

Video Game Reviews: Fast and furious combat makes fingers go flying

by Jeb_Haught

Game: "Rogue Galaxy"

Publisher: Sony

System: Sony PlayStation 2

Cost: \$40

ESRB rating: T

Review rating: 3 1/2 stars

Just when you might think the PS2 is nearly dead and buried, along comes a delightful role-playing game to occupy your time - lots and lots of time.

"Rogue Galaxy" isn't your typical RPG. It uses cel-shading to give it a gorgeous look and incorporates an action-packed battle system to keep your fingers busy.

Players assume the role of Jaster Rogue, a mild-mannered hunter who begins a series of misadventures when he inadvertently ends up on a space pirate ship called the Dorgenark. Along his voyage he meets up with several types of warriors and incorporates them into his entourage.

This game throws packs of enemies at the player, using old-school "random enemy encounters." Opponents seemingly materialize out of thin air because the screen doesn't change from "exploration mode" to "battle mode," so the enemies actually pop onto the screen and start attacking at random intervals.

'ROGUE GALAXY' - Opponent seems to pop onto the screen, prompting furious battles in the random enemy encounters of 'Rogue Galaxy.' CNS Photo courtesy of Sony.

'DIDDY KONG RACING DS' - Diddy Kong and his Nintendo 64 racing pals fly around the little screen of the Nintendo DS. CNS Photo courtesy of Nintendo.

GIDDY OVER DIDDY - In typical Nintendo kart-racing fashion, 'Diddy Kong Racing DS' lets players blast around unusual tracks while shooting rival drivers with playful missiles. CNS Photo courtesy of Nintendo.

Fortunately, the combat is fast and furious. At first glance, battles can easily be mistaken for those found in a combat title, as players can attack as fast as they can press the appropriate button. However, simple additions such as refilling an energy gauge to continue attacks and using potions to heal during combat show the game's RPG roots.

Be prepared to spend hours upon hours with this game, and that's just learning the intricacies of combat. RPG fans will enjoy "Rogue Galaxy," but the game might eventually become tedious for action fans.

Game: "Diddy Kong Racing DS"

Publisher: Nintendo

System: Nintendo DS

Cost: \$35

ESRB rating: E

Review rating: 3 1/2 stars

Strap on your racing boots and stock up on bananas as "Diddy Kong Racing DS" - pardon the pun - peels out on your favorite dual-screen, hand-held gaming system. If you thought "Mario Kart" was fun, wait until you try the high-octane combat racing found in this cute and cuddly title.

In typical Nintendo kart-racing fashion, "Diddy Kong Racing DS" lets players blast around unusual tracks while shooting rival drivers with playful missiles or leaving surprises for them in the form of land mines or oil slicks.

However, unlike "Mario Kart," this title offers more complex weapons as well as the ability to upgrade them. For example, homing missiles can be upgraded to powerful Patroller Missiles, which hover around the player's vehicle and lock onto any rivals who come too close.

Another new feature is a free-roaming adventure mode in which players must conquer every challenge in all four worlds. There always seem to be new places to explore or races to enter in this mode, and it's a welcome addition to the series.

As if that isn't enough, kart enthusiasts can challenge friends to local and online wireless races. But this isn't limited to standard races, as players can play Token Tussle to see who's the first to collect five gold tokens, or Battle Tracks, to fight opponents on special racetracks. It's even possible to create race courses for use in multiplayer races. Talk about cool.

With "Diddy Kong Racing DS," Nintendo once again shows the gaming community that the best games for its systems are created internally.

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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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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