

Video Game Reviews: Ho-hum 'Armored Core' still far too easy to beat

by *Jeb_Haught*

Game: "Armored Core 4"

Publisher: Sega

System: Sony PlayStation 3

Cost: \$60

ESRB rating: T

Review rating: 2 1/2 stars

While action-packed games featuring heavily armed robots have been up and down in popularity since the days of the PS1, fans always knew that a new "Armored Core" title was around the corner. But despite being the 12th game in the series, "Armored Core 4" still suffers from extremely short, boring missions.

Fortunately, the archaic controls have been dropped in favor of a modern, first-person-shooter-style control scheme that uses both analog sticks. This kicks the action into overdrive as players can focus on destroying enemies rather than struggling with the controls.

Another nice touch is the ability to reassign every single button. Now, budding mech pilots can't blame the controls for their questionable performance.

Anyone looking for an in-depth mech builder won't find a superior version on any console. Everything from weapons to targeting hardware can be mixed and matched, meaning that no two mechs will ever be the same. On top of that, the player can choose from several colors and patterns to customize each mech part.

'ARMORED CORE 4' - In 'Armored Core 4,' everything from weapons to targeting hardware can be mixed and matched. CNS Photo courtesy of Sega.

ARMORED BATTLE - In 'Armored Core 4,' players can choose from several colors and patterns to customize each battle. CNS Photo courtesy of Sega.

'SPECTROBES' - If the idea of excavating fossilized creatures and then taking them into battle sounds fun, then you'll love 'Spectrobes.' CNS Photo courtesy of Disney Interactive.

FANTASY BATTLE - Excavating and customizing 'Spectrobes' is very entertaining, and players can engage in local wireless battles with up to 15 others. CNS Photo courtesy of Disney Interactive.

With so much emphasis placed on these steel behemoths, it's hard to believe that the missions are still as lame as ever in "Armored Core 4." Do the developers actually think fans enjoy playing levels that can be beaten in less than two minutes?

In addition, I can't believe the creators still incorporate the practice of ending the mission when the player steps outside the small mission areas. This feature is unnecessary and very frustrating.

However, fans can rejoice at the inception of frantic online multiplayer combat for the series, even if it's limited to death match and team death match. While this feature alone is enough to satisfy some fans, this one hopes that the inevitable sequel's missions and graphics will be greatly improved.

Game: "Spectrobes"

Publisher: Disney Interactive

System: Nintendo DS

Cost: \$30

ESRB rating: E

Review rating: 3 stars

If the idea of excavating fossilized creatures from raw ore, customizing them and then taking them into battle sounds intriguing, then you'll surely dig Disney Interactive's latest role-playing game, "Spectrobes."

Take control of Nanairo Planetary Patrol Officer Rallen as he raises the unusual creatures extracted from ore that are called Spectrobes. When fully developed, these powerful beings are needed to battle the dastardly Krawl, who are insidious monsters bent on conquering the universe.

This title utilizes the touch screen and built-in microphone in inventive ways that add fun to game play. For example, during excavation, players will use the stylus to control a variety of tools that extract Spectrobes. In addition, blowing into the microphone clears dust out of the way to make mining easier, and talking to newly found Spectrobes awakens them so they can evolve.

Combat is performed in real time, with Rallen combining his attacks alongside two customized Spectrobes. He can mix up the attacks between himself and his Spectrobes at any time, and even blend attacks into devastating combos. However, using combos simplifies combat because they're so powerful, which makes them the equivalent of an "easy" button.

Still, excavating and customizing Spectrobes is very entertaining, and players can engage in local wireless battles with up to 15 others. As Disney's first game that's not based on a movie, "Spectrobes" is a solid title with the potential to evolve into a series.

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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