

Giant Talking Book

Save your lunch money.

There is a tendency amongst geeks to compare the video game industry to the entertainment behemoth affectionately known as Hollywood. But where, we ask, is the game that truly shows American culture at its worst? Where is the game so crappy that you *have* to play it? In short, where is the *Plan 9 from Outer Space* of video games? Well, weep no more, my friends; the train wreck of a game we've been waiting for is here. And we call it *Makai Kingdom*.

The story is this: You are Lord Zetta – or maybe you're just his first in command; it's hard to say. Anyway, Lord Zetta happily rules over one of many Netherworlds,

which may or may not be parts of Hell. One of the other Netherworld rulers, Pram, tells him of a prophecy she heard about in the aptly named *Book of Prophecy* that seems to indicate that Lord Zetta's Netherworld will be destroyed in short order. So Lord Zetta heads off to read the book, battling a few guardians along the way. (This serves as the tutorial for the game's simplistic combat system.)

Anyway, Lord Zetta finally gets to the book, but when he tries to read it, the book destroys his Netherworld and attempts to kill him. Zetta saves himself by combining with the book, and thus, becomes a giant talking book for the rest of the game.

Wanting to recreate his Netherworld, the giant talking book that is Lord Zetta convinces Pram to make a wish by writing in him. Thus the path of the game is revealed, as Lord Zetta now must get other Netherworld rulers to wish new land to be created by writing notes in the now-inhabited *Book of Prophecy*. Of course *you* must now go out and conquer those lands, using whatever real time strategy and character management you can find.

The graphics and sound here really help to bring the game to the depths of

badness it wanders through. The music is so boring, and yet so annoying, you may wind up wincing in pain from the sounds that feel like they were lifted straight out of a late '60s Roger Corman movie. The graphics are reminiscent of *Final Fantasy – Final Fantasy I*, that is – blocky and cartoony all at the same time; so bad, in fact, that you may find yourself squinting from time to time just trying to figure out what that image on your TV is supposed to be.

All of the above makes this a bad game, but what pushes it below and into *Plan 9* land is the dialogue. How many times will we hear Lord Zetta say that his incarceration sucks? Does it matter that he actually uses the word "sucks" a lot, thus giving you the Teen rating? Do you really want to spend 15 minutes hitting the X button while a three-headed character essentially talks to itself, revealing no useful information whatsoever?

Yes, *Makai Kingdom* is a sight to behold – but never with your own money. If you must rent it, because you are the type of person who gets a kick out of bad movies, borrow the rental money from someone you don't like, then never pay them back. It's the only way to save your own pride.

Adam Diamond writes for Weekly Dig (www.weeklydig.com) in Boston.



MAKAI KINGDOM: CHRONICLES OF THE SACRED TOMB.

Publisher, NIS America.
Platform, PS2. Price, \$49.99.
ESRB rating, T (Teen).
What's cool, kitch value.
What's uncool, almost everything else.
Gameplay, 2. Graphics, 1. Sound, 1.

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