

War: Game a must for PlayStation 2 fans

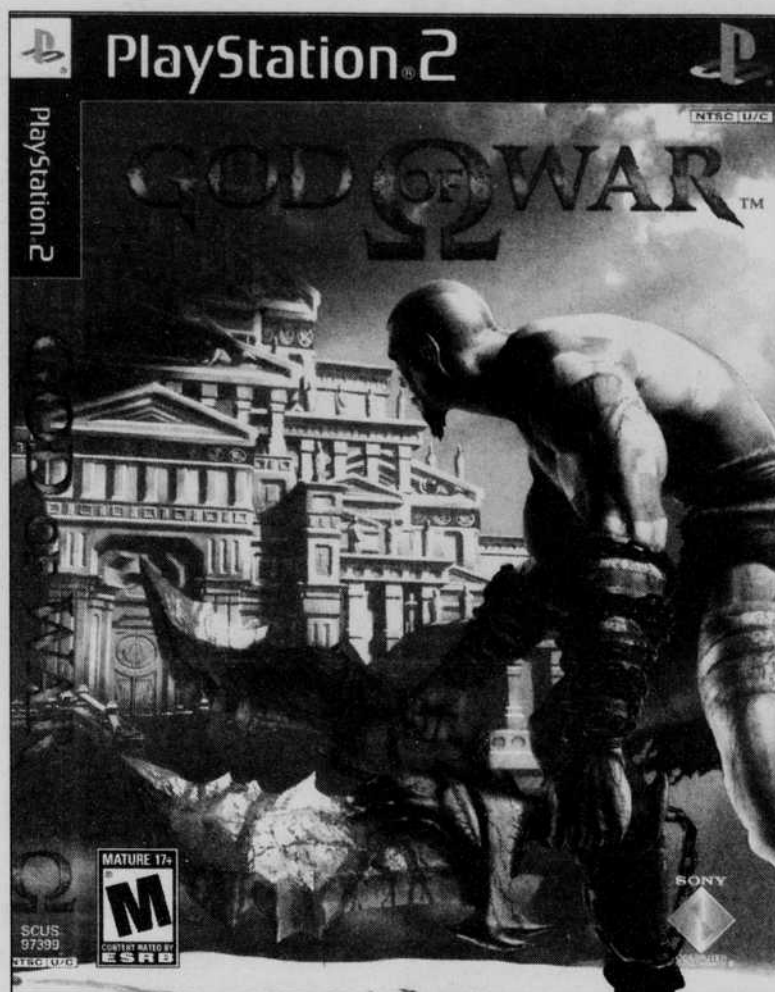
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grab the controller.

When players first meet Kratos, we find him standing on Suicide Bluff staring into the Aegean Sea below. Kratos casts himself off the cliff and moments before he hits the bottom, players flashback to the start of Kratos' journey. Kratos, a mortal, is commissioned by Athena to kill Ares. It seems that Ares has gone crazy with jealousy and has decided to destroy his sister's city, Athens, in a desperate bid for the attention of his father, Zeus. In order to kill Ares, Kratos will need to acquire Pandora's Box, which is located in the puzzle-laden Pandora's Temple.

The production value of "God of War" is amazing. Levels are vast, detailed and varied; they give the game an epic feel and lend to "God of War's" superb storytelling. Early in the game players find themselves jumping from ship to ship fighting undead legionnaires and Hydras. Later, players will find themselves peering through a sandstorm as they crawl through a desert listening for a Siren's song. Loading rarely stifles the pace of the game and the graphics are some of the best seen on the PlayStation 2.

"God of War's" combat is a brutal ballet of violence. The Blades of Chaos, Kratos' weapons, are a pair of huge knives connected to chains which are bound to Kratos' wrists. These weapons allow for some of the most imaginative combat in a video game. Kratos furiously whips his blades from one adversary to another as combos reach over 100 hits. After some battles players will find both their thumbs and wits exhausted. The fluidity of the combat is astonishing, a player can be dicing up harpies at one moment and then quickly dodging a Minotaur's club the next.

It is clear that "God of War's" programmers spent a lot of time dreaming up some of the most gruesome and imaginative ways to take out an enemy.



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For instance, when fighting Medusa the player will first have to whittle away on the queen of the Gorgons. After she takes enough damage, the symbol for the circle button will appear over her head beckoning players to grab her. Once Kratos grabs hold of Medusa players find themselves locked into a mini-game, quickly entering combinations until Kratos manages to rip off the head of Medusa. Kratos is then able to use Medusa's head to turn enemies into stone.

One of "God of War's" greatest aspects is also the one of the game's low points. "God of War's" boss battles are so enjoyable and so satisfying that it is disappointing that there aren't more. Each boss, much like many of the game's enemies, has a

gimmick. As players fight bosses it becomes quickly apparent that Kratos' blades will not be enough to take down the foe. It is up to players to discover each boss's weakness, or environmental factors that may help Kratos defeat the boss.

It is important to note that "God of War" is extremely violent and that it intended for a mature audience. Each swipe of Kratos' blade causes enemies to gush blood and Kratos seems to find some of the most brutal ways to kill any enemy. With that said, "God of War" is a must have for any Playstation 2 owner. It will take a player anywhere from 15 to 20 hours to beat and once the game is finished players will unlock deleted levels, extra content, and other new challenges.

Jungle: New creatures, visuals break monotony

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including ice caverns and lava pits.

In "Jungle Beat," players control Donkey Kong, a huge fuzzy gorilla who's out to become the king of the jungle by conquering various fruit kingdoms. Each level is loaded with bad guys, as DK tries to collect as many bananas as possible before proceeding to the area boss to do battle for the throne.

The action becomes repetitive, each level presenting only a small challenge of knowing when to jump and where. Game play can almost become automatic, often relying only on well-timed claps, which trigger events to progress through the level. Thankfully, Nintendo recognized this fact and went some distance to help break things up. DK encounters help in many different forms as the creatures of the jungle come to his aid; animals such as killer whales and flying squirrels present different types of play and help diversify the game.

"Jungle Beat" also has a very polished visual aspect. When the camera zooms in for boss battles, DK is covered in hair that makes him look like a walking fuzzball with arms. The fact that Nintendo has gone the extra mile to create individual hairs and still have the game run at a smooth frame rate just makes you want to smile. The level designs leave you feeling a little empty. All of the visual work seems to have gone into characters, which become painfully obvious when it feels as if you've ran through the same blocky corridor 50 times.

Although "Jungle Beat" is entertaining, it's simply not meant to last. From start to finish, total game time will range anywhere from 2 to 4 hours depending on skill and how in-depth players wish to get. Nintendo tries to remedy this problem by presenting the idea of crests.

Crests, objects that are earned after beating a world and collecting a specific number of bananas, are used to open up new levels in the game. In order to collect all of the crests, players will have to venture into worlds multiple times before they can reach perfection. This type of game play can be enjoyable, but for those who just wish to go from point A to point B will find themselves backtracking to collect crests in order to proceed further in the game.

The game also takes a hit by being one-player, which is a real shame because "Jungle Beat" becomes a lot more fun with a group of people. Those who've bought more than one bongo for "Donkey Konga" will be saddened to see extra bongos collect dust in this new adventure. Normally Nintendo throws in a pitiful head-to-head battle mode to bring in more players, but they've decided to leave it out all together this time.

For people who've already invested in the DK bongos, "Jungle Beat" will be a fine addition to their game collections. Those who haven't purchased the drums will be fine renting it instead.

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