

Video Game Reviews: Customize your experience in 'Neverwinter Nights 2'

by Jeb Haught

Game: "Neverwinter Nights 2"

Publisher: Atari

System: Windows XP

Cost: \$49.99

ESRB Rating: T

Review rating: 3 1/2 stars

'NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2' - If a medieval fantasy world of supernatural beings and exotic locations sounds like cool gaming nirvana, then play Atari's 'Neverwinter Nights 2.' CNS Photo courtesy of Atari. If creating your own adventure in a medieval fantasy world of supernatural beings and exotic locations sounds like gaming nirvana, then you should delve into Atari's computer game "Neverwinter Nights 2."

While this mystical title does contain a robust adventure, it also has plenty of side quests to let players enjoy the game in their own way, at their own pace. The ability to directly control your party members as well as fill their inventory slots and equip their armor and weapons is new to the series.

Up to three party members can travel with you at any time, and various information can be extracted from them depending on how the player acts in battle. This can affect game play drastically because slaughtering every living thing can have negative effects.

FANTASY COMBAT - With four characters to manage at once in 'Neverwinter Nights 2', combat is really fun to experiment with. CNS Photo courtesy of Atari. With four characters to manage at once, combat is really fun to experiment with, but managing inventories could be much easier. I don't mind switching between characters in order to utilize their skills in battle, but constantly going back and forth in order to locate inventory items is a nuisance.

"Neverwinter Nights 2" builds upon the tool set released with the original title that lets players create their own adventures. Everything from weather to locations to enemy placement can be customized, and creating adventures can be as much fun as actually playing the final product. This title also can be enjoyed online, either by playing through the main adventure or someone's creation, which infinitely extends its replay potential.

Game: "Naruto: Uzumaki Chronicles"

Publisher: Namco/Bandai

System: Sony PlayStation 2

Cost: \$39.99

ESRB Rating: T

Review rating: 2 1/2 stars

'NARUTO: UZUMAKI CHRONICLES' - Namco/Bandai has broken the fighting-game trend by unleashing 3-D mission-based 'Naruto: Uzumaki Chronicles.' CNS Photo courtesy of Namco/Bandai. Ever since the Naruto animated show became popular, Naruto fighting games have been flying out of developers' hands faster than the boy ninja can toss kunai. Fortunately, Namco/Bandai broke this fighting-game trend by unleashing a 3-D mission-based adventure, "Naruto: Uzumaki Chronicles."

Even though every mission in the game is combat-oriented, it's still more of an adventure title than a fighter. That means players are limited to controlling Naruto most of the time, although they are able to call in teammates to aid in battles.

Fortunately, Naruto's moves are easy to pull off, and custom attack combos can be created, so players are free to experiment. They can take control of teammates for short durations, and some of the teammates' powers are needed to advance through later missions. No matter which character you control, the enemies are dumber than punching bags, which is all they end up being anyway.

CLONE KILLER - Naruto's moves are easy to pull off, and custom attack combos can be created, so players are free to experiment in 'Naruto: Uzumaki Chronicles.' CNS Photo courtesy of Namco/Bandai. Further customization is offered through the upgrade system that uses special chips and plates found throughout each level to alter strength, stamina and speed, as well as adding special moves. Because of the limited amount of space offered on which to use these items, the player must prioritize their upgrades, which in turn makes the

game easier or harder.

Graphically, the feeling of the animated TV show is lost since cel shading has been dropped in favor of a more three-dimensional look. Still, most fans will enjoy the variety of authentic moves and characters that "Naruto: Uzumaki Chronicles" offers.

RATING KEY

4 stars - Must have

3 stars - Pretty good

2 stars - So-so

1 star - Don't waste your time

Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)

E: Everyone

T: Teen (13 and older)

E10-plus: (Everyone 10 and older)

M: Mature (17 and older)

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