

Video Game Reviews: Harry Potter's wizardry comes magically to life

by *Jeb_Haught*

Game: "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix"

Publisher: EA

System: Nintendo Wii

Cost: \$50

ESRB rating: T

Review rating: 3 stars

WIZARDRY - In this virtual version of Hogwarts, the player is free to explore nearly every location from the series, including the Dungeon Corridor, Viaduct, Hagrid's Hut and the Gryffindor Common Room. CNS Photo courtesy of EA. FULL PRESS - The most powerful move in 'Mario Strikers Charge' is called the 'MegaStrike,' which can blast several balls at the enemy in succession. CNS Photo courtesy of EA. With the fifth installment of the Harry Potter series comes the inevitable movie-based game "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix."

Surprisingly, it's good. Unlike most Hollywood tie-ins, this one stands on its own merits. The ability to cast magic using the Wii motion-sensing controller makes it all the more enjoyable.

Fans of the series will surely appreciate the inclusion of content not in the movie. In this virtual version of Hogwarts, the player is free to explore nearly every location from the series, including the Dungeon Corridor, Viaduct, Hagrid's Hut and the Gryffindor Common Room. Since it's easy to get lost in such a massive, magical playground, the developers let players access the infamous Marauder's Map. Once a location is highlighted, visible footsteps appear on the ground that lead the player to his or her destination.

I recommend the Wii version over its Xbox 360 and PS3 brethren, because the Wiimote realistically simulates Harry's magic wand. Virtual magicians can cast a wide variety of spells. For example, twirling the Wiimote will cast "Reparo" (which rebuilds broken objects). Flicking it back and forth will cast "Destructo" (which breaks objects).

In addition, pulling back on the Wiimote casts Wingardium Leviosa (levitate objects), and these floating items move about with the player's motions.

Due to the great opportunity for exploration, "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix" isn't as action-packed as the movie. Nevertheless, there's no better way to simulate the antics of "The Boy Who Lived."

Game: "Mario Strikers Charged"

Publisher: Nintendo

System: Nintendo Wii

Cost: \$50

ESRB rating: E

Review rating: 3 stars

Though based on soccer, "Mario Strikers Charged" barely resembles it. It's just madcap fun. Ever since Mario became an uber-star, he has dabbled in everything from tennis to mini-games to kart racing. For his latest outing, titled "Mario Strikers Charged," the beloved plumber takes his surreal version of soccer online and scores a hat trick for smooth game play, lovable characters and overall wackiness.

While this series is based on soccer, very little resembles the popular sport. Sure, there's a rectangular field with goals on each end, but the soccer ball is made of steel and possesses magical powers. In addition, David Beckham wannabes can drastically affect the course of each game by dropping banana peels and "bob-ombs," shooting turtle shells and making themselves invincible.

The most powerful move is called the "MegaStrike," which can blast several balls at the enemy in succession. When this happens, a mini-game appears on the screen, and the defender has to move the Wiimote to stop each ball individually.

Although the MegaStrike seems overpowering at first, it can be easily prevented with a slide tackle or big hit to the attacker. And when a MegaStrike is successfully launched, experienced defenders have little problem deflecting all the shots.

As only the second Wii game to feature online game play, "Mario Strikers Charged" offers a bevy of options ranging from extensive leaderboards to a permanent friend roster and four-player matches (two per Wii).

Sure, the game lacks voice chat and a few other options, but that doesn't put a stopper on the madcap fun. 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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