South Park comes to the N64

"In the past year South Park has spawned a second series, a movie deal, a video and DVD lineup, [and] more merchandise than the average blockbuster..."

"Now it's time for some Police brutality."
-Officer Barbrady

"ooh, you're so naughty... you're asking for a drive-by slapping."
-Big Gay Al

"I'm going to clone you a new ass."
-Mephisto

SOUTH PARK
COMES TO THE N64

"DUDE, THAT'S PRETTY F#@%ED UP RIGHT THERE!"

DUDE!

MMUPPFF!!

POOT!!

By John Davison

Comedy Central president Doug Herzog was quoted in the February '98 issue of *Rolling Stone* as saying, "*South Park* is the Michael Jordan of basic-cable series." At the time it was the network's biggest show by a considerable margin and was drawing a massive share of the all-important 18-24 age group. The 1997 Christmas special drew 4.5 million viewers, more than seven times the typical audience for a Comedy Central show.

At the time there were two distinct camps when it came to passing judgement. There was the vast majority of people over the age of 14 and under the age of 40 with an even remotely puerile sense of humor who thought it was great, and then there were people who just didn't get it. Usually these were the parents of the other group.

Back in late '97 and early '98 people were chucking the word "zeitgeist" around in connection with the show like they actually knew what it meant. The same people were also speculating that the show would burn itself out in no time at all while also using the expressions "paradigm shift" and "youth-cult phenomenon" with equal pretentious abandon.

Well...they were wrong. And they still probably don't know what zeitgeist really means. In the past year *South Park* has spawned a second series, a movie deal, a video and DVD lineup, more merchandise than the average blockbuster, an album with a budget of $2 million that features Master P, Primus, Devo and Isaac Hayes and, most importantly (for us anyway), a video game.

The gaming rights to the franchise were actually being touted around at about the same time as that early article in *Rolling Stone* and were soon snapped up by Acclaim with its typical franchise-snagging fervor. The aim: presumably to get a game out quickly, just in case the *South Park* bubble burst. Gamers and fans of the show around the world, elated that a game had been signed, were equally disturbed by the news at first. Let's face it, most games of license products like this are, not to put too fine a point on it, crap. And Acclaim has had its fair share of barrel-scrapers in this particular area. Batman anyone?
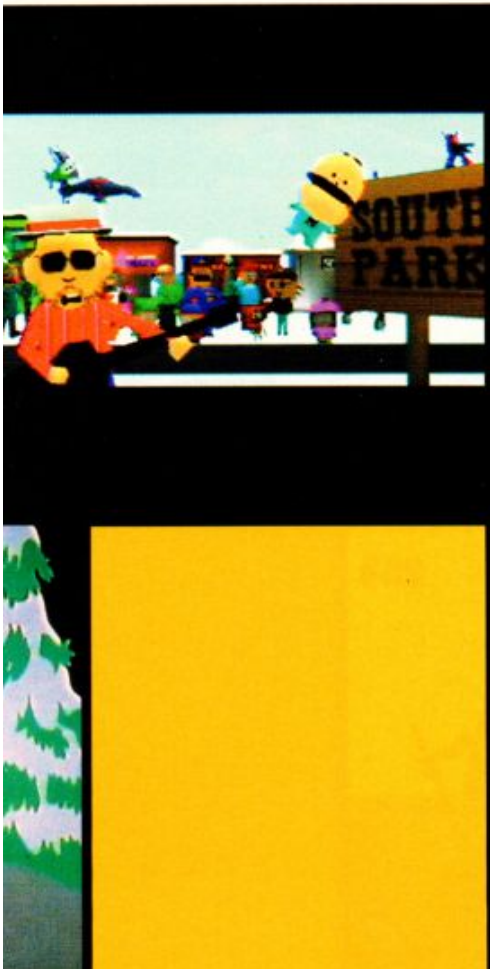
EGM
193

"YOU WILL RESPECT MY AUTHORI-TAY"
—Cartman

Fortunately, Acclaim put its best team to work on the project. Fresh from the success of Turok on the N64, Iguana was being pushed to produce a number of new products that would help signify the "new Acclaim," not least of which was Turok 2. South Park is a huge product for the team, but is by no means an easy one. And not just 'cause one of the first systems it is to be available for is the N64. Erm...isn't Nintendo going to be just a bit touchy about the words "fat ass," "piss" and "crap" slotting in alongside even stronger stuff that's bleeped out? Surely you can't do a South Park game without the dialogue?

"Nintendo was obviously a little concerned about the title at first," offers project leader Neill Glancy, "especially concerning the adult nature of the game, and we negotiated with them for a good few weeks about some of the finer points. We ended up reaching an agreement where we got to say everything that we wanted to within the game. It was something that might have been a sticking point, but Nintendo worked with us—they realized the importance of the integrity of the product and the importance of letting us do what we needed to. After negotiating with them, we came to a conclusion where everyone was happy, and where we didn't have to make any compromises. We had a number of phrases that we thought Nintendo would have some objections to, and they did air some concerns to start with, but ultimately the integrity of the South Park license was held to and Nintendo was terrific. I think you'll be surprised."

The game is shockingly close to the series. As we booted up an early version in the *EGM* offices, there was an audible sigh of relief from the gathered throng of onlookers as the expressions "Dude, that's pretty f****d up right there" and "Oh my god, they killed Kenny. You bastards!" were aired within the first minute of game time.

"There'll be things in the game that will make you think, 'Wow, we didn't think they'd be able to do that,' but ultimately we didn't want to produce a watered-down product," continues Glancy. "We can't let down the fans of the show."

Considering the short time period between contract signing and playable product, the game is surprisingly impressive. Anyone with concerns that a) it's not going to be funny and b) it's going to be a really crap game, can rest assured—there's nothing to be worried about. By taking the essence of the series and shoving it kicking and screaming into a simple, 3D action environment, the team has achieved an excellent balance. Matt and Trey were quoted in *Rolling Stone* as saying, "There's this whole thing out there about how kids are so innocent and pure. That's b******t man. Kids are malicious little f*****s. They totally jump on any bandwagon and rip on the weak guy at any chance. They say whatever bad word they can think of. They are total f*****g bastards..." Fortunately, the game manages to convey their feelings just as effectively as the show. There's no holding back here. Think Doom/Quake/Turok and imagine the essence of that gameplay mixed with simple but very clear cartoon-quality visuals, a broad selection of very vocal characters, and an even broader selection of bizarre and sadistic gadgets.

"It's been a very quick project to put together," offers Glancy. "It's been only about nine months in development. We've been using the technology from the T2 [Turok 2] engine as a base and then we've basically added to that. Destructible buildings, lip syncing, facial expressions...we altered the engine so we could make the game play like a show."
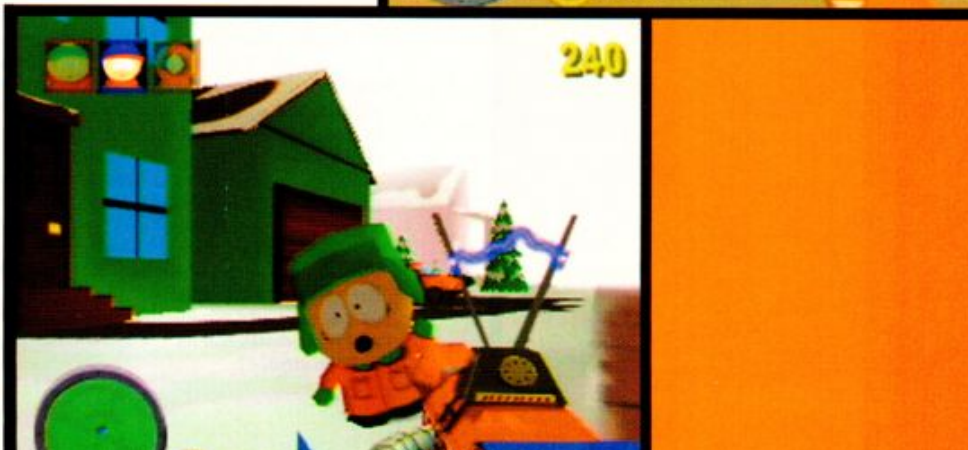
"WELL SPANK MY ASS AND CALL ME CHARLIE...ISN'T THIS EXCITING?" —Mr. Garrison

"The story deals with several days in the life of the town," Glancy continues. "There's this evil meteor approaching the Earth that has something of an influence over certain creatures and characters within the South Park universe. The basic premise of the gameplay itself, though, was always to produce something with a lot of action. We wanted to produce something of a twitch game that was fast-paced and fun with lots of funny, wacky gadgets and amusing comments from the kids.

"We got to do a lot more with the one-player aspect of the game than we thought we could. It basically has the kids starting at the town, and they have to make their way out toward the enemies who are heading in with the intention of destroying South Park itself. The kids simply have to stop the threat before it destroys the town.

"The enemies themselves are broken up into two distinct character types. We have the standard minion enemies. If we use the first level as an example, it leaves us with a turkey analogy; you have the standard turkey minion, and then you have the next layer up, which is the kind of 'tank' enemy, which in the case of the turkeys is the *Braveheart* turkey. The larger tank enemies move through the landscape, navigating the terrain (using a special pathfinding AI routine that we wrote) toward the town. As they do so, they are constantly spawning off the smaller enemies along the way—so the object is to destroy the tanks before it's too late. You have to nuke the big guys to stop the little guys."

As first levels go, South Park kicks things off

in as surreal and amusing way as it's probably possible. The player starts off in a really believable 3D interpretation of the town before heading out into the wilderness to face the turkeys. Now, throwing snowballs at turkeys is a pretty damn weird start to any game, but throw in the fact that most of the sound effects are the voice actors imitating certain sounds—rather than actual sounds—and things get even funnier. The turkeys are nothing short of hilarious as they scream "gobble, gobble, gobble," while the kids hurling their usual torrents of abuse around only add to the genuine humor of it all. And when the tanks start firing stuff out of their asses...well, it may be childish, but it is funny. As you progress through the levels, the available gadgets for wiping out the bad guys get more and more elaborate and sadistic. Although still to be confirmed as we go to press, everything from drain plunger-firing weapons to pissballs (snowballs...with, well, y'know) and a yet-to-be-confirmed cow-firing implement are on offer to supplement the more "normal" arsenal of snowballs.

"At the end of each chapter," continues Glancy, "you get a tally of how many of the big tanks got to the town, and how many you destroyed. I think if I was forced to give a most basic analogy of the idea behind the game it would be Missile Command, only in a 3D environment. You're protecting a location from enemies who are heading toward it, and you are rated on how much of the threat you manage to eradicate.

"Not every level involves the tank-style strategy though. Some levels are simply all-out action, while in others you find some more covert elements. For example, in episode three you are encountering the alien visitors for the first time, as well as the cows that they are affecting. The level is really mad because the aliens are abducting the cows and flying off with them, so sometimes you'll see characters wandering around and cows are falling from the skies onto their heads. In the third chapter of episode three the kids encounter the alien mothership and it's a really huge object in the landscape. As the chapter begins you see that the mothership is being patrolled by the alien visitors, so the only way to get in is to take these guys out from a distance. Fortunately at this point you are given one of the game's special gadgets, the sniper chicken, a covert weapon where you can zoom in on the enemies and knock out the bad guys without them seeing you."

"FART JOKES ARE THE LOWEST FORM OF COMEDY" —Philip

As any guy can tell you, there are few things in life that are actually funnier than farts, and the crew behind South Park are fully aware of this. Any opportunity to throw in a farty noise is firmly grasped, and every menu and option screen in the game is accompanied by a suitably varied collection of flatulent samples.

South Park isn't the first game to firmly promote the comedic value of the fart though. For those of you seeking solace from the dull and boring...

...dare you enter the chamber of farts?

Abe's Oddyssey
Abe's Exoddus
Banjo-Kazooie
Glover
ToeJam & Earl
Battle Arena Toshinden
Boogerman
ClayFighter
  (63 1/3 & Sculptor's Cut)
Lost Vikings
Beavis & Butt-head
Ren & Stimpy
Monster Rancher
Samurai Shodown (1&2)
Primal Rage
Tomb Raider II
WWF War Zone (N64)

EGM 195

"I'M HELLA COOL." —Cartman

Much of the concept work for the game is very much in the spirit of the show (let's be honest—would you be surprised if a chicken was used as a sniping weapon in the show?). So, was all of the work done by the team at Iguana, or did Matt Stone and Trey Parker play a big hand? "When it came to piecing the whole concept together," explains Glancy, "we came up with the skeleton story and split the whole thing into five different episodes in which there are further individual chapters or levels. We wanted each of the different episodes to have its own individual story, while at the same time contributing to the whole global idea behind the thing. Once we'd done that, we came up with a basic script kind of thing with some of the elements that we knew we needed the characters to say, and then we submitted that to Matt and Trey through Comedy Central."

So what happened then? "The two guys were actually very helpful, indeed. They've been extremely involved in the whole project and have overseen a lot of it. I spent a lot of time speaking with them to discuss different aspects and to try to make the whole thing fit in with what they wanted it to be. They are actually both very big games players themselves so it was really fun to work with them because they knew what they were talking about."

Did they change much of the project as it was developing? "What happened was that they went away and rewrote portions of the script and fed suggestions to help with the overall flow of the thing. They actually suggested each of the individual episodes should end with an amusing closing scene with the characters where they could put in

South Park creators Matt Stone (left) and Trey Parker (right) have played a significant part in the creation of the game. Both big game fans, they reworked much of the script, recorded original voice work for the majority of the characters and provided suggestions for the product.

some funny one-liners. That was easy for us to do, because we could just produce it using some of the tools we have in-house for producing cinemas from within the engine.

"Each episode will begin with an opening scene setter, where the boys go and talk to Chef and he tells them the basic idea of what they're going to be doing. They then go off into the level to perform the tasks at hand and they'll eventually find that Chef lives in a special location within the map. If you find him again he'll impart various pieces of advice and tips and there'll be a lot of witty stuff thrown in, too. There's a lot of stuff that was written specifically for the comedy element alone. Once all of this was scripted, the four voice actors (Matt, Trey, Mary Kay Bergman and Isaac Hayes) went into the studio to record it all for us. There isn't any speech in the game that wasn't recorded in a custom session for the product. Everything in there was recorded for the game. It was a lot of work to get that done, but it's made a huge difference."

"DUDE, THAT'S PRETTY F****D UP RIGHT THERE." —Stan

One of the many concerns that fans have about the transition from TV show to video game is the way the speech will be handled throughout. For a start, no one wants anything where the script has to hold back—and this seems to have been addressed, but how can you possibly get enough speech into an N64 cart? "It goes without saying that the speech in the game is a very large part of the experience," begins Glancy, clearly proud of what the team has achieved, "and it was something that we were very conscious of getting right. We didn't want to kind of wimp out on the speech and do a half-assed job. We dedicated an awful lot of cart space to the speech and sound. We're going to ship on a 16Mb cartridge, and of that about 9Mb of that is going to be just speech. A good proportion of that is actually RAX'd too...RAX is our proprietary compression technology for speech (and I've no idea what it stands for) so I think we worked out that if you had all of the speech samples uncompressed, it would be, I dunno, about 25Mb of sound."
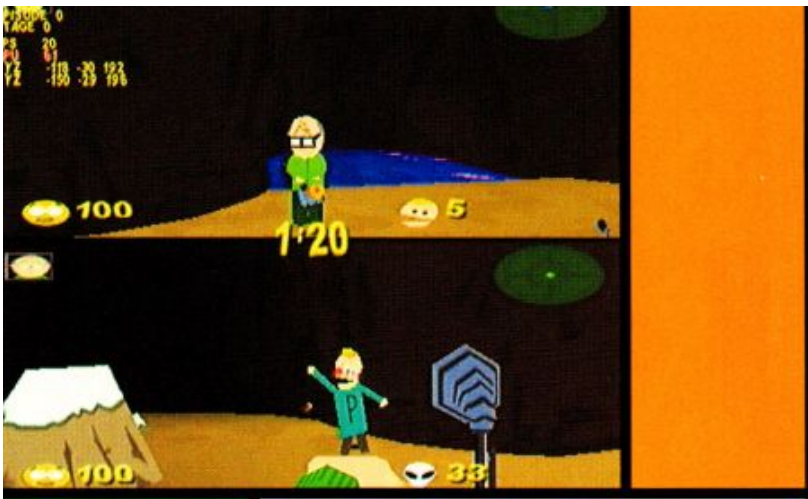
It shows too. The variety of

SOUTH PARK DEVELOPMENT TEAM

1. Justin Norr
2. Cheesey Poofs
3. Peyton Duncan
4. Cow
5. Neill "Alien Overlord" Glancy
6. Gregg Hargrove
7. Marc Schaefgen
8. Carl Wade
9. Scott Brocker
10. Chuck Lupher
11. Jeff Everett
12. Randy Buck
13. Kris Pelley
14. Darren Mitchell
15. Jim "Jimbo" Richardson
16. Jon Mayfield
17. Jonny Garrett
18. Mat Kraemer
19. Chuck Karpiak
20. Dave Smith
21. Trevor Lemoine
22. Kim Lum
23. Cubbie
24. Joe Willis
25. Mike Janke
26. Mike Daubert

comments spewed from all of the game's characters' mouths is impressively diverse. Every single character has a number of "stock" comments as you cruise around the environments, but they also have certain expressions that they will make when faced with different situations. It's all pretty cool.

"We've implemented a lot of our own custom technology to let us do things that weren't previously supported [in the T2 engine] such as lip-syncing from within the engine and adding emotional states to facial animations," adds Glancy. "Basically what we do when we get the speech back from Matt and Trey, and then of course Isaac Hayes and Mary Kay Bergman, is go through all of the scripts and flag what kind of emotional state a character needs to be in as they say it. So, if Cartman is saying, 'Quit that you butt-licker,' his facial expression is appropriate for what he's saying. This way, as they're walking around and interacting in different ways, their facial expressions and 'moods' appear to be correct.

"The speech in the game is all split into two main sections. The one-player game is the proper 'story' mode and this has the kids talking to each other, Chef helping you out and basically all of the work that the four voice artists performed. Then we have the second module, which is the speech for the multiplayer mode. This is basically the introductions for each of the numerous characters that we've put in there, of which there are about 20, as well as additional quotes for hits, flinch reactions and stuff like that. When we were planning the multiplayer mode, we simply submitted a list of characters that we wanted to put in there, along with a list of phrases that we'd like to see crop up. Pretty much all of the favorite characters are in there. Every character has original dialogue and there are numerous secret characters that can be accessed."

Based on the version of the game we've had here at *EGM*, there are already some firm favorites. Hearing Big Gay Al mince his way through the levels has to be heard to be believed ("Ooh, you're so naughty...you're asking for

a drive-by slapping"), while Terrance and Philip make a welcome appearance too.

"There are a lot of multiplayer levels," continues Glancy. "In fact, there are nearly 20 different maps which are set in the town, and some are arenas that you uncover in the one-player game. There are even sections out in the wilderness and even in the alien mothership. There's a variety of both indoor and outdoor levels."

Thankfully, it would seem that Iguana has pulled off a multiple-coup with South Park. Not only is it shaping up to be a more than respectable 3D action game, it's also one of the most honest and daring licensed games we've seen on just about any system. Add in the fact that it's yet another game that supports both four-player fun and Nintendo 4Mbit RAM Pak (for hi-res), and it would seem to be guaranteed success. In the words of the South Park kids... "This kicks so much ass."

SOUTH PARK EPISODE GUIDE

Season One
Cartman Gets an Anal Probe
Weight Gain 4000
Volcano
Big Gay Al's Big Gay Boat Ride
An Elephant Makes Love to a Pig
Death
Pink Eye
Damien
Starvin' Marvin
Mr. Hankey, The Christmas Poo
Tom's Rhinoplasty
Mecha-Streisand
Cartman's Mom is a Dirty Slut

Season Two
Terrance & Philip in "Not without my Anus"
Cartman's Mom is Still a Dirty Slut
Chickenlover
Ike's Wee-Wee
Conjoined Fetus Lady
The Mexican Staring
   Frog of Southern Sri Lanka
City on The Edge of Forever
Summer Sucks
Chef's Salty Chocolate Balls
Roger Ebert Should Lay off the Fatty Foods
Clubhouses
Cow Days
Chef Aid