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Death by Degrees

No woman, no game

Beautiful girls have always been the favorite characters for film makers and game producers. Will anyone ever take over Lara Croft's throne? Many have tried, none of them succeeded. Fighting games are avid for babes to display on the screen to cover the lack of storyline and gameplay. Tekken is not a bad fighting game, but its female characters are pretty hot, so why not use one of them as a lead character for another game? Namco had an idea, nothing new till now... so they took Nina out of the Tekken context and back to her MI6 origins. You probably expect to play a pretty decent action game, a shooter even. But when was the last time that a game met your expectations? **Story** One of the most famous feminine duos is back with a punch, or should I say kick. I'm talking about the Williams sisters, not the girls playing tennis, Anna and Nina from Tekken. They seem not to be too keen on each other, but that's not the main plot in Death by Degrees. Little Miss Nina must infiltrate a cruise ship that has the world's most dangerous weapon dealers on board. As part of the MI6 she will be aided by two other fellow agents, they will be called "sneakers". Get the possible pun about junk food out of your head and listen to Nina's codename: "sweeper". Pretty easy to figure out what each one of them does and you might have already realized that Nina does all the dirty, bloody work. There will be no cruising around and sun tans, till you get the bad guys out of the perimeter. **Concept** Welcome to the perfect action game...NOT! Taking a character out of a fighting game and giving it the main part in a totally new game and totally different genre is something that takes guts and a recipe of success. Nina Williams put the analog stick down! Namco should have done that before basing the entire combat system on analog control! Imagine the perfect tool to destroy gameplay or maybe I'll tell you that it's practically an entirely different system from anything we've ever used. Directional pad? Triangle? Circle? Square button? Who needs them? Let's assign more functions to the analog sticks. Use the left one to move around and the right analog stick to hit, kick, or fire. That's right, fire. Imagine a jumpy gamer that gets scared and fires all of his bullets because his finger slipped. The camera makes this torment worse for the gamer that really wants to kick some terrorist behinds. I didn't expect much shooting in Death by Degrees and I didn't get that much, if that matters. The fun factor increases by using melee weapons like the tonfa batons or the katanas. While Namco was very careful with some in-game details, others were totally neglected, I mean how can you implement weapons that break after they take some damage and still have Nina walk over tables and beds? Check the screen out to see that there's more to it than the beautiful Nina, I'm talking about a health meter that you must watch in order to have some chance in surviving the trip. Under the red meter that shows how much life you've got, there's a focus bar that you'll keep track of in order to perform nice moves once you'll have taken reasonable damage. Another meter will appear, an oxygen meter, but that happens only when you are underwater, which is a real pain as you'll view every action in first person mode. Namco was kind enough to relieve the gamer of his pain by making the game adaptable to your skills. If you die many times in the same place, eventually the game will change difficulty to a lower level and you'll be a happy noob. Any man that sees a girl like Nina could express his admiration by using the slang expression "man she's got skills!", but in Death by Degrees that becomes a fact. The female character of the day gathers skill points and unlocks new moves, that should be more powerful than the basic ones, but the reality is that they're the same, only more difficult to perform. If you'll ever get bored of kicking your way through the same environments, you might consider the sniper mission a blessing. To be a minigame or not to be? Forget I said "mission" and let's say that sniping zero AI terrorists is closer to a

whack-a-mole game than an action game. **Gameplay** Ana will have a lot of walking to do, because in *Death by Degrees* you tend to get lost specially when going from one floor to another. There is even a labyrinth section in the game that has all that a secret agent could want: lasers, guards, print scan-based doors. Speaking of which, a respectable agent like Miss Nina, can't cut fingers off her enemies and use them to open the doors that require finger prints. Instead, she'll use a special device that scans the enemy's prints and stores them in its database. What does Nina eat to look so fit? The answer seemed hilarious at first: candy, but I soon realized that the items I used to replenish my health were not sweets, but some sorts of army rations. If using rations to increase your health reminds you of *Metal Gear Solid*, you'll really be shocked when you see that your other health pickup is a beef can. Candy and beef for Nina, table 3, please! And don't forget a bottle of mineral water, you'll use those to increase your focus. Do you want to be cool and break some bones? Nina has the possibility to break some jaws and backbones, Jet Li style. There will be some short events, that resemble cutscenes and they will show you the bones of the opponent being smashed in slow motion. Everything will be viewed like a radiography, each bone in its place. Being a fan of such sadistic gaming action *Death by Degrees* made me see more human skeletons than a doctor could have ever seen. There are tons of things you can do to your enemies, you can throw knives at them to slice those guys, hit them with the tonfa batons, break their necks, shoot them or use an electric stun gun to spice things up a bit. Every enemy that Nina has looks like the main character from *Hitman* or a well-armed policeman and I'll tell you one thing that they're good at: flying. Once you're up on the deck, or near a ledge you can throw them overboard or from higher ground, or even push them in the swimming pool. Sometimes the foes even come back, but I can't really tell if it's them or some other guard, because they all look alike. Bosses are the toughest part of the game and now I am not kidding, as the first one, Bryce, ruined my day with his unfair techniques. It's the first time in my gaming experience when I felt cheated by the vicious AI and needed to take a break between two sessions of *Death by Degrees*. **Video** Nina isn't the only eye candy that you'll get when playing *Death by Degrees*, considering that the environment looks pretty good. The breeze will shake some threes, and the characters' facial expressions could sometimes turn the game into a cheap action film. Our female hero looks hot in any of her outfits, but her tendency is to dress rather light for a secret agent. If you didn't already know, you can leave Nina alone for a while and she'll start doing all sorts of fun stuff, like warming her legs like boxers do or fixing her hair. Is she comfortable with herself? There's one other thing that Nina can do while you leave the joystick intact and it's so troublesome that you'd better hide all the women and children: she'll pull her underwear up and out of the... item storage place, so to say. The rough adventures of the blonde agent of the year will not pass unnoticed and we'll see the young lady covered with dust, scratches, blood, but a quick change of clothing will solve the problem. Don't expect too much from the background, because the game's action will take place on a single ship, a big ship, but still...a boat. Nina is a big girl with big ... thighs, but sometimes she seems to mutate. Cutscenes show a skinny Nina with a pretty angry face, while during the game you'll see a woman that could really use a liposuction. **Sound** Gather all the songs and soundtracks ever made for action films and put them on one single DVD. Label it "*Death by Degrees*" soundtrack and you won't feel like you've done anyone wrong. Except for, maybe, the action films. It's the kind of score I would expect to hear when sneaking behind someone's back to snap his neck and the music is predictable like hell in the cutscenes. Nina's voice is lovely, but what she says is nothing but a series of useless clichés, as are the other characters' lines. The analog control got me so angry that I could criticize the sound made by the weapon shooting, but enough is enough. Nina is a firecracker herself, but why are her weapons too? They sound like toys that have just come out the shopping mall, unlike the Uzis we would have wanted to hear. **Multiplayer** A little fun with the multiplayer could really be useful after a couple of hours of fighting the worst enemy in the game: the gameplay. Too bad that such an option was not developed; maybe it would have

increased the already short lifespan of the title. **Conclusion**Something happened while playing the game, you know there's that little thing that describes the whole gaming experience. Nina had to enter the ship's kitchen at some point of the game and she found a little recipe there. It was sauteed rat... Yes, comestible rats were stored in the kitchen and they escaped running through the air ducts. One document mentioned that they really adore shiny things and the furry creatures steal them and take them to the ducts. That about covers it... Death by Degrees is our rat sautee of the day, served with Nina roast beef and a little bit Tekken 5 flavor.