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Sneak Peek: Skullcracker
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NOTE: Screen shots and information presented in this article are based on a pre-release version of Skullcracker and are subject to change before final release. This article is not a review.

In the last two years, CyberFlix has grown by leaps and bounds. What once was a 4-man basement software start–up has grown into a 25+ employee software publishing company thanks to the success of unique CD–ROM titles like Lunicus and Jump Raven. But despite the fame and glory, CyberFlix remains relatively isolated (and believe me, they like it tha
t way) in Knoxville, a small city in northeastern Tennessee.

The brain trust behind the company's phenomenal success is Bill Appleton, a wildly intelligent and charismatic leader who's dedication for the last 10 years has been to provide the best in Macintosh software. In recent years, his passion has been creating great Macintosh games. His co–workers, all 25 of them, are much like the man himself—talen
ted, determined, and enthusiastic. With this talented pool of designers, artists and programmers, CyberFlix is readying an assault of titles in 1995. Among them are Dust, a blast–to–the past western set in the year 1882. In the game you'll be able to explore an western entire town and interact with the people of Diamondback, New Mexico. Also in
the works are RMS Titanic, an interactive adventure set on the ill–fated ship that sunk some 80 years ago and for all you Jump Raven fans, Jump Raven: Part Two is set to begin production early next year. And set to ship in early January 1995 (at Macworld San Francisco to be exact) is Skullcracker, an action–horror arcade game full of nasty werevol
ves, vampires, and grave–walkers.

The Rise of the Living Dead. Murder, mystery, and mayhem. Three elements that make Skullcracker a gruesome yet fun arcade game set in a post–mortem world where the walking dead (or Freaks) have become a commonplace part of day–to–day living. Enter Mortality Enforcement, Inc. (MEI), an organization whose motto is "Helping the Dead Stay Dead." an
d who, until now, has helped keep the supernatural deviants in check.

But a band of politically correct citizens are now demanding an end to MEI and calling for, of all things, civil rights for the undead. But something strange is happening in the Freak community, the undead have become rather nasty in their nature due to the effect of a sinister mind–altering substance known as goop. This goop, whatever it might be
, may also be the cause of normal citizens and ordinary creatures mutating and becoming quite fierce.

This is where you come in, Mortis Rigor, AKA "Skullcracker" (or Penelope "Bonebreaker" Jones if you wish to be a female). Your job is to help Mortality Enforcement regain control over the uncooperative undead. The job at hand won't be easy. On your mission you'll encounter repulsive and disgusting fiends like werewolf bikers, hell–bound pets
, goop–crazed gangs on skate boards, and blood–sucking vampires.

The Characters. In the game you can choose to be either Mortis Rigor, AKA Skullcracker or Penelope "Bonebreaker" Jones. Mortis Rigor was formerly a crack squad leader for Mortality Enforcement, Inc. He left MEI after becoming privy to certain information on covert activities that were part of the company's new business contracts and services. M
ortis is a weapons specialist and considered an expert in hand–to–hand combat.

Penelope Jones fought vampires and werewolves in London while working for Scotland Yard and the British Secret Service. She is the only female ever to be given a license to kill. Bonebreaker's employers regard her as a "blunt instrument" to be used only as a last resort.

Throughout the game you'll also come in contact with the likes of; Boggs Grogle, a no–nonsense MEI control agent who briefs field operatives at the outset of each mission; Dick Charmin, MEI's public relations hack; Regan Learton, a dedicated and idealistic investigative journalist; and Moss Kragg, a powerful, albeit obese, vampire kingpin who ow
ns several businesses in Romero Mall.

Let's Get Cracking. There are a total of four assignments in Skullcracker. Within each assignment are 4 sub–levels and hidden levels. As you progress through levels, they become increasingly difficult. Each level leads ultimately to a "Level Boss," a sub creature who is rather evil. It takes special skills (and key weapons and advanced moves) t
o defeat the level boss.

Assignment 1 takes you into the woods and playground. It's been reported that werewolf bikers are giving goop to school kids and it's your job to get rid of these nasties once and for all.

Assignment 2 takes you into the very pits of hell on earth, the ever present urban shopping mall named Romero Mall. Here the mall is held hostage by a band of goop-crazed skate punks or "the Mall Crawlers." Your job is to defeat these vermin from the shopping mall so the citizens can go back to what they do best, shop–til–they-drop.

Assignment 3 brings you to the graveyard and cathedral. Here zombies are operating a "free goop kitchen" from inside the deserted cathedral. When an "anti–freak" demonstration erupts into chaos, the zombies get wired on goop and go on the offensive. You job here is to shut down the goop–dispensing operation by destroy the zombies and their lea

der, Mizithra, a fearsome adversary who wields electricity as a weapon and possesses

the uncanny knack of splitting in two.

Assignment 4 takes you on a little detour of sorts. It seems the trail of goop is

leading to Mortality Enforcement. Is there a connection between MEI and the goop

epidemic? On this level you'll find out as you set out to destroy the machinery that

produces the goop.

Gameplay and Graphics. Skullcracker is somewhat of a throw back to the classic
arcade games you once played at your favorite local arcade center. The artwork and
storyline was inspired by classic scare films like Teenage Zombies, and George
Romero's Night of the Living Dead. It features fantastic side-scrolling action where
the scenery moves whe
n the player moves either left or right. A lot of attention to detail has been spent on
the graphics and are evident in the wonderful backgrounds you see in the game. For
example, while in the shopping mall you'll find real-life like stores like Radio Shriek,
Screamin Marcus, Wolfman Camera & Video, The Goop, Record Barf, and Victoria's
Secretio
ns.

The two characters in the game, Skullcracker and Bonebreaker each have their own
style, weapons, and other abilities. Each also has the ability to punch and kick, or
throw knives, etc.

The gameplay itself involves moving to the right until you reach the end of that sub-
level. Of course, there will be plenty of demons, werewolves, and other sub-creatures
along to that way. You'll have to use your punching, kicking and throwing abilities to
kill each of these monsters. Along the way you'll be able to pick up other necessary
powe
r-ups to use against the vermin.

As with all CyberFlix games, you won't have to wait a half hour for the game to load
The action is non–stop and fast–paced throughout the game. Also included is a killer
soundtrack to liven up the mood.

Raising the Dead. If the graphics and gameplay look familiar to you, then you've
probably realized that Skullcracker is essentially an updated version of Reactor's
Creepy Castle, a game Bill Appleton wrote for that company back in 1991. Fans of
that game will be happy to know that Skullcracker maintains that same gamestyle
but improves on graphi
cs, action, and gameplay.

Now in the hands of Rand Cabus, Skullcracker's producer, who's eye for detail and
visual continuity bring to life a once fun but forgotten game. Skullcracker also
includes rich soundtrack from Scott Scheinbaum, gorgeous graphics by Eric Whited
3D models and animation from Michael Kennedy, and is being meticulously
programmed by Don McCasland. S
kullcracker typifies CyberFlix's dedication to bring not only wonderfully visually CD-
ROM games to the Mac, but also games that feature an intriguing storyline, witty
humor and exciting gameplay.

Look for Skullcracker to awaken in January, 1995.