Interview Vampire

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GamePro visits Konami in Japan to dig up the dirt on series, Castlevania 64, in this interview with the

By Ken Ogasawara

GamePro: *What is your background with Konami?*

Takeo Yakushiji: I've been in production eight years. Castlevania 64 is my second product as a director. I started off as a character designer, mostly with Super Famicom games. I worked on Gambare Goemon twice and Tiny Toons for the Super Famicom. This is the first time I've worked on the N64.

GP: *Have you directed any other Castlevania games?*

TY: This is the first time I've worked on the Castlevania series, but I've enjoyed playing the games since long before I even joined Konami. People who go to work for Konami generally want to work on Castlevania at least once…(laughs)… or Gradius.

GP: *Which Castlevania game's your favorite?*

TY: The third one for the Famicom, Akumajyo Densetsu [Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse].

GP: *What's Castlevania 64 about?*

TY: Here's the story line in a nutshell. It's been a hundred years and Dracula has resurfaced. Each of the four playable characters has their own reasons to seek out Dracula, and they spend the game looking for him.

One of the main features is that gameplay will take place during both the night and the day. We will also focus more on vampires in this version.

Vampires tend to be nocturnal, so they appear at night to attack the player.

Generally, the vampires will be in hiding during the day, but there may be instances where they come out while the sun's up. However, *where* the vampires can go will be limited. If the player goes to an area where there's sunlight, the vampires cannot follow—but when night falls, the vampires will be able to roam freely, searching for you to drink your blood. Also, it will be relatively safe to explore the castle in the daytime, but during the hours of darkness, vampires and other monsters increase the risk of exploring.

If a vampire sucks your blood, you'll turn into a vampire. There may also be instances where vampires trans-form into victims and plead for help, just to lure you into a trap.

Castlevania 64 will be part action game, where you fight enemies and avoid traps, and part exploration game with puzzles you must solve using items and clues. All this must be done to get closer to Dracula.

GP: *Could you explain a little more about how the day and night cycle works?*

TY: Within the game, there will be a timer. From 6 in the morning to 6 in the evening will be the daylight hours. Graphically, this will be represented with the light fading or darkening to the night. Your field of view will get shorter as it gets darker. With a smaller field of view, it becomes more difficult for the player. Also, monsters that do not normally roam during the day will start appearing as the light fades.

It will be just the opposite in the daytime sections of the game. For example, during the day, vampires may appear, but if you lure them into direct sunlight, they may be destroyed outright. So, one of the strategies in the game will be to find territory that has direct sunlight and use it to your advantage.

Using night and day cycles, there are ways to involve events and traps. There will be

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with the Maker

the latest entry in the Castlevania game's director, Takeo Yakushiji.

some doors that open only during the day, so you may have to perform some actions during the night, but then head toward that door as it is about to open. If you take longer than you expected, you may be trapped by a door that becomes locked during the night and get stuck in a dangerous section, so there can be traps that are time-dependent.

GP: How much does this game follow the previous games in the series?

TY: Timewise, it takes place about the same time as Richter's story in Dracula X for the SNES and Symphony of the Night for the PlayStation, around 1792.

A difference is that the older versions took place in medieval-oriented castle settings, but this version will be something closer to the modern age—rooms will have mechanically oriented themes,

and there will be enemies that you haven't seen.

GP: Will Castlevania 64 be similar to the PlayStation's Symphony of the Night?

TY: Yes. Although Castlevania 64 doesn't have the same RPG-like feel that the PlayStation version had, we certainly have exploration of the castles and puzzles.

GP: How many characters will there be?

TY: Currently, there are four characters to choose from. Since they have their own motives, each character will have a different ending. There will also be multiple endings for each character. One character, Schnieder, is a member of the Belmont family, and of course since he's a Belmont, his weapon of choice is the whip. The second character's name hasn't been finalized yet, but we are calling him "Cornell."

Cornell's a fighter who uses close-in martial arts kicks and punches.

GP: Will Cornell also use throws?

TY: Not right now. Cornell has a special ability that enables him to change his form, and he powers up considerably. He also has a secret ability that we can't announce yet. *[Rumor has it that he powers up into a werewolf...Ed.]*

GP: Do the different characters represent different difficulty levels?

TY: Yes. Schnieder is the basic character, and he represents a normal skill level. With Cornell, the game will be marginally more difficult, since Cornell has to get closer to enemies to do damage. But he does have greater speed, which he uses to get closer to enemies before they attack. One of the other characters has a high damage ratio, but a long attack range. This character will be slightly easier to play through the game with than Schnieder. The last character has unusual tactics. It's harder to play with this character because the moves are different from the other three, but basically, that character will be able to change from a power type to a speed type.

GP: Does your character evolve at all?

TY: The player doesn't develop per se, but there will be techniques that won't be explained in the manual—although all the abilities are there from the be-

Cornell as he appears in the game so far...

... and concept art of him.

Cornell makes the howl of fame.

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ginning. There will also be new special attacks that were not present in the other games.

GP: When you start the game, do you choose only one character? Can you switch during the game? Do you interact with other selectable characters during the game?

TY: Right now, you choose only one character at the beginning. However, in the game, the other players are in the castle for their own reasons, so some sort of interaction is possible. Depending on which character you choose, other characters may aid you, or be one of the bosses that you must defeat.

GP: Will there be candles as in other Castlevanias?

TY: There will be no items falling from candles this time around. However, there will be things lying around that previous adventurers have left behind. Also, breaking some walls will reveal food as in the other games.

Another thing we can't reveal too much about is a bartering system for items. A kindly-seeming character will sometimes appear to sell items. He will have items that are hard to get, but he will exchange them for something. It's a mystery what or who he is. To call on him, you must use an item called a contract. You enter into an agreement with him to get items; however, there seems to be a catch in the contract, so overdoing this may not be a good idea.

GP: How about the camera angle? Is it fixed, or can players control it?

TY: The camera angle will change depending on the best perspective for the situation. For example, if the best gameplay view is for the camera to follow the player, it will be that way. Or, if we deem that it will be easier in a situation to have the camera looking down at the player, we will do that. Also, players can look around in first-person view in any section, although they will not be able to move in this mode.

GP: How will you lay out the controls?

TY: All movement will be controlled with the analog stick, like Super Mario 64 or Tomb Raider II. In the Castlevania series, the section that really hindered the movement in the game has been the stairs—moving up and down and doing diagonal attacks. In Castlevania 64, all the characters will have diagonal attacks. Using Schnieder as an example, you can perform an attack and hold a button, then move the analog stick around to flail the whip.

Schnieder as he appears in the game so far...

GP: We've heard that players will be able to battle bosses, much as in a fighting game.

TY: Originally, we were planning to develop the game so that players could fight, much like Virtua Fighter or Tekken, but we found that working on the main part of the game is taking a lot of time and effort. We really hope to be able to put that in, but…right now, I don't know.

GP: How large do you think the game will be?

TY: About 96 to 128 megs. We don't really know yet. We want to put in as much memory as we can. Already, the sound and

... and concept art of him.

music take up a substantial portion of the memory.

GP: Music always seems to be an important part of the series, and I was wondering who the composer is and what problems you'll face with the N64's sound capabilities.

TY: Right now, we are trying to think of new ways to use the

N64's sound processor. We can't really reveal anything yet. In the sound section, the biggest problem is the memory limitations.

GP: How far along in development is the game?

TY: You mean, what percent complete is it? (laughs) Ten percent?

GP: When can our readers expect to play the game?

TY: Next year some time.

GP: Okay, some American gamers are going to want to know this: Since Castlevania 64 deals with vampires, will it be a bloody splatterfest?

TY: Since Castlevania has a horror theme, there have been issues raised about turning out a product with a lot of gory gameplay and cruel imagery. However, we envision Castlevania 64 as a gothic horror story—still as scary as other games with horror themes, but with a certain beauty to it. We are trying to use [Francis Ford] Coppola's film *Bram Stoker's Dracula* or [Neil Jordan's] *Interview with a Vampire* to help us with this imagery. We are not planning to make it a bloody horror game. **G**

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