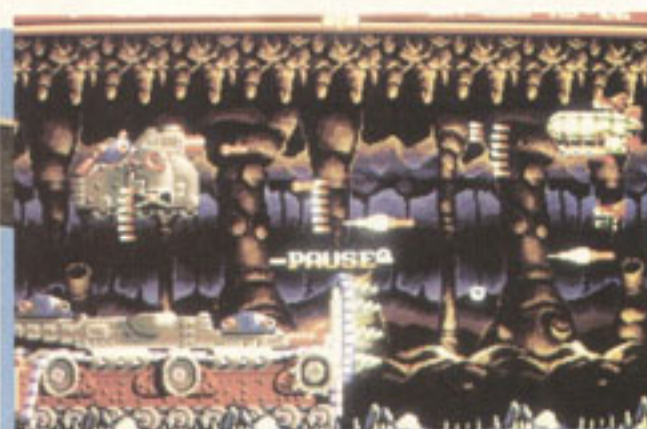




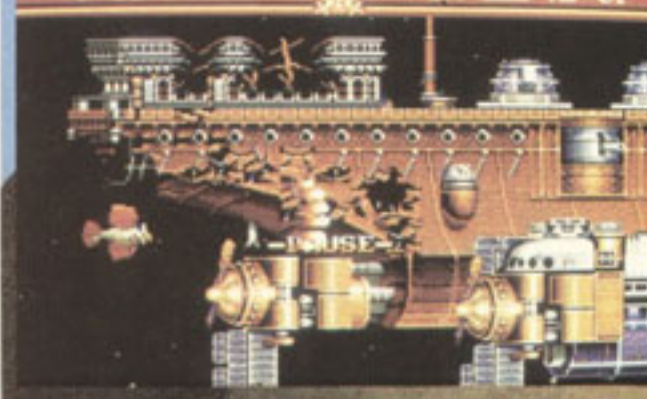
STEEL VILL



LV=15 EX=000 NO=01



LV=17 EX=000 NO=01



LV=19 EX=000 NO=01



LV=20 EX=000 NO=02



LV=22 EX=000 NO=02

Imamio Thunder might sound like a sad Japanese pop band to us, but to the citizens of the Steel Empire it is a moniker to be feared. The Imamio Thunder is in fact a big gun with the power to destroy large areas of cities. As you may expect, this super-powerful weapon has fallen into the wrong hands, those of the Motorhead empire, who are now embarking on a mission of conquest across the globe. Only one force stands in the way of the evil Motorheads and that is the Silverhead Empire - to which you have sworn allegiance. Thus it falls to you, controlling a fighter team, to destroy as many Motorhead war engines as possible and blow up that big gun.

Steel Empire is a horizontally scrolling shoot 'em up set in a Super-Science Industrial Revolution era, replete with steam-powered flying ships and cities in the sky. It is your job to hunt down all the Imamio Thunder weapons in possession of the Motorheads and destroy them. This sounds easy enough until you find that each one is mounted on a nigh-on indestructible war machine up to three screens long! Are your flying skills up to the challenge?

PLANE TO SEE

At the start of each level you are given a choice of two aircraft, each of which is equipped in a different way. The first is a bi-plane which boasts a small machine for air-to-air defence and a larger gun to strafe lower targets. This, combined with its great speed and maneuverability make it ideal for air-to-ground combat. The second craft is a small airship (although it still dwarfs the 'plane). What this Zeppelin lacks in speed it makes up for in resilience to attack, and its powerful cannons make it ideal for air-to-air jampy.



LV=22 EX=000 NO=02



LV=24 EX=000 NO=02



STEEL EMPIRE

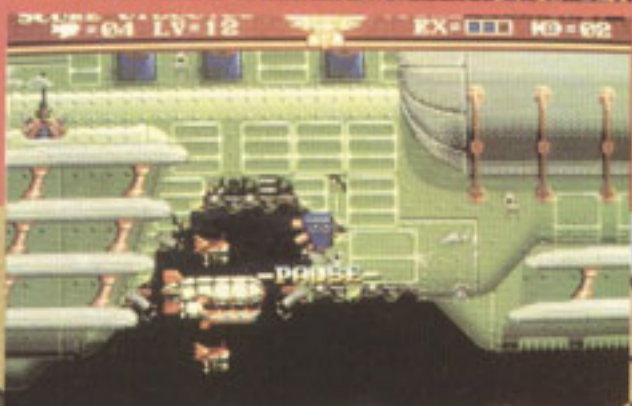
EXPAND YOUR WEAPON

Roaming around the skyways of the Steel Empire are scores of goods-carrying airships. Destroy one and their contents spin out into the ether. The goodies they carry include extra energy, option 'planes which follow you around the screen blasting as they go, electrical storm smart bombs and extra lives. Some airships also carry experience icons. Collecting three of these advances your firepower (and your options) by one level, and there are twenty levels of power in all!



CASTLES IN THE SKY

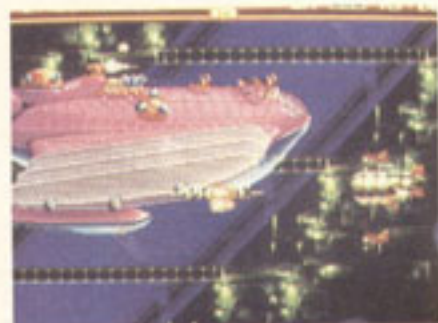
Fans of Japanese animation may experience some déjà vu whilst playing Steel Empire. Most of the sprites, backgrounds and guardians are faxed from a brilliant film called Laputa - City in the Sky. Laputa was a film based on a book called, funnily enough, Steel Empire, written in 1816. It features the exploits of two children, a magic pendant, a gang of sky-pirates, an evil government and a city held aloft by giant propellers (called Laputa), not to mention a horde of magic warrior robots. The visual effects are certainly stunning, and it's surprising quite how well Steel Empire captures the atmosphere of the film. If you can track down a copy of Laputa, it's well worth a look.





TWO-WAY FUN

It's just as well that Steel Empire casts you as a two man crew of pilot and gunner - the amount of enemies swarming on-screen makes your bi-directional fire essential. Steel Empire has not one but two buttons to operate your main guns. One fires them to the left, and the other to the right. So if some micro-planes try to sneak up your rear end, they can be easily disposed of without joypad stress.



COMMENT



RAD

What's best is that the gameplay comes close to the standards set by the graphics. The two-way fire makes things a bit more interesting and there's always plenty to do on-screen at any time. However, there are one or two faults. Firstly, when there's loads going on and the screen is stuffed with sprites, bonuses and bullets, Steel Empire does suffer quite badly from slowdown. Secondly, most of the challenge in each level is held with the end-of-level guardian, so if you've got any objections to multi-phase bosses which keep drawing new weapons or transforming, Steel Empire quickly becomes boring. The game is also way too simple on EASY mode - set the difficulty to HARD for a decent challenge. Although the gameplay could never be called original (one of the guardians looks suspiciously like the Dreadnought from R-Type), the atmospheric graphic feel and frenetic action make Steel Empire a worthy purchase for blasting fans.

COMMENT



JULIAN

I have to disagree with Rad on this one. Gorgeous looking it might be, but Steel Empire didn't provide me with much excitement. There's no originality or surprises in the gameplay (with elements taken from R-Type, UN Squadron and P-47 amongst others you immediately get those seen-it-all-before blues), there's only one weapon and the challenge level is very, very low. It's possible to finish it on EASY on your first go, NORMAL requires a couple of credits, and HARD takes an hour or two to conquer. If you're a shoot 'em up beginner, you might find this fun, but anyone who's played a few games of this type simply won't get full value for money. Try Gynoug or Hellfire instead. Both were recently officially released and offer superb, highly addictive and challenging gameplay.



BY: HOT B

PRICE: £35.00

RELEASE DATE: IMPORT

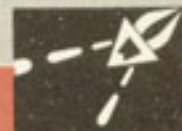
GAME DIFFICULTY: EASY/MEDIUM

LIVES: 3

CONTINUES: 3

SKILL LEVELS: 3

RESPONSIVENESS: VERY QUICK



PRESENTATION 91%

Loads of options and groovy in-game presentation.

GRAPHICS 94%

Stunning sprites and backgrounds in a refreshing style make this a graphics-fest of considerable proportions.

SOUND 78%

There are adequate tunes and some decent blasting effects, but on the whole the sound could have been better.

PLAYABILITY 82%

The simple and straightforward blasting action and low challenge level means this is

LASTABILITY 59%

Very easy to complete on all levels, and even though you might come back to it once finished

OVERALL 70%

A potentially brilliant, superb looking game which is let down by its lack of challenge.