

# Reviews

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Developer Universal  
Publisher SCEA  
Genre Platform



## Spyro the Dragon



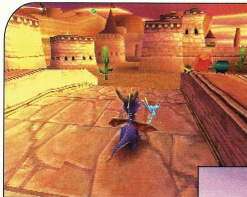
An entertaining title with a star-studded cast

**T**ime for a little quiz: What do Taco Bell, *Earth 2* and The Police all have in common? The answer? Why, *Spyro the Dragon*, of course! Featuring one of the most impressive collections of talent ever seen in a video game, *Spyro* sports a pedigree as distinguished as its unorthodox design. *Spyro* himself is voiced by Carlos Alazraqui, the man behind Taco Bell's ubiquitous Chihuahua, who also handled a portion of the voice duties for the 80 dragons *Spyro* needs to save. The majority of the rest of the dragons are voiced by Clancy Brown, who was seen as John Danziger on TV's sadly short-lived science-fiction series *Earth 2* (and has enjoyed a recurring role as Ellis West on *ER*), and heard as the voice of Dr. Neo Cortex in *Crash Bandicoot 2: Cortex Strikes Back*. And rounding out the mind-boggling cast is the composer of *Spyro*'s musical score, Stewart Copeland—yes, that Stewart Copeland, the very same fellow who put in all those years behind the drum kit for a snappy rock trio known as The Police, and a man producer Mark Cerny now describes as “honestly *Spyro*'s biggest fan.”

Now, a team like this can be put together for two reasons: Either Universal was hoping to generate more interest in the game by enlisting big-name voice and musical talent, or they were interested in presenting a truly distinctive take on the ever-growing character-based 3D platform genre. My bet's on the latter, and I'll tell you why.

### Something old, something new...

First of all, the gameplay is, if not completely unique, at least innovative enough to keep things interesting. The development team has adopted a slightly different focus with *Spyro*, opting to focus more on enemies' personalities than on their number and strength. The result is a game that may seem surprisingly simple in terms of sheer life-threatening challenge, but upon inspection reveals an equally surprising depth of character. Some enemies will laugh uproariously after squashing *Spyro* flat, while others will quiver in fear, only to turn and moon him (yup, you read right) when they think he isn't looking. That sort of subtlety is sprinkled throughout the game, and can get quite entertain-



I had to ask producer Mark Cerny whether the developers ever considered just going ahead and having Alazraqui do his Chihuahua voice for *Spyro*. His answer? An unequivocal “No.” It's too bad; I would have found the character far more entertaining.





Spyro's got surprisingly deadly breath for a dragon of his diminutive stature. It's actually a bit disappointing when he can take out enemies 10 times his size with a single puff. But then, if that weren't the case, size would matter, wouldn't it, and then where would their snappy marketing campaign be?



ing if you take the time to stop and pay attention to what's going on around you rather than rushing headlong through a level.

#### Less is more?

A similar situation applies to the game's level design. At first glance, Spyro's environment may appear unusually sparse. Look closely, however, and you'll notice that this is in large part due to the sheer size of the majority of the levels. Levels like the Tree Tops sprawl over huge areas, forcing Spyro to puzzle out how to reach some of the farther (and extremely carefully placed, I might add) outlying areas.

This generous use of space does help tone the game down from the usual hectic platform pace. Combined with Copeland's almost New Age soundtrack, this makes for a strangely relaxing experience.

#### Um, did you say "relaxing"?

OK, we're not talking Aquanaut's Holiday or Tail of the Sun here, but Spyro does make for a pretty significant departure from the door-die pacing of most platformers. Now, don't get me wrong, the

game isn't without its challenges; there's plenty on the 35 levels to keep you going for days (although "hardcore" gamers—those of you who actually stuck it out and got 100 percent on the original Crash Bandicoot, say—will most likely find it disappointingly easy). But this may be the first platformer I've seen which actually invites players to get every gem on every level, simply by making that an attainable goal from the start and carefully ramping up the challenge level as the player gets more comfortable with the controls.

Furthermore, the game is extremely pleasing to look at (typically superlative graphics from the developers of Disruptor), and generally fun to control, especially with the Dual Shock—I say "generally" because of the touchy edge detection, which can cause Spyro to slip from what seemed solid footing far too often.

A presentation unique enough to interest long-time gamers, coupled with a shamefully cute character and the relaxed pacing, may make Spyro an all-around hit. And although it's certainly not the most challenging platformer I've ever seen, it is one of the most enjoyable.

—Joe Rybicki

## Friendly Skies

## Box Score

Easily the most entertaining parts of the game are the Flight levels, the areas in which Spyro's stubby little gliding wings get a bit of a boost, allowing him to do some serious flyin'!

In order to pass these levels, Spyro will need to complete a series of objectives, be it lighting a series of lighthouses, taking out a small swarm of biplanes, or flaming a number of treasure boxes, making these levels somewhat reminiscent of the arcade title Prop Cycle. (A bit of a hint here: It

seems that, on most of these levels, the items are arranged in such a way that a



specific path will lead you past them all in the shortest possible time. Work on finding this path, and you'll finish the level in a jiffy.)

What's most enjoyable, however, is that after completing every goal on a level, subsequent visits to that particular level allow Spyro to fly around freely, to try for a better time or simply to spend some time diving and swooping and enjoying the scenery.

Furthermore, the very last level in the game is—well, I won't give away any secrets, but let's just say that in my mind it's well worth it to spend the time collecting 100 percent of the treasure just to gain access to that one level.



### Pros

- Non-hectic, "less is more" design philosophy
- Some entertaining enemies
- Spyro's just so darned cute
- It's a nice, big game!
- Unusual, new age-y music
- The Flight levels!

### Cons

- Frustratingly touchy edge detection
- Not enough challenge for the hardcore gamer

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Official PlayStation Magazine



Rating