

Video Game Reviews: Challenges in 'Vanguard' beckon hard-core players

by Jeb_Haught

Game: "Vanguard: Saga of Heroes"

Publisher: Sony Online Entertainment

System: Windows XP

Cost: \$50

ESRB rating: T

Review rating: 3 stars

From the developers of "Everquest" comes another fantasy-based, multiplayer online role-playing game that

lets players explore worlds filled with mythical creatures and exotic landscapes.

Unlike most modern games of the genre that copy the trend of making adventuring easy, "Vanguard: Saga of Heroes" is aimed more for the hard-core gaming market.

Don't expect any computer-controlled characters in this game to hold your hand, as you'll have to figure out which path to follow on your own.

'VANGUARD: SAGA OF HEROES' - 'Vanguard: Saga of Heroes' is aimed at the hard-core gaming market. CNS Photo courtesy of Sony Online Entertainment.

FANTASY BATTLES - 'Vanguard: Saga of Heroes' offers cool combat and exotic landscapes to role players. CNS Photo courtesy of Sony Online Entertainment.

'VIRTUA FIGHTER 5' - 'Virtua Fighter 5' knocks out the other fighting games competitors. CNS Photo courtesy of Sega.

REALISTIC FIGHTING - In 'Virtua Fighter 5,' realistic Dolby Digital sound effects let players know where each kick came from and how hard it hits. CNS Photo courtesy of Sega.

Adding to the difficulty is the fact that players lose experience when their characters die rather than simply being burdened with running back to their character's corpse in ghost form. This alone means players won't be so gung-ho in their playing styles.

In addition to cool combat, "Vanguard" features in-depth crafting as well as an unusual diplomacy system. This addition is difficult to use at first, but helps to ensure that players have multilayered alternatives to fighting monsters.

A strong focus is placed on acquiring various types of transportation, ranging from horses to flying creatures and wooden boats. While it isn't in place yet, the developers promise that ship-to-ship combat will be added at some point.

Although the adventuring aspects are well thought out, the player-vs.-player facet is practically nonexistent. Players have the option to kill other players during questing, but the tense feeling brought upon by traipsing through areas controlled by enemy human players is missing.

Still, most hard-core MMORPG fans will be pleasantly surprised with "Vanguard: Saga of Heroes."

Game: "Virtua Fighter 5"

Publisher: Sega

System: Sony PlayStation 3

Cost: \$60

ESRB rating: T

Review rating: 3 1/2 stars

If you've played fighting games since the 1990s, you're probably a fan of either the "Virtua Fighter" or the "Tekken" series. Because of their different control and fighting setups, most people jumped on one side or the other, but rarely dedicated themselves to both. While this "Tekken" fan hasn't been fully converted, Sega's PlayStation 3-exclusive fighter, "Virtua Fighter 5," knocks out the current competition.

As the first next-generation release of the series, "VF5" looks simply stunning in high definition. During every match, gorgeous backdrops and fluid combat animations combine with minute details like hair blowing in the wind, immersing players in the mystical world of Asian martial arts. Realistic Dolby Digital sound effects let players know where each kick came from and how hard it hits.

El Blaze, a Mexican wrestling champion, and Eileen, a monkey kung fu master, are added to 15 returning combatants, increasing the number of deadly pugilists at your control. Each character brims with realistic martial arts moves that are just waiting to be unleashed on unwary opponents.

While there are plenty of different matches, tournaments and competitions, they all center on beating up computer-controlled opponents. With a lack of online game play, the only way virtual fighters can play against other real players is if they're both in the same room.

It's too bad that a lack of online game play is holding the "Virtua Fighter" series back, because the fighting genre could use a new champion.

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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