Video Game Reviews: Dueling axes help you work on your chops

by Jeb_Haught

Game: "Guitar Hero 3: Legends of Rock"

Publisher: Activision

System: Microsoft Xbox 360 (PS2, PS3, Wii)

Cost: $60 ($90 with guitar)

ESRB rating: T

Review rating: 3 stars

CRANK IT UP - 'Guitar Hero 3: Legends of Rock' has new songs, a co-op career mode, a new battle

mode and online game play. CNS Photo courtesy of Activision. QUEST BEGINS - 'Dragon Blade: Wrath of Fire' is the story of a young man who travels dangerous lands scorched by dragons to unite the renowned pieces of the mighty Dragon Blade. CNS Photo courtesy of D3. Start practicing your air guitar because the next installment of "Guitar Hero" has exploded onto consoles worldwide. Just when you thought you had mastered the intricacies of the last version, "Guitar Hero 3: Legends of Rock" arrives sporting new songs, a co-op career mode, a new battle mode and online game play.

Perhaps the biggest complaint about the series is that most of the songs are "covers" (not performed by the original bands). However, the latest version features a new group of rocking tunes, and only a few are covers. As a result, I'm certain that my neighbors are sick of hearing Tenacious D's "The Metal" and Metallica's "One," but I can't get enough.

"Guitar Hero 2" lets two players jam together on individual songs, and the sequel expands on that by adding co-op career mode. During songs, one person still plays bass and the other plays lead, but now they can tackle an entire career mode as a duet.

Another cool new mode lets two players battle each other at the same time. Hitting all notes on your ax is helpful, but attacking opponents with negative power-ups such as doubling the amount of notes or reversing them really pumps up the competition.

Ever since the original "Guitar Hero," players have been wanting to compete online, and now they can either alternate turns to try for the best score or amp up the competition to the aforementioned battle mode. This is where true budding rock stars vie for attention, so don't step up unless you have the proper skills.

"Guitar Hero 3" improves upon its predecessor in every way, and the new wireless guitar will help you achieve proper flexibility without destroying your living room.

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Game: "Dragon Blade: Wrath of Fire"

Publisher: D3 Publisher

System: Nintendo Wii

Cost: $30

ESRB rating: T

Review rating: 2 1/2 stars

Wii owners may have noticed that, with the exception of first-party titles, most of the original content available for the innovative console consists of boring mini-game collections or ported titles that barely make use of the motion sensing controllers. D3 wants to answer this call for original content by introducing a brand new hack-and-slash action adventure game - "Dragon Blade: Wrath of Fire" - that utilizes the Wii's sensor controls to mimic the real-life movements required in melee combat.

Developed by Land Ho! (of Panzer Dragoon fame), "Dragon Blade: Wrath of Fire" presents the story of a young man who must traverse dangerous lands scorched by dragons in his quest to unite the renowned pieces of the mighty Dragon Blade. Each piece is infused with the soul of a guardian dragon and offers supernatural powers to whomever wields them. For example, one piece gives the player the ability to summon a dragon head that floats over the protagonist, spewing deadly fire balls with a flick of the Wiimote. Another piece summons a giant dragon talon that protrudes from the adventurer's side, ready to swipe at enemies when the player initiates a natural motion mimicking a right cross.

Although the addition of dragon attacks fills the screen with impressive visual effects during combat, the rest of the game looks rather average. In fact, colors seem to be a bit muted. However, every dragon is intricately detailed and they all sport cool and varying designs.

"Dragon Blade: Wrath of Fire" seems to be a pretty straightforward game, forgoing side-quests and tedious item collection for intense action. As a result, it is more suited for young gamers than seasoned ones.

Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)

E: Everyone

T: Teen (13 and older)

E10-plus: (Everyone 10 and older)

M: Mature (17 and older) RATING KEY

4 stars - Must have

3 stars - Pretty good

2 stars - So-so

1 star - Don't waste your time

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