= Panzer Dragoon Saga =

Panzer Dragoon Saga (??? ????? ????? RPG , Azel : Panzer Dragoon RPG) is a 1998 role @-@ playing video game (RPG) for the Sega Saturn , published by Sega and developed by Sega 's Team Andromeda studio . It is the third game in the main Panzer Dragoon series and the only instalment that is not a rail shooter , combining traditional role @-@ playing elements such as random encounters with the 3D shooting elements of previous games .

The player controls Edge , a young mercenary who battles an empire on a flying dragon and encounters a mysterious girl from a vanished civilization . Unlike the other Panzer Dragoon games , whose gameplay takes place while flying on the dragon , the player has full 3D movement and some areas are explored on foot . The battle system mixes real @-@ time and turn @-@ based elements , with the player circling enemies on the dragon to expose weak spots and escape dangerous positions .

Development of Panzer Dragoon Saga began around the same time as that of its predecessor , Panzer Dragoon II Zwei (1996) . According to director Yukio Futatsugi , the need to blend the series ' shooting elements into an RPG with full 3D and voice acting - both unusual for RPGs at the time - made it the most difficult Panzer Dragoon game to develop . Two staff members died during its two @-@ year development , which Futatsugi attributed to the stressful working conditions of the video game industry .

According to GameRankings , Panzer Dragoon Saga is the most critically acclaimed Saturn game , winning praise for its story , graphics , music , and unusual battle system . It has appeared in several " greatest games of all time " lists . As Sega had shifted its focus to its next console , the Dreamcast , the game had a limited release outside Japan , attracting a cult following . It has not been rereleased and is now a rare collector 's item . After its release , Sega disbanded Team Andromeda ; several staff joined Sega 's Smilebit studio and went on to develop the final game in the series , Panzer Dragoon Orta , released for Xbox in 2002 .

= = Gameplay = =

Unlike the otherPanzer Dragoon games , which are rail shooters , Panzer Dragoon Saga is a role @-@ playing video game (RPG) . The player controls the young mercenary Edge , who flies a powerful dragon . Gameplay is divided into three modes : traversing large areas on the dragon , battling enemies , and exploring on foot . The game uses a random encounter system , whereby battles are triggered randomly as the player flies .

Movement is not " on rails " , and the player can explore the 3D environments in all directions . A targeting reticle is used to interact with locks , doors , and other elements ; on the dragon , this can also be used to fire lasers to activate triggers or break objects . On foot , Edge can talk to non @-@ player characters and buy items including health potions and weapon upgrades . Different zones are accessed via a map screen , which changes as the game progresses . Campsites serve as rest areas and save points .

As with other Panzer Dragoon games , the characters speak a fictional language , " Panzerese " , which combines elements of Ancient Greek , Latin and Russian . However , Panzerese is only used in the introduction sequence ; the rest of the dialogue is in Japanese , subtitled in English for the western release .

= = = Battle system = = =

Panzer Dragoon Saga 's battles mix real @-@ time and turn @-@ based elements , with three action gauges that charge in real time . When a gauge fills , the player can make a move , such as attacking or using an item such as a shield or poison cure . Waiting for multiple gauges to charge facilitates more options , such as making multiple moves in quick succession , but this gives the enemy more opportunity to attack . The speed at which the gauges charge is governed by the dragon 's agility attribute ; if this is higher than the enemy 's agility attribute , the player can make

moves more frequently than the enemy , and vice @-@ versa .

During combat , the player can circle the enemy to expose weak points and escape dangerous positions . Changing position temporarily stops the gauges charging . Likewise , enemies may change position to force the dragon into vulnerable areas ; a radar at the bottom of the screen indicates safe , neutral and dangerous areas , with the front and rear areas typically posing the most danger . Weak points can sometimes only be attacked from dangerous areas , and enemies ' attack patterns often change mid @-@ battle , forcing the player to adapt .

The player can attack with the dragon 's laser , which strikes multiple targets simultaneously , or Edge 's gun , which focuses damage on a single target and is useful for striking weak points . Edge 's gun can be upgraded with power @-@ ups including three @-@ way fire and the " Sniper " modification , which deals additional damage to weak points . The dragon 's " berserks " , the equivalent of magic spells in other RPGs , have effects including powerful attacks , healing , and boosting the dragon 's defense or agility . Berserks require berserk points (BP) and sometimes multiple action gauges .

The dragon can be morphed to change its attack , defense , agility and spiritual attributes . Boosting one attribute diminishes another ; for example , boosting the attack attribute reduces the spiritual attribute , meaning berserks require more BP , while boosting means gauges fill faster at the expense of defense . Certain berserks are only available in certain dragon configurations .

= = Plot = =

Edge , a mercenary hired by the Empire , guards a site where artefacts from an ancient advanced civilization are being excavated . Fending off an ancient monster , he discovers a girl buried in a wall . The site is attacked by the mutinous Black Fleet , who seize the girl and kill Edge 's companions . Edge escapes with the help of a mysterious flying dragon and swears revenge on the Black Fleet leader , Craymen .

Edge rescues Gash , one of a band of scavengers called the Seekers , from a monster . Gash directs him to a nearby nomadic caravan , where he learns the location of the Black Fleet . Edge and the dragon defeat the fleet , but learn that Craymen has already reached the Tower , an ancient structure of tremendous power . They fend off an attack by the girl from the excavation site , who has sworn allegiance to Craymen and rides an enormous dragon , Atolm .

In the town of Zoah , Edge meets an engineer , Paet , who will trade information about the Tower for ancient artefacts . Searching an ancient vessel for parts , Edge is captured by imperial soldiers but rescued by Gash . Paet reveals that the Tower can be reached via the ruins of Uru ; there , Edge is attacked again by the girl and Atolm . After the battle , separated from their dragons , he and the girl fall into an ancient underground facility and form a truce to escape . The girl explains that she is an ancient bio @-@ engineered being named Azel , created in the facility , and designed to interface with ancient technology . After Edge 's dragon rescues them , Azel warns Edge that she will kill him if he crosses Craymen 's path again and leaves on Atolm .

Craymen surprises Edge in Zoah and asks for his help fighting the Empire . Paet tells Edge he can find the Tower by deactivating an ancient machine , Mel @-@ Kava , that obscures the Tower 's location with fog . In exchange for destroying an imperial base , the village leader gives Edge access to an ancient artefact that grants him a vision of Mel @-@ Kava 's location . Edge and the dragon destroy Mel @-@ Kava , clearing the fog , but are attacked again by Azel and Atolm . They shoot down Atolm and rescue Azel as she falls .

The Emperor 's flagship , Grig Orig , destroys Zoah , but the Black Fleet intervenes before Edge and the dragon are killed . At the Tower , Craymen tells Edge that it is one of several that manufacture monsters to combat humanity 's destructive forces . He needs Azel to activate the Tower and destroy the Empire before they can use it for themselves . Imperials arrive and capture Edge and Craymen . After the Emperor forces Azel to activate the Tower , monsters emerge and kill everyone but Edge and Azel , who escape on Edge 's dragon . At the Seeker stronghold , Gash explains that the Tower will destroy humanity if it is not deactivated . He believes Edge 's dragon is the prophesied Divine Visitor who will be humanity 's salvation . Edge and the dragon battle

rampaging monsters and destroy the infested Grig Orig .

Edge rescues Azel from monsters in the Uru facility , where she has returned to contemplate her purpose . They infiltrate the Tower and Azel prepares to transfer Edge and the dragon into Sestren , the AI network that controls the towers . She confesses her love for Edge and he promises to return . Inside Sestren , Edge and the dragon defeat the network 's " anti @-@ dragon " programs . Through visions , Edge learns his dragon originated as the Heresy Program , a rogue AI purged from Sestren . The Heresy Program explains that the Divine Visitor is actually " the one from the outside world " who has guided Edge , and who must now destroy Sestren with Edge inside .

Gash awaits Edge in the desert , to no avail . Travelling alone , Azel asks directions across treacherous land .

= = Development = =

Panzer Dragoon Saga was developed by Sega 's Team Andromeda studio for the Saturn over approximately two years . Development began around the same time as development of the game 's predecessor , Panzer Dragoon II Zwei (1996) , with a team of about 40 , twice as many as the Zwei team . Director Yukio Futatsugi stated that Saga was the hardest Panzer Dragoon game to develop , as the team had to implement fully 3D environments and full voice acting , unusual for RPGs at the time .

It took about a year to rework the previous games ' shooting gameplay into an RPG . Once the team had settled on the core action of " locking on " to targets , such as enemies , NPCs , or other elements , the rest of the design followed . Futatsugi originally conceived a battle system in which the player would fight enemies for space , which became the game 's positioning system . The dragon 's morphing ability was added to compensate for the lack of a party of characters with different skills common in other RPGs . The team wanted to show the dragon morphing between forms , but dismissed the idea as too difficult to implement ; one day , a programmer surprised them with a working prototype , and the idea became a feature . After the battle system was finalized , development proceeded quickly and some members were moved to help complete Zwei .

Rather than create a " save @-@ the @-@ world " story with a large cast , Futatsugi wanted to concentrate on a small number of characters " who you are really close to " , which he felt would make the story more meaningful . An early version had Edge as an imperial soldier who defects ; Craymen also had an extensive backstory , explaining his motivations for betraying the Empire . Both stories were cut for time . Although Edge is not a silent protagonist , Futatsugi minimized his dialogue outside cutscenes to focus on Azel 's story , whom he felt was the most important character .

The team did not want the android Azel to be a typical energetic anime @-@ style heroine , and instead tried to make her simultaneously appealing and frightening . Her character underwent the most revisions , emphasizing her human and non @-@ human aspects , and one early design had a hole in her torso . Art director Manabu Kusunoki picked Katsumi Yokota to design the characters ; according to Futatsugi , Yokota is " a very , very good artist . The fragility of the character Azel exists because of Yokota @-@ san . "

The game uses the Zwei engine . As the dragon 's movement is not " on rails " , unlike other Panzer Dragoon games , the engine had to support free exploration along with battle sequences and real @-@ time morphing and shading ; according to GameSpot , this pushed the Saturn 's hardware further than any game . Futatsugi felt it would not have been possible on PlayStation , as the Saturn 's " cloudier " palette gives the Panzer Dragoon series its atmosphere . Rather than using pre @-@ recorded music , the game 's soundtrack is mostly generated via pulse @-@ code modulation by the Saturn ? s sound hardware , as with Zwei .

Two staff died during development : one in a motorcycle accident and the other from suicide . Futatsugi attributed the deaths to the stressful working conditions of the video game industry . In 2013 , he said : " All we could do was carry on and finish the game - it was out of my hands . Part of me did want to stop though . That was definitely the toughest project I 've ever worked on . Personal relationships became strained . The stress was overwhelming . " Despite the difficulty of the project ,

he felt it had benefited from having " someone who plays the bad guy role , someone who acts a little selfish , acts a little forceful to the team to achieve specific goals ... Having team members that will support that kind of bad cop is necessary , and if they don 't exist then you can 't get those kind of results . "

= = Release = =

 Panzer Dragoon Saga was released in North America in April 1998 on four CDs , one of the last Saturn games released outside Japan . As Sega had moved its focus to its next console , the Dreamcast , fewer than 20 @,@ 000 copies were released in the west and the game 's Japanese voice acting was subtitled rather than rerecorded in English . IGN 's Levi Buchanan characterized the release as an example of the Saturn 's " ignominious send @-@ off " , writing that " sunset Saturn games like Panzer Dragoon Saga and Burning Rangers demanded far better launches . The way these games were slipped into retail with zero fanfare and low circulation was insulting to both hard @-@ working developers and Sega fans . "
 Because of its limited release , English @-@ language copies of Panzer Dragoon Saga are rare and sell for high prices . It has not been re @-@ released . In 2009 , game @-@ downloading service GameTap ? s general manager Sene Sorrow stated that GameTap had the rights to distribute the game , but as Saturn emulation is difficult , he did not believe there was enough demand to make it a priority . In the same year , Futatsugi stated that Sega had lost the game 's source code , which would make porting the game difficult .

= = Reception and legacy = =

 According to the review aggregator GameRankings , Panzer Dragoon Saga is the most critically acclaimed Saturn game , with an aggregate score of 92 % . It received praise for its graphics , gameplay , story and music , and many critics felt it was one of the best RPGs of all time . In 2007 , Game Informer wrote that " critically , the game was a smash hit , lauded as one of the year 's best , and generally considered the Saturn 's finest title . "
 Edge praised the game 's range of enemies , tactical gameplay , and especially its extensive FMV cutscenes , which have " a cinematic quality that shames the work of almost every other developer " . It concluded that the game had " true creative integrity " and lamented that the Saturn 's failure meant it would not find a wider audience . Game Informer described it as " easily " the best Saturn RPG , praising its graphics , story , sound , and originality , and felt it was rivalled on other consoles only by Final Fantasy VII , released the previous year . Sega Saturn Magazine described the game as " a monumental effort , a work of art , and quite clearly a labour of love " , concluding that it was the best adventure on the Saturn . GameSpot praised its graphics , music , battle system , and story , concluding that it was " flawlessly executed " and " possibly the finest RPG of 1998 " . Electronic Gaming Monthly reviewers unanimously praised the game as one of the best RPGs of all time .
 In 2007 , 1UP described Panzer Dragoon Saga as " the greatest RPG you 've never played " and one of the " most unique " RPGs of all time . In 2005 , Electronic Gaming Monthly placed Panzer Dragoon Saga # 1 in its list of cult classic games . Game Informer ranked it # 1 in its 2006 list of the " top 10 rare RPGs you need " . It was named one of best games of all time by Computer and Video Games in 2000 , Electronic Gaming Monthly in 2001 and 2006 , IGN readers in 2005 , IGN in 2007 and G4 in 2012 . In 2010 , NowGamer named it the 30th greatest retro game and called it " one of Sega ? s greatest non @-@ hedgehog moments " .
 After the game 's completion , Sega disbanded Team Andromeda . Futatsugi left Sega and joined Konami , while other staff moved to Sega teams including Smilebit , which went on to develop the final Panzer Dragoon game , Panzer Dragoon Orta (2002) , for Xbox .