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SANTA CLAUS: TWAS THE NIGHT



Developer: Creative Control Games

Publisher: c² LTD.

of Players: 1

Features: Analog Support, Vibration, Dolby Pro Logic II

THE NYPD, FBI, AND EVEN THE CIA ARE MAKING A WANTED LIST AND checking it twice, for they are out to nab Santa, alive or iced...

We've all thought about it, probably now more than ever in this era of paranoia: What if a drunken redneck spotted Santa landing his sleigh and confused it for a UFO? Actually, why would anyone ponder such a ridiculous idea? Do not question, for Creative Control Games did and created a third-person action game that finds Santa on the run.

The story begins with Santa being spotted in Anytown, USA. The cops are alerted and the chase begins. The first mission is a non-optional training run, introducing the two basic modes of gameplay you must master to get Mr. Claus' massive red derrière out of trouble. First, you must partake in the game's version of a stealth missions. You enter a house and deliver gifts to good children or "snipe" the naughty ones with coal. While crawling through chimneys, through vents, or up and down creaky staircases, you must keep an eye on your "Invis-O-Meter." If you awaken a child and they catch you snooping around, mission over. Be sure to recover health by eating cookies and milk left out by kids or mooching eggnog left in the fridge.

After completing the in-house training mission, you take to the rooftops on your sleigh. Access your list of boys and girls and head to the next mission. Locations range from Jamaica, with Santa sporting a Hawaiian shirt, to an overpopulated China. This part of the game plays a lot like Crazy Taxi, only not as much fun. A timer counts down as you speed to your next destination. However, on your tail are now the police, Feds, CIA, civilians and even a couple of helicopters and fighter jets. Fight them off by hurling items from your unlimited supply of toys or utilize Blitzen's speedburst to make your getaway.

Control is questionable. While navigation through the game's pointlessly demented menus (images of psychotic toys and cracked ornaments abound) is quick and easy, controlling the action is a chore. Santa moves like a soggy diapered Louie Anderson and while the sleigh riding is fast paced, you'd have a simpler time controlling Oprah's eating habits.

Graphics and sound are a mixed sack. The cel-shaded animations resemble an anime spin on Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, but come off sloppy and needlessly choppy by no fault of the Xbox's capabilities. While it may run at a "smooth" 60fps, it surely doesn't look it. Cinema sequences are also lacking, using the same in-game graphics and not really providing much in the way of entertainment. In-game sound FX are this title's high point. With Dolby Pro Logic II, the ambient sounds of jingling bells, clattering reindeer hooves, and the voice talent of John Goodman, Kelsey Grammar, Don Rickles, and Betty White resonate crisply. That is, when they are not drowned out by the game's music. Queensrÿche-esque versions of classic carols loop throughout the game. The screeching vocals of "O Tannenbaum" are definitely the harshest.

Normally, I'd have to say leave this game at the store, but as budgetware, it's a tempting purchase. For a mere \$19.99, I'd say this bizarre title is worth picking up for the Christmas metal soundtrack alone. And with that, a note on the PS2 version of "Twas the Night" - Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells, Jaggies all the way....



BY ANTHONY G. CASASNOVAS

