



Treasure chests descend from the heavens from time to time, offering all kinds of wondrous goodies. Once broken open with a few shots, the contents leap out for you to pick and choose from. There's a selection of both good and bad bounty - smart bombs, shields, extra time, lives and energy are the predictable positive ones, but a lot more imagination has gone into the conception of the negatives. For example, how about an icon that transports you back a few screens, or poisoned fruit that sends you to sleep, wasting precious time or, most heinous of all, a skull that turns the screen upside down! Aieee! To make matters worse, the bad things aren't always bad - sometimes they may deliver a handsome points bonus instead, so you have to decide if you want to take the risk.



RISKY WOODS

Woo-oo-oo! Dare you enter the Risky Woods? Gary Whitta did, and this is his story...

Risky's a bit of a funny old word, isn't it? Unlike "Shwing" and "Cowabunga", it's not yet received worldwide recognition, and this is perhaps because it's not a very good word. If it wasn't for Jim Davidson and his hilarious "Too Risky" catchphrase and that boardgame, it would be very much in the Vauxhall/GM Conference of words. However, this is undoubtedly all set to change thanks to Spanish developer Dynamic (the team behind the execrable Army Moves and Navy Moves games among countless forgettable oth-

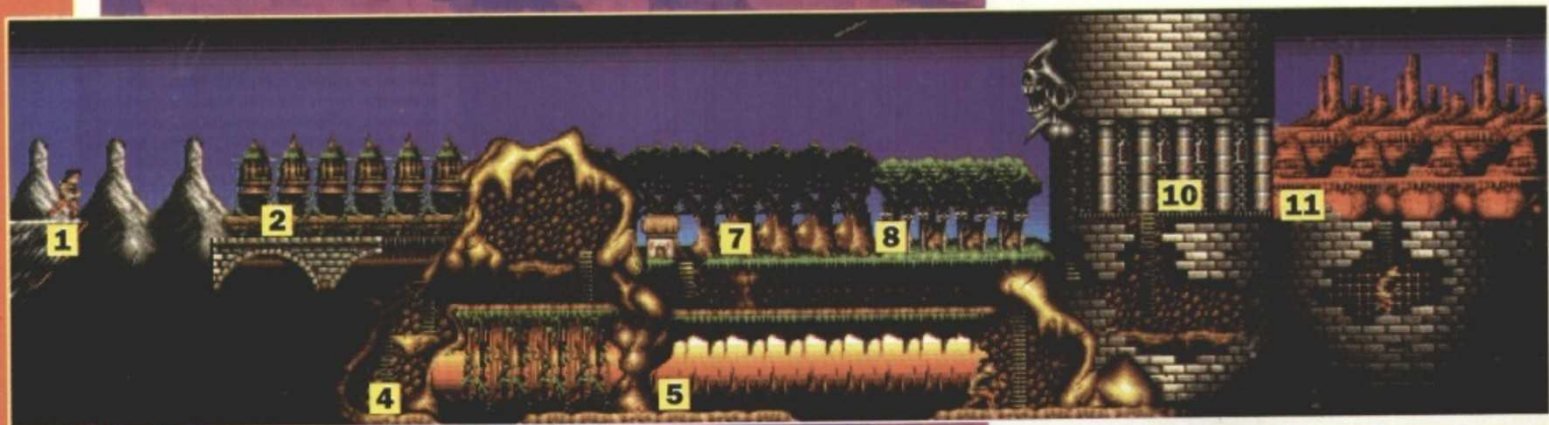
ers) with its long-awaited latest. The entertainingly-titled Risky Woods is a colourful slice of scrolling platform-based hack-and-slay action in the same vein as Switchblade II and last month's Jim Power.

The story (such as it is) tells of a mythical world called the Lost Land, where peace and prosperity reigns thanks to a bunch of wise old monks that look after the place. That is until the evil Draxos and his minions turn up, turn the monks to stone and draw a curtain of utter ghastliness across the land. As the headstrong young warrior Rohan, it's your job to enter the Risky Woods, rescue the stoney-faced monks and generally make everything dreamy again. Yes, yes, it's formulaic stuff, but I for one couldn't give a monkey's for the intricacies of the storyline, just so long as the game's a right royal laugh. So let's press on and see if it is or not, shall we?



Risky Woods consists of four zones, each made of two levels and each with its own end-of-world guardian. The object is simply to slash your way from left to right to the goal-line at the end. Prior to each level, this map screen appears showing a part of the Risky Woods world. A miniature Rohan shows where you're about to venture, with the map scrolling to reveal more of the world as you progress. Smart, eh?

Rohan comes armed with an infinite supply of throwing knives - ideal for offing the hordes of the undead that accost him constantly. These skeletal oppressors, which constitute the first part of the game's main opposition, are a real pain, attacking virtually non-stop - advancing just a single screen can take a while, as much of the time is spent just hacking them out of the way. They don't have any weapons, but if they touch you they explode, taking one of your hit points (you get eleven of them for each of your three lives) with them.



1 Nothing too risky here, just a bit of a warm-up for what's to come.



2 Slightly more risky now, as we enter the next, darker stage of the woods.



4 Lots of flying baddies in stage four, including demons and gargoyles.



5 The next stage is much the same, but with even deadlier pitfalls. Aaiee!

Just like in that old favourite *Ghouls'n'Ghosts*, each stage is preceded by a map of the Risky Woods world, showing you where you're about to venture in miniature. So let's make use of the latest screenshot-joining technology to show you the entire game world in one go, along with all the levels. The only thing we've left out are the end-of-level guardians, because they're best kept secret.



7 A trip into town for the next stage, complete with hordes of city guards.



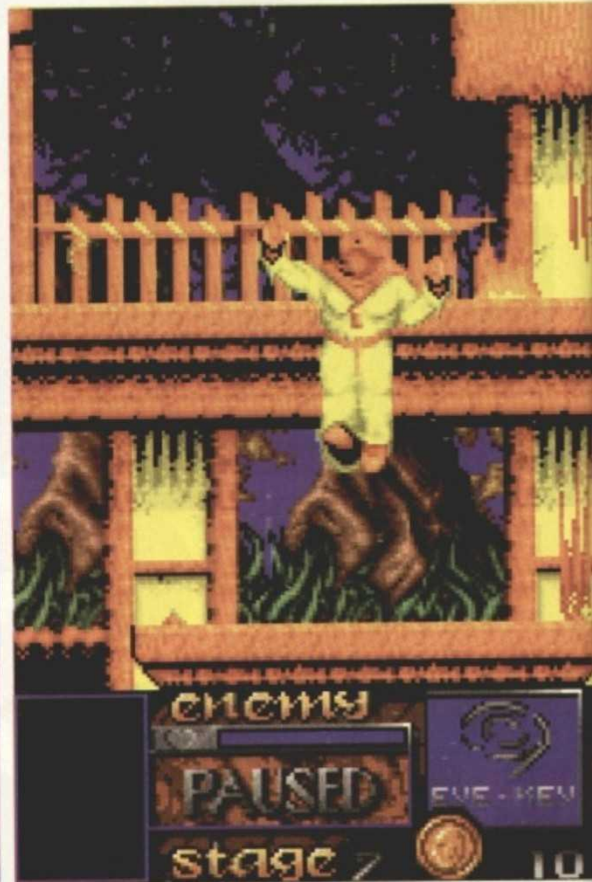
8 The urban violence continues, with more hacking frolics around town.



10 Rohan travels into the spooky castle, replete with guards and traps.



11 Finally, a danger-fraught trip across the desert wastelands...



Each level is guarded somewhere around the midway point by a tower with a big starey eye on top. Called an Eye Door, it's completely invulnerable to your fire and can't be gotten around, so the only way to progress is to destroy the tower by using an Eye Key, which has been broken into two parts that are found around the landscape. Simply collect both halves, then release the key when you reach the tower to blow it up with an impressive pyrotechnical display. If you get to the tower without the piece(s) of key required, you're spirited back to the nearest key piece, so you don't have to go searching. Oh, and if things get too bad, the Eye Key can also be used as a smart bomb.

So far so good. I'm at the start of the level and have a few seconds of shield. Off we go!

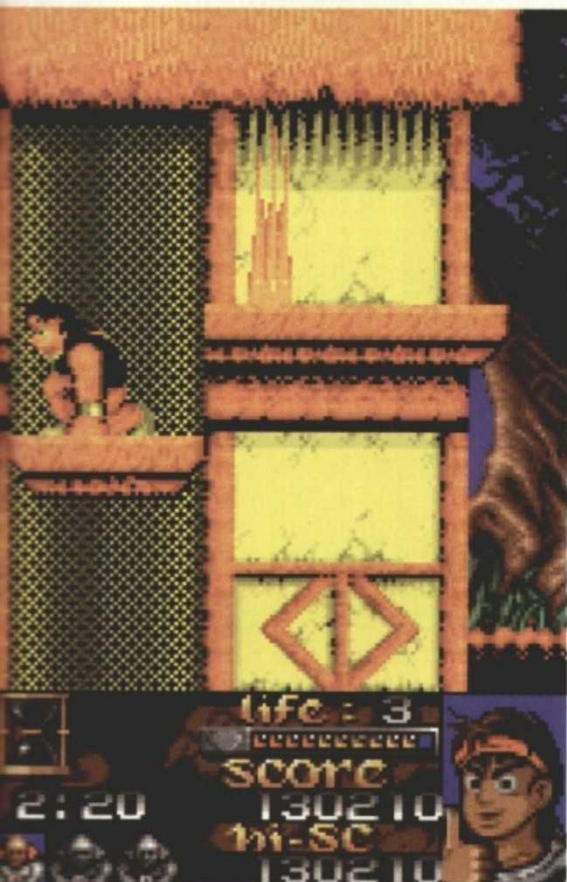
Aiee! Accosted by the undead! I shall kill them with my knives. Boom!

Luvvly jubbly! Shooting open the treasure chest reveals a large selection of goodies. Collect them before they disappear!

Bah, more baddies! Fortunately these ones are releasing coins when hit, ideal for spending in Ye Olde Shoppe later.



Some meanies, when killed, release a spinning golden coin worth five credits. Duck down to pick them up and they're added to your bank balance - but be quick as they flicker away after a few seconds. Rohan drops a coin or two every time he's buffeted by a baddy, and the whole lot goes flying when his last hit point is exhausted. It's well worth trying to keep hold of these, as they're used as tender in Ye Olde Shoppe at the end of each level.



Risky Woods' end-of-level guardians have a stage all of their own - the confrontation takes place in an underground cave with no platforms or ledges to assist you. Each guardian has its own particular modus operandii - obviously they get harder as the game progresses, with the final fight against Draxos being a real killer - although there's no major difference in the way that you fight them. They shoot at you, you dodge the bullets and shoot back. Generally it's the dodging part that tends to be the hardest, as they're very ferocious and have a habit of chucking an inordinate amount of nasty stuff at you. When battling a guardian, its own energy is shown in the status display, so you can see at-a-glance how many more hits are required to kill it.



Ye Olde Shoppe, found at the end of each of the twelve stages, is where you can top up your energy and, more importantly, trade in your crusty old knives for something a bit more special. Each of the four weapons on sale can be bought up to three times - each time you re-buy a weapon, its power is increased, making for a much more efficient killing device. The shopkeeper is a friendly chap, and if you want to change your weapon at any time, he'll happily buy back the old one, so you only have to pay the difference.

FIRE

A fairly smart weapon, costing 70 coins. For this you get an unlimited supply of spinning fire-wheel things. They behave exactly like the knives and chains, except they're a bit faster and do more damage. They look good too.

AXE

Oh dear, a bit of a duffer this one. Instead of travelling straight ahead, it moves in an arc when thrown, travelling upwards first then falling towards the floor. This is okay for dealing with enemies above you, but not so hot for general use as their range is limited. 90 coins is the asking price for this one, and it's a little overpriced if you ask us.

CHAIN

These work in the same way as knives, travelling in straight lines towards their targets. But they're slightly faster and more powerful, so well worth investing in for a measly 60 coins.

BOOMERANG

Now this is a tasty bit of kit. Complete with sharp spikes, these antipodean lifetakers are superbly effective in tight corners. They do, of course, travel outwards in a straight line, then turn round and come back, doubling its striking power at a stroke. If you've got baddies coming in from both sides, this is the weapon you want to have. A steal at just 160 coins.

ENERGY

Simple, this one. Energy is bought in single notches, with each hit point selling for 20 coins.



Level One may be the least risky of all the stages in Risky Woods, but it's got its fair share of perils, alright. So let's follow Rohan as he makes his way through a section

of this first stage and see how he gets on, shall we?



Watch your step - one foot wrong on this moving platform means certain death. The fire-spitting demon isn't helping much.

Treading on the logs sends a lethal boulder crashing down from above - good job you jumped back just in time.



Publisher: EA
Developer:
Dinamic/Zeus

£25.99 Out Now

Joystick/Keyboard

MEMORY 512K
DISKS 2

GRAPHICS



86%

SOUND



89%

PLAYABILITY



88%

LASTABILITY



84%

OVERALL

84%

THE VERDICT

After the likes of the excellent Myth, Fire & Ice and The Addams Family, Amiga owners have been a bit spoilt on the platform-based action front lately. And though Risky Woods has its faults, there's no doubt that it measures up admirably to that quality trio. More hack'n'slash action than the Mario-esque exploits of Gomez or Cool Coyote, Risky Woods is nevertheless an obvious attempt (and the latest of many) to produce a true console-style arcade game - the Japanese representation of the main character is a dead giveaway. Unfortunately it will have to be cliché city as I say that the gameplay in Risky Woods is fast and furious, with virtually no let-up or respite in the action from start to finish. If anything it's a little too tough, bordering at times on the point of complete foot-through-the-monitor frustration. Anybody who's played some of Dinamic's earlier games will be familiar with this - the Spanish must have special gaming glands that give them extra skill, as I'd warrant that Risky Woods is too hard for the average British gamer. Maybe it's just being a big girl's blouse, but there you go. That said, I immensely enjoyed my time with

Risky Woods - it plays very well, and the graphics, colourful and supremely well-animated as they are, wouldn't put a coin-op to shame. There are some annoying aspects, like the juddery movement of the central character, and the way in which you're sometimes forced to pick up objects you don't want, but there's nothing seriously wrong - the design is sound, and talking of that there are some superb tunes and spot effects to jolly the proceedings along. If you've got a high endurance threshold and reckon yourself as a bit of a master gamer, I'd recommend Risky Woods unreservedly as a long-lasting blast. Everyone else should at least check it out - it's a lot of fun.



Because Risky Woods only scrolls horizontally, it could hardly be called an arcade adventure, and you'd have to be a complete arse to get lost - but nevertheless there's a fair bit of leaping about the landscape to be done, via the many floating and sliding platforms, elevators and ledges. The constantly-moving nature of many parts of the background make timing a key factor, but on the whole the action is nowhere near as platform-orientated as, say, Fire And Ice.



Like all good platform games, a lot of the action in Risky Woods is all about leaping from ledge to ledge across deadly chasms. You don't have to be pixel-perfect, the game's too frantic for that, but you do need to be able to judge distances fairly accurately under pressure. This situation is aggravated by the fact that many of the more perilous areas are patrolled by 'orrible squawking bird creatures that knock you back in mid-air, often with fatal results.



(Above) When you come across one of the frozen monk-statues (each level has a few, as indicated in the status display), pump a few shots into it. The stone with splinter and crack, then finally explode apart, releasing the monk inside with a big BOOOM and some dazzling lightning effects. Only when all the monks have been released can the level be completed - miss one and you have to go back and do it all again. Doh! Beware also of bad monks. They're indistinguishable from the goodies until you open them up, when they unleash nasty energy things that sap your hit points. The only thing to do is try all of them and learn where the bad ones are so you can leave them alone in the future.



There are plenty of smart graphical effects to behold. For example, when Rohan ventures into a cavern it gets all dark and gloomy, limiting visibility and adding to the atmosphere. It gets a bit squinty after a while, but fortunately these sections don't last too long - they're just a bit of an interesting aesthetic interlude.