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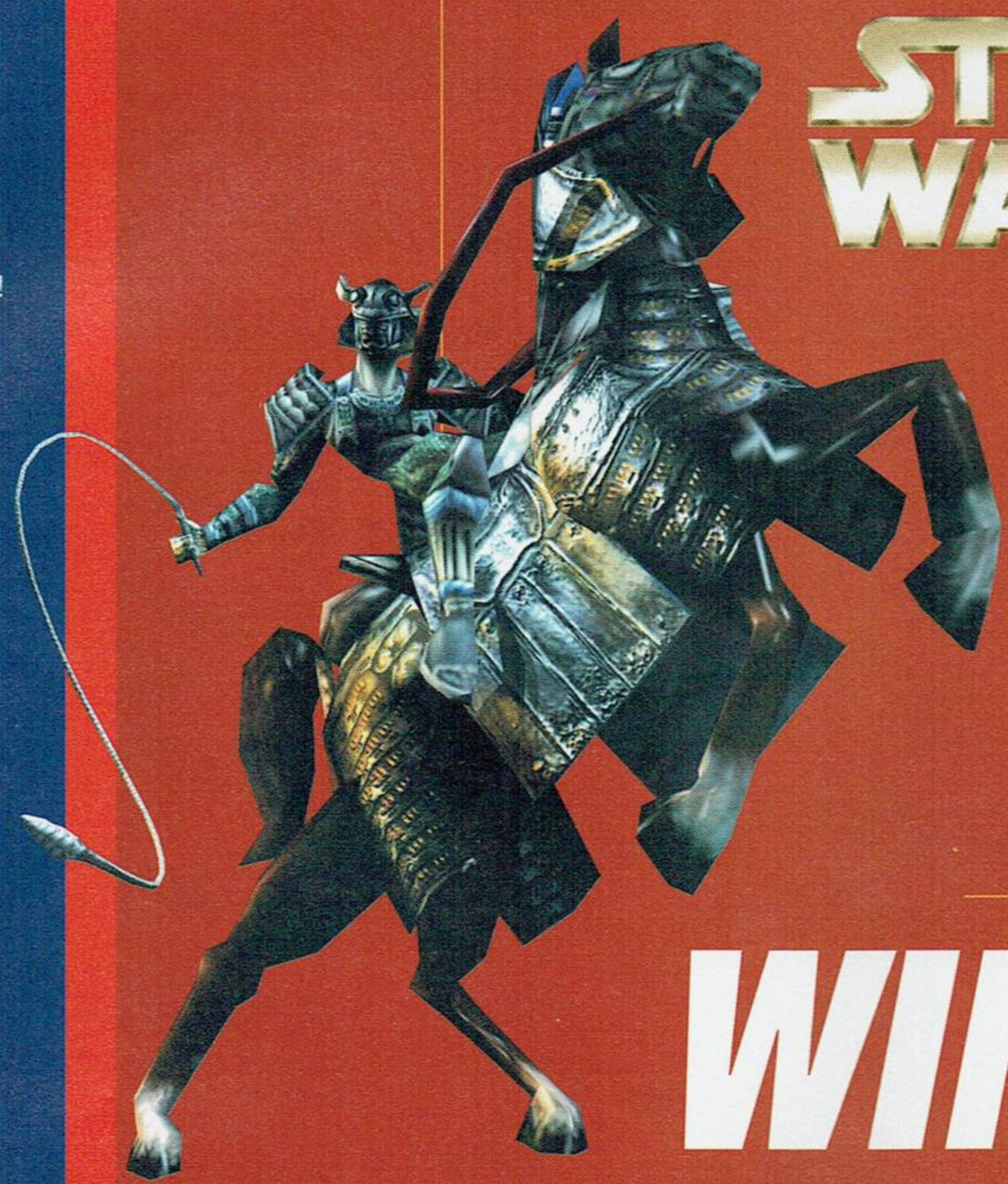

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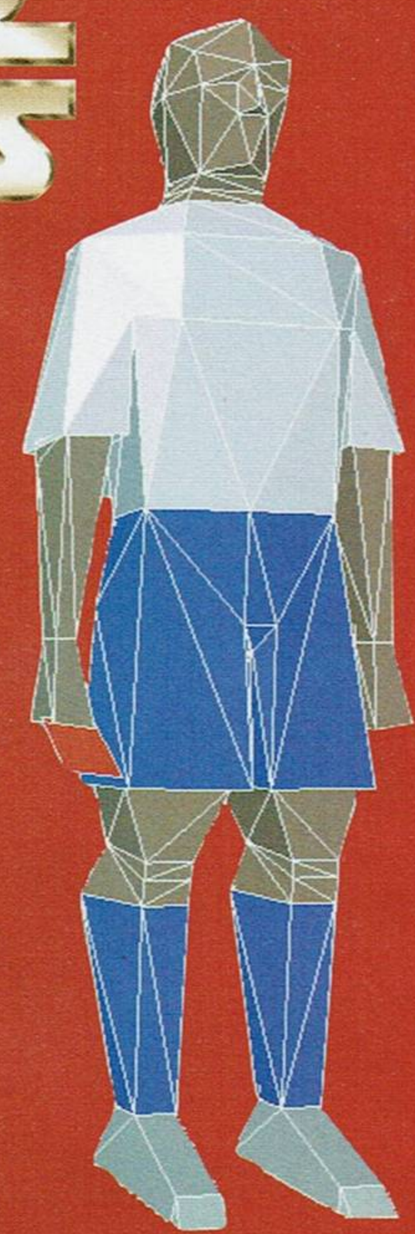

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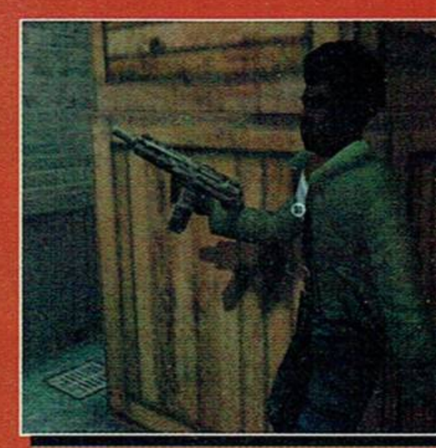

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SHENMUE
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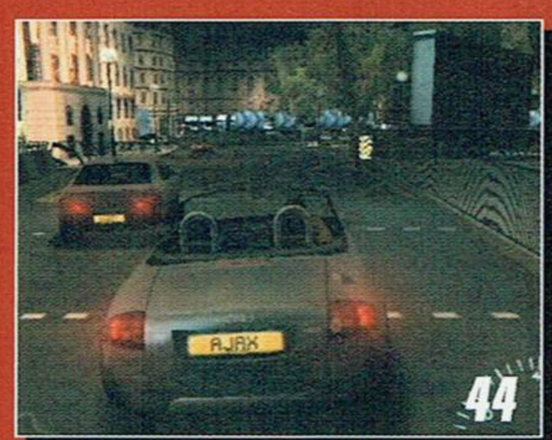

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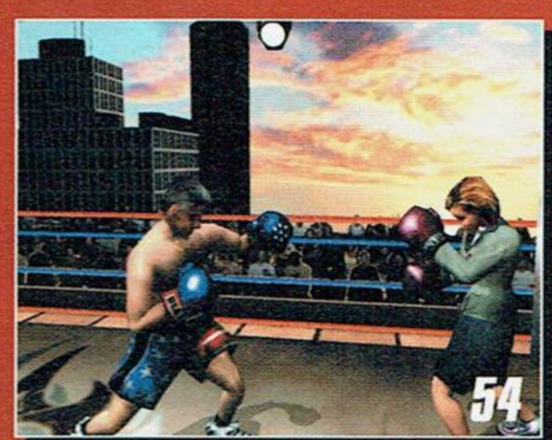
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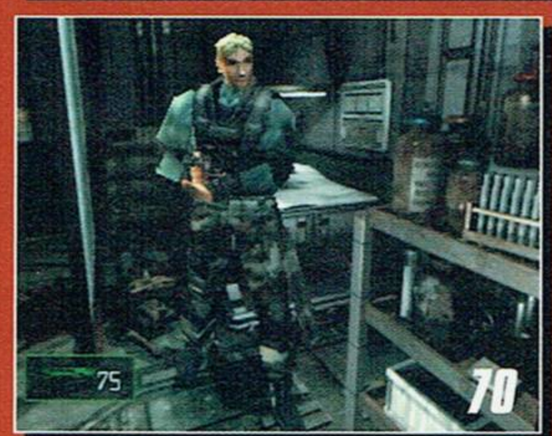

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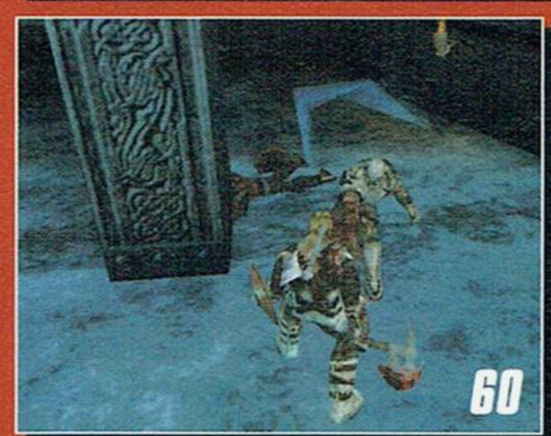
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HYPE IT UP

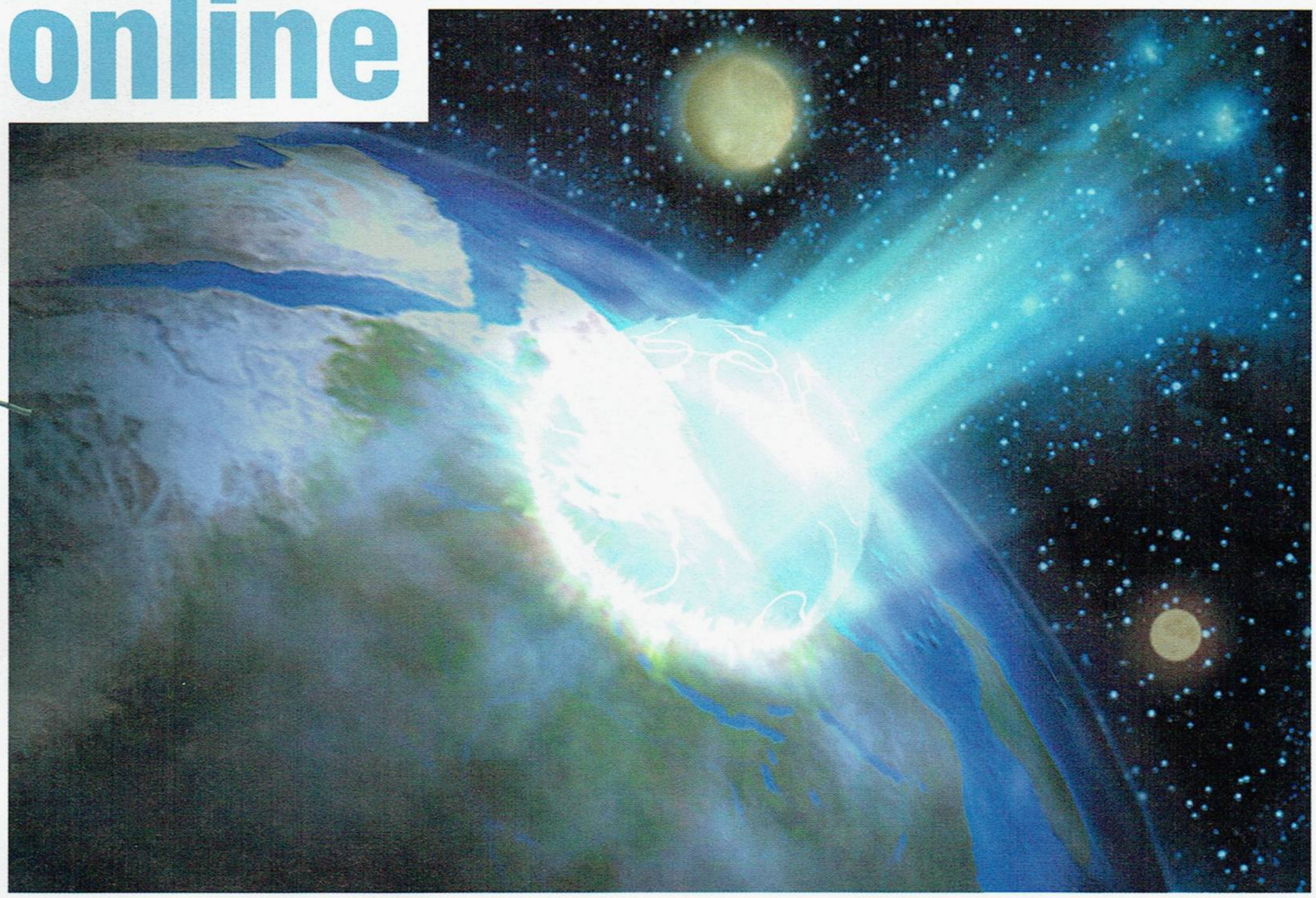
The Dreamcast has boldy tackled the year 2001 with a stunning adventure game that you just might have heard of... **Shenmue**. This is the kind of game the PS2 probably needed at launch. It's innovative, original and absolutely gorgeous, like nothing before it. If adventure games aren't your style, then how about the shatteringly good Metropolis Street Racer? The **Dreamcast** this month has nothing but style. Makes you wonder why some people are so quick to write it off in the face of 2001's hardware. Sure the **PS2**, **Xbox** and **Gamecube** will be more powerful platforms in the long-term, but the Dreamcast has had quality games and we're really yet to see anything on the other platforms that show as much polish and originality.

We'd also like to welcome back Lara "the undead" Croft to our cover this month... Lara has copped a lot of flak over the years, but she's still a pretty cool gaming icon and **Tomb Raider 5**, whether you like it or not, is good gaming. If she bothers you, just imagine that it's Angelina Jolie staring up at you! Oh, did I mention that next issue we will be reporting from the set of the Tomb Raider movie in Cambodia?

ELIOT FISH >> EDITOR

phantasy star online

"Character creation gives you the ability to alter everything from your costume through to your hairstyle..."



PLATFORM: Dreamcast
AVAILABLE: Early 2001
CATEGORY: Online RPG
PLAYERS: 1–4
PUBLISHER: Sega

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, THE IDEA OF PLAYING A massively multiplayer RPG on a console was pretty far fetched, but with the Dreamcast's online capabilities, Sonic Team have been working on just such a title, Phantasy Star Online. Unlike the old Phantasy Star games, which were far more traditional Japanese RPGs, PSO uses a fast paced real-time interface, making it play like a 3D version of Diablo, rather than the turn-based style used in Everquest. However, like Everquest, PSO offers a large 3D world to explore, and what a gorgeous world the folks at Sonic Team are creating for us. Lush environments both indoors and outdoors play host to 3D characters toting lightsabers, laser rifles, and spectacular magical powers... and of course the various monsters they're up against. The screen shots make it pretty clear just how gorgeous a game we're talking about here.

HIGH-TECH WEAPONRY

PSO is set on a planet called Ragol, which is a proposed site for colonisation for the people of a dying world. A ship named Pioneer 1 is sent to Ragol to set up the "Central Dome", which is essentially the base of operations on the planet. As Pioneer 2 arrives into orbit seven years later, the dome explodes, and contact with the first settlers is lost. This leaves us with a future-fantasy scenario, with high-tech weaponry and spacecraft, co-existing with magic.

Players can choose from one of three main character classes, Hunters (melee experts), Rangers (ranged weapon experts), and Force (magic users). Each class is again split into three variants, offering more diversity. Character creation gives you the ability to alter everything from your costume through to your hairstyle, to help make everyone look distinct, which is important in a game with so many players logged on at once.

Sonic Team are gearing much of Phantasy Star Online to revolve around teamwork, and players can form into parties of up to four, rather than no limit, which makes it a lot more manageable for the developers to create encounters and challenges that are suited to the party at hand. Some puzzle elements will require players to work together to get the job done, and it goes without saying that there will be countless situations where one character alone could not hope to take on all the monsters before them.

So players can communicate properly with other folk from around the globe, PSO will feature a simple translation system that will allow players to say a series of commonly used phrases and instructions, that will come out in the other players' native language (assuming they speak Japanese or one of the main European languages). You'll also be able to arrange to meet people at a certain time, as the game uses a time system called "beats", of which there are 1000 in a day. This is a simple means of having everyone use a single time zone.

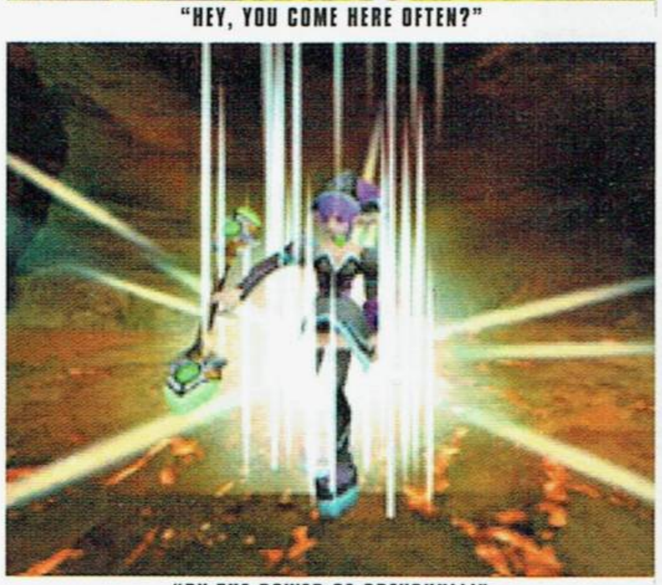
THE GLOBAL SCENARIO

Recent demonstrations of a PSO demo have taken place in Japan, and the result was a fast moving game with no apparent lag problems. How this will hold up on a global scenario obviously remains to be seen, and probably won't be known till we see a local release here, or get word on how things are working in the US, or the UK.

WOW-O-METER

KILL IT! KILL IIIIT!!

"HEY, YOU COME HERE OFTEN?"



"BY THE POWER OF GREYSKULL!"

YEAH, WHAT HE SAID

There are still uncertainties as to what the situation will be here in Australia, purely because Sega have not released details on how the networking will work for this title, but the plan has always been for a global game. Phantasy Star Online will feature single player gaming, which is something massively multiplayer RPGs have not had to this day, but Dreamcast owners should be far more interested in the prospect of participating in the first online console RPG. At least this ensures you'll still have a decent game to play in the event that lag is a problem for us here.

Phantasy Star Online is looking awesome from what we've seen, with amazing visuals, a fast paced real time combat system, and gameplay that not only encourages teamwork, but actually requires it, there seems much reason to be excited about Sonic Team's next RPG. All that really remains to be seen is how well the game will play for us down here, and if Everquest and Ultima Online are anything to go by, whether or not there will be an ongoing fee to keep playing the game. Due for release in Japan just before Christmas, the local release should be early in 2001. ■

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

No monthly fees. A one off payment to buy and play the game.

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LINUX-BASED GAMING? THE INDREMA CONSOLE EXPOSED

Lifecycle 2 Vol3 #4 04/01

NextGen

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STAR WARS STARFIGHTER
PHANTASY STAR ONLINE

PlayStation 2 ■ PC ■ N64 ■ GameCube ■ Xbox ■ Dreamcast

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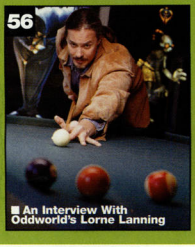

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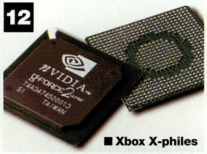

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■ EDITORIAL

Manifest Destiny

For those unfamiliar with the term "manifest destiny," it is used to describe a future event that is accepted as inevitable. The stories in this issue are in many ways tied together by that concept. Take Sega, for example. Many would argue that Sega's failure with 32X, Sega CD, and Saturn sealed the fate of Dreamcast before it even launched. Considering the company history and the strength of its competition, Sega faced an industry that simply couldn't commit itself wholeheartedly to Dreamcast. Despite a Herculean effort that resulted in some incredible first-party games, Sega has given up hardware for good. What's next for Sonic and friends? See page 6.

Microsoft's entrance into the console business certainly didn't help Sega either. Any industry insider will tell you Microsoft is really shaking up the market. Is the software giant with a tyrannical reputation screwing up the world of games? No way. The company has been proactively forging win-win partnerships with developers, publishers, and retailers. The plan is to see that Xbox isn't profitable just for Microsoft, but for everyone involved. That plan starts with a smart technology approach and a strong support staff that has enabled developers to get next-generation games up and running in record times — and we've got a stunning, 21-page look at the proof. The first Xbox games are actually running on Xbox hardware, beginning on page 38.

But there's another, smaller player out there with some radical notions about what a console can be if it doesn't play by the same rules as the big boys. Is the time right for an independent, underground, art-house game machine? The Indrema team told us so during our world-exclusive first look at their console on page 62.

Tom

— Tom Russo

■ There are numerous ways to communicate besides just plugging in text bubbles

■ The controls are surprisingly easy to navigate and nicely user-friendly for newbies

■ PLAYSTATION 2

Phantasy Star Online

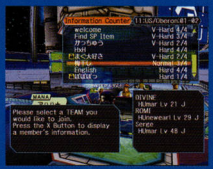
■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **Sonic Team**

Online role-playing arrives with a bang on Dreamcast

Sega's fight for market share in the console arena was a long, arduous one. Despite having one of the strongest software collections in the industry, ranging from the ground-breaking *Shenmue* to the excellent *NFL2K1*, there's no denying that Dreamcast never quite got the recognition (or support) it deserved. So when Sega and Sonic Team announced that they would be developing the very first online console RPG, we wondered if this would be the one title to put the system on the map, the reason for console gamers everywhere to join up and battle across the Internet.

And after spending countless hours duking it out online against hordes of alien monsters, while chatting with gamers from every country, we're satisfied that *Phantasy Star Online* is worth every bit of its hype even if it's not without a few chinks in its role-playing armor. In fact, *PSO* may at first appear modest to those already steeped in the likes of PC online RPGs such as *EverQuest* or *Ultima Online*.

At the outset, players are treated to the game's underlying premise. As a "hunter" on a massive space colony named Pioneer 2, you're charged with solving the mystery of what happened to the original Pioneer colony sent to inhabit the planet of Ragol. The Pioneer's crew has mysteriously vanished during a large surface explosion as your ship approached the planet. There's also a more personal story thread that involves a legendary hunter named Red Ring Rico who disappeared along with the Pioneer 1. But all this aside, any storyline within *PSO* has been minimized in order to accommodate the game's larger structure: multiplayer online.



■ There's a single-player mode, but it's in the online play that *PSO* excels, doing so with surprising aplomb

Although the de-emphasis of strong story elements in *PSO* will undoubtedly come as a disappointment to console players, especially those who may be eager for a continuation of the *Phantasy Star* series, the gameplay more than makes up for it. Players are given a chance to make their way through either a single-player offline mode or the multiplayer online game. Both are identical in terms of how play progresses and their mechanics: You beam down from the main city area and travel through four separate, sprawling dungeons on Ragol's surface, clearing

■ There's a lot of graphical flash on display here — you can expect a certain amount of pyrotechnics

rooms full of dangerous creatures and massive bosses.

Both offline and online modes offer three different difficulty levels: Normal, Hard, and Very Hard. The number of experience points, the value of collected items, as well as how tough and how fast each monster is, all change depending on which difficulty you choose. And in order to "complete" *PSO*, you'll have to build your character up (by traveling with friends online) to a very significant level in order to finish the game, single-player offline, in Very Hard — not an easy feat by any stretch of the imagination.

■ Many of the boss creatures are as large, detailed, and intimidating as you could possibly ask for — the character graphics are top-notch as well

The gameplay experience smacks of a (richly gorgeous, brilliantly textured) *Diablo*, with the emphasis on leveling your character up and acquiring that oh-so-rare item. And in practice, it's a formula that is instantly addictive and undeniably solid. With the inclusion of online multiplayer, you can also immerse yourself in the camaraderie of joining up with other live characters, something that previously had only been afforded to PC gamers. Sonic Team has included all sorts of clever communication tools in order to make the process easier, including a large set of preset phrases that can be instantly translated into several different languages. While the translator turns out to be rather clumsy in practice, the other features such as Guild Cards (sort of like electronic business cards) and simple email make finding your friends online or making new acquaintances a snap.

The entire *PSO* experience, in itself, is unprecedented on a console, and Sonic Team has seen fit to create a painfully beautiful and easy-to-navigate world filled with surprises, but it is not without its flaws. Because of the online gameplay, it's clearly evident that many things were sacrificed, including a cohesive storyline and complexity in dungeon design, as well as the gameplay itself. There are also some technical issues to tangle with, including lag and the more-than-occasional disconnection.

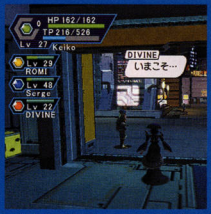
However, not one of these snags diminishes the genuine appeal and satisfying, addictive gameplay. As a testament to Sega's talented developers and Sonic Team's savvy gaming know-how, *PSO* is title that shouldn't be ignored. — *Francesca Reyes*

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Flawed, but absolutely phenomenal — reason enough to mourn the console's passing with an online wake.

MONSTER.COM JOB LISTINGS

Online or off, players are able to take on odd jobs now and then not only to earn a little extra Meseta (the game's currency), but to uncover some of the auxiliary storylines of Pioneer 2's citizens. The Hunter's Guild in the city is the way to sign up for these quests, which range from retrieving lost items on the planet's surface to convincing a man to save his cash rather than spend it all on useless weapons. As a throwback to the *Phantasy Star* series' Guild Quests, *PSO*'s odd jobs are necessary to beef up your bank account. And the cool thing is that Sonic Team also plans on adding more to both the online and offline modes and to make the additions available by download. Can't argue with that.



■ If this doesn't look like any other RPG you've ever played, don't let that throw you, because you'd miss out on a rare experience

■ Talking to other folks from around the world has its own innate appeal, and *Phantasy Star Online* lets you do just that

Attachment T

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official game site

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Phantasy Star Online

SEGANET SIGN UP NOW

Publisher: Sega of America

Players: 1; 1 to 4 online

Developer: Sonic Team

ESRB: Teen

Release: 01/23/2001

Platform: Dreamcast

Genre: Action/Adventure

Net Support: Yes

Peripherals: Visual Memory Unit (VMU), Controller, Keyboard

screenshots

In the history of RPGs, one series has always been on the forefront of innovation. The first one helped define a genre, while the second ushered in the age of 16-bit RPGs. Now, the dawn of a new world is at hand. Sonic Team presents *Phantasy Star Online*, the first massively multiplayer RPG designed for a home console. Using the Dreamcast modem, connect to the *Phantasy Star* universe and explore distant lands populated with real players like you. Chat, exchange items and information, and go into battle with players from all over the world -- all in real-time. With *Phantasy Star Online*, RPG gaming has no boundaries.

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- Multiplayer RPG action over a worldwide network. Play with people from America, Japan, and Europe!
- Collaborate with other players to slay monsters and achieve goals in a real-time battle system.
- Advanced chat feature allows conversation without language barriers.
- Swatch's BEAT system unites the world with a single time zone.
- Designed by Sonic Team.

Weekly maintenance of the United States Phantasy Star Online servers will occur every Wednesday morning at approximately 9:00 AM (PST) and will last for up to two hours. During this period of time, you may not be able to connect to the US servers. Thank you for your patience.

SEGA SPORTS visit segasports.com

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April 6, 2001

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Phantasy Star Online is Hot

Gamers throughout the world are logging on. Find out how many.

April 6, 2001

So you've logged on to Sega and Sonic Team's *Phantasy Star Online* for some never-before-seen Online console adventuring, eh? Don't feel too special. Reports out of Japan indicate that nearly a quarter of a million people throughout the world have done just that, making this one of the most populated Online worlds ever.

The official figure is 235,000 people, split across the world as follows:

- Japan (release 12/21/2000): 130,000
- America (release 1/31/2001): 70,000
- Europe (release 2/16/2001): 35,000

Looks like Japan is leading the pack, despite a monthly fee.

In addition to offering up these stats, Sega mentioned that the current high for simultaneous connectivity throughout the world is 26,000. That means, at its peak, the game had 26,000 people Online simultaneously.

Don't expect these numbers to cap off here, though. Sega plans to get more people Online with *PSO* through upcoming network events. These events are proving to be quite popular, with the recent Japan-only Famitsu/Sega tie-up, Famitsu Cup, having a total participation of over 70,000. And, of course, there is the upcoming release of *Phantasy Star Online version 2*. Currently, this update is only planned for Japan, but we suspect it will eventually make its way over to America as well.

-- *Anoop Gantayat*, *Contributor*

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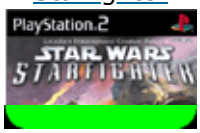

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PSO Registrations Soar

4/6/01 12:21 Sega

Sega announced that it gained more than 35,000 new *Phantasy Star Online* registrants in March, bringing the worldwide total of online registrations to over 235,000. At any given time, up to 26,000 people are playing the game simultaneously on secure servers around the world.

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heading to Game Boy Advance, and with a few tweaks, it might just be good!

Red Faction (PS2)

[Sony Feature]
Red Faction is almost here and it's better, faster and more fun than we even thought possible. Check out a huge gallery and movies from all-new levels.

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[Showbiz Review]
Director Ted Demme takes a great story... and *blows* it.

Xbox vs. PS2: The Year To Year Comparison

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Are You Spying Or Stalking?

[Direct Hit Greatest Hits Week]
The line can be blurred at times.

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Gaming Maxx: Sega Dreamcast

Phantasy Star Online

» Updated: 01.22.2001

Connect to the Phantasy Star universe and explore distant lands populated with real players like you...

In the history of RPGs, one series has always been on the forefront of innovation. The first one helped define a genre, while the second ushered in the age of 16-bit RPGs. Now, the dawn of a new world is at hand. Sonic Team presents Phantasy Star Online, the first massively multiplayer RPG designed for a home console. Using the Dreamcast modem, connect to the Phantasy Star universe and explore distant lands populated with real players like you. Chat, exchange items and information, and go into battle with players from all over the world--all in real-time. With Phantasy Star Online, RPG gaming has no boundaries.

Prepare to enter the sprawling sci-fi fantasy universe of "Phantasy Star Online," as quest-seeking players from across the globe unite online via SegaNet. When the first "Phantasy Star" installment launched on Sega Genesis, it amazed gamers with detailed 3D labyrinths, vast free-roaming landscapes, and endless hours of non-linear gameplay. Building upon its legacy, this new story begins with a scout crew descending from space to investigate an explosion on the Phantasy Star planet. Being the first fully networked console-based RPG, "Phantasy Star Online" for Sega Dreamcast will create a community unlike any other. Allowing up to four people to take part in each mission, this is the largest amount of participants per quest that have ever been possible for a console RPG. Using their own ID numbers, players will coordinate their adventures in this expansive world by using a special feature to alert and attract other players who want to partake in the proposed quest. Communication involves a translation-based "keyword" system using a standardized set of phrases and symbols which enables players of all nationalities to interact with one another sans the language barrier impeding gameplay. Developed by Yuji Naka and his Sonic Team, whose members include some of the original "Phantasy Star" developers, there is no doubt that fans of the franchise will be pleased.

Features:

- The first fully networked multiplayer RPG for a console via SegaNet
- The game will support up to four players in online games
- Standardized set of phrases and symbols allow for global interaction among players

STATS

Gene	RPG
# Players	4 Netplay
# Disc	1
Developer	Sonic Team
Publisher	Sega
Net Play	Yes
ESRB	T

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- This milestone setting four-player mission is the largest amount of players per quest that have ever been possible for a console RPG
- Developed by Yuji Naka and his Sonic Team, whose members include some of the original "Phantasy Star" development team

» **Marques Hicks**

Screen Shots:

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-

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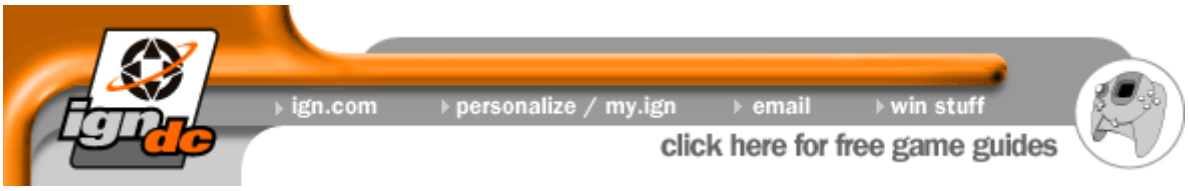

January 31, 2001

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Dreamcast > reviews > Phantasy Star Online

Phantasy Star Online

DC gamers have been waiting for a good reason to get online. And here it is.

January 31, 2001

Online gaming has been something of a xxxx for the Dreamcast. When the Dreamcast launched, it was touted as the next step in getting gamers together. And while it took SEGA almost a full year before we got our first true taste of online gaming with *Chu Chu Rocket* (sorry, playing by email with *Sega Swirl* didn't cut it), the Dreamcast has a pretty good line-up of online games. Whether it was blowing your friends into smithereens with *Quake III Arena*, sacking the quarterback in *NFL2K1*, taking it to the hole in *NBA2K1* or competing against online players in other Dreamcast online games, SEGA fanatics could interact with online players in almost every way... except one. As much as we love to compete against other players, DC gamers haven't could really play together as it has been limited to two-on-two sports games and team battles in ranching mice. Additionally, there hasn't been much of a large online gaming community to center around those online games (especially to all those guys who can't stand losing and pulled out on me

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Game Info

Publisher
Sega

Developer
Sonic Team

Genre
RPG

Origin
Japan

Number of Players
4

Net Support
SegaNet Support

Jump Pack
Yes

Release
Jan. 30, 2001

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when I was leading 27-0 in *NFL2K1*). There hasn't been a real good reason to get online and STAY online with your Dreamcast because no DC online game has made gamers come back to play together. That's probably explains why I haven't seen the huge number of online gamers that I thought would be on, and instead, I've seen fewer and fewer.

You think Cloud had a big sword? I'll show you a big sword!

Well, now there's a reason to get back on and, believe it or not, keeping back on and staying. No, it's not a *Street Fighter* game online, and as much as I would love to see something like that, this new Dreamcast game is bigger than that. Nor is it *Daytona Online Network Racing*, and while that's pretty big, it's not coming out quite yet... and it's not as big as this game, either. Woah... pretty big words there, huh? Well, that's how big *Phantasy Star Online* is, as it becomes the first real-time, online multi-player, console game in video game history. And having played *PSO* through a countless number of sleepless nights, with several different players online, and even through all the hardships I've encountered when playing *PSO*, I find myself STILL playing this game and I will definitely be playing *PSO* for many months to come. With Sonic Team leading the way, *Phantasy Star Online* is one of the best Dreamcast online games I've played.

When encountering numerous enemies, the fusion bomb-like spell will be most helpful..

Ice, ice, baby....

Offline Is Another Story

Noticed, I said *Phantasy Star Online* is one of the best online games I've played instead of just calling it "one of the best games". There's a reason for this, dear readers, leading me to one of the biggest oversights of *Phantasy Star Online*. With the huge brand name of the legendary SEGA RPG series, the story behind *Phantasy Star Online* is shockingly non-existent. For the hardcore *Phantasy Star* maniacs, the time frame of the story seems to take place after the happenings of *Phantasy Star IV*, but it's not exactly clear how many years have passed. Your homeworld is dying and in this emergency, "Project Pioneer" is conceived. Sending out probes all over the galaxy in order to find a new planet, when a potential planet was found the first colony ship, Pioneer 1, was sent out to establish a new colony on this planet. Seven years pass and Pioneer 2, packed

full with refugees, is orbiting the new planet, Ragol. Establishing communication with Pioneer 1 on the planet's surface, before Pioneer 2 can land, a huge explosion occurs. All communication is lost and this is where you come in. As one of many hunters on board Pioneer 2, you're hired to go down to the planet and find out what the heck happened.

Sounds like a beginning to a great story, right? Well, that's all you get folks. From there, you basically take your character through numerous dungeons into the source of all the evil. Along the way, you'll get text messages that try to enhance the story of the game, and there are side quests that also try to enhance the overall plot of the game. But it doesn't work; the text messages are a mix of hints on how to deal with enemies, and the side quests aren't very exciting in general. But probably the biggest disappointment when it comes to the story is the lack of good ending. I'm not going to spoil the ending for you dear readers, but after playing through the game on hardest difficulty, and going through all the hard work to level my Ranger to level 75, it was a huge letdown not to see something really special when beating the game on very hard. And you think that after such a downer, I'd stop playing *PSO*. And that's the funny thing about this; even after a mediocre ending, and a couple of hours of venting, I picked up my DC controller, logged online, and started playing again. Was it because I couldn't get enough of the oh-so-good visuals that decorate the world of *PSO*? Maybe... Perhaps it's because I enjoyed playing online with the number of editors who have also slaved through the game with me; it's always fun to play online games with cool people. But for me, I kept going because of a very simple reason – it's fantastically addictive.

Diabolically Addictive

If Sonic Team had to give us a meager story for *Phantasy Star Online*, you know they had to balance it out with a wealth of gameplay. First off, is the amount of customization the game permits; with nine different character types to choose from, each with numerous edit options to make your character look unique, Sonic Team didn't stop there. With online gaming, Sonic Team knew standing out from a crowd of online gamers is important and gave *PSO* the ability to customize messages and symbol. As you may or may not know, playing *PSO* online will enable players around the world to get together. Since not everyone speaks English, the symbol chat interface allows you to get basic communication across through happy faces, angry expressions, and other default symbols. You can also edit your own symbols (up to 12) to your own liking, and I've seen some hilarious ones. Of course, you can't always type (whether on DC pad or keyboard) while in the midst of battle, and the game allows you to shortcut phrases to specific keys on the DC pad (up to 8 shortcuts) and on the keyboard (up to 12).

Then comes the MAGs, and if you've been reading up on our previews and such, you've probably seen them but wondered the heck are they. MAGs are the hovering little buddies behind your character and are essential in your character's progress. While your character levels up through the normal means of killing monsters, you actually have to "feed" your MAG utility items (i.e. cure items, antidotes, etc.,) to increase your MAG's abilities. You can "feed" your MAG every five minutes or so and by increasing its abilities, it will also increase you abilities dependent upon what items you feed it. MAGs evolve into different shapes of sizes depending how well you take care of them, and each character will have a different looking MAG, be it Ranger, Hunter, or Force. All this customizing and editing is pretty darn cool and I've spent many hours making my own custom symbols and "feeding" my MAG the proper "foods". Though I spent quite a bit of time making my character unique with all this editing, I have to say the biggest reason why I came back to *PSO* is because the game is just too damn addicting. In a similar way to *Diablo*, even at level 75, I always have this nagging feeling that there's some better item out there I don't have, some better weapon that'll really kick more arse than the one I have, or a suit of armor that's just god-like... anyone who's played *Diablo* know that sensation. And when I start going on that item hunt, then comes the experience points factor. Just when I'm going to call it a night, I look at how many experience points I have and if it's 2000 or less, I keep going... till I'm way past that. This addictivity is doubled when you play with players online. Teaming up with three players (four to a game maximum), more enemies come out and with more enemies, comes more items and experience points. But whether you play it online or offline, the spectacular visuals remain the same, and I have to say that this is one of the finest looking DC games.

Whether it's the wonderful intro sequence, the exhaustive detail of the each character, or the enormous boss monsters, *Phantasy Star Online* doesn't disappoint at all in the visual department and you'll definitely know what I mean once you start taking a stroll in the city. Right from the get-go, you're greeted with graphics that destroys anything you've seen on a console. In the city, you'll be amazed at the detail of the metallic floor, the pulsating colorful lights, the gorgeous nurses...er, um, nevermind. And once you teleport down to the forest, DEAR LORD! The forest greets the player with stunning, vibrant colors, a grand blue sky... it's just a feast for the eyes. And with every level you progress through, the more incredible the visuals get. And then come the bosses... even the first level boss is about 10 times the size of your character. And the get bigger, more intricate, and a whole lot tougher. Thankfully, you don't have to face these nasties alone.

Support Dreamcast Online Obviously, the biggest feature for *PSO* is the online, multi-playability. With eight US servers, each server split up into 10 blocks, you shouldn't have a problem

finding anyone to team up with. Once you meet someone in a lobby, you can chat with them, trade Guild cards (enabling you to find and email that person whenever their online), and setup a game. Games can be open so any player can join at any time, or you can make them password protected in case you only want specific people playing in your game. Once in, players can stay together or go off in whatever direction they choose. However, with the increased number of monsters, the experienced and wise stay together and work together. This is a great gameplay feature, as players, whether they like it or not, are basically forced to work together in order to get through each room. Of course, getting everyone to work together takes time and of course you might end up playing with some item whore that steals every item in a room without helping out. But you won't be able to experience this until you get online. For that matter, you won't be able to fully enjoy *PSO* until you've gone online with a bunch of good players and quested together for a few hours. So, if you plan to buy *Phantasy Star Online* but you're not planning to go online, you're not playing the game. Whether it's just chatting online getting to know other Dreamcast players, helping out newbies on their first grand day out, or beating the final boss on very hard difficulty (gah), Dreamcast players must play *Phantasy Star Online* online... and that means everyone.

--*Anthony Chau*, *IGNDC*

Presentation Nice menu layout, excellent customization enabling players anywhere to communicate, and good intro sequence.	9.0
Graphics This is among the best games, visually, across all platforms. There's really nothing that compares to the visual quality of PSO.	9.8
Sound The sound effects are really good, and the music gets better as you progress throught the game.	9.6
Gameplay Though it has a few nagging control and camera problems, how can you dispute online multi-play? Especially across the world!?	9.4
Lasting Appeal If you play for the story, this game will be over once you beat it. But you might get that addictive bug that'll keep you coming back for more. And it's easily contracted	9.3
OVERALL SCORE (not an average)	**9.3**

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Current Media

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- online screen - BANG!
- online screen - BOOM!
- online screen - big explosions.
- online screen - casting spells.
- online screen - chain lightning.
- online screen - custom symbols are keen.
- online screen - custom symbols.
- online screen - don't go chasing waterfalls.
- online screen - feeding your MAG
- online screen - four player team up
- online screen - greetings
- online screen - group power-up hug
- online screen - hating enemies.
- online screen - ice and lightning.
- online screen - ice spells are cool.
- online screen - item stealers are called...
- online screen - plans
- online screen - rattatattat.
- online screen - runaway!
- online screen - some real bad monsters.
- online screen - special MAG attack.
- online screen - taking on sticky guys
- online screen - which portal?

movies

- Big bad enemies.
- Essential teamwork
- Helping revive players
- Strange nasties in the caves

Archived Media

images

- A big, big, big sword.
- Accessing the menu while still playing.
- Aiming with two guns, eat your heart out Lara
- Attack of the killer yellow penguins!
- Attacking the creatures from Black and White.
- BOOM!
- Beware the cute evil penguins.
- Blocking claw attack from Booma.
- Chatting in the lobby

movies

- Boss 1: The Dragon 8900K
- Casting spells 5800K
- Creating your character 5210K
- Do you think your sword style can defeat me? 7100K
- Force And ranger Team up again. 7000K
- Force and Ranger team up 5900K
- Gun brothers in action. 7700K
- Having some fun with two guns.
- Life in the city. 9660K
- Menu management while fighting 4600K
- Our hero's first adventure. 5500K

- Communicating during boss fight.
- Create-a-Character -- Always with the headset
- Create-a-Character -- Anime eyes.
- Create-a-Character -- Finished product.
- Create-a-Character -- He's a pretty boy.
- Create-a-Character -- It's metal fatigues.
- Create-a-Character -- So many options.
- Create-a-Character -- Traditional blue.
- Create-a-Character -- Tweaking the hair.
- Create-a-Character -- Wild red hair.
- Die mantis, DIE!
- Double firepower, double the fun.
- Double teaming on the Hildebear.
- Enemies getting too close.
- Four on two.
- Goat Girl and friends.
- Going into the merchant area
- Going to have me some fun.
- Gun Brothers at work.
- Gun Brothers do what they're good at.
- Guns and lightning.
- Guns blazing.
- Hand-to-hand against a Booma.
- Happy, happy, joy, joy.
- Homage to Raymond E. Feist.
- Hunter robot in cool city.
- Identifying new weapons.
- John Woo would be proud.
- Joining the block.
- Keep the eye on the sword.
- Line up, boys!
- Meeting the council.
- Message Log.
- Mine level is pretty.
- More shopping...
- No, it's not Rise of the Robots.
- Now THAT's a gun.
- Oh, I'll relieve that headache really quick.
- Oh, so cute... so BLAST THEM!
- Oi, I'll give you such a kick in the head!
- Ok, wolves... dance!
- One BBQ Rag Rappy coming up.
- One, two, three, four... ten, FIRE!
- Teaming up with another magician.
- These guys are TOUGH!
- Using teammates portal. 2900K

- Phantasy Star Online logo.
- Point blank with the laser rifle.
- Powering up.
- Pug is happy.
- Rag Rappies are cute and stupid.
- Ratta tat tat with my...uh.. cannon.
- Running from the wolves.
- Sending email
- Setting up a game
- She's armed with light.
- Shooting at mines
- Summoning fire
- Summoning lightning.
- Taking out some Goboomas
- Talking with the town folk.
- Teleporting in.
- The "Heisman" pose.
- The Gun Brothers power up!
- The city maps are pretty confusing...
- The evil shark has no idea.
- This girl can swing it.
- This is for Spawn!!!
- Time to buy some toys.
- Trading items.
- Two baddies, two guns.
- Um... some advice... move.
- Unarmed combat isn't very effective.
- Wait a sec, why run when I have this gun here
- Walking through the city.
- We're surrounded!
- Weapons for sale.
- Well, hello Irene...
- Whatcha you say about my momma?
- Wonder why there's a bullseye on the ground.
- Wooo... that's a crazy getup you got there.
- Yeah, and how about your digits, too?
- Yeah, those birds look cute, but...
- Yes, even Ragol has eggplants.
- Yup, you guess it... summoning ice.

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Phantasy Star Online

Price: **$39.99**

Usually ships within 24 hours.

Add to shopping cart

This game is rated "T" for Teen.

This time you're not the only hero…

The dawn of a new world is at hand with Phantasy Star Online, the first online multiplayer RPG designed for a home console. Using the Dreamcast modem, connect to the Phantasy Star universe and explore distant lands populated with real players like you. Chat, exchange items and information, and go into battle with players from all over the world -- all in real-time. With Phantasy Star Online, RPG gaming has no boundaries.

- Massively multiplayer RPG action over a worldwide network. Play with people from America, Japan and Europe!
- Collaborate with other players to slay monsters and achieve goals in a real-time battle system.
- Advanced chat feature allows conversation without language barriers.
- Swatch's BEAT system unites the world with a single time zone.

We recommend these items:

☐ Shenmue
(DC) $39.99

Checked items will be included when you click "Add to shopping cart" above.

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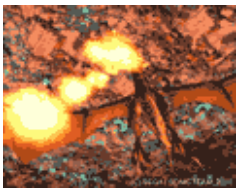
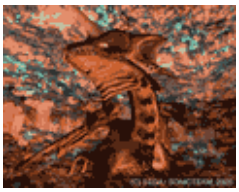
Screenshots

Screenshot 1


Screenshot 2


Screenshot 3

Screenshot 4(382x300)
Screenshot 5(382x300)
Screenshot 6(382x300)
Screenshot 7(382x300)
Screenshot 8(382x300)
Screenshot 9(382x300)
Screenshot 10(382x300)
Screenshot 11(382x300)

Click here for all 119 screenshots

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Features

A plan born of desperation, conceived in response to the imminent destruction of their home worlds.

As plans for the evacuation began, unmanned probes were sent into deep space to find a habitable planet. When a potential site was discovered, the first interstellar transport ship, Pioneer 1, was sent to establish a colony.

Pioneer 1 confirmed that the Planet Ragol was a suitable location, and the initial colonists started preparing the planet for the main wave of refugees, beginning with the construction of the Central Dome.

7 years later....

Pioneer 2 completed its long voyage with the main wave of refugees aboard. But as Pioneer 2 entered orbit and opened a communications link with the Central Dome, an enormous explosion shook the entire planet. All contact with the thousands of men and women of Pioneer 1 was lost.

Hunter's Guild

Assignment:
Your efforts as a hunter acting on behalf of the colonists of Pioneer 2 will be supported by the tireless work of the Hunter's Guild. From the Guild you will receive all necessary information and assignment of new missions and directorates. As you progress in your experience the Guild will provide you with new missions.

Hunter's Network:
Hunter's Network Support is facilitated by SegaNet, the fasted interstellar relay in this quadrant or any other. Using Dreamcast units, hunters from across the universe will be able to access the lobbies of Pioneer 2 and report for active duty on the surface of Ragol. In total, there will be 9 active relay points (called "servers") supporting the relay of almost 10,000 Dreamcast-wielding hunters simultaneously.

Translation:
The investigation of Ragol will involve hunters from a wide variety of linguistic backgrounds. The Guild has developed the universal translator, in real time, by the PSO universal translator into the appropriate language of the speaker and the hunter he or she is chatting with at the time. The translator converts any of the five languages, English, French, German, Spanish, and Japanese, into any of the other tongues, depending on the setting of the individual hunters.

Hunters

The Hunter's Guild currently recognizes three classes of Hunter:

Force:
Force personnel must have high levels of experience in force techniques and, at a minimum, should be capable of casting elemental (fire, water, electricity) techniques upon declaring classification. Skill and range of techniques should increase with experience levels.

Suitable only to Human and Newman personnel.

Ranger:
Rangers should be well suited to handling of firearms and light distance weapons. However, qualified personnel should be capable of handling heavier ordinance and light artillery as well, for various ranged attacks.

Most suitable for Human and synthetic (Android) personnel.

Hunter:
Hunters are expected to be fully trained in hand-to-hand combat, in particular the

use of the photon saber and related weaponry. Though some proficiency in force techniques is applicable to the full range of Hunter skills, it is expected that members of this class will devote themselves largely to close range attacks.

Suitable to Human, Newman and synthetic (Android) personnel.

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Specifications

Publisher:SEGA OF AMERICA INC. 1-4 players; SegaNet Support; Jump Pack; VMU
Category: Dreamcast

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Customer Reviews

Overall customer rating: ★★★★★

"Some people don't even know the game"
"An addictive game"
"Online rocks, but offline doesn''t"

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IGN.COM Review:
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Wacky Weapons of Phantasy Star Online: The Frying Pan!
I can take on the level 3 boss ... and fry him up in a pan!

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Phantasy Star Online FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) Updated!
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All About...

Phantasy Star Online

Review

Online or Off ... Phantasy's Reality Does Not Bite

It's nice to know the future holds many crates to break open.

The arrival of one of the most anticipated titles of the past few years seems to be something akin to a gaming epiphany, so to speak. Amid rumor, bad news and confusion, Sega's strange week in the videogame industry spotlight reveals nothing except that this is one company that knows games and gamers, even if everything else is up in the air.

Daily RADAR Rating — DIRECT HIT

Continued...

Phantasy Star Online

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What game are we talking about? *Phantasy Star Online*, of course. With its ambitious goal of taking console gamers to places that only PC players had been previously (online), developer Sonic Team has gloriously succeeded in full 3D -- with vibrant, colorful textures to boot. Taking an obvious page from the premier dungeon-crawling, multiplayer antics of Blizzard's *Diablo* series, *Phantasy Star Online*, in fact, more refines a formula than redefines a genre.

While countless previews have hit the web and print magazines outlining its general mechanics and gameplay, for the uninitiated, *PSO* is a role-playing game that can either be played online or offline. At the outset, you'll choose one character from nine different

"Phantasy Star Online, in fact, more refines a formula than redefines a genre."

Screens

Four-player action forces players to cooperate, which is a sorely needed skill.

This strange fellow wants to eat you.

He is the last one! Seriously.

Stats

Developer	Sonic Team
Publisher	Sega of Japan
Genre	Action RPG
Players	Lots

Phantasy Star Offline

The solitary exploration of Phantasy Star's wondrous worlds pales in comparison to its shared experience. Simply, the game deserves to be won -- or lost -- with other heroes standing by your side.

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choices, then customize their costumes, hair, etc. to suit your liking.

Class Wars

The different characters all hail from three different "classes:" Rangers, Forces and Hunters. Each class has its weaknesses and strengths that range from power to weaponry. Forces are magic users with a good ability to gain TP (the term for the usual Magic Points in most RPGs), but are slower to gain hit points with every successive level. Rangers, on the other hand, can be equipped with the heavy artillery and pack much more power than the spell casters. Hunters have a slightly balanced compromise between the other two classes, and can be used for hand-to-hand combat as well as magic.

The balance between the different classes gives players a good choice to suit their preferred fighting style. Though there's definitely room for complexity and variety in character selection that hasn't been fully explored in *PSO,* the bases are adequately covered. There's just enough disparity in gameplay and strategy between the types to keep you wondering what exactly it would be like to play as a Ranger if you've been using a Force all along.

Alien Resurrection

For those who've read every story about *PSO* since its announcement, the concern for fans has been whether or not the game remains true to its *Phantasy Star*Algol System roots. The answer is mixed, to say the least. Because of its online functions, the chances for a strong, coherent storyline are strained. Because of the number of players and the non-linear structure that is the focus of online gaming, the difference between *PSO* and, say, *Skies of Arcadia* is a rather large gap filled with plenty of monster-killing and the odd offhand reference to *PS* series staples like Dark Falz and Monomates.

At the start, your character is chosen as a hunter to chase down the cause of a giant explosion on Ragol, a planet that your civilization is hoping to inhabit. An earlier crew that had previously been inhabiting the surface of Ragol has now strangely vanished, along with all communication from your ship to theirs. A cool premise, but the actual thread of story within the game is almost pushed off to the side in favor of actual gameplay.

Phantastic Voyage

Prepare for an overload the minute you plunge into an online room filled with *PSO*-obsessed folk speaking every language (including the long-lost international tongue of "smut") and eager to level up their characters just like you. Navigation and signing up for game is amazingly easy for first-timers, but you'll have to contend with some strangely delayed character rendering and the annoying habit of speech "bubbles" clogging up your screen if there are tons of people in the lobby.

Once you enter a game with as many as three other characters, the fun really begins. The structure of the

game is this: Clear a dungeon and gain access to the next one. The more characters you have in your party, the more monsters will inhabit each room of every dungeon. Therefore, the more people in your party, the better chance you have of scoring large amounts of experience points in order to level up your character (which is the basis of any good online RPG). Having more players in your party can also be a brilliant way to swap items and take down big, bad bosses more easily. There's always someone to revive you if you die, as well.

But there's a downside to every group experience, virtual or physical. The distribution of items gained from killing monsters, boss fights or treasure chests are always a source of tension in a low-level group of explorers. Grabbing items to sell or equip sometimes boils down to who gets to them the fastest, but this is also part of the strategy in *PSO.*

So, what does the offline game mean in any of this? Answer: a few different things. Your offline game is played alone, with you going solo against the exact same monsters in the exact same dungeons as online. But, once you clear a dungeon in the offline game (you'll start the offline game on Normal difficulty), you'll be able to bypass it in an online game of the same difficulty level if you are the leader. Therefore, if you clear the Forest on Normal offline, when you sign on and start a Normal online game, you'll automatically be given access to the next dungeon, the Caves. Also, besides the fun hijinks of online, the real point of *PSO* is to beef up your character enough to take on all three difficulty levels of the offline quests (Normal, Hard and Very Hard) to receive the game's "real" ending. Not an easy feat by any stretch of the imagination.

But the camaraderie of the online quests is plenty good enough to keep gamers enthralled for the long run, if simply for the "*Diablo* factor" of wanting to get your character to the next level or to find that ridiculously rare item. Plus, you get to dish dirt with all your friends online in different ways.

Chat Boom

Sonic Team has done a commendable job giving gamers all sorts of ways to communicate with one another, be it simple mail, guild cards or universal "translators." While the universal bit doesn't work as smoothly as we'd hoped (it makes gamers scroll through a clumsy network of preset phrases), the effort is definitely there and makes asking someone who doesn't speak English "Where are you from?" easier than breaking out a foreign-language dictionary.

Players are also able to swap Guild Cards, which work like ICQ numbers or business cards. Once you have someone's Guild Card, you can seek them out online, no matter which server they're gaming on. As creepy as it might sound, if you use discretion in who you hand your card to, the feature is a blessing if the server is crowded and you can't seem to find your friend no matter how hard you look.

There's also the inclusion of "simple mail," which allows you to send limited email to a friend online,

granted you have their Guild Card on you. The entire chat and communication system in *PSO* is geared to make each player's online life much, much easier, and even enhances the entire experience. Kudos to Sonic Team.

The Minus Points

Though Sega has pulled off the unthinkable feat of placing a high-quality online RPG on Dreamcast, the project doesn't come off without a few hitches. Yes, *PSO* does have a lot of slowdown that occurs during big brawls in rooms with loads of beasties and players running around. Yes, there is lag that will really confuse players who see their friends appearing and reappearing at odd locations on the screen. Yes, there are instances of hard crashes and soft crashes that will boot you off the server so you'll have reconnect. Yes, broadband compatibility is officially "unsupported" by Sega. Yes, the game could use more diversity in its dungeon designs and more brain-work in its overly simplistic "step on this switch and have a friend step on the other" puzzles. And finally, yes, this is a dungeon crawler with the emphasis on killing things rather than exploring themes of love, death and loyalty alongside a salty lead character who has more angst and anguish than a typical *Final Fantasy*hero.

BUT (and it's a big "but") this is a game that's so expertly constructed in its pick up 'n' play controls, mechanics, simple but well-plotted systems and painfully gorgeous graphics (Sonic Team clearly gets something out of the DC that loads of other third parties can't seem to figure out) that it's best to keep your opinions to yourself until you've kicked much alien butt online. Then, make up your mind whether you want to trash the game (probably not) or keep playing so you can test out that Dragon Slayer sword and get your character to level 62. For most gamers, the answer is the latter. With a high addiction factor and groundbreaking console design, this isn't a game that any DC owner should pass up. And it stands as a testament, flaws and all, that Sega, no matter what it decides to do in the future or how it's gonna do it, is delivering the content that will dictate what most gamers will see on other systems for years to come.

The Bottom Line: Brilliant.

- *Francesca Reyes*

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