

★  
GAME OF THE MONTH

PlayStation 2

# OKAMI

## Refusing to paint by numbers

Game of the Month

A Fair Fight?

*Okami* borrowed most of the good stuff from *Zelda*, but it left out one crucial bit: It has no lock-on button to help you engage the enemy head-on. To enjoy yourself in *Okami's* battles, you need to be a pro at controlling the camera yourself (using the right analog stick). The game is so generous with power-ups, however, that sucking won't even get you killed.

**ROBERT:** I've never been the type to go googly-eyed at the sight of a pretty game, but I can't talk about *Okami* without first giving a nod to its visionary art direction. Fuzzed out on faux paper, punctuated by thick black lines, and stained with a cornes-buzzing palette of bright and muted colors, *Okami* is a painter's imagination come to life. It proves that intrepid game-makers can blow your mind without the use of bleeding-edge computer hardware, confirming what I've long suspected: Great art is more important to the visual experience of a game than great technology.

That painted-canvas look ties directly into *Okami's* hook. An adventure game very much in debt to the *Zelda* series, *Okami* replaces the usual inventory of puzzle-solving, path-unlocking gadgets with a paintbrush. As you traverse mythological Japan, killing monsters and solving puzzles, you can pause the game at any time and use the Celestial Brush to affect the onscreen

action. From drawing in a missing section of bridge to slicing an enemy in half with a single stroke, the brush plays into every aspect of the game. *Okami* throws new brush uses at you all the way up to the end, quite a feat considering its length of approximately 40 hours.

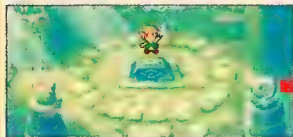
Epic adventures are great and all, but *Okami* could have used tighter pacing. The first five hours of the game are a slow mix of long-winded character speech and basic training. In fact, the entire game is packed with reams of text. That's fine in principle, but you'll find yourself forced to read the same details over and over as helpful townspeople beat clues into your brain (while you wish for an adult text-speed option).

But just when it seems that Amaterasu (the game's wolf-goddess protagonist) and Issun (her sprite sidekick) have settled into a rut, *Okami* wows you with something new, a shrink-ray jaunt into the garden to fight spiders and ride on the feet of passersby or a journey into the snowy

North. *Okami* developer Clover obviously put a lot of love into its creation and, as you travel the countryside, painting barren landscapes into bloom, that love radiates from the screen.

**MARK:** Next gen schmeck schmen. Who needs expensive new hardware when *Okami* delivers graphics so rich, so vibrant, and so spectacular that you often can't help but pause just to admire them? Who needs extensive online options when you have a world full of great characters, sharp dialogue, and tons of secrets? Who needs fancy new controllers when *Okami's* brilliant brush system innovates, simplifies, and entertains all in one (ahem) stroke? As recent *Castlevania* games did with the *Metroid* formula, *Okami* takes a well-established game template (in this case the *Zelda* series) and reinvents it with a style all its own. The sleepy villages, sprawling valleys, and clever dungeons of *Okami's* mythic Japan induce the same wide-eyed wonder and thrill of discov-

### Is *Okami* Too Exotic to Understand via Words? Look, Pictures!



Take *Zelda's* puzzle-heavy adventuring...



...let the player use the game as a canvas...



...throw in a healthy dose of flowery landscaping...

**Good:** Amazing art, novel gameplay ideas  
**Bad:** Long-winded, repetitive text, no locking on to battle  
**Did You Know:** *Okami* originally didn't feature its painted look

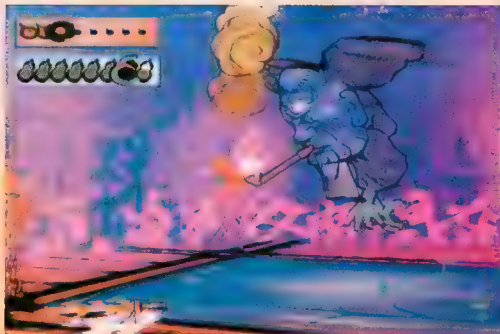


THE VERDICT  
TOP OF THE

9.0 9.5 9.0  
ROBERT MARK ANDREW

Publisher: Capcom  
 Developer: Clover  
 Players: 1  
 ESRB: Teen

www.capcom.com



ery you'd encounter in Link's finest adventures. Which is not to say it's the same old game with a fresh coat of ink; the developers have seamlessly worked the unique brush mechanic into every aspect of *Okami*, especially its epic boss battles.

I could've done with a bit more challenge in combat and fewer, less preachy story bits, but these complaints are so minor in the face of *Okami*'s achievement that I almost feel silly even bringing them up. I'd be surprised if you find a better game on any system this fall.

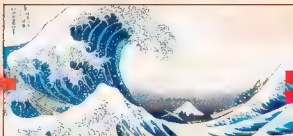
**1UP.COM—ANDREW:** As much as it owes to the *Zelda* series, *Okami* is every bit as good: It has a charming, classic story; characters who actually possess character; entertaining and varied side quests; and a visual aesthetic that manages to make *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* look like a paint-by-numbers piece. But every time my mind crept toward "This is a total rip-off" territory, *Okami* surprised me by doing

something new. The Celestial Brush had much to do with this, as the other two guys have said. What they didn't point out was this creative technique's misstep (cue evil eyes in Mark and Robert's direction): Whether it's due to finicky recognition or the DualShock 2's shoddy analog sticks (or perhaps even your own lack of artistic talent), sometimes your lines and curves won't translate into the actions you want. (I'd love to see what the developers could do if they ever bring the game to the DS or Wii.) But once you get the hang of it, you'll love it: Whether drawing bombs to open up new areas or bringing barren trees to bloom, you'll find that this game world truly does feel like a giant canvas that you're breathing life into.

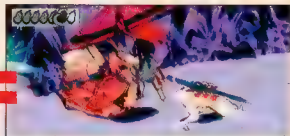
But Robert is absolutely right: If you're a developer thinking of pouring tons of money into graphical engines and CG cut-scenes, for the love of dog, stop and hire some brilliant artists. *Okami* proves that we'd all be better off for it. ▶



...add an *Onigiri*-like tale based on Japanese mythology...



...use Japanese artist Hokusai's woodblock print style...



...and you get *Okami*.

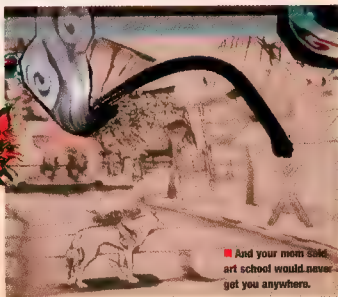


# OKAMI (CONT.)



## The Write Stuff

We paint a picture of *Okami's* in-game calligraphy



■ And your mom said art school would never get you anywhere.



So, how do you draw a picture in the middle of an adventure game? *Okami* allows you, via the R1 button, to pause the action at any point, turning the colorful scenery into a washed-out canvas. You then use the left analog stick to guide the brush across the screen. You'll come across 13 brush techniques in all.

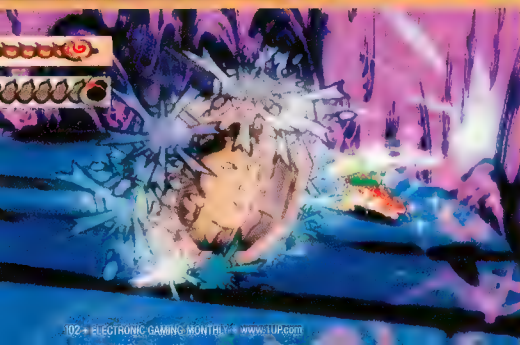
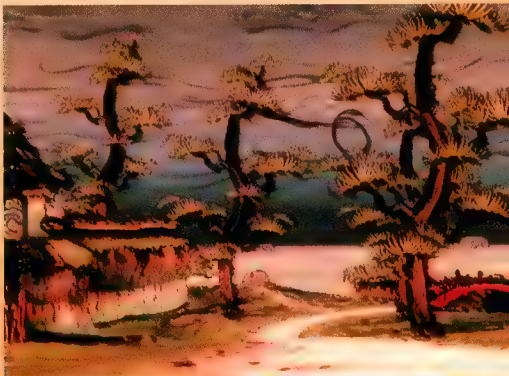
**Battle:** Among other methods, you'll find yourself slashing enemies with a quick

stroke, channelling the power of wind by drawing curlicues to blow away flying foes, and firing "ink bullets" by covering an enemy in dots.

**Puzzles:** Bringing out your inner artist is also key to solving most *Okami* puzzles. You'll often find yourself drawing a line from a flame to a flammable surface, changing the night to day by drawing a sun in the sky, and slipping

past fast-moving gates by slowing down time with a special symbol.

**Travel:** Much of *Okami's* world is sealed off until you learn the right brush techniques to pass. You'll gain the ability to bomb your way through walls by drawing a bomb (a circle with a line through it), to make your way to upper reaches of forests by connecting vines to Amaterasu, and to slice your way through giant boulders.



■ We can buy the Celestial Brush thing, but the wolf and the cannon...