

Video Game Review: 'Tenchu - Shadow Assassins' plays well with Wii

by Jeb_Haught

DEVELOPER: Acquire

PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft

SYSTEM: Nintendo Wii

PRICE: \$49.99

ESRB RATING: Mature

REVIEW RATING: 3.5 stars (out of 5)

Using the Nintendo Wii, gamers make like Budding shinobi in feudal Japan, attacking and defending using realistic motions in "Tenchu: Shadow Assassins." Photo courtesy of Ubi Soft. Clad in a schoolgirl uniform, a sword-wielding teen dispatches zombies in "Onechanbara: Bikini Samurai Squad." Photo courtesy of D3. REVIEW SCORING SYSTEM

5 stars = Must Have

4 stars = Pretty Good

3 stars = Above Average

2 stars = Bargain Bin

1 star = Don't Bother RATINGS KEY

Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)

E: Everyone

E10-plus: (Everyone 10 and older)

T: Teen (13 and older)

M: Mature (17 and older)

I will be the first to admit that the Nintendo Wii has changed the face of gaming. But now that the novelty is wearing off, owners are realizing that 95 percent of the games available for the system are destined for the trash heap. For this reason, I'm both surprised and delighted that "Tenchu: Shadow Assassins" is a Wii-exclusive title that contains no mini-games, incorporates motion controls, offers a moderate challenge, and is actually fun to play!

Created by the developers of the first two Tenchu titles, "Tenchu: Shadow Assassins" introduces some welcome new features while also eliminating old favorites. For example, Rikimaru and Ayame can now move objects around to reach rooftops and rafters in specific locations, but, sadly, the awesome grappling hook that let them zip up to any rooftop is gone. Also, players can't crouch at will or roll while crouched anymore. Instead their character automatically crouches when hiding in preordained locations.

But all is not bad in this virtual version of feudal Japan, as cyber-shinobi can perform a wide variety of Hissatsu, or stealth kills, on the enemy that incorporate the environment. Strike from the bushes, and your faithful ninja pulls the enemy into the shrubbery, attack from above, and he or she hangs upside down and snaps the enemy's neck. In addition, hitting enemy samurai with shurikins can knock them down wells or into campfires.

I also appreciate the ability to blow out candles and douse fires with water to create additional shadowy areas in which to sneak. However, even the most nimble ninja gets caught once in a while, and that's where the new combat mode kicks in. These one-on-one fights switch the camera to a first-person viewpoint, and budding shinobi take turns attacking and defending using realistic motions. It can take some time to adapt to this new system, but it makes great use of the motion controls.

"Tenchu: Shadow Assassins" is a shining example of the Wii's potential and proves that games for the system don't have to be dumbed-down to be appealing.

Novelty Wears Thin in 'Onechanbara: Bikini Samurai Squad'

DEVELOPER: D3

PUBLISHER: D3

SYSTEM: Microsoft Xbox 360

PRICE: \$39.99

ESRB RATING: Mature

REVIEW RATING: 1.5 stars (out of 5)

Japanese teenagers are obsessed with American pop culture, and nowhere is this more evident than the popular hack-and-slash series, "Onechanbara," translated as sword-fighting big sister. As the first in the series to reach North American shores, "Onechanbara: Bikini Samurai Squad" follows the exploits of two razor-sharp katana-wielding sisters who battle zombies and other nasty creatures. One sister is a swimsuit-clad cowgirl sporting a scarf and ten-gallon hat while the other wears a sexy Japanese schoolgirl outfit. Sound cheesy? You betcha! But is it fun to play? Yes, but only for about 15 minutes.

Once the novelty of such far-fetched ideas being thrown together wears off, players are left with a poorly made action game that emphasizes cleavage and gore over quality game play. To begin with, the level design is not only simplistic, but it's also incredibly boring.

Whether you're playing outside or in cramped corridors, very few environmental objects are visible, and every single area is shaped like a traditional square, rectangle, or circle. As the player enters these cramped areas, magical wooden spikes appear from nowhere to close off the area until all enemies in the vicinity are eliminated. Didn't this type of limitation go out of style with the original PlayStation?

Speaking of enemies, the zombies in this game are truly the epitome of brain-dead, which makes the game way too easy to beat. It's as if they gathered all the people from the movie "Idiocracy" and turned them into zombies. I love how dozens of them lurch toward my character and then don't even bother to attack her. Their only function seems to be splattering the surrounding area with copious amounts of blood and body parts. Don't get me wrong, I'm a fan of virtual violence, when it's appropriate, but the gore in this game is excessive.

"Onechanbara: Bikini Samurai Squad" offers proof that every now and then, what happens in Japan should stay in Japan.

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