



REVIEW

The Dark Zone, once known for its complete lack of crime, has been invaded by a gang led by a strange criminal overlord known only as M. The police, suddenly overwhelmed by the crime wave, are not surprisingly completely powerless. This doesn't stop one particularly hard cop, Sergeant Brody, attempting a one-man assault on the overlord's criminal infested strongholds. Unfortunately, upon entering the danger zone, he is immediately blown away by an Uzi-wielding, sharp-shooting maniac. Such is life, and indeed death, for that matter.

His best friend and partner, known only as Sergeant Gray, witnesses the brutal murder and attempts to do something about it. Using his martial arts skills and tough cop training he decides to avenge his dead chum by infiltrating all five of M's bases, kicking the waste products out of his cronies and finally facing up to M himself in a horrific final conflict.

The actual gameplay is pretty simplistic. The player controls Gray, who runs around the horizontally scrolling platform landscapes using his punching and kicking skills on the chins of the various criminals who accost him on his travels. This may sound pretty easy, but M's been expecting something like that and he's placed his best henchmen at the end of each level. They're just itching to kick Gray's ass up and down the many streets that make up the Dark Zone...



▲ Gray is able to whip out his firearm at will!

RUNNING



▲ Sergeant Gray ducks to avoid enemy fire. Perhaps now he should beat up his assailant?



COMMENT



JULIAN

Running Battle's special suits, different weapons and beat 'em up action may sound like a recipe for a superb game, but unfortunately it's all half-baked. The sound is a ghastly booming cacophony, the background graphics are rubbish and the animation on the poorly-drawn sprites is wooden - the only decent bit is Sgt Gray's laughable epileptic fit attack that masquerades as a special move.

And to cap it all, the gameplay is very poorly designed. During the level the baddies are completely pathetic and offer no resistance, whereas the end-of-level bosses are really tough, which makes play very frustrating and annoying. When it comes to the crunch, Running Battle seems to be half finished. With some graphical and gameplay tweaks it could have been pretty neat, but sadly it's not to be and the end product is a mediocre, irritating and horrible-looking beat 'em up which falls well short of its potential.

SUPER SUITS ON A STICK

Should you chance across a fine SS icon, Gray is immediately endowed with a Super Suit. This boosts his attack strength fourfold, and makes his defensive moves twice as effective. The best icon to find is marked SR. The effects of this are dramatic. Gray's running speed becomes near lightning speed and he won't fall through holes in the scenery! As an added bonus, Gray is also invincible and enemies die on contact. Watch it though - there's a strict time limit for your killing spree.



▲ Leaping enemies accost Sergeant Gray in this fun-filled, action-packed adventure.

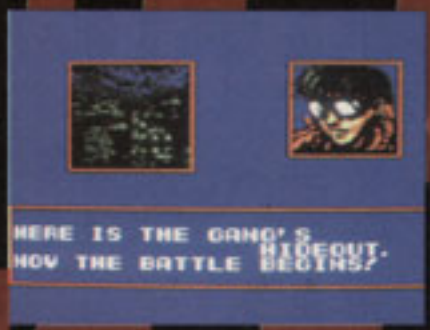


BATTLE



SHOOTING WEAPONS

Located around M's stronghold are two different types of powerful weapon. The 9mm Beretta is very common on the earlier levels, and comes with thirty bullets (rather than fifteen in the magazine and one down the pipe like the real thing). If you're lucky, you should be able to get hold of the Uzi. Its bullets are far more powerful, but only ten rounds are supplied.



COMMENT



Running Battle ranks as one of the most desperately average games I've ever played on the Master System. The graphics are well-defined, but the final visual effect is very

RICH

dull. The sound is predictably dire with awful tunes and uninspiring effects. Even in the gameplay stakes, Running Battle is lacklustre. There are only three attack moves, making the action repetitive and dull. I must admit that the "special" move (I think it's supposed to be multiple mid-air kicks to the face) made me laugh out loud - it looks as though your character is having airborne convulsions! Only the end-of-level bosses pose any serious threat to our stiff, almost unanimated hero - and they seem to dust him almost immediately. It's all a bit of a shame really because the Master System has been crying out for a decent beat 'em up and this definitely isn't it.



BY: SEGA
PRICE: £29.99
 RELEASE DATE: NOW
 GAME DIFFICULTY: EASY/MEDIUM
 LIVES: 3
 CONTINUES: 3
 SKILL LEVELS: 1
 RESPONSIVENESS: ACCEPTABLE



PRESENTATION 42%

Running Battle is lacking in this department, with little in the way of options or pretty screens to look at.

GRAPHICS 55%

Visually, the game's pretty ropey with very dull backdrops and lacklustre animation.

SOUND 39%

Awful, unatmospheric music warbles along to the violent proceedings, with dull effects making up the rest of the soundtrack.

PLAYABILITY 59%

Running Battle seems quite a laugh to begin with, but with only three attack moves it quickly gets boring.

LASTABILITY 51%

Five levels of average, unexciting action won't keep you glued to the Master System for very long.

OVERALL 54%

A disappointingly average beat 'em up which falls well short of its potential.