= Ninja Gaiden (2004 video game) =

Ninja Gaiden is an action @-@ adventure hack and slash video game developed by Team Ninja for the Xbox video game console . It went through five years of development before its release by Tecmo in 2004 , and had a number of expansion packs and two remakes , Ninja Gaiden Black and Ninja Gaiden Sigma . The game follows the fictional story of Ryu Hayabusa , a master ninja , in his quest to recover a stolen sword and avenge the slaughter of his clan .

Tecmo specifically targeted Ninja Gaiden at a western audience , and despite difficulties in obtaining content ratings due to the game 's graphic depictions of violence , it was generally well received , and 362 @,@ 441 copies were sold in North America in the first month after its release . Nevertheless , the game had to be censored for release in some regions , and Japanese sales were poor , with only 60 @,@ 000 in the four months following its release . Making use of the Xbox 's internet connectivity , Ninja Gaiden was the focus of a series of online contests across North America , Europe and Japan . Record @-@ breaking numbers of players took part , competing for places in the live final , which was held during the Tokyo Game Show (TGS) 2004 .

Team Ninja continued to update the game after its release : two Hurricane Packs were made available as free downloadable content that added extra content , gameplay challenges , and game engine improvements . These were incorporated into a reworked version , released in 2005 and entitled Ninja Gaiden Black , that was regarded by the game 's creator Tomonobu Itagaki and many players as the definitive version . In 2007 , Ninja Gaiden was graphically enhanced on the PlayStation 3 , with extra content , in the form of Ninja Gaiden Sigma . This version was later released on the PlayStation Vita as Ninja Gaiden Sigma Plus .

= = Gameplay = =

Ninja Gaiden develops its narrative thread through the actions of its player @-@ controlled protagonist , Ryu Hayabusa . Viewed from a third person over @-@ the @-@ shoulder perspective , in typical action @-@ adventure fashion Ryu starts the game with basic , low @-@ level abilities and weapons that can be upgraded as he progresses , by discovering or buying items . In keeping with his ninja persona , his character can interact with the game environment to perform acrobatic feats , such as running along and jumping off walls , swinging from pole to pole , or running across water . The game world is made up of several distinct regions , most of which are connected via the city of Tairon , which functions as a hub . Access to these regions are obtained by fighting enemies , finding keys , or solving puzzles , inspired by the mechanics of the The Legend of Zelda video games . Dragon busts scattered throughout the regions provide the means to save player progress , permitting gameplay to be resumed at a later time .

Ryu 's movements are directed using the console gamepad . The game 's control system , which comprises the left thumbstick , two attack buttons , and a block button , was described as fluid and responsive , and Ninja Gaiden was regarded as having one of the deeper combat engines among Xbox games at the time , comparing well to the PlayStation 2 action @-@ adventures God of War and Devil May Cry . Eric Williams , the designer of the God of War combat engine , explained that Ninja Gaiden prohibits players from stopping or changing attacks in mid @-@ stroke . In contrast , God of War allows players to do so , and Devil May Cry grants this freedom to certain attacks . Williams said that , compared to those two games , the combat system in Ninja Gaiden was harder to master ; however , it lets players fight their computer controlled foes on equal terms .

Ninja Gaiden features a large selection of weapons for Ryu to wield , each with advantages and disadvantages that affect the way the player approaches combat . These include one @-@ handed swords , such as the Dragon Sword and Kitetsu , which grant quick attacks , and a move called the " Flying Swallow " , which allows Ryu to leap and slash through enemies . In addition these light weapons allow Ryu to smash foes into the ground and perform his signature Izuna Drop ? a spinning piledriver . Heavy weapons , such as the Dabilahro and the Unlabored Flawlessness , are slow but cause more damage to opponents . With flails and staves , the player can string together long sequences of attacks . To engage distant foes Ryu can throw shuriken and shoot arrows . In

addition to using standard melee techniques , Ryu can employ essences ? colored globes of energy that are released on the death of enemies and absorbed into Ryu 's body when he comes into proximity with them . Essences have an important role in general gameplay , acting to heal Ryu , restore his magic , or increase his cash . However , in combat the player can cause Ryu to deliberately draw in essences , which can then be used to unleash powerful attacks known as Ultimate Techniques that allow Ryu to damage enemies without taking damage himself . These techniques deal heavy damage and make Ryu immune to injury for a short time .

Ninja Gaiden also provides Ryu with magical spells in the form of ninpo spells . When activated by the player , these make Ryu cast fireballs , ice storms , or bolts of lightning . Functioning in a similar manner to the bombs or grenades of shooter action games , these spells allow Ryu to inflict heavy damage on enemies while potentially avoiding damage himself . But , dissatisfied with their programmed visual effects , the game 's director Tomonobu Itagaki wanted to deter players from using ninpo . He therefore tweaked the game to award bonus points when players cleared stages without employing magic . For Ryu 's defense , the player has two options . First , Ryu can stand still and attempt to block attacks . However , certain enemies can break his guard ? either through particularly strong attacks or by grappling him . The second option is to make Ryu dodge , by rolling away from the attack in a maneuver called " reverse wind " .

= = Plot = =

Inspired by the 1990s Ninja Gaiden series for the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) , the 2004 version was originally set in a re @-@ imagined game world based on another Team Ninja creation , the Dead or Alive (DOA) series of fighting games . However , interviews with Tomonobu Itagaki indicate that the Xbox games are prequels to the NES series and that both possibly share a single continuity .

Ninja Gaiden is set in the game world of the Dead or Alive series . Located mainly in Japan and the fictional Vigoor Empire , the game draws on Heian period structures for its Japanese locales ? a ninja fortress and village set in the mountains . In contrast the Vigoor Empire , with its capital city of Tairon , is a blend of architectural types from around the world . European @-@ style buildings display Arabic lettering , and the monastery in Tairon exhibits Gothic influences with a vaulted hall , pointed arches , and large stained glass windows . A hidden underground level features statues with the heads of cats , walls covered with carvings , hieroglyphics , Aztec pyramid and a labyrinth . This mix of styles was the result of Itagaki 's deliberate refusal to constrain the game 's creative process .

= = = Characters = = =

Ryu Hayabusa , the " super ninja " , is the protagonist of Ninja Gaiden , and the only player @-@ controllable character in the game . Itagaki believed that creating extra player characters might distract his team from focusing on Ryu 's development . Ryu has a long history with Tecmo ; he was the star of the 1990s Ninja Gaiden series , and has been part of the DOA roster since 1996 . His roles in these games played a part in his popularity among fans and the video game industry . Ninja Gaiden provides a backstory to Ryu 's appearance and character as seen in the Dead or Alive series , being set two years before the first DOA game .

Rachel is the leading female character , and tragic heroine of the game . She and her twin sister , Alma , are afflicted with a blood curse that turns humans into fiends . Believing that there is no cure for their condition , Rachel seeks to kill Alma to redeem her sister 's soul . The relationship between the sisters and the Greater Fiend Doku , who cursed them , serves as a plot device to drive the game forward , with Rachel occasionally needing to be rescued by Ryu . Although not a player @-@ controlled character in Ninja Gaiden , in a few sections of the Ninja Gaiden Sigma remake she is controllable . Two other characters assist the player in the game . Ayane , a young female ninja and one of the DOA regular cast members , acts as a guide throughout Ninja Gaiden by supplying advice and objectives to the player . Muramasa , a bladesmith , has shops scattered throughout the

game world where players can purchase useful items and upgrades for Ryu 's weapons . Muramasa also gives quests and relates back @-@ stories and other crucial information ; for example , he tells Ryu how he can obtain the item required to upgrade his Dragon Sword to its full potential . Players have the option to customize the appearance of player characters , with selectable costumes for Ryu and hairstyles for Rachel .

Most of the enemies are fiends ? humans changed into monsters by their blood curse . Three Greater Fiends lead their lesser brethren against Ryu , playing major roles in the game 's plot : Alma , Rachel 's sister , whose story forms a significant part of the game ; Doku , Ryu 's main antagonist , whose raid on Hayabusa village and theft of the Dark Dragon Blade comprise the main plot thread ; and Marbus , lord of the fiend underworld who is responsible for the final set of challenges Ryu faces in the realm of the fiends before encountering the Vigoor Emperor .

= = = Story = = =

Ninja Gaiden 's story spans 16 chapters , each beginning and ending with a cutscene . At the start of the game , the player takes control of Ryu as he infiltrates the Shadow clan fortress . Ryu is there to visit his uncle , the clan leader Murai . During their chat , Ayane delivers news of a raid on the Hayabusa village . Fighting his way back to his village , Ryu encounters Doku , who has killed the Hayabusa shrine maiden Kureha and has taken the Dark Dragon Blade . Ryu is cut down by Doku with the stolen Blade , but he is brought back to life as a " soldier of revenge " by a falcon , the spiritual animal of the Hayabusa clan .

Seeking vengeance for Kureha 's death , Ryu learns from Murai that the raiders were from Vigoor , so he stows away on an airship bound for the empire . Fighting his way through the streets of its capital city , Tairon , Ryu faces several bosses including the three Greater Fiends . He defeats Alma in a battle that wrecks the city , but leaves her to Rachel 's mercy . Conversely , Rachel cannot bring herself to kill her sister , and instead is taken by Doku , who prepares to sacrifice her in a ritual to enhance Alma 's power . With Alma 's help Ryu rescues Rachel and destroys Doku 's spirit , but with his dying breath Doku casts the blood curse on Ryu . The only way for Ryu to lift the curse is to kill the emperor , so he storms the palace , defeating Marbus who bars his way to the emperor 's personal realm . Two successive boss fights must be completed to destroy the Emperor and reclaim the Dark Dragon Blade ? once this is accomplished his realm starts to destruct . Ryu must then be maneuvered up a series of ledges to escape , but in the process he loses his grip on the Dark Dragon Blade .

The fallen Blade lands at the feet of a figure , the Dark Disciple , who has been shadowing Ryu throughout the game . Taking the Blade , the Disciple reveals himself to be the clan leader Murai . He admits that the raid on Hayabusa village was part of his plan to restore the Blade 's evil power , using souls harvested by Ryu . Drawing on the Blade , Murai transforms himself , setting the stage for the final boss fight . Ryu defeats Murai and shatters the Blade with the True Dragon Sword . Victorious , Ryu turns himself into a falcon and flies to the Hayabusa village . In the game 's final scene he places the Dragon Eye , used to enhance his sword , on Kureha 's tombstone and disappears into the night . The story of Ninja Gaiden is continued in the sequels Ninja Gaiden : Dragon Sword , Ninja Gaiden II and Ninja Gaiden 3 .

= = Development = =

In 1999 , Team Ninja started work on the " Next @-@ Generation Ninja Gaiden Project " . The first stage of development was to create the game on the Sega NAOMI arcade system board . They then planned to move the project to the Dreamcast console for further development and release , but this was abandoned when Sega announced the end of Dreamcast product line in 2001 . At this point , Tecmo decided to release Ninja Gaiden as a launch title for the Sony PlayStation 2 in the United States . Itagaki , however , had other plans ; the Team Ninja Leader was impressed with the software development kits for the Xbox and pushed for his team to develop for the Microsoft console . The company kept silent on this change in direction , and surprised both the games industry and

fans when they announced at E3 2002 that Ninja Gaiden would be released exclusively on the Xbox gaming console . Most fans who voted on Tecmo 's poll wanted the game on the Nintendo GameCube .

Ninja Gaiden was Team Ninja 's first action title . Its initial concept had nothing in common with the original Ninja Gaiden series that was released for the NES . However , for retail reasons Tecmo wanted to retain a link with the previous games , which had many adherents in the West , so Itagaki was asked to rethink his ideas to target the foreign market . Analysing the earlier games , he concluded that their violence appealed to players , and included gory content , such as beheadings , in the Xbox game to retain that spirit . He also aimed to make his new game hard but alluring ; it would challenge players on their reflexes rather than on their memories of layouts and timings . His team made a point of designing smoothly @-@ flowing gameplay with high @-@ quality animations that reacted quickly to the player 's input . Itagaki paid homage to the earlier Ninja Gaiden series by including updated versions of foes and special attacks . Team Ninja based their 3D computer models , from the pistols of the henchman upwards , on real world material . Character models were taken from studies of human anatomy , and the team hired martial artists in order to digitally capture their movement . Rather than import the motion captures directly into the game , however , the animators used them as templates to give a sense of realism to the game characters ' exaggerated movements . Itagaki found it more interesting to design nonhuman creatures than human enemies .

= = Release = =

In 2004 , Tecmo released a demo disc of Ninja Gaiden in Japan , bundled with the February 26 issue of Famitsu Xbox magazine . The demo let players try the first chapter of the game on two difficulty settings with a few fully upgraded weapons and ninpos . On March 2 , 2004 , a year later than originally planned , Tecmo released Ninja Gaiden in the United States .

= = = Regional censorship = = =

As released , Ninja Gaiden contained bloody acts of violence , decapitations and grotesque monsters . The North American games rating body , the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) , rated it as a " Mature " game , which prohibits sale to anyone under the age of 17 . The depiction of beheadings , though , attracts stricter ratings in other parts of the world . In Germany , the Unterhaltungssoftware Selbstkontrolle (USK) deemed these excessive , and refused to rate the game at all . Since this had the potential to place Ninja Gaiden in Germany 's " List of Media Harmful to Young People " , which would have meant that shops could neither advertise the game nor sell it unless by request to customers of 18 years or older , Tecmo censored the European PAL version to obtain a USK rating . A year later , Tecmo managed to obtain a USK 18 + rating for the uncensored release of Ninja Gaiden Black .

Japan 's Computer Entertainment Rating Organization (CERO) rated Ninja Gaiden and Black , on their release , as 18 + games . At the time , CERO ratings acted as guidelines for consumers . However , on March 1 , 2006 , the Japanese rating system changed . A scale from A to D was introduced , with an additional Z rating for games with large amounts of gore and sexual content . The Z rating is legally enforced , it being illegal to sell such games to anyone under the age of 18 . As a result , Tecmo removed the human beheadings in Sigma to obtain a D rating for the East Asian market . However , CERO reclassified the two previous games as D , despite them also depicting human decapitations .

= = = Post @-@ release = = =

Team Ninja kept working on the Ninja Gaiden project after its release , with the aim of pushing the action genre and their first such title as far as they could . To this end , they released downloadable expansions , known as Hurricane Packs , free of charge . Itagaki said that since the packs were born out of his team 's interest , they did not care to charge players for their efforts . The two packs

were available over Xbox Live in the third quarter of 2004 .

 Hurricane Pack 1 was a revamped version of Story Mode ; Team Ninja tweaked the encounters and artificial intelligence (AI) of Ryu 's foes to increase the difficulty of the game . The pack introduced additional foes such as humanoid cats , giants wearing dinosaur skulls , and cyborgs , and Team Ninja made a key change to the camera system by which the on @-@ screen action is displayed ; players could now control the camera and change its viewing angle . Another feature of the pack was to enhance the combat engine ; the new " Intercept " skill let players counter any enemy attack with the proper timing .

 Hurricane Pack 2 kept the enhancements of the first , but took place in an alternative world comprising only two regions , where players have to fight through several encounters to rescue Rachel from two new bosses (Nicchae and Ishtaros) . This expansion introduced fiends who wield giant swords and cast fireballs .

 Team Ninja later compiled both expansion packs , and added new features , to create Ninja Gaiden Black . This game , which Itagaki viewed as the final version of Ninja Gaiden , went on sale on September 20 , 2005 . A few years later , Team Ninja upgraded the graphics of the game and ported it to the PlayStation 3 (PS3) . This version was released as Ninja Gaiden Sigma on June 14 , 2007 . Black became an Xbox Original game on February 11 , 2008 .

= = = Online competition = = =

 The Master Ninja Tournaments were a series of three online contests held by Microsoft and Tecmo in 2004 . They took place over Xbox Live , and were open to participants in Europe , Japan , and North America . Winner selection was based on the scores achieved through playing Ninja Gaiden or its Hurricane Packs . Players had 14 to 24 days to complete the required games and submit their scores to an online scoreboard .

 The first two tournaments formed regional qualification stages for a live Ninja Gaiden Master Tournament World Championship , held on September 25 at the TGS 2004 . Competition for places was intense , with both tournaments breaking records for online participation in Xbox Live events . Six of the highest scoring players from Europe and North America won bokkens bearing Itagaki 's signature , and five regional winners were selected to proceed to the final . Here , the finalists simultaneously played a custom game drawn from Hurricane Pack 2 while commentators called out the action . They had 15 minutes to complete the game and post the highest score ; the winner emerged only in the last 20 seconds , when Yasunori Otsuka cleared the game and outscored his rivals . At the award ceremony , the finalists received their prize plaques from Itagaki .

 The tournaments were not without controversy . Players complained about Microsoft 's tardiness in posting the official rules for the first playoff , and it was believed that the top posted score was not achievable by fair means . Officials , however , stated that the score was possible , and allowed the results to stand . In the second playoff , Microsoft initially named the runner up as the North American finalist , after disqualifying the winner for no publicly stated reason , but eventually had to send the second runner up to Tokyo when the first was unable to produce a passport in time .

 Master Ninja Tournament 3 started on September 27 and lasted 26 days . Rankings were decided by scores obtained while playing Hurricane Pack 2 , and the prizes were Tecmo apparel and Team Ninja games . This marked the end of official tournaments for Ninja Gaiden , although Microsoft have retained the ranking boards for players to upload their scores .

= = = Merchandise = = =

 Tecmo has built up a line of merchandise around the Ninja Gaiden name . Its online shop carries apparel and accessories such as caps , wristbands , T @-@ shirts , key holders , and mugs . Most of the merchandise is based on that associated with the various Ninja Gaiden game launches or given as prizes in the Master Ninja Tournaments . Tecmo also published the original soundtrack of the game under their record label Wake Up on March 20 , 2004 . Kotobukiya , a figurine maker , includes 1 / 6 scale plastic figurines of Ninja Gaiden characters in their range of products . As of

2007 , they have produced figures of Ryu , Ayane , Kureha and Rachel .

= = Other versions = =

Tecmo published two versions of Ninja Gaiden : Ninja Gaiden Black for Xbox and Ninja Gaiden Sigma for PS3 . Essentially the same game as the original , they tell the same story of Ryu and the Dark Dragon Blade , but include additional content and updated game mechanics . Itagaki deemed Black to be the final version of Ninja Gaiden , but with the release of the PS3 , Tecmo ported the game to this platform as Sigma .

In addition to the narrative Story Mode , Black and Sigma introduced a gameplay variation called Mission Mode . Focused on action rather than character development , this provides combat @-@ based missions set mainly in small areas , where the player 's goal is to " destroy all enemies " . In both Story and Mission modes , game scoring is based on the player 's speed in clearing encounters , the number of kills achieved , the number of unused ninpo spells remaining at the end , and the amount of cash collected . Players can compare their scores on online ranking boards .

= = = Ninja Gaiden Black = = =

Tecmo announced at E3 2005 that Team Ninja was working on Ninja Gaiden Black , and later exhibited a working version of the game at the TGS 2005 . Black is a reworked compilation of the original Ninja Gaiden and the two Hurricane Packs . The game features new foes , such as exploding bats and doppelgänger fiends who can imitate Ryu . It contains more costumes than the original , and swaps Ninja Gaiden 's unlockable NES games for an arcade version .

One key feature of this version is its two new difficulty settings ? the easy Ninja Dog and the very hard Master Ninja . Itagaki added Ninja Dog after receiving complaints of Ninja Gaiden being too hard in its default incarnation , although he believed that , with persistence , any player was capable of completing the game . Hence he ensured that those players selecting Ninja Dog would be subjected to gentle mockery by the game ? players on this difficulty setting receive colored ribbons as accessories , and Ayane treats Ryu as an inferior . In compensation , Itagaki made the other difficulty settings harder than in Ninja Gaiden . Another feature of Black is its Mission Mode , which comprises 50 combat missions , one of which is adapted from the custom game designed for the Ninja Gaiden Master Tournament World Championship final . The last five missions are based on those in Hurricane Pack 2 and form a linked series known as " Eternal Legend " . While most of the improvements made in the Hurricane Packs carried forward through this game , including the camera system tweaks and new boss battles , the Intercept maneuver , introduced in Hurricane Pack 1 , was not included in Black , adding to its increased challenge .

= = = Ninja Gaiden Sigma = = =

In 2006 , Tecmo and Sony announced the development of Ninja Gaiden Sigma for the PS3 . Eidos obtained the European publishing rights for this game . Itagaki had no direct role in Sigma and judged it a flawed game , although he acknowledged that Sigma gave PlayStation owners a taste of Ninja Gaiden . A version for PlayStation Vita , titled Ninja Gaiden Sigma Plus , was released in North America and Europe on February 22 , 2012 .

= = Reception = =

Ninja Gaiden was released to much critical acclaim . Greg Kasavin of GameSpot called it " one of the best most challenging action adventure games ever made " , and IGN 's Erik Brudvig said that it " sets a new standard for third @-@ person action games in terms of length , depth , speed , and gore . " Electronic Gaming Monthly (EGM) called it " an unmissable instant classic " , and declared that " no Xbox should go without [Ninja] Gaiden . " Critics also regarded it to be one of the most difficult games released prior to 2007 .

Its enhanced version , Ninja Gaiden Black , also impressed reviewers . GameSpot noted that it had the best visual and audio presentation on the Xbox , and praised its new Mission Mode for " [distilling] the game down to its purest essentials . " IGN called its release " a rare and welcome day " , which brought their " excitement levels back to the first time [they] played the game . "

From a technical point of view , critics regarded Ninja Gaiden and Black as the best of the available Xbox software at the time ; the console hardware had been pushed to its limits without showing significant drops in performance . GameSpot 's Kasavin was impressed with their " first @-@ rate presentation " and said that no other games at that time came close in visuals and audio . According to IGN , the games could " make [them] momentarily forget about the next generation of consoles " . Both Ninja Gaiden and Black were top @-@ sellers , which led to them being compatible with the Xbox 360 for all regions on the new platform 's release . Ninja Gaiden attracted criticism for the way on @-@ screen action is framed by the game 's camera . The default camera system centers the action on Ryu and his surroundings , but reviewers were frustrated by occasions when the camera locked on to part of the scenery , thus losing track of Ryu . Tecmo attempted to address this with the introduction of manual camera controls in the Hurricane Packs , and most critics judged that either the camera frame was usually acceptable , or that Ninja Gaiden was a good enough game that its flaws could be overlooked .

Consumers purchased 1 @.@ 5 million copies of Ninja Gaiden and Black to August 2007 , with the bulk of these sales going to North America and Europe . According to the NPD Group , in its first month Ninja Gaiden sold 362 @,@ 441 copies in the United States . These sales figures reflect Tecmo 's decision to target the non @-@ Japanese market . Japanese gamers were not particularly excited ? according to Itagaki , only 60 @,@ 000 copies of Ninja Gaiden were sold in Japan in the four months following its release . The critical and commercial successes of Ninja Gaiden have led CNET and GameSpot Asia to induct the game into their halls of fame .

The Ninja Gaiden games gained a reputation throughout the gaming community for their difficulty and attention to detail . Although they appealed to gamers who , like Pro @-@ G 's Struan Robertson , wanted a " bloody hard , but also bloody good " challenge , it was feared that casual gamers would find the learning curve daunting . IGN warned that gamers with lesser skills might not " get as much out of this game as others due to [its] incredible difficulty " , and Edge commented that " Tecmo ? s refusal to extend any kind of handhold to less dedicated players is simply a failure of design , not a badge of hardcore honour " and " it ? s impossible to believe they couldn ? t have found a way to increase the accessibility of the game without undermining the gloriously intractable nature of the challenges it contains . " EGM found the challenge to be " rewarding " as it " motivates you to actually get better at the game . " Clive Thompson focused on Ninja Gaiden in his Slate article examining the motivation for playing difficult games . He contends that extreme levels of challenge can be initially very frustrating and may cause a game to be abandoned in disgust . However , where a game also rewards a player 's perseverance by teaching the skills required to overcome its challenges , that player will have the motivation to finish the game . Ninja Gaiden , in his opinion , strikes the correct balance between challenge and reward ; completion brings " a sort of exhausted exhilaration , like finally reaching the end of War and Peace . " In 2012 , CraveOnline included it on their list of five " badass ninja games " , calling it " the pinnacle of action gaming at the time , holding onto that crown for an entire year until God of War released in 2005 " and " a true video game classic , and maybe the best ninja game of all time . " That same year , G4tv ranked it as the 83rd top video game of all time , also calling it " the best ninja game ever made and one of the all around hardest . "