

The Making of ... Rogue Squadron

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THE MAKING OF...

BURIED TREASURE

Despite being released long before Episode I hit the cinemas, the game included the top-secret Naboo Starfighter, protected by the most obscure cheat code ever. Julian recalls: "It was a nightmare to convince LucasFilm licensing to let us put it in, as they didn't believe we could hide it properly. In the end, only two people – me and LucasArts – knew the code. Even the programmers didn't know it. We decided to put it in after seeing it in the first picture of Episode I that Lucas released, in the summer of 1998. We were confident no-one would find it – there wasn't a Gameshark out at the time. It wasn't in the PC version either, just to be safe. We added it as a patch later."



THE MAKING OF...

ROGUE SQ

Every month, we'll be revisiting classic N64 games with the people who made them. Factor 5's Julian Eggebrecht takes us through the difficult development of the prequel to Gamecube's most eagerly anticipated launch title...

As an N64 launch title, LucasArts' *Shadows of the Empire* provided a glimpse of what was possible when the classic movie series was combined with Nintendo's powerful new hardware. The Battle of Hoth level in particular was superb, even if what followed couldn't quite match up to such a strong opening sequence.

Among *Shadow's* admirers was Julian Eggebrecht, of legendary ex-Amiga codeshop Factor 5. After seeing what Nintendo's next-generation console could do, Julian was eager to start producing games for it.

Humble beginnings

Julian explains: "We were working on

PlayStation software when *Shadow* was released. There was this whole mystery around the N64 – that it was the wonder console and it could do everything. We'd had a terrible time switching over to 3D, as did many people, and the nasty thing about the PS early on was that you clearly saw Japanese developers getting more information [from Sony] than the Western ones. That was frustrating for European developers. We talked with the SOTE team, and they filled us in on the new machine."

Factor 5 liked what they heard. So much so, that they decided to abandon PlayStation development and put all their resources into pitching for a sequel to *SOTE*. One that would really

WHY ROGUE SQUADRON WAS A CLASSIC

MAGIC MOMENT SOUNDS AMAZING

SECRETS It's absolutely packed full of hidden goodies. Perform well enough and you can unlock a selection of bonus levels, plus extra vehicles (including an AT-ST, the Millennium Falcon, and, er, the art director's 1968 Buick).

DETAIL The greyish colour scheme found throughout much of the Star Wars universe proved ideally suited to the way the N64 handled textures, allowing for bigger textures, and better-looking objects than in other games of the time.

CONTROLS Creating the feel of piloting an X-Wing took Factor 5 almost nine months. It was designed to sit halfway between full flight controls and steering a car, and it requires little practice before you can zoom around like Luke Skywalker.



IT'S STAR WARS! Being based on the most popular movie series of all time is a pretty huge selling point. Rogue Squadron harnessed the N64's power to provide a more authentic look and feel than previous Star Wars games.

The game's orchestral soundtrack and 3D effects showed that the N64 wasn't as limited as some thought. Says Julian: "We had these grandiose plans for a complete sound system, which became MusyX (the system now used in all Nintendo machines). We surprised Nintendo with that – they were very sceptical about their own sound hardware, but didn't want to use streaming music like in SOTE. We said trust us, and they were convinced."



UADRON

do justice to the Star Wars movies. "The SOTE guys went off to work on *Episode I: Racer*," says Julian, "And LucasArts needed another team to do a

timeline – we had to concentrate on side-stories. That turned out to be pretty lucky, because otherwise we'd never have managed to do those

Factor 5 put all their efforts into pitching for a sequel to *Shadows of the Empire*

Star Wars N64 game for Christmas. Our original idea was to do a 'best of' the movies, a Greatest Hits of Episodes IV, V and VI – basically, exactly what *Rogue Leader* on Gamecube is. But back then they wouldn't allow games to be set in the Star Wars movie

scenes justice on the N64 – Gamecube turned out much better!"

Sticky patch

The N64 hardware, so well promoted by the SOTE team, proved problematic for Factor 5. In fact, it was only in the

last four months of development that the game began to look like something special. Julian says: "It took us a long time to get to grips with the N64 – what we had one year into development was really terrible. The game only came together when the SOTE team told us about 'microcode' [Nintendo's jealously guarded code library that gave "Dream Team" coders access to the N64's custom chips]. We knew it'd be perfect for making the landscapes much faster than using the CPU alone.

"We persuaded Nintendo by giving a written presentation, saying how we'd use the microcode if we had it. That convinced them, but it was a year into development, and we'd already

spent 12 whole months working on the game engine."

Factor 5 proved equally adept at dealing with LucasFilm, even though the movie giant was busy putting the finishing touches to *Episode I* at the time. Producers from the company were always on hand to cross-reference the game's storyline with the carefully co-ordinated events of the films and books, making sure there were no glaring contradictions or embarrassing timeline errors. It also meant the team were privy to the kind of insider knowledge that Star Wars fans would give their eye teeth for. "We had to go back and forth to the Lucas ranch, checking everything, not only against what already existed but also what

THE MAKING OF...

MAGIC MOMENT FLY ANYWHERE

Rogue Squadron's huge environments and go-anywhere feel were made possible by Nintendo's decision to stick with cartridges. It's faster to drag information from chips than it is from a CD, and the team were able to use this to their advantage. "We were heavily influenced by some bits of Starfox, especially the free-roaming bit with the mothership and all the ships swarming around. The cart helped to do free-roaming, as we could drag new bits of landscape off it quickly. Rogue Squadron wouldn't have been possible on the PlayStation."



George was planning with the new movies," says Julian.

Last-minute frenzy

The difficulty of adding structured gameplay to such a large, free-roaming title was a big headache. After watching visitors to the March '98 E3 show get hopelessly lost in the game's vast landscapes, the team knew they had to make major changes. The 'radar cone', which directs players to each objective, proved to be just the thing the game needed, but was added just four months before launch. "We were

really panicking," admits Julian. "We knew we needed a visual clue, but didn't want pointers or arrows that cluttered up the screen, or took away control from the player."

Appropriately enough, inspiration came from the movies. Julian reveals: "I had the idea after watching a bit of Star Wars where they're gathered around a table at a hologram display, and you can see an orange wedge approaching the Death Star. We decided to take that and use it as the guidance system."

From what was, initially, little more than a technical demo, *Rogue Squadron*

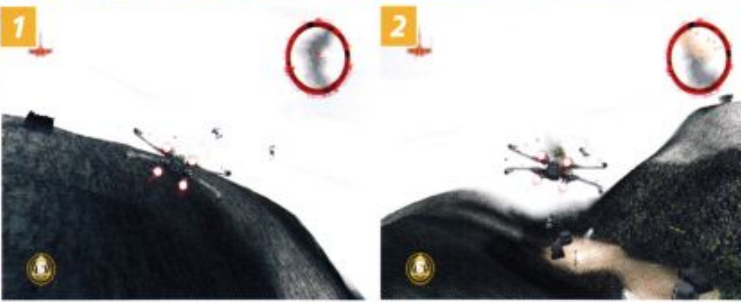
blossomed into a finished game with a speed born of necessity. LucasArts needed it completed in time for Christmas in the States, so Factor 5 did what they could, as quickly as possible. The developers are the first to admit that it's not the greatest game ever, but if it wasn't for the close relationship forged with both Nintendo and LucasArts, we wouldn't have the magnificent *Rogue Leader* on Gamecube. And that's definitely something to be grateful for. **NGC**

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE



One part of the game that Factor 5 found disappointing was its unbalanced difficulty level. "It had a terrible, terrible learning curve," laments Julian. "Because it came together at the last minute, there wasn't time to get the curve right. There were huge spikes anywhere and everywhere. It's the same with the medals - originally they were supposed to work out nicely, but they carried over that initial difficulty on some levels and that made them ever harder to collect. Take Sullust for example - even I can't play that. I barely get through, let alone get a gold medal."

SMART? OR NOT...



The game throws up some fiendish set-pieces, but how smart are those enemies? Julian reveals: "There's practically no AI in RS. It's a huge hassle to write good AI. It bogs down the CPU."

Surprisingly, Julian cites one of the N64's best games to illustrate the detrimental effect of AI: "A good example would be how slow *Perfect Dark* became, largely due to AI." It's a tough trade-off.



"What we ended up with," continues Julian, "were two or three battles with TIE Interceptors which had specific AI. Everything else is pre-scripted stuff that draws in the player much more."

The final result is impressive. As you battle against the Empire, you have to look hard to notice that the enemies are following preset patterns. It makes little difference to the gameplay itself.



LOOKING GOOD

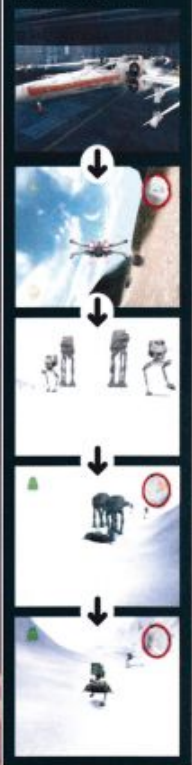
The game's real standout feature was always its graphical finesse. Julian admits that visual appeal was a top priority: "Our main aim with *Rogue Squadron*'s visuals was to top *SOTC* big-time. We knew we could do way more. We wanted to do the best-looking Star Wars game ever." Certain effects, such as the sand on Tatooine and the subtly shaded skies, took months of trial and error. "They were a nightmare," says Julian, clearly relieved to be working on the far simpler Gamecube these days.



LEVEL TOUR: ESCAPE FROM FEST

MAGIC MOMENT HIRES

It was only the second game to use the N64's Expansion Pak, making a world of difference to the graphics. "Lots of stuff came about by luck," says Julian. "The Expansion Pak option was added in the last six weeks! We heard the Turok 2 team used it, so we tried it ourselves, and it worked fine."



● Why set the game on boring old planet surfaces, when so many of the climactic action sequences from the movies are in space? "Everyone was sick to the teeth of space battles," says Julian. "Nobody had ever done a landscape-based Star Wars game, so we decided to focus on that."



● So that you're not left nodding off during the more tedious moments of flying from place to place, the game fools around with distance and scale somewhat. It's not something you'd immediately notice, but the ships aren't actually the correct size.



● The complexity of the graphics and the sheer size of the levels meant that fogging was inevitable. It's a technical issue that Factor 5 fixed completely by the time Battle For Naboo arrived, though, thanks largely to its considerably longer development period.



● Since the best part of SOTE was the icy Hoth world, it would have been madness not to include some kind of reference back to the earlier game. Hence, the frozen wasteland of Fest in Rogue Squadron, with its legions of deadly walkers. Tow ropes at the ready...



● Apart from making the landscapes quicker to navigate, it wasn't just for cosmetic reasons that Factor 5 played around with the size of the ship models. Julian explains: "If you actually drew, say, an A-Wing to proper scale, it would look so tiny you'd be laughing at it."



● Attacking ground troops is particularly satisfying – even if they do explode when shot, as opposed to spew a great fountain of gore everywhere. Julian puts the lack of death animations down to lack of time, but we doubt LucasArts would have approved of exploding body parts.