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XIII

October 2004

Bam! Zap! Ka-Pow! With fond memories of classic comics such as Dick Tracy and Secret Agent X-9, we thoroughly enjoyed playing XIII. A mission-based, first-person shooter, XIII stars you as Jack Rowley (aka Jason Fry, aka Agent Thirteen)—one of an elite tactical group overrun by a conspiracy of traitors plotting to take over the world.

Agent XIII fights alone, so you don't have to worry about any bonehead squadmates blowing your cover when your mission requires stealthy maneuvers, such as taking out guards without sounding the alarm (there's loads of this sneaky—maybe too much). In the realm of mindless shoot-'em-ups, XIII's multiplayer mode pits you against up to five bots or LAN friends in games such as standard Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, and Capture the Flag, plus a game called The Hunt—an all-against-one fray in which the one is a bizarre little furry, white-hooded, Jawa-looking thing. Multiplayer is fun, but it's no Unreal Tournament, and while online play is supported via GameRanger, we couldn't find an in-progress game despite repeated attempts.

The single-player game challenges you to stop the baddies from taking over the world, but just when you think you've foiled their nefarious scheme, you must face Agent II (aka the Mongoose)—a tough varmint. Along the way, we had all kinds of destructive fun: shooting down choppers (with and without the bazooka weapon); blowing up a munitions bunker; using a hostage to escape a mental institution (d'oh! some of the guards shot at us anyway); stalking and silently killing (or neutralizing without killing) guards, and dragging their corpses out of sight; crawling through steam vents and swinging from that ol' standby, the trusty grappling hook; and, of course, collecting medkits, weapons, armor, ammo, keys to open locked doors, and other useful loot.

Speaking of weapons, XIII has a fine selection. For maximum stealth, the throwing-knives tactic is perfect for close foes, and a scoped crossbow works for far-off ones. (You can also pick up blunt bludgeoning objects, such as bottles and chairs, for silent, nonlethal dispatch). When you can play loud, your choices include 9mm and .44-caliber handguns, a shotgun, a sniper rifle, three different machine guns, and the big bazooka. Especially cool is a harpoon launcher you can pick up in the submarine-base level.

The game played fine on both our Power Mac G5 and our 1.25MHz PowerBook, and froze up only once. But although we dig the low-tech flavor, we wish the developers could have splurged on a few more character skins—we got tired of killing the same seven or eight guys over and over on different levels. Also, the game had a habit of forgetting where we saved our progress, so the next time we sat down to continue, we usually had to replay some scenarios.

XIII's comic-strip styling and cell-shading provide a nice break from the recent invasion of cinematic war-based shooters and are a perfect match for the game's plot and Dick Tracy-style melodrama. Bonus: As you sneak into the Sanctuary for a recon mission, there's a postcard sunset to see above one of the most-realistically rendered oceans we've ever seen in a game. It may seem out of place, but it's a nice touch in a great game. —Niko Coucouvanis



XIII makes great use of its comic-strip styling, rewarding long-range headshots with a three-panel death vignette.

GOOD NEWS: Cool retro-comics look and attitude.
BAD NEWS: Not enough bad-guy models. Has too much sneaking around for some.



COMPANY: Feral Interactive
CONTACT: +44 0 208 875 1375, <http://www.feral.co.uk>
PRICE: \$55
REQUIREMENTS: 800MHz G3 or faster, Mac OS 10.2.3 or later, 256MB RAM, 1.6GB disk space, 32MB VRAM, DVD drive