Video Game Reviews: Baseball franchise in a league of its own

by Jeb_Haught

Game: "MLB 07: The Show"

Publisher: Sony

System: Sony PlayStation 2

Cost: $40

ESRB rating: E

Review rating: 3 stars

With spring rapidly approaching, die-hard sports fans are gearing up for America's pastime. But PlayStation 2

owners don't have to wait until April to get their Major League Baseball fix, as Sony's "MLB 07: The Show" gets an early jump on the season.

'MLB 07: THE SHOW' - You don't have to wait until April to get your Major League Baseball fix, as 'MLB 07: The Show' is now available. CNS Photo courtesy of Sony.

BATTER UP - For 'MLB 07; The Show,' Sony captured the swing of New York Mets' David Wright. CNS Photo courtesy of Sony.

GREAT ACTION - Add in-depth online and ad-hoc action to the new 'Metal Gear Solid' and it may be the best action game available on the PSP. CNS Photo courtesy of Konami.

'METAL GEAR SOLID: PORTABLE OPS' - Konami has created a new 'lost' chapter in the series that's sure to please gearheads the world over. CNS Photo courtesy of Konami.

While the Madden series may dominate the football gaming arena, the "Show" franchise is king of the baseball diamond. This is mostly due to attention to details, such as the ability to take full control of fielding.

This year's version includes a pitching confidence meter. A pitcher confident in his fastball, for example, throws more strikes with that pitch.

The series is also known for adding more than just updated rosters to each new version, and this year, series rookies and veterans can look forward to playing offense and defense from the players' perspective. Gamers also can set up online leagues for six to 30 teams with full stat tracking and rewards.

But "The Show" has shortcomings. Graphics are mediocre. Animations seem stiff and jerky. Stadiums and backgrounds lack detail. And fans in the stands are cloned from a small set of templates reminiscent of the movie "Logan's Run."

Fortunately, these flaws aren't game-breakers, and the combination of smooth play and various subtle details ensures that anyone who's the slightest bit interested in this franchise will be intrigued.

Game: "Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops"

Publisher: Konami

System: Sony PSP

Cost: $40

ESRB rating: M

Review rating: 3 1/2 stars

When the PSP was released, action fans were excited to get their hands on the first "Metal Gear Solid" game for the high-tech handheld.

Unfortunately, "Metal Gear Acid" was a turn-based game that was anything but exciting. Konami must have heard the collective moan from series fans, because the newly released "Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops" contains more action than anyone's pocket can handle.

Instead of porting one of the many PlayStation 2 "Metal Gear" games to the PSP, Konami has created a new "lost" chapter in the series that's sure to please gearheads the world over. Just like past versions, players get to assume the role of Solid Snake and some of his cohorts.

New to the series is the ability to knock out opponents and drag them back to a truck, where they are brainwashed into serving Solid Snake's cause. This adds a fun element to the series.

On top of that, different enemies give special benefits to the player. For example, capturing doctors helps Snake's health replenish faster, and technicians invent new gadgets as well as familiar ones, like the handy cardboard box, which is perfect for hiding. Players also can plant brainwashed enemy soldiers among their companions for spying purposes.

Add in-depth online and ad-hoc game play to the extensive single- player campaign, and the result is quite possibly the best action game available on the PSP.

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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