

XENOGEARS



Publisher: Square EA
Developer: Square Co., Ltd.
Featured In: EGM #111

There are big games, there are huge games and then there's Xenogears. If you've ever hankered after something that's really going to eat into a seriously sizeable chunk of your life, this is the game for you. There's a good deal more than 60 hours' worth of gameplay here...It's considerably larger than Final Fantasy VII and easily one of the most sprawling and contentious games yet on the PlayStation. In underlying theme it shares a lot with FFVII. A tortured soul makes a group of friends, wanders a land that's a novel blend of old-school swords and sorcery with super-modern technology, and gets into fights (maybe too often). The similarities don't end there—much like Square's previous epic it is rich in story and character development, but unconvincingly linear when you sit back and really think about it. That said though, the tale it weaves is full of intrigue, action and most importantly—some genuinely exciting and different themes. Without giving the game away, much of the story deals with religion and the way it is handled is simply beautiful. Presentation is up to the usual Square standard too, with cinematics and 3D environments only let down by the quality of some of the sprites. It may be good for the hardcore RPGer, but the story's so good you'll want to get through it.

John D

Xenogears is a different kind of RPG for Square—and not just for its anime flavor or unique combat system. This is Square's most story-driven game to date (yep, more so than FFVII). You spend as much time watching cinemas (most of which use the slick in-game engine as you do playing. It makes for a long adventure that takes a while to get into. Yet once all the plot pieces fit, you'll find one of the greatest RPG stories of all time.

Crispin

Nothing is more important to me in an RPG than the story. A good story can make up for even the worst gameplay most of the time. Fortunately, in Xenogears' case, it only serves to add to an already great-playing game that not only looks beautiful, but sounds it as well (with a soundtrack). Fights take place a little too frequently, and most of the writing quality is weak, but otherwise I have no complaints. A fantastic game.

John R

There's nothing like a long, long RPG to keep me up all night for weeks. Xenogears sports some of the slickest animation cinematics I've seen, mixing CG objects with traditional cel work. The story is just plain cool, with morality deep topics discussed, and the battles are no cake walks with lots of techniques to learn and master. Being able to rotate the world is great, but I wasn't too keen on the slightly muddy graphics.

Sushi

WILD 9



Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Shiny
Featured In: EGM #110

Like Shiny's other famous side-scroller, Earthworm Jim, Wild 9 is full of fresh ideas and very solid gameplay. Upon playing Wild 9 for the first time, everything seems to indicate that this is a fantastic product. The graphics are among the best in the 2.5D side-scrolling genre, the multipurpose rig is an incredibly innovative idea and the game even makes your Dual Shock vibrate in all the perfect places (don't read too much into that...). But after a while, the excitement dies down a bit when you look at some of the game's faults. For example, some parts are tough to navigate (hard to make jumps, almost impossible to reach areas, etc.). Also, it's very difficult to get the 99 Gears you need to earn a free continue. You pretty much have to find every single gear in each stage—miss one and the whole thing is for naught (finishing a level with 98 Gears doesn't give you a crap). So even though Wild 9 has plenty of checkpoints (some of which are cleverly hidden), not having enough continues means you're in for some frustrating games. But what makes Wild 9 so memorable, and well worth checking out, is its sadistic side. Torturing enemies may seem like pointless violence, but it actually plays a necessary part in this game's design. Fun, solid and innovative. Give Wild 9 a try.

Dan

Dave Perry's long-awaited title is here...and it's worth the wait. Wild 9 gets going real fast, with good visuals and sound. The control is OK, which is important for a game like this. But it gets a little frustrating trying to control the rig and yourself at the same time. Also, trying to find 99 Gears in order to earn a continue can be a chore. Wild 9 is a good game, and you should at least rent it. By the way, torturing your enemies is damn cool.

Jay

Wild 9 is a hell of a lot of fun. It's a bit linear in some areas but overall I had a blast playing it. The torture element certainly is original, and helped me relieve a portion of my deadline stress. Actually, the whole game is quite original. The PlayStation needs more games like Wild 9, since it combines solid old-school side-scroller elements with excellent new-school graphics. Note: The voice in it is lame. Still, it's one to look into.

Shawn

This is a surprisingly playable platform game that actually makes a bold step...it has some original ideas. The whole concept of picking up the bad guys and torturing them by throwing them into grinders, blenders and other such nastiness adds some real humor to the graphics, but the animation on all of the characters is exceptional. A nice change from the usual 3D crap these days.

John D

POKÉMON



Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo/Creatures/Game Freak
Featured In: EGM #112

When a game sells over 9 million copies in Japan, you know the developers had to have done something right. Play Pokémon for a few hours and you'll begin to understand. No matter how much I try to write it off as "just another wacky Japanese fad," I can't. Heck, I can't even put the game down, much less write it off. If you're the perfectionist type (like me), Pokémon has your name written all over it. Collecting monsters, then building them up, trading them, evolving them and so on is just ridiculously addictive, and it'll keep you occupied for weeks. Getting into the game is simple for even the most novice game players, yet trying to build a complete collection of all 150 Pokémon is nearly impossible, even for the best of the best. This is, in my opinion, the definition of masterful game design. Sure, the one-player game is pretty darn easy (and rather linear), and some of the text is kinda hokey (gotta love when Ash "rubs" the Captain to make him feel better), but on the whole you won't even care, because the core part of the game (collecting and battling monsters) is just too much fun. With the Game Boy Color right around the corner, and the holiday season about to hit, there's no better time to dive into this little gem. Just be prepared to sacrifice many, many hours.

John R

When you first start Pokémon, this cutesy game almost seems a chore—especially if you're not into the combat aspect of most RPGs. You spend a lot of time at the outset fighting other Pokémon over and over again. But once you assemble a decent collection of critters, the game gets downright addicting. Combat becomes surprisingly strategic. Yet it's swamping and fighting with other human players that's the real draw here.

Crispin

Fifty squillion Japanese people surely can't be wrong, can they? Think of Pokémon as a truly social experience—something that's as much of a hobby as it is a game, and you find that the simple play mechanics aren't a problem. You'll soon feel attached to your Pokémon, talking about them with disturbing affection. Playing becomes a weird habit that you turn back to whenever you have a spare moment. I think I feel weird.

John D

At first, Pokémon may seem like it's made for kids, but once you get into it, I guarantee you'll be hooked no matter how old you are. There's so much depth to Pokémon, even I—a notorious non-fan of the Game Boy—an impressed. Gameplay is perfectly balanced and incredibly addictive—you can spend hours fighting, training, trading, etc. before even getting into the story! One of the most clever, innovative GB games ever.

Sushi

VISUALS 8 SOUND 9 INGENUITY 8 REPLAY 6

VISUALS 8 SOUND 8 INGENUITY 8 REPLAY 6

VISUALS 5 SOUND 6 INGENUITY 9 REPLAY 10