



**[1]** Different enemies are susceptible to different types of attack. Fire sorts out these wind wizards. **[2]** Freaky extra life in a box incident. **[3]** In the bonus levels you get to practice your gliding. **[4]** The bog stages are where things really get tough.

# Spyro The Dragon

Think Sony's *My Little Dragon* is just for kids?

Don't believe that real 3D can make a difference? That's what

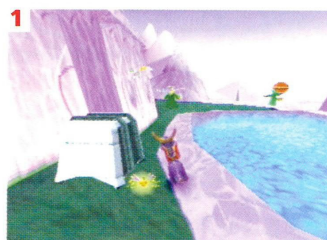
we thought until we took *Spyro* for an extended test flight...



**M**any games create 3D environments but very few create 3D worlds. You see, 3D environments are too often gameplay straight-jackets channelling you towards a particular goal, letting you look but not touch the wonders that unfold only after you've completed a series of tasks. Worlds are different. Like that thing outside your window they don't care what angle you examine them from, what you have or haven't done yet, they're just sort of, well, there. This is the liberating and (at times) disconcerting feeling you get when you play *Spyro The Dragon*. It's like the scenery and blue sky aren't there just for your benefit, that the nonchalantly evil enemies and oblivious local wildlife were busy doing what they were doing before you turned your PlayStation on.

Technically speaking *Spyro* is a platformer. Your job is to guide the little dragon of the title (use an analogue pad if you've got one) through seven worlds teeming with baddies, freeing your dragon mates and collecting stolen treasure. Like any platformer much of the action

involves getting from A to B. You see a distant platform with a dragon on it (they appear as rather fetching green statues) work out a route, eliminate the enemies and overcome the obstacles in the way and – izzy-wizzy – one less statue, one more grateful scaly friend. All pretty standard stuff if it wasn't for a couple of things. Look closely at Spyro and you'll see a pair of stubby wings protruding from his back. Tap the X button once and he'll jump, press it again while he's in the air and he'll open his wings and begin to glide. Height is



**[1]** Looks like a toaster but in fact this box contains gems. Your ultimate task is to Hoover up every last one. **[2]** The thunder druids need grilling.



PUBLISHER: SCEE    DEVELOPER: Insomniac Games  
 RELEASE DATE: October    AGE RESTRICTION: None  
 PRICE: £39.99    STYLE: Platformer



## FLAMING BUTTS

Faced with a villain you've got two main attacking options: the quick horns-down charge or a dose of your flame breath. It's a case of learning which enemies are susceptible to which attack. For really tough types or wizards who you can't seem to reach, use a nearby super-charge ramp with its distinctive glowing chevrons. Charge in the direction of the arrows and you'll take out the toughest of bad guys.



Scared out of his wits this frog-guard is about to get the horn.



Spyro's natural gas makes crisping these wizards a pleasure.



Find some arrows and do a super-charge to evade his defenses.



**[1]** These spiders are tough to kill. **[2]** You get a cut-scene every time you free one of the dragons. **[3]** Have a gander at the local scenery. **[4]** Ram a case to eject a jewel. **[5]** Spyro gets advice.

therefore important in *Spyro* for a very specific reason. While jumping and opening your wings near the ground won't get you anywhere, high up on a mountain top or tower it will quite possibly get you everywhere. Maybe the platform you need to get to is up on a pillar of rock, there are no stairs leading up it and you certainly can't jump nearly high enough. How do you get to it? First, turn away from the pillar and use the Triangle button to look up and around the local scenery, picking out a platform or ledge that looks higher than your pillar. Secondly, work out a way of reaching this new platform. Finally, ascend, throw yourself off and open your wings hoping you're close (and skillful) enough to glide like a scaly paratrooper onto your target. This gliding ability isn't anything new, the developer formerly known as Ocean used it in the

SPYRO'S LEVELS ARE SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED WITH GLIDING IN MIND, HENCE THE WHIRLWINDS...

ancient computer game *Batman* and in the more recent PS title *Jersey Devil*. What is new is the scale of glidage on offer. Unlike these other games *Spyro's* levels are specifically designed with gliding in mind, hence the whirlwinds that whisk you up into the stratosphere and all the towers, ledges and staircases whose sole purpose is to provide you with altitude.

*Spyro's* worlds with their tall escarpments, fortresses, caverns and pools are, far from empty places. There are two main types of inhabitant, the hench-creatures of head villain Gnasty Gnorc and each habitat's natural wildlife. Gnorc's flunkies vary enormously from charging rams and bulls to wizards, vultures, Napoleonic soldier-types, cunning Mexican bandits and their ample wives – all superbly animated and characterised. Each enemy can be dispatched in one of two ways: by *Spyro* charging at them horns down, or letting rip with a mighty blast of flame. At the start this is easy but the shallow difficulty curve gradually rises as some enemies turn up in flame-resistant armour or are just so big and tough that they're only vulnerable to a toasting in the rear. ▶

## CRIMESTOPPERS

While searching for treasure and freeing dragons you come across the despicable egg-thief who, now the dragons are out of the picture, takes the opportunity to kidnap unhatched *Spyros*. To stop him, hold down the charge button until you ventilate his rear. The more eggs you collect the more chance you've got of accessing the next world. Check your inventory to see if you've freed all the dragons first.



Knock this tea-leaf into the middle of next week. Take that!



Tuco pilots the balloon that ferries you between worlds.



Use your inventory to find out where the other dragons are.

# Spyro The Dragon

[1] Millions of years of evolution have given these frogs special flame-proof tongues. [2] When in doubt charge down the arrows. [3] Many of the enemies come in pairs. While the beasts can be killed with a good flaming the masters need to be rammed. [4] Don't fret, the violence is pure cartoonery. Watch your firefly, the duller he is the weaker you are.



► Goats, sheep, lizards, chickens – everywhere you go there are small critters scampering about, doing their best to stay out of your way. This is because while Spyro himself seems to have no appetite, Sparks, the little firefly who buzzes everywhere with him, certainly does. Why is this important? Because Sparks represents your current state of health. If he's glowing brightly it means you're beaming with vitality, take a few hits though and he'll sputter, become green and drab and eventually disappear – a sign that the very next hit will see you lose a life. But while Sparks looks after you, you have to look after him by providing butterflies for him to eat – strangely, these are prepared by flame-grilling any wildlife stupid enough to get close to your little dragon.

The one big criticism you could level at *Spyro* is that its laid-back pace is exaggerated by early levels that are far too easy. If you're a real platform veteran you're likely to amass a stack of lives going into double figures while wandering about saving dragons and hoarding gems. This is a game that's determined to be gentle with you, obviously a good thing to draw in occasional and first time gamers but it runs the risk of alienating or boring more experienced players. This is a shame because after the first couple of worlds *Spyro* becomes much more challenging,

IGNORC'S FLUNKIES VARY ENORMOUSLY FROM CHARGING RAMS TO... CUNNING MEXICAN BANDITS AND THEIR AMPLE WIVES.

introducing new power-ups, more complex obstacles and stronger enemies. Things can get very tough indeed with rampant dragon-eating trees, razor-tongued frogs and electric weapon-toting soldiers. Suddenly all those lives you collected will start to disappear and the prospect of having to free all the dragons and collect all the treasure recede into the distant future.

The sad thing is because *Spyro* doesn't fit the traditional platform game mould some will instantly write it off. Where are the switches? The puzzles? The all-important depth that hardened punters demand? You could play *Spyro* for half an hour and go away convinced that there is nothing more to it than collecting dragons and gems. Take the time to muck about though, to play around with *Spyro's* 3D world as it invites you to and you'll form a very different opinion. The switches are wizards that must be super-charged so that they don't have time to block entrances. The puzzles are how to glide out to seemingly unreachable distant platforms. The depth is in using objects within the world – cannons, towers, moving platforms and whirlwinds – to your advantage. Cynics beware: decide that *Spyro* is just a game for kids and people who normally don't play games and you'll miss one of the PlayStation's most accomplished platformers.

Pete Wilton

### Alternatively...

<i>Spyro</i>	8/10	PSM20
<i>Box 3D</i>	8/10	PSM22
<i>Cruc</i>	7/10	PSM25



## SUPER SOARAWAY DRAGON

One of *Spyro's* real pleasures is gliding. Whirlwinds can be used to lift you up to high platforms for especially long glides. It's worth experimenting and just gliding from the highest point of any level as this is the way to find hidden sections. There are also bonus levels that help you practice your gliding, the idea being to pass through as many hoops and archways as possible, collecting treasure as you go.



The stars whisk you up to the parapet.



Impossible? You need to gain more altitude.



Practice by flying through these rings.

### VERDICT

- GRAPHICS: Epic 3D landscapes and memorable characters **8**
- GAMEPLAY: Fun and intuitive but a little too shallow **8**
- LIFESPAN: The gentle difficulty curve halves its longevity **7**

Spoiled by a lack of challenge early on, scratch the surface and you'll find the best 3D platform game to date. It is charming and superbly polished.

**8**  
OUT OF 10