

■ Video game review

'Soul Calibur III' carries on series' fighting tradition

The new PlayStation 2 exclusive adds some minor new features but still closely resembles its predecessors

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If it isn't broke don't fix it. That's the sort of mentality that Namco had when developing "Soul Calibur III," the latest addition to its lauded series. This time around instead of fiddling with the nearly perfect weapon-based fighting system, Namco opted to add a bevy of new single player diversions, including a character creation mode and "Chronicle of the Sword," a game mode that adds role playing and real-time strategy elements to the mix. This PlayStation 2 exclusive is

just as great as its predecessors, but aside from some minor tweaks and additions, the game feels largely unchanged.

The game's character creation mode is a fun, but useless addition to the game. Players choose from eight different fighting styles (more can be unlocked while playing the game) and can customize all aspects of their character's appearance. Players then take that character through the "Chronicle of the Sword," a clunky, real-time strategy mode that doesn't require much strategy. "Chronicle of the Sword" is an

interesting idea that doesn't pan out when it comes to gameplay.

User-created characters come off a little weak when compared to the nearly 30 characters in the game's stable. All the favorites from the previous "Soul Calibur" games have found their way into "SC3" as well as three brand-new characters: the scythe-wielding Zasalamel, Tira, whose weapon is essentially a bladed Hula Hoop, and Setsuka, whose parasol conceals a blade. Namco has also fleshed out some of the previous game's throwaway characters, such as Rock.

"Soul Calibur III" really shines in the multiplayer department. The game's one on one battles are the stuff of legends, when two players of equal skill fight each other, hours can slip away in what seems like minutes. The "Soul Calibur" games have always done a great job catering to fighting game veterans as well as casual players. Button mashers will enjoy the game's simple control scheme and fast-paced gameplay. Fighting game veterans will enjoy the depth that the game has to offer. Unfortunately, Namco didn't include online play, so players will be stuck fighting their buddies.

Graphically, "Soul Calibur III" is stunning. All of the characters are colorful and well designed; Namco has done a great job updating the look of some of the series' classic characters. The game's animations are incredibly fluid, which leads to some truly cinematic battles. The backgrounds are stunning; players may find themselves taking their



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mind off the action to check out their surroundings.

"Soul Calibur III" is a great game, especially when it comes to multiplayer mode. But, many of the additions that Namco made to the single player game don't really add to it as a whole. The character creation system is a fun gimmick, but I doubt that anyone will do too much

fighting with their custom character. But really, when has "Soul Calibur" been about the single player experience? "Soul Calibur III" delivers some of the best fighting seen on any game console, and it's a must own for any fighting game fan.

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