

MEGADRIIVE
REVIEW



BY: SEGA

SEGA™

12 M-BIT

STYLE



RPG

PRICE £49.99

PLAYERS 1

SKILL SETTINGS 1

RELEASE DATE

JUNE 1993

SHINING



As Editor and King I called upon the valiant PAUL of DAVIES to take a critical look at Sega's latest RPG.

Obviously the instructions weren't all that clear because Paul, Ye Dimme, eagerly returned with a rag and a tin of Brasso. What a jester! What a crap gag!

If there's one thing to be sure of with role playing games, or RPGs, it's that they are generally massive! Shining Force is 12 megas of enormity and continues the story set by 1991's 'Shining and the Darkness' adventure — a game commended for its ease of play and wonderful graphics, though criticised for its monotony. Have Sega learned from their mistakes? Let's find out...

Firstly Shining Force presents a brand new cast of characters for the player to direct around the land of Rune against the forces of Darksol, the defeated Lord of Darkness from Shining and the Darkness. This time around Darksol has employed a like minded dark soul named Kane to avenge his embarrassment by finding the key to the Gate of Ancients and releasing the Dark Dragon contained within.

As you may have guessed by now, Darksol is very fond of the word dark and dedicates his whole being to everything that the term encompasses. So, who better to combat him than the Shining Force — a group of warriors who, by nature, oppose everything that the evil Kane symbolises.

At the start of the game the Shining Force amounts to just you, the player, who isn't much of a threat when all's said and done. However, things soon start to pick up, and news quickly spreads concerning a Runefeast invasion; this being the army under Kane's control. Following all this so far?

Anyhow, the King of Guardiania requires your presence at his court and this, dear readers, is where the plot starts to thicken and where you become the proverbial spoon with which to stir it!

RUNEQUEST

It may come as no surprise to find that the character under your control is the long-awaited hero of Rune and begins his quest in the town of Guardiania, home to the Ancients. The Ancients are the people responsible for guarding the gate which holds the Dark Dragon, hence the name of

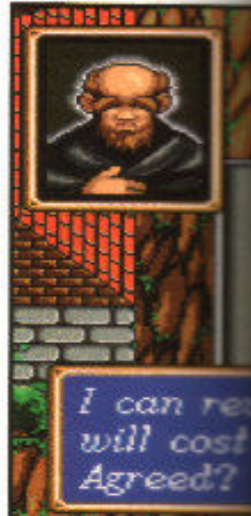


▲ This is how the combat takes place. In this example young Chip is able to beat that fairy to death with that old cow's leg bone.

their town no doubt. Consequently it isn't such a long trek to the King's castle where instructions are given to raise a small but efficient army of warriors of the light.

This acts as an introduction to the first of two basic game-playing methods employed in Shining Force, and that is the exploration and information gathering section. During this part of the game the player directs the lead character about his current location, buying items from the shops and holding conversations with the locals. By doing this important information is learned along with helpful clues as to the requirements expected of him. For example the town of Altarone's inhabitants hint at the good nature of their King and so lay your mind at rest even though he appears to be in league with the Runefeast forces.

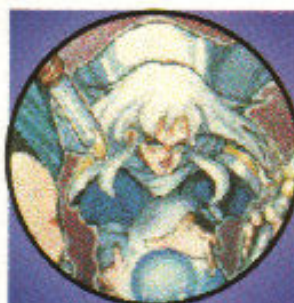
The necessary duties in Guardiania are simply to gather an army and set out to the first part of call and everything points to the confrontation with the King. In fact no sooner has the hero left Guardiania castle than five of his friends come rushing after him and offer their undivided dedication to the cause (fantasy). Nova, who is our bond of warriors' guide, also chooses this point to introduce himself and it is he whom our heroes now turn to for advice should they need it. Nova has an outpost in every town on the face of Rune which also, and quite conveniently, acts as the Shining Force's headquarters. It isn't always important to meet up with this wizened, old fellow but he is the source of much helpful advice where battle tactics are concerned and so should not be brushed off so lightly. Finally, the most useful man in the whole of Rune is Guardiania's very own Friar who is first encountered in the town's Chapel. He



▲ This is the Friar. We're sure an impressive one is below.



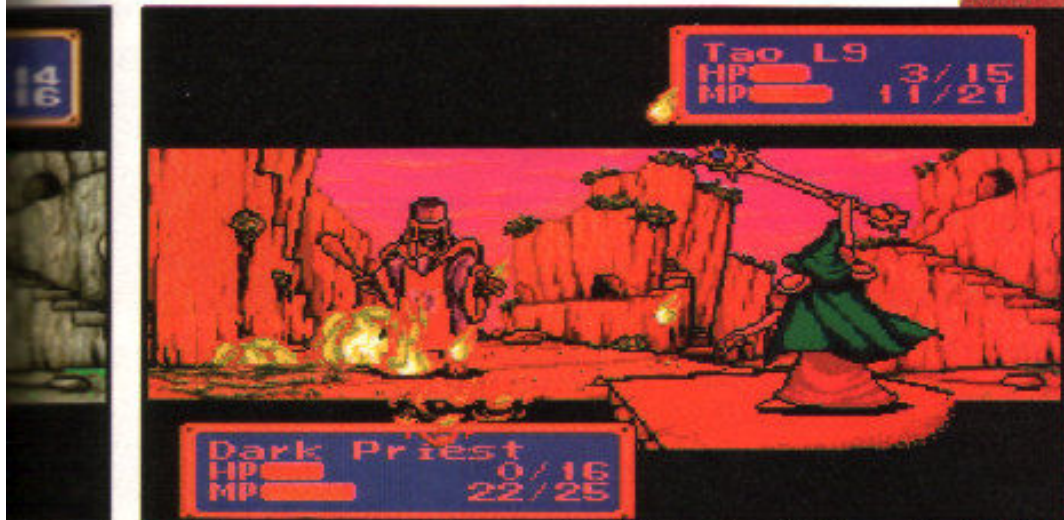
▲ Want to see some puppies, little boy?



SHINING FORCE



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▲ All the damage is worked out automatically. This is quite useful, because the characters can then concentrate on their poses. In this situation, the Dark Priest has a far better pose.



▲ Some incredible tricks, but by far his most impressive is his ability to throw shells over his eyes. Truly amazing!



▲ No, come with me, young chap. Come and see my rabbits!

may not have been able to save his receding hairline but he can save your current position in the game and also promote, cure or even revive any of your party who is injured or, well, dead!

THE FIRST MISSION

The Shining Force's first mission is the scattering of a Runefaulst platoon that is attempting to open the Gate of Ancients and also acts as your introduction to the second basic game-playing method: combat. Shining and the Darkness's combat system was a little tedious and so Sega have chosen a different approach here. Due to the overhead view employed throughout the game, in comparison to the first person perspective of the first instalment of the 'Shining' saga, fighting becomes far more involved. Fighters are now given a certain amount of moves to which they are confined which is represented by a glowing area about them. Runefaulst's allies move in exactly the same way.

The weapons that they may or may not carry also affects their vantage points in certain situations too. For example Ken, a Knight, carries a spear when he first joins the force and may use this to attack diagonally. Ken may also carry a lance as the game progresses but this is only useful for direct confrontations. Similarly magic attacks have their own specific effective ranges and are capable of multiple attacks as your company's mages increase with power. Don't worry, it's not as complicated as it sounds and makes the many battles that occur far more exciting than ever before.



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WINDOW PAINLESS

If all this still seems daunting, the simplistic control system from Shining and the Darkness thankfully remains. This is a beautifully designed window system that applies to every aspect of this vast game. When exploring the towns and other areas the option to either speak with a person, use an item, search an area or even make use of magic is open to the player and within each of these options is a further four. An item may be used, equipped, dropped or given for example. Likewise, in battle, the window system presents an attack, stay, item and magic selection. You can't possibly go wrong! What this means is that the player is free to concentrate on more important matters such as, 'What the hell am I going to do against this enormous skeleton chap, eh?'

STATUS SYMBOLS

It's also nice to know that all of your team's hard work is rewarded. Any experience that they gain is noted on their status screens and promotions are given when a significant amount of experience points are acquired. Experience points are gathered from time spent in battle, and so a fighter cannot afford to shy away in corners if he, she or it wishes to become stronger. The status screens are where such details as agility, defence, magic points (if any), movement and current weapon information is stored. All of which would be pointless to explain here because the instruction manual tells you all that!

A SHINING FORCE?

Of course an interest in RPG's is an advantage with this game but, to be perfectly honest, I usually can't stand them. With Shining Force, however, I make a big exception. When a game is so beautifully presented as this it is hard to ignore and once the plight of Rune catches your interest it is impossible to ignore.

The first few battles prove as a lesson in patience and perseverance but that's only because it's unfamiliar territory at first. Soon

the characters begin to develop into the fighting force you'd expect and from then on Shining Force is as compelling as Tom's excuses for being late each morning. And, like Tom's excuses, get better as time goes on. The game is presented as a story book in the writing which is another nice touch - a young elven girl named Simone is the reader and she bids you welcome and farewell before and after you play.

Don't expect all the locations to be, more or less, the same either because there are many surprises in store for the our band of hopefuls in the offering. On many occasions the plot appears to travel in a certain direction and then makes an about-turn at the last possible moment. Such occurrences really liven the quest beyond expectations.

Adding character to the game are the superb pictures of all its stars. Even the status screens feature a small amount of animation, preventing anything or anyone from appearing too wooden. With each new defender of Rune joining up there comes the addition of new tactics, not forgetting personality, and leads to choosing the most useful members for a specific mission. Shining Force is a game of such depth that it's possible to lose your whole self in it. The puzzles are often straight-forward, but occasionally you come across a real poser which ties you up for some time. This, combined with the action, makes some really compelling gameplay.

Another important addition to this admirable follow-up is its immense size. Twelve megs is an awful lot when used carefully and so the quest for Rune's peace is guaranteed to take many weeks of rewarding play. With a musical score of rousing battle themes and soothing melodies backing the action too the only possible faults here are that it is, in essence, an RPG and so cannot suit everyone in the same way that a character like Sonic the Hedgehog can. However I feel that Shining Force is among the best possible examples of an introduction to the role playing scene as well as offering a decent challenge to those who are more familiar.

THE SECOND OPINION



THOMAS DE GUISE
(SERF)

I agree with Paul completely. Shining Force is excellent. Perhaps the best thing about it is the effort that has been spent on the characters. For instance, the more experienced the characters in your team get, the more they change visually... clothing, weapons even hairstyles. In fact, you really start to care about the members of the force and try to help your favourite ones develop better than the others. Although the game is mainly fighting, it's far superior to that of Shining in the Darkness. With more characters, there's more strategy and you get to see the action too. What's more, the atmosphere of the game is great. It's excellent when you return to the city after the first battle. The music goes all sad and the wounded lie in the streets. With the exception of the little character pirs though, the graphics are a bit posy and Master System-ish. Nonetheless, they do the job just great. Yup, Shining Force is an truly classic game and I thoroughly recommend it.



RATINGS

REFLEXES STRATEGY



CHALLENGE TROUBLE

PRESENTATION

93% Smart attract sequence and a high standard of presentation.

GRAPHICS

86% Stylishly designed and carefully detailed.

SOUND

86% Not of the highest quality, but perfectly adequate.

SHORT TERM PLAY

90% Once the action starts it's virtually impossible to pull away.

LONG TERM PLAY

87% The game's size ensures many hours of play.

OVERALL

90 Finely presented combination of exploration and fighting leads Shining Force to victory.

ALTERNATIVELY



SWORD OF VERMILION
BY: SEGA
PRICE: £44.99

87

Like Shining Force this features a compelling plot and user-friendly controls, decent graphics and presentation. Something to own alongside SF but certainly not in place of.