sidekick pal.

SPYRO THE DRAGON

He may look harmless, but Spyro the Dragon is the only hope for the dragons of his home world. The evil Gnasty Gnork has turned them all into crystal statues, and only Spyro survived the spell. Equipped with full fire-breathing powers, the ability to glide and his trusty sidekick and childhood friend, Sparx, Spyro has 36 levels of action to conquer. Good luck, little dragon.



SPARX THE DRAGONFLY

This little sidekick has been a friend of Spyro's since he was in his egg, and Sparx was just larvae. He buzzes around Spyro's head and acts as an early warning system for Spyro's health. Sparx can take three hits, and then Spyro is vulnerable. You can tell how well Sparx is feeling by his colour - if he's yellow he has full health, when he's blue he's down to medium health, green and his health is low - then he's gone until Spyro can find some butterflies to feed him up.



You're captivated by the slick presentation, gorgeous graphics and witty dialogue...

keeps track of how healthy Spyro is. The more hits Spyro takes, the less sparkle and colour Sparx has. You can perk up the little bug by killing the expendable beasts around the level and turning them into butterflies for Sparx to eat. Each level has its own beast-sheep, goats and chickens, and these are just a few I've come across.

So, I bet the question on your lips is, "How does a baby dragon survive in a world of whacked-out creatures?" Well, this little dude is far from defenceless. He can do all the usual things like walk, run and jump. Then, being a dragon with stubby wings, he can glide through the air to move further and to fly in the bonus treasure levels. Using his

horns he can charge at creatures, knocking them over. Then, with his fiery breath, he can flame, super-flame or fireball his enemies - a very effective defence mechanism.

Well Thought Out

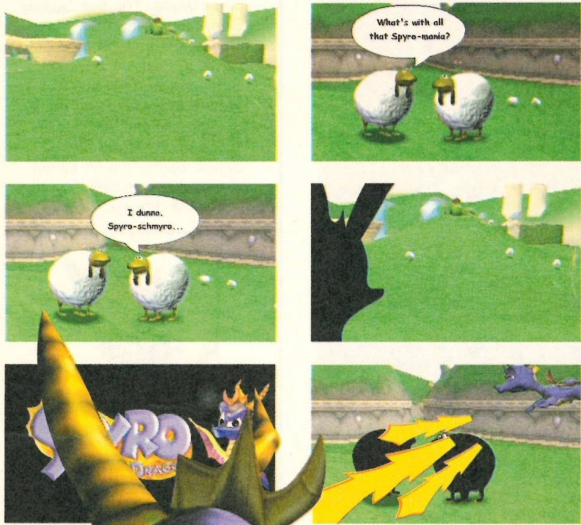
The developers of Spyro the Dragon, Insomniac, have really paid attention to detail with their new creation. Everything has been meticulously planned out to give the player something out of the ordinary, right down to the way the other dragons and creatures react to Spyro. For example, depending on how well you've been playing the game, the enemies might run

and hide, hit each other, fire cannons, throw snowballs or even moon you. This always adds a welcome extra dimension to any game, giving a new experience each time you play.

As games on the PlayStation get larger, we have all come to expect longer loading times between stage. Not so in Spyro the Dragon. The stages are streamed directly from the CD, so loading times between them (while Spyro takes a balloon ride) are kept to a fraction of a second, instead of the long pauses of other games. This really boosts the enjoyment factor, giving the game an almost cartridge-like feel.

CARTOON CAPERS ON THE NET...

If you're lucky enough to have Internet access, check out the DNN (Dragon News Network) on the PlayStation site. Not only will you find all the latest news and features from the world of Spyro the Dragon, but you're also treated to an exclusive cartoon to introduce the game, where Spyro sings two sheep who were bad-mouthing him. Nice one Spyro. You can find the Spyro the Dragon web site at: <http://www.playstation.com/games/categories/actionadvent/spyro/>



has stolen the dragon's eggs must be chased and caught to fully complete a level, precision gliding is needed to survive past certain sections and the first boss you meet seems menacing - but then turns out to be a sheep on stilts.

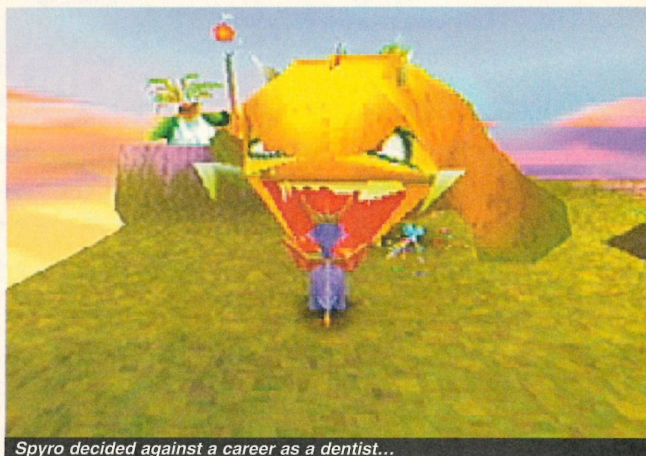
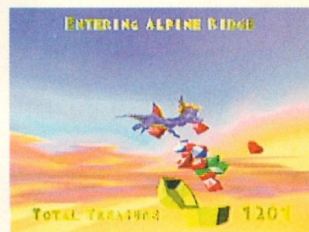
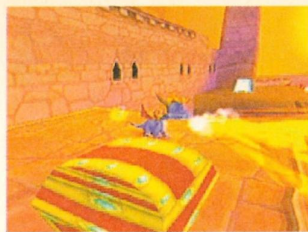
Now comes the criticism. The developers have really tried their best to create a 3D adventure game worthy of standing next to the Nintendo 64's Banjo-Kazooie and Super Mario 64 with Spyro the Dragon, and on many levels it's more than worthy. The one area the game does fall down on, though, is variety. The different worlds and levels have been well thought out, with challenging layouts and tricky manoeuvres needed to overcome certain obstacles, but when the main objective is simply to find and touch the dragon statues, you can easily become bored. Mario and Banjo give the player a wide variety of tasks to complete, so you are always finding new challenges. Sadly, you've mastered most of what Spyro has to offer in an afternoon.

Don't let my moans put you off, though. This is by far the best 3D platform adventure game I've ever played on the PlayStation, and I'm sure it's going to be a mammoth hit this Christmas.

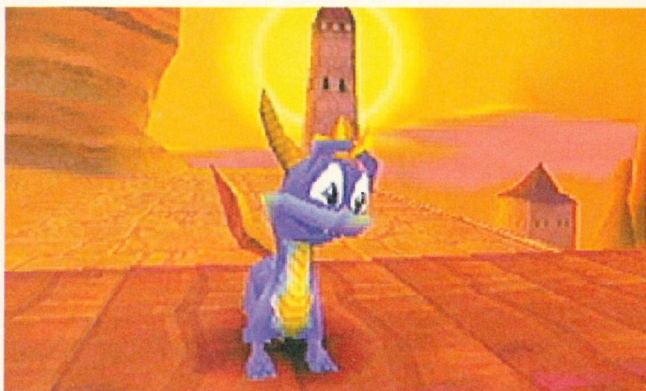
Doug Williams

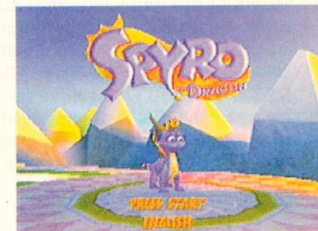
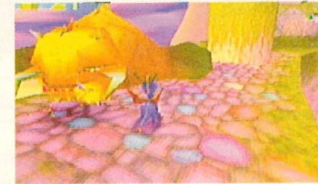
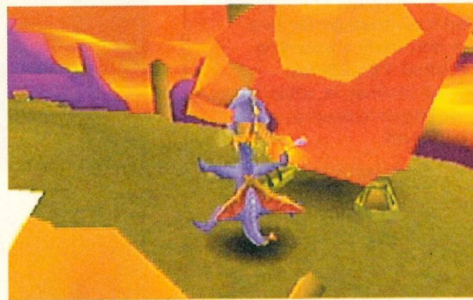
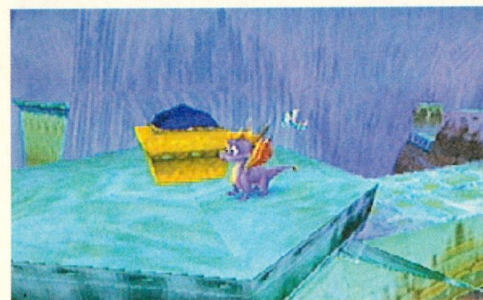
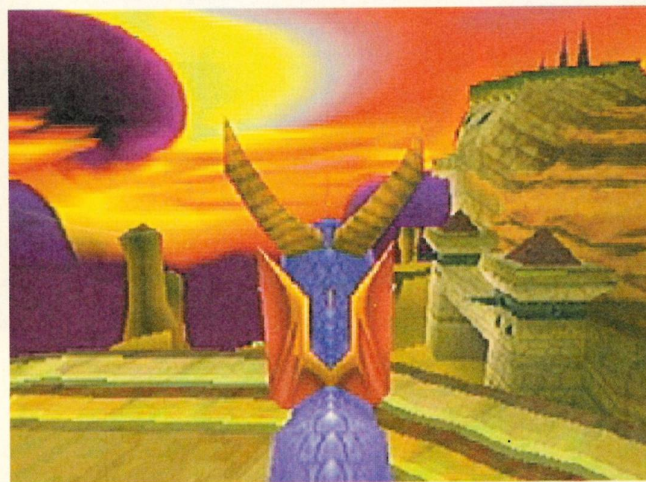
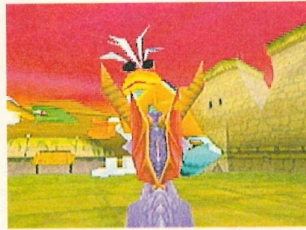
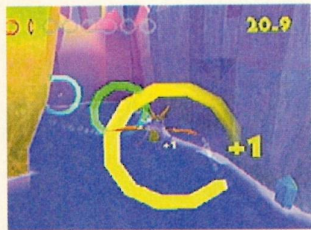
Slick Stuff

From the moment you set foot in the first world of Spyro the Dragon, you're captivated by the slick presentation, gorgeous graphics and witty dialogue between Spyro and the other dragons. The game really does gel together well, with a difficulty curve set just right, allowing you to make mistakes in the early levels, but becoming less forgiving as your skills improve. There are some really clever ideas packed onto the one CD too. A thief that



Spyro decided against a career as a dentist...





GENTLEMEN, START YOUR ENGINES...

If you want to know what a console can really do, you should never look at the first games to roll off the production line. It has now been three years since the PlayStation was launched in the UK, and we're just starting to see how well the console can be programmed when developers put their minds to it. Insomniac have done an excellent job with *Spyro the Dragon*, and much of the graphical richness of the game is due to the three game engines that all mesh together to create the 3D world. Here's a look at all three...

Environment Engine

We can guarantee you've never played a game with such a realistic environment. Insomniac have been quite innovative in what they have created for *Spyro the Dragon*. They have used multiple levels of polygons and textures with special routines that smooth the transitions between the levels of detail. This allows the game to have an infinite number of distance views, and still retain a high level of detail on closer inspection.

Cyclorama Engine

Cyclorama is a strange word, but when you learn what it means, all becomes clear. In most games, the sky in the background is made up of one simple image of clouds or stars. When the character moves, this is simply scrolled left or right to give the impression of movement - not in *Spyro the Dragon*. The Cyclorama Engine creates a sky that is a spherical mesh of over 5,000 polygons. This wraps around to create a sphere over the entire environment, so when you use the 'look around' feature, you're looking at an accurate representation of the sky at all times. There's no strange distortion of the kind we've all become used to in videogames.

Character/object Engine

Using similar techniques to the environment engine, the character/object engine creates the characters *Spyro* meets on his adventures and the other interactive areas of the world. Large numbers of objects can be shown together using these new techniques which means you don't get the pop-up problems of other PlayStation games.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT...

Sony, Universal Interactive and Insomniac have drawn on some interesting sources to create *Spyro the Dragon*. The most original of these has to be the source for the atmospheric music in the game, and the voice of *Spyro* himself. Stewart Copeland has created all the music. He's not that well known on his own, but if we tell you he used to play drums in The Police with Sting, you'll see just how distinguished a career this man has had. Since leaving The Police he's created many movie soundtracks, but this is the first time he has tried his hand at videogame music.

Carlos Alazraqui provides *Spyro's* mutterings during the game. Again, not a name that conjures up anything much, but Carlos has provided the voice for the Taco Bell Chihuahua in their advertising campaigns, and is also known as the voice of Rocko in the Nickelodeon cartoon.



SECOND OPINION

What an excellent game. Technically, it's unbelievable - show this to your N64-owning buddies and they soon stop crowing about *Super Mario 64*. The gameplay's polished too, though perhaps a little samey. All in all, great stuff.

Dave France

THE SCORE

▶ GRAPHICS	10
▶ SOUND	9
▶ GAMEPLAY	8
▶ LIFESPAN	8

90%