



The Saga Begins!

Panzer Dragoon is back... in the most incredible adventure the Sega Saturn has ever seen! You want cinematic visuals, right? Stunning interactive gameplay? You want a Saturn title to out-quaff Final Fantasy VII? Panzer Dragoon Saga is the epic you've been waiting for! So says RICH LEADBETTER...

It has been three months since I last played Panzer Dragoon Saga. The one disc I had then was a mere taster of what was to come but I was hooked. What Team Andromeda had done was to merge the awesome visuals and technology of Panzer Dragoon Zwei with a cunningly crafted adventure and gripping storyline.

I now have in my possession a beta copy of the Japanese version of the game which is due to go on sale any day now. And I'm even more impressed - no, impressed isn't the word. I'm amazed... this adventure is just utterly brilliant and I believe that it is SEGA SATURN MAGAZINE's duty to tell you why.

Over the next few issues, SSM will be taking Panzer Dragoon Saga apart. We'll be showing you the incredible graphics, telling you how the game works, we'll be following this mammoth FOUR CD quest through to the very end. And by the time we're finished and the game is available in Europe I guarantee that you'll want to have experienced what I have with this epic game!





After each of the game's most powerful bosses are defeated in combat, the mighty dragoon morphs into a more powerful battle-beast! And you can adjust its attack, defence, agility and spiritual powers as well during the game to suit your own style of play.



The sheer imagination that Andromeda have put into the design of even the smallest enemy is awe-inspiring. Oh yes.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Looking at the screenshots for Panzer Dragoon Saga you might wonder how it fits together as an adventure. I mean, for the most part it looks a lot like Panzer Dragoon Zwei, a simple (yet stunning) blasting game. Where's all the adventuring eh? That's what the words on these two pages will explain - how it all fits together.

THE FULL-MOTION VIDEO

The story-advancing sections of Panzer Dragoon Saga are mostly depicted with the wonders of full-motion video (FMV). Team Andromeda were creating computer-generated movies years before everyone else jumped onto the bandwagon and with Panzer Dragoon Saga they have reached the pinnacle of their art. The first taste you get of this is in the first sequence where Azel (that's you), first meets up with his winged steed. Like Final Fantasy VII, Panzer Saga seamlessly merges FMV with gameplay to awesome effect.



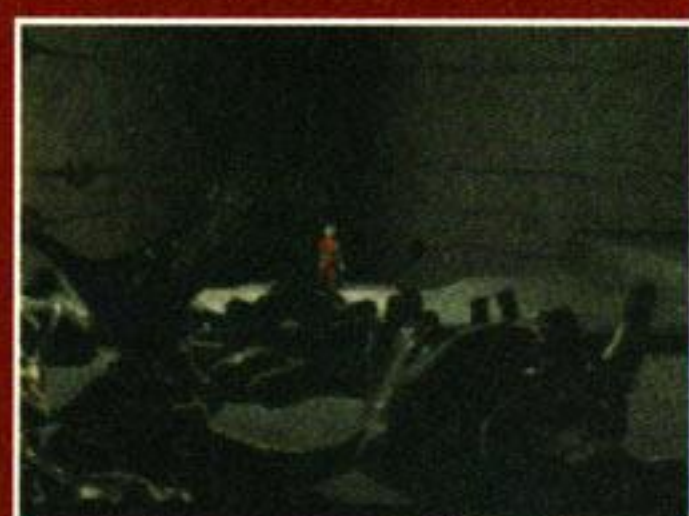
The full-motion video that Team Andromeda has created for Panzer Dragoon Saga is frankly superlative - the sheer emotion and feeling seen even in the characters' movements is exceptional.



This sequence here is showing one of the first FMV episodes. Azel has found himself alone in a large cave when out of the gloom comes a host of darkness-dwelling creatures out for blood... and Azel's laser has been damaged!



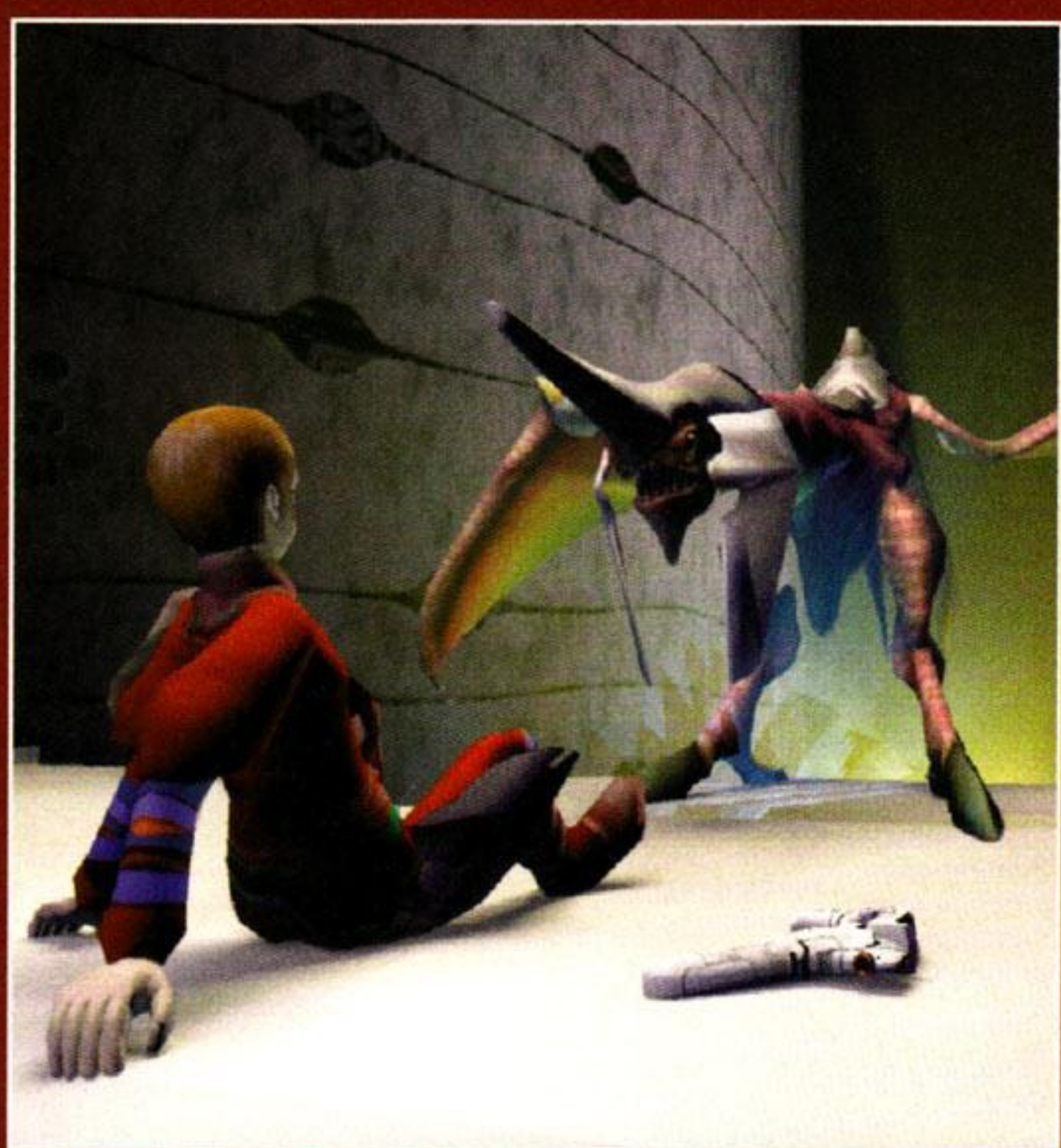
Punctuating the gloom is a blinding light from above which streaks down accompanied by a deafening roar. As the lights approach, they become clearer as the lock-on missiles of the mighty dragoon!



The missiles strike home, instantaneously annihilating every cave creature in sight and leaving nothing behind save their charred, ruined corpses. But where is the heroic dragoon?



Answer: right on top of you! An unearthly light illuminates the area as the dragoon lands, initiating a peculiar mind-meld that brings man and animal together... for the rest of their lives!



THE ON-FOOT SECTIONS

Team Andromeda very much portray Azel and his dragoon steed as separate entities. When the dragoon touches down, it's down to Azel to do the investigating on-foot - hence the change to a sort of 3D Zelda style of gameplay. These sections can be tiny, for example when you touch down in the desert and make a campfire, or they can be huge, such as when you investigate a town or city. The keyword here is realism. The environment is lit according to the time of day, and as time passes so you move from day to night. The eerie glow of your



The engine that Team Andromeda have created for the on-foot sections of Panzer Dragoon Saga will blow you away - watching the lighting change as day moves in night is a visual treat.

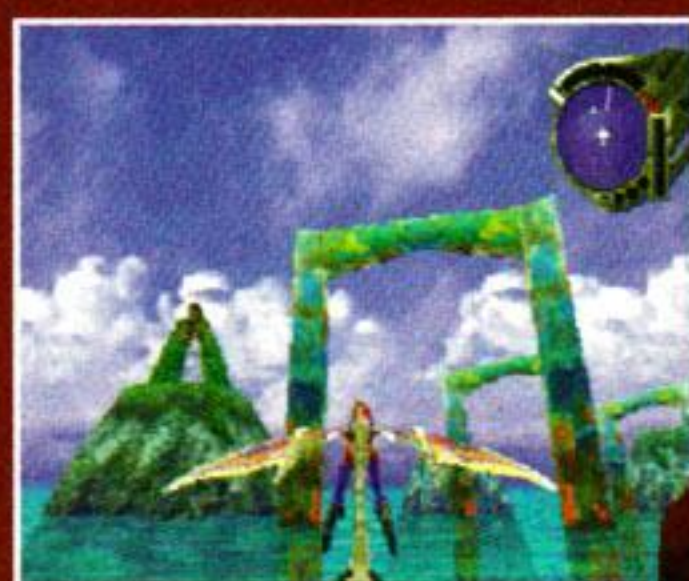


TAKE TO THE SKIES!

A great deal of time in the game is spent on the back of your mighty dragoon! These are called the "field" areas of the game and this is where you get the most similarity with previous Panzer titles. The big difference this time is that unlike the previous shooting games, you get to choose wherever you want to go and you can alter the altitude of your beast at will. Typically the field areas of the game have you solving logic puzzles which open up an exit to the next level. What puzzle-solving you do here is interspersed with battles against legions of alien creatures. As the game progresses, so does the complexity of the puzzles. In latter areas you find yourself moving between areas solving puzzles that change areas in earlier stages. Additionally, early on in Disc Two you receive instructions from one of the characters in a major settlement, telling you to return to a previous stage to solve a major problem that has arisen. Punctuating the puzzle-solving action are confrontations with small fry meanies who boost your experience levels. Usually at the end of each major area you find yourself in a major boss-style battle.



The water stages (two pics far left) feature some stunning rippling effects. Disc Two continues the water theme (last three pics below). Throughout the game the graphics are just amazing!



THE CUT-SCENES

Panzer Dragoon Saga had some awesome FMV, but even more amazing was the use of the actual game's 3D engine to move the story along in the form of cut-scenes. Team Andromeda use the same technique in Panzer Dragoon Saga, again showing the strength of the incredible 3D visuals. You've just got to see how realistic the men and women of the eye-popping Panzer world move... it's awesome! Typically, this sort of cut-scene is used to depict events such as solving a puzzle, saving a man's life, or introducing a terrifying boss creature!



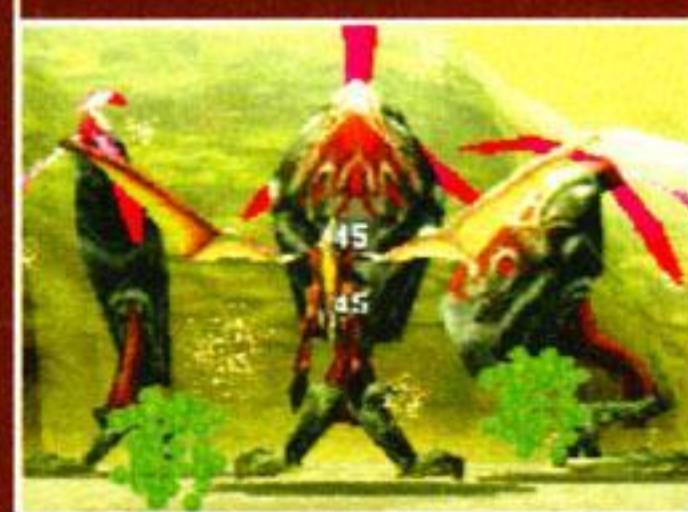
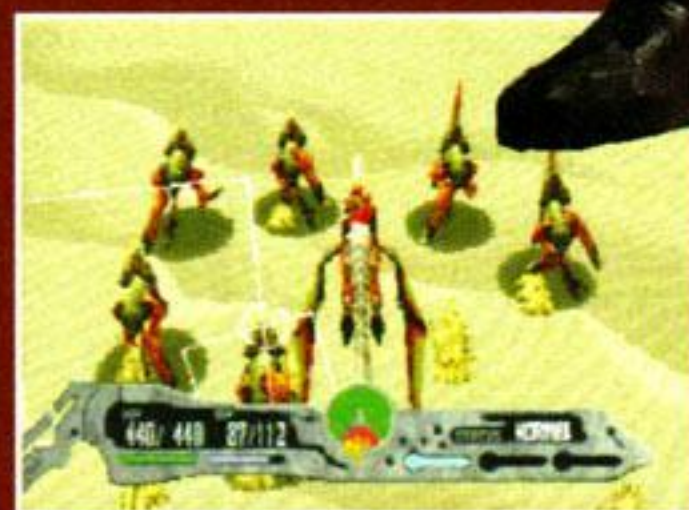
The fact that Andromeda use their own 3D engine to produce some of the game's more dramatic moments (as opposed to more full-motion video) is testament to the incredible skills of Team Andromeda. It's the movement and characterisation of the characters that makes these sections look so good... as well as the weirdo technology you get to see.



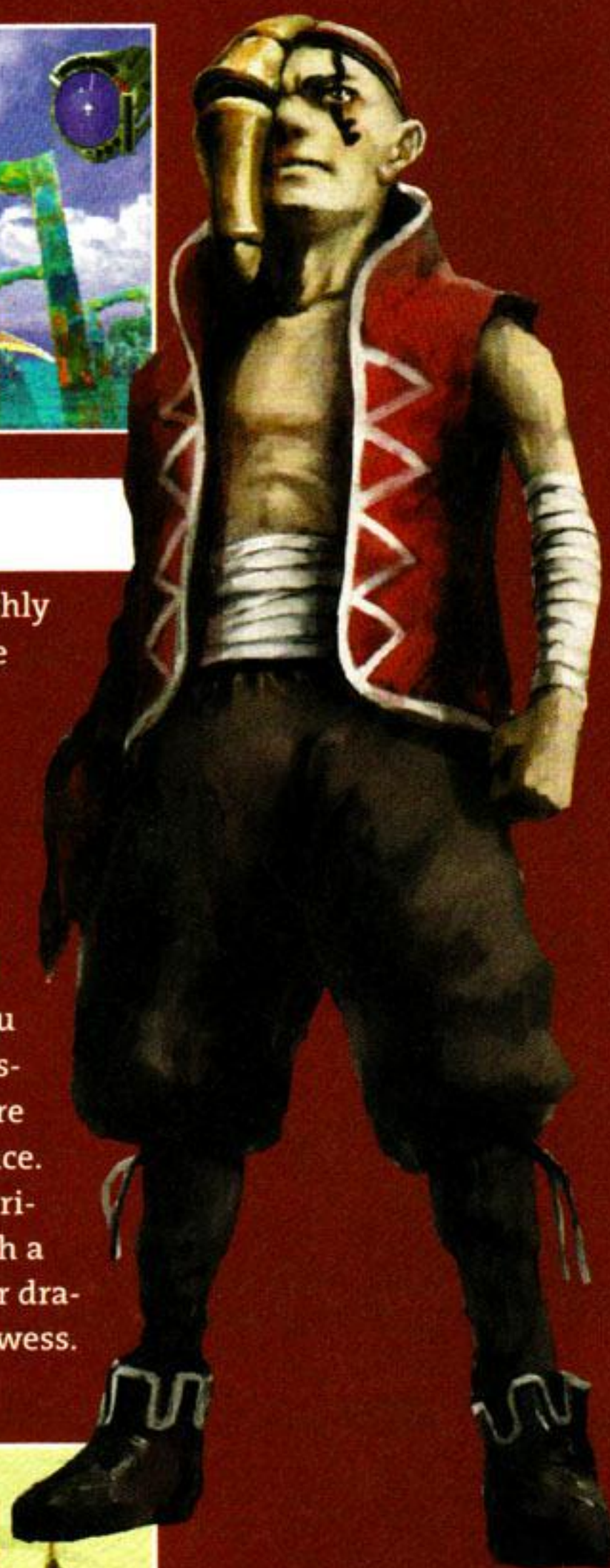
Solving the puzzles also produces some of the excellent cut-scenes. Blowing up two weather-beaten beacons unleashes a tornado that clears an exit (left) while on the right we're powering up a teleportation device on the waterworld that leads to a (dare I say it?) epic boss battle!

THE BATTLE BE JOINED!

The fighting system in Panzer Saga is simple, yet highly advanced. Like all RPGs it's turns based. A time gauge runs up at the bottom of the screen, split into three sections. When one section is full, you can attack or use an item (thus using up one section of your gauge). At any time you can move your dragoon about and it is this manoeuvring that is all-important. Every creature in the game (including you) has a weak point that when fired upon produces around five times as much damage. In terms of weapons, you can use Azel's laser blaster, the dragoon's lock-on missiles, or its berserker attacks. Once your opponents are vanquished, the computer evaluates your performance. The quicker you dispatched your foes, the more experience points you get. Just like all RPGs when you reach a certain amount of points, you go up a level with your dragoon and rider gaining more stamina and battle prowess.



Panzer's combat system is turns based a la Final Fantasy VII - the effects unleashed with your berserker attacks will blow you away such is their power! But berserker power is limited so it's best to stick with missile and laser attacks for the most part.





The dragon-morphing system is one of the graphical highlights of the game - you can change your dragoon's appearance and capabilities to fit your style of play!

THE CAVE

Azel starts the game on his own, having chanced upon a magical cave. This section is very straightforward - a simple logic puzzle to help you get to grips with the control system... plus a lesson that looking at things closely is more rewarding than glancing at them from a distance away. This section leads into a stunning FMV sequence where the dragoon arrives to save Azel from a bunch of mutant cave-dwelling creatures.



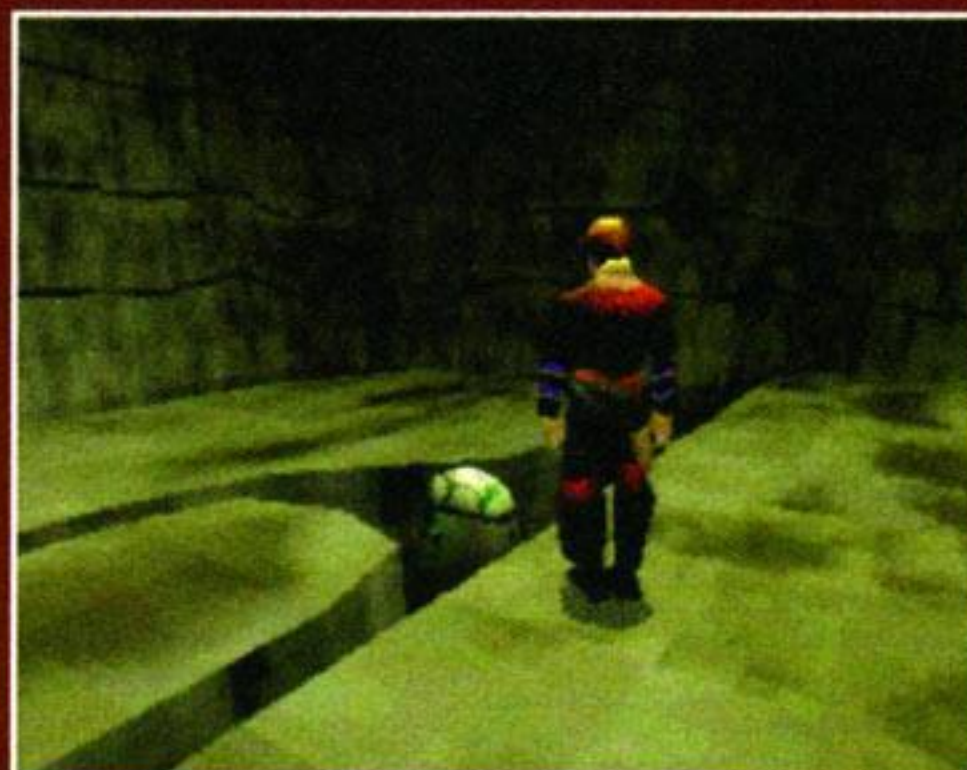
new, very good weapon. Your ship's movement changes the direction of its targeting scanners.



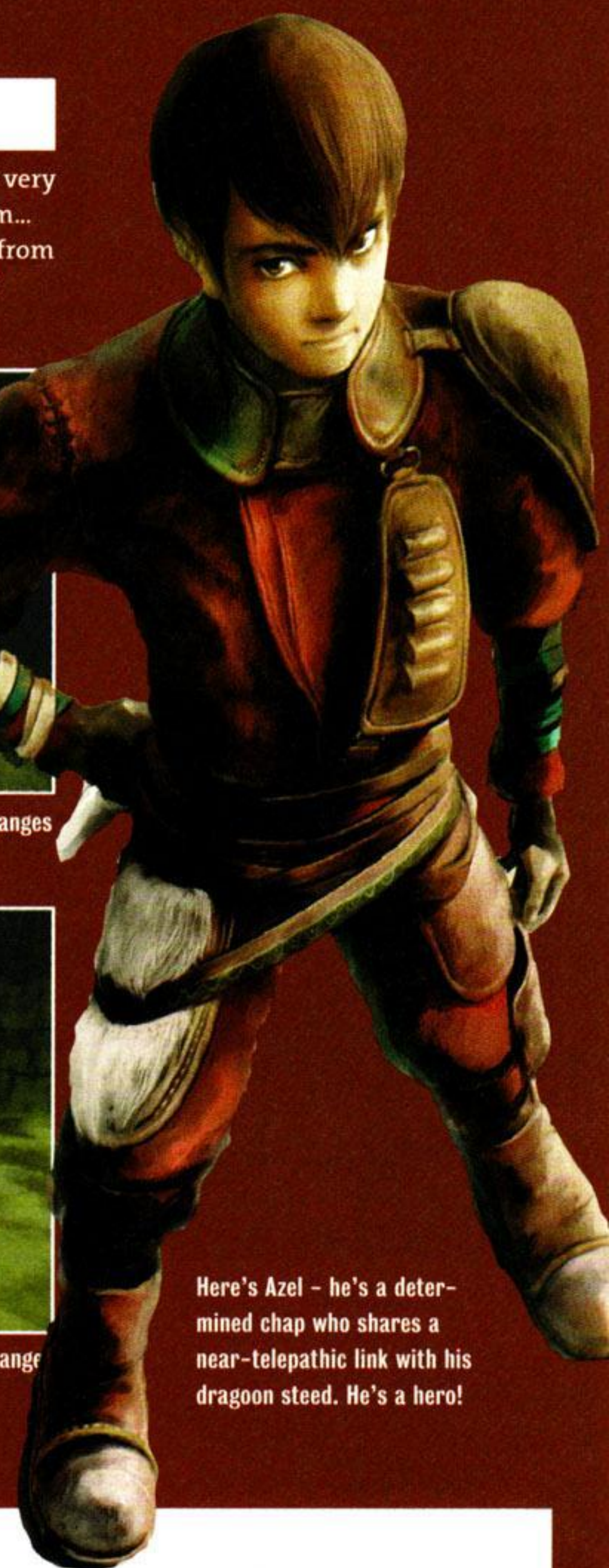
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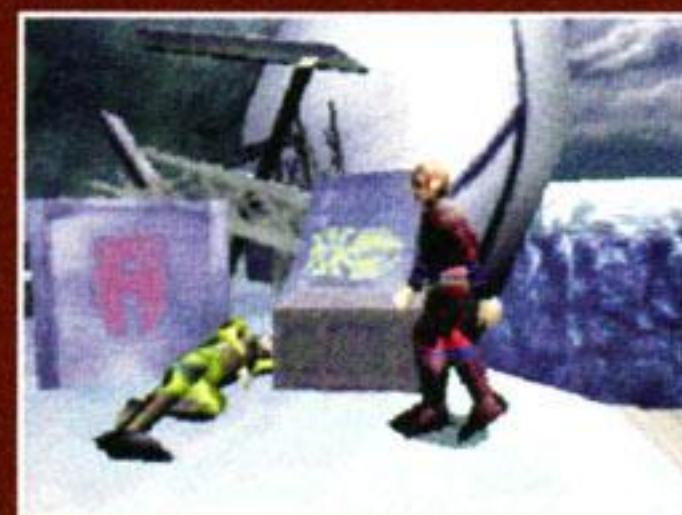
Here's Azel - he's a determined chap who shares a near-telepathic link with his dragoon steed. He's a hero!



The creatures you face in the Chasms are pretty docile. Out-flank 'em and use lock-on missiles and send them to their deaths.

THE CHASMS

Shades of Panzer Zwei are Azel and his steed take to the skies for the first time. Here you can test out the dragoon scoping system. Press A or C to bring the cursor on-screen, then run it over objects to see if you can search them. Alternatively, run it over a cave entrance and press the button to go inside. There's an on-foot section where Azel witnesses the death of a close friend, leading into some battle drills and a simple first puzzle. You deactivate a series of cliff-mounted fans designed to keep airborne intruders away before moving on.



Flying high over the chasms, use your sights to blow up artifacts, releasing some useful health power-ups which are most useful when it comes to taking on the bosses at the end of the stage.

One of the first on-foot stages sees Azel arrive at a ruined station too late to save his friend from death. Howling with anguish he returns to his dragoon and begins a Roscoe P Coltrane style "hot pursuit".



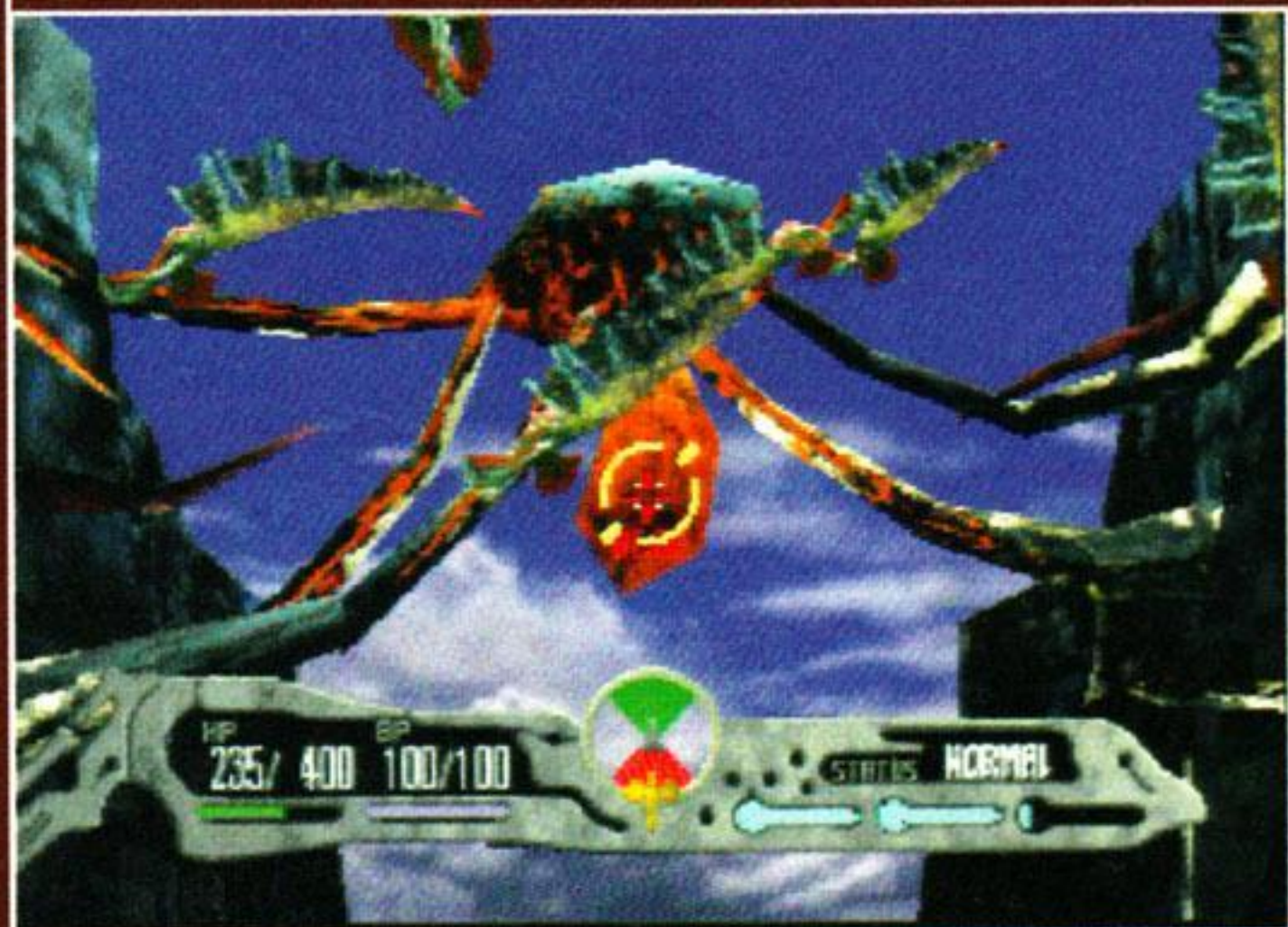
You're free to enter the many mined-out caves the line the sides of the chasm in order to locate more power-ups (left). When you reach the fans (right) you face your first puzzle as you're effortlessly blown away.

Whoever set up the fans wasn't exactly a rocket scientist though... as you end up being blown towards the cave that powers the whole area. Shut the fans down and fly through without further delay.



BOSS: CHASM CREATURE

This enormous creature bridges the gap between the chasm and boasts what amounts to vast amounts of stamina for a creature at this stage of the game. Isolate the weak point and ignore the irritating small fry creatures it berths. Then let it have it, with despatch.



THE WATERFALLS

The chasms remain, but witness the awesome rapids and the beautiful waterfalls. Using your sights you can even pick out individual fish in the water - such is the power of Panzer Saga! Something else powerful is the return of the Chasm Boss Creature midway during this stage... and he ain't alone!



The creatures faced during the Waterfall stages tend to have little mobility and striking at their weak spots exposes you to their fire. Let them face you, blast 'em then dodge and repeat the process.

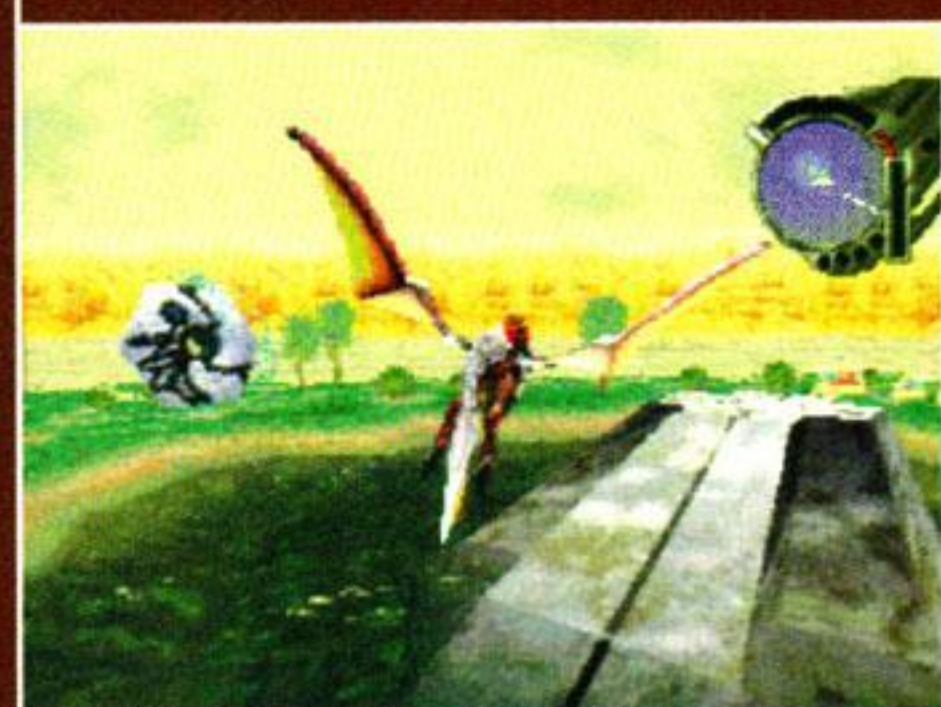
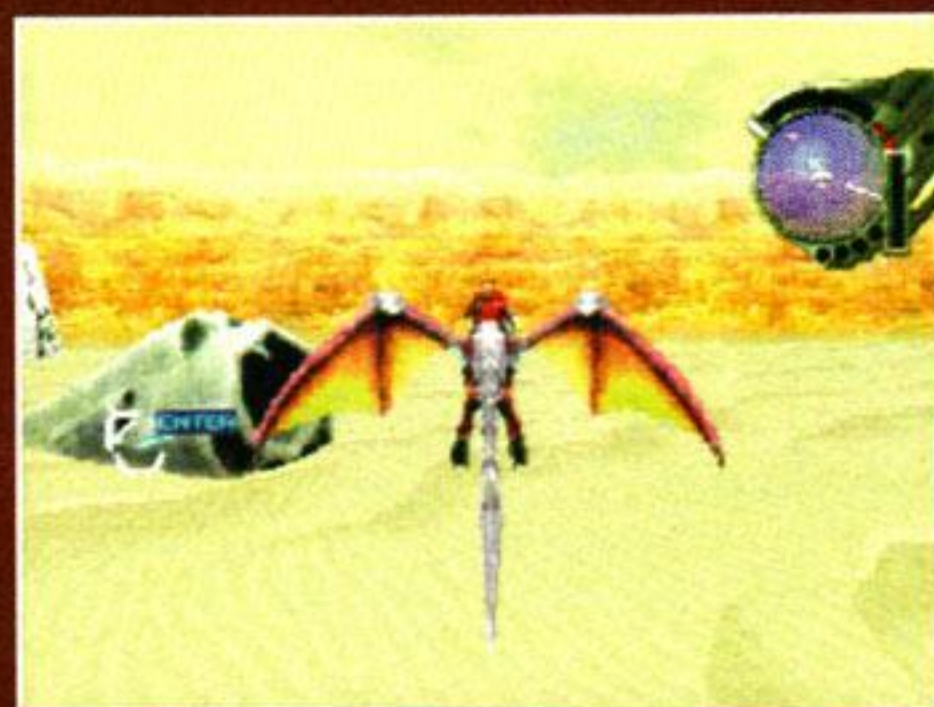
BOSS: RIDER RESCUE

A lone rider flees a hideous creature as the chasms collapse around its terrible fury. It's down to Azel and his dragoon to save the day. The creature you face here is one of the most cunning you find up to this point (that's probably why it's a boss). It hides



THE DESERT

Fans of the original Panzer Dragoon should recognise this desert area. Judging from the inhabitants, it wouldn't surprise us if this was the exact same place! The deserts are enclosed by a circle of rock and the main objective here is to solve the logic puzzles that open up the cave to the next area. The rider you rescued in the last stage gives plenty of advice on the myriad creatures you face.



The desert stages bring forth both land and air-based creatures for you to do battle with. They tend to have a blind side that you can use to out-maneuvre them.





BOSS: THE GROUND ITSELF!

Once examined, some strange looking nodules on the ground turn out to be the surface manifestation of a strange creature lurking in the sand. This guy's armoured like a tank - it's down to you to find a chink in that armour and exploit it.



As you progress through the desert stages so you see the quality of enemy resistance improve. Compared to latter enemies they're still small fry, being very easy to out-think and out-gun.



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BOSS: THE CAVE CREATURE

A small black creature lights up the darkness of the cave... surely this won't be any problem? Of course it isn't! Unfortunately it isn't on its own - under the sand lurks its enormous counterpart - hurt the small creature and the large one surfaces and takes to the air. Face it buddy, you're in for the fight of your life! Especially when you discover that the first flying monster actually has another one inside! Yup, you're in trouble all right...



BOSS: SKYFLEET

Two flying fortresses seen in previous Panzer epics return in an all-new configuration as Azel and his airborne steed prepare for another vicious boss encounter. Take down the two mini-fortresses then blast hell out of the mothership!

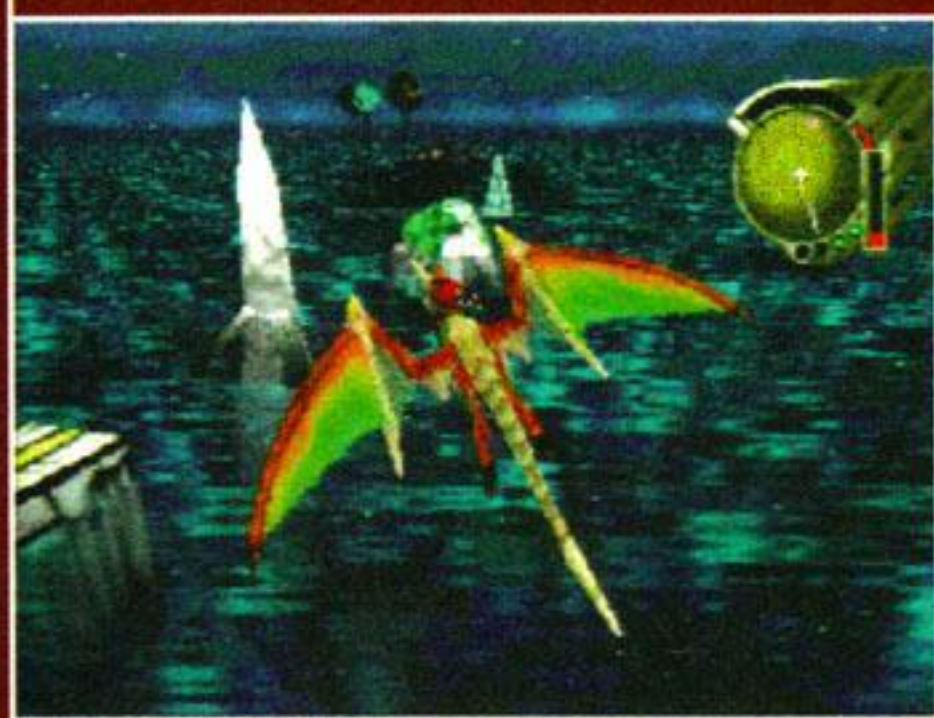


WATERWORLD

The last stage of Disc One sees you hovering over a settlement built on the waves themselves. The quality of the visuals here is just amazing. Not only is the water realistically translucent, the settlements themselves are just amazing. The energy pylons dotted around the map slowly build up power, resulting in a stunning discharge into the skies that ionises the air around each them. Incredible. After another series of battle drills, it seems that the aim here is to activate some kind of energy matrix in the map's centre. The look of other buildings gives you a clue as to how you should achieve this. When it's done you're warped into the skies where battle begins anew!



The enemies faced at the WaterWorld pose some interesting problems. Some of them can even fire electro-bolts that can temporarily stun your dragoon!



THE FIRST SETTLEMENT

You might have had a bit of practise controlling Azel as opposed to his dragoon pal, but after taking down the cave creature you get your first taste of RPG action, as check out the desert settlement. Every tent can be checked out, you can talk to the locales and you can even spend those hard-earned Dyne (the Panzer currency) on getting stocked up for the coming journey... This place is also where you get clued up about the next phase of your journey.



The first settlement you chance upon is a caravan of tents and er... caravans pitched in the middle of the desert. This is the first chance for on-foot action you get after facing the harshness of the desert bosses and it's also the first time you get to barter with the natives, buying up precious supplies and mysterious objects you can use to improve your chances of surviving the epic quest that awaits...



The outside areas look brilliant thanks to a lighting system that changes according to what time of day it is (no kidding), but the sheer amount of detail Andromeda have crammed into the interiors is equally amazing, perhaps even more so. Just look at these shots and swoon!

AND NOW THE CONCLUSION

The end of Disc One sees Azel exploring the gutted remains of the big fortress he's just annihilated. Unfortunately, mid-exploration he's challenged by the Dark Dragoon, who has finally caught up with him. The scene is set for the toughest challenge faced yet... how can Azel take down a more experienced warrior with a bigger and nastier dragoon steed. Answer? You need to learn tactics, out-flanking the enemy and blasting its rear!



The dark rider (left) is one of the game's major recurring enemies atop your monstrous dragoon. Her berserker powers can annihilate you in seconds.

Two types of creature tend to attack: native monsters and bizarre man-made devices such as the one pictured to the left.

