

Video Game Reviews: First true 'Mana' sequel should be left in the dark

by *Jeb_Haught*

Game: "Dawn of Mana"

Publisher: Square Enix

System: Sony PlayStation 2

Cost: \$50

ESRB rating: T

Review rating: 2 stars

'DAWN OF MANA' - 'Dawn of Mana' for the Playstation 2 features upgraded visuals and improved combat. CNS Photo courtesy of Square Enix. FANTASY FIGHTING - In 'Dawn for Mana,' players can attack enemies with their sword and initiate magic spells. CNS Photo courtesy of Square Enix. 'TANK BEAT' - 'Tank Beat' puts the action on both screens of the Nintendo DS. CNS Photo courtesy of 03 Entertainment.

ATTACK - In 'Tank Beat,' players are free to switch from movement mode to attack mode, and they can swivel their turret to scan the horizon by sliding the stylus around. CNS Photo courtesy of 03 Entertainment. Nearly 15 years after the beloved role-playing game "Secret of Mana" was released, Square Enix takes the series into the three-dimensional realm with the first true sequel, "Dawn of Mana."

Too bad the only real similarity between the two is the fact that they're set in the same mystical universe.

For starters, players can only raise their character's abilities to a measly Level 4 on each stage. There's no choice in what stats players can increase at any time. And in one of the most annoying "game features" of all time, characters are reset to Level 1 at each new stage.

So let me get this straight: Having to earn the same abilities over and over is supposed to be fun? This completely ruins the game. Players want to progress, not regress.

It doesn't help that the lock-on system is so finicky. Usually, it will lock on to a random enemy or item rather than the intended target. Flicking the right analog stick shuffles through available targets. But if you shuffle the wrong way, it can take what seems like forever to reach the intended one.

"Dawn of Mana" does have some fun parts, though. The real-time combat can be quite enjoyable. Players can attack enemies with their sword and initiate magic spells. But the real joy comes from grabbing them with a rope and swinging them into their comrades. Grabbing objects and tossing them into enemies is also good for a laugh.

In the end, "Dawn of Mana" has slick combat and nice visuals, but doesn't live up to the reputation of the franchise.

Game: "Tank Beat"

Publisher: 03 Entertainment

System: Nintendo DS

Cost: \$30

ESRB rating: T

Review rating: 3 stars

While a flood of mini-game compilations explores the capabilities of the Nintendo DS touch screen, few action games use it as much as O3 Entertainment's artillery-laden title "Tank Beat."

In fact, the bottom-screen controls are so integral to the game that players will sometimes have a difficult time focusing on the gorgeous symphony of action that they're composing.

Tank commanders will find the controls both interesting and fun. Basically, the armored vehicle follows whatever path players draw on the bottom screen with their stylus, and it's up to them to avoid running into obstacles such as buildings and mountains.

While the tank is traveling from Point A to Point B, players are free to switch from movement mode to attack mode, and they can swivel their turret to scan the horizon by sliding the stylus around. Players also can

fire either of their two types of weapons by tapping the touch screen at the exact spot where the gunfire should hit. This makes it necessary to "lead" targets on the move, which can be challenging.

Unfortunately, I've played entire games without looking at the upper screen due to the complex touch-screen controls. This is really a shame, because the visuals on "Tank Beat" are impressive on such a small screen.

However, the addition of online and offline "battle royal" matches for up to four tanks more than makes up for this. Add a wide variety of vehicles, ranging from swift tanks to hulking behemoths to mobile missile launchers, and the result is pure video destruction in the palm of your hand.

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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)

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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