The Lord of the Rings : The Return of the King (video game) =

The Lord of the Rings : The Return of the King is a 2003 action / hack and slash video game developed by EA Redwood Shores for the PlayStation 2 and Windows . It was ported to the GameCube and Xbox by Hypnos Entertainment , to the Game Boy Advance by Griptonite Games , to mobile by JAMDAT , and to OS X by Beenox . The game was published by Electronic Arts . It is a sequel to the 2002 game The Lord of the Rings : The Two Towers .

The game is an adaptation of Peter Jackson 's 2002 film The Lord of the Rings : The Two Towers and his 2003 film The Lord of the Rings : The Return of the King , which was released shortly after the game . As it is not an adaptation of J. R. R. Tolkien 's 1954 novel , The Return of the King , the third volume in his Lord of the Rings trilogy , anything from the novel not specifically mentioned or depicted in the films could not be represented in the game . This is because , at the time , Vivendi Universal Games , in partnership with Tolkien Enterprises , held the rights to the video game adaptations of Tolkien 's literary works , whilst Electronic Arts held the rights to the video game adaptations of the New Line Cinema films .

The game is similar to its predecessor in basic gameplay , but differs by adding multiple storylines , more playable characters and increased interaction with environments . A two @-@ player co @-@ op mode is also available for some missions . As with The Two Towers , The Return of the King was developed in close collaboration with the filmmakers , using many of the actual reference photos , drawings , models , props and other assets from the film . The game was met with positive critical reception for its graphics , audio , and gameplay , although its camera positioning and short length were criticized .

= Gameplay = =

Described by the developers as a modern version of Gauntlet , The Return of the King is a hack and slash action game played from a third @-@ person perspective . The game is very similar to its predecessor in basic gameplay . Each character has a quick attack which does minimal damage and can be easily blocked , and a fierce attack , which does more damage , but is slower and leaves the player vulnerable to attack . Only fierce attacks can break enemy shields . Each character also has a ranged attack , a " killing move " (which can be used to instantly kill downed enemies) , a parry (which can deflect enemy attacks) , a knock back (which pushes nearby enemies away) , a jump back (in which the player character jumps back away from the enemy) , a devastating attack (a charged fierce attack) and a special ability . Playable characters in the console and PC versions are Gandalf , Aragorn , Legolas , Gimli , Frodo and Sam , with Faramir , Pippin and Merry available as unlockable characters . Playable characters in the GBA version are Aragorn , Legolas , Gimli , Frodo , Gandalf , and Éowyn , with Gollum and Sam available as unlockable characters .

Each playable character has their own set of combos and attributes . After the end of each level the player can upgrade their characters ' abilities and combos using experience points . The number of points available to the player depends on the efficiency of their kills . During each level , the player will be continually graded on the skill with which they dispatch enemies ; " Fair " , " Good " , " Excellent " and " Perfect . " The more skill with which the player kills , the more experience they acquire . The player 's skill is measured by an on @-@ screen meter which increases as the player dispatches enemies . To avoid the meter dropping back down , the player must avoid being hit , and kill enemies using a variety of different methods . When a player reaches a Perfect level , all of their attacks increase in strength , and the experience from each kill is doubled . However , Perfect status only lasts for a brief period of time . A new aspect of Return of the King is that at the end of each level , rather than purchasing upgrades for the individual character , the player can also purchase " Fellowship " upgrades which apply to every playable character . However , characters will only be able to avail of a particular skill when they have reached the corresponding experience level .

A major change from The Two Towers is the interactive nature of the game environments . The player can operate machinery , for example bridges and catapults , to complete objectives , and use environmental objects as weapons , such as spears and cauldrons , to kill enemies . The levels are

also twice the size of the largest level from The Two Towers and many are less linear . Unlike The Two Towers , The Return of the King features a co @-@ op mode , allowing two players to play through the game together . The North American PlayStation 2 version also has an online multiplayer mode , with USB headset support , although this was removed from the European version of the game .

The Game Boy Advance version is more of a hack and slash RPG , and is played from an isometric three @-@ quarter top @-@ down view . A major gameplay difference in this version is the addition of " runes " which players can etch into their weapons , granting them special abilities . The game also features co @-@ op multiplayer through the Game Boy link function , and unlockable content when connected to the GameCube version via the Nintendo GameCube ? Game Boy Advance link cable .

= = Plot = =

Todd Arnold , senior producer of The Return of the King , stated that the game was not intended to re @-@ tell the story of the film , but to allow the player to come as close as possible to experiencing the critical parts of the film for themselves . Levels were designed with this goal in mind , with just enough plot to give context to the player 's actions . Liberties were thus taken with the plot , and critics noted there was little footage which could spoil the film for those who had not seen it . GameSpot 's Greg Kasavin said " if you didn 't know anything about the story of The Return of the King , then the story of the game may be hard to follow , though you 'll still get the gist of it . " However , he also advised , " in case you don 't want any aspect of the movie spoiled for you , it 'd be wise to hold off on playing The Return of the King until after you 've seen the movie . "

= = = Synopsis = = =

The game begins during the Battle of the Hornburg at Helm 's Deep , with the Uruk @-@ hai having just penetrated the outer walls . With the defenders falling back to the inner court , Gandalf (voiced by Ian McKellen) appears on a hill @-@ top flanked by thousands of Rohirrim . The player takes control of Gandalf as he enters the battle and helps defeat the Uruk @-@ hai and orc army . After this level , the game splits into three separate mission arcs , each with its own individual set of characters . The " Path of the Wizard " follows Gandalf , the " Path of the King " follows Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen) , Legolas (Orlando Bloom) and Gimli (John Rhys @-@ Davies) , and the " Path of the Hobbits " follows Frodo (Elijah Wood) and Sam (Sean Astin) , although initially only Sam is playable .

The Path of the Wizard continues immediately after the events of the first level . The remains of the Uruk @-@ hai and orc army flee into Fangorn Forest . However , within the forest , the Ents , led by Treebeard , have awoken and joined the fight against Sauron . Gandalf helps the ents as they destroy the rest of the army , and then assists them in bringing down a dam holding back the River Isen . This floods Isengard , trapping Saruman (Christopher Lee) , who had joined forces with Sauron , in his tower , Orthanc . Gandalf and Pippin (Billy Boyd) then head to Minas Tirith , capital of Gondor , leaving Aragorn , Legolas , Gimli and the Rohirrim to follow them . Gandalf has gone ahead of the others because Sauron mistakenly believes that Pippin has the Ring , and Gandalf plans to use this confusion to distract Sauron as Frodo and Sam are led by Gollum (Andy Serkis) towards Mount Doom to destroy the Ring . In Minas Tirth , Gandalf helps repulse the enemies from the walls for a time , but eventually , they break through the city 's defenses . Gandalf and the soldiers of Minas Tirith then retreat to a courtyard , where they must defend the fleeing civilians from the enemy . Once the people are safely inside , Gandalf can do little but await the arrival of Aragorn .

The Path of the King picks up with Aragorn , Legolas , Gimli and the Rohirrim on the way to Minas Tirith . Before arriving , however , the three companions must walk the Paths of the Dead in an effort to convince the Army of the Dead to join their cause in the War of the Ring . To do so , they must defeat the King of the Dead (Jarion Monroe) in combat . After this , the Paths of the Dead start to

collapse , and they must escape before the falling rubble crushes them . With the Army of the Dead pledged to aid them , they travel to Minas Tirith and enter the Battle of the Pelennor Fields . Joining the Rohirrim and the soldiers of Minas Tirith , they face orcs , Easterlings , Haradrim and oliphaunts . They must also defend Merry (Dominic Monaghan) and Éowyn (Lorri Holt) , allowing Éowyn the opportunity to defeat the Witch @-@ king of Angmar . As it seems they are about to be overwhelmed , the Army of Dead arrive , destroying the forces of Mordor and saving Minas Tirith .

 The Path of the Wizard and Path of the King share the same final level , set at the Black Gate of Mordor . In a further effort to distract Sauron from the approach of Frodo and Sam , Gandalf advises that Aragorn and the remaining army marches to the Gates of Mordor as a direct challenge to Sauron , who will send out a vast army to meet them , thus keeping his attention away from Mount Doom . Upon arriving at the Gate , the party are confronted by the Mouth of Sauron (Roger L. Jackson) , who tells them that Frodo is dead . They kill him and must then face a massive army of orcs , before fighting the remaining Nazgûl . Not believing Frodo to be dead , they plan to fight as long as they can , ultimately sacrificing themselves so as to give Frodo enough time to destroy the Ring .

 In The Path of the Hobbits , Frodo , Sam and Gollum must first escape from Osgiliath , fighting past orcs to get to the sewers and ensuring that Frodo is not captured by the Nazgûl . However , upon escaping , Gollum decides to betray them and take the Ring back for himself . He tricks Frodo into going on without Sam , but Sam follows them into Shelob 's lair . In the lair , Gollum abandons Frodo , and Sam must fight past spiders and orcs , eventually facing Shelob herself , who has attacked Frodo . Sam defeats Shelob , but upon reaching Frodo , he mistakenly believes him to be dead . About to go to Mount Doom on his own , he hides as a group of orcs arrive , and hears them say that Frodo is alive , but unconscious . They take him with them as Sam follows them to the Tower of Cirith Ungol . As Sam is about to enter the Tower , the orcs begin fighting among themselves , and Sam uses the distraction to rescue Frodo . Together , they head to Mount Doom . However , before Frodo can throw the Ring into the lava below , he is attacked by Gollum , who takes the Ring . In the final level , the player controls Frodo as he fights Gollum on the edge of the precipice . Frodo successfully defeats Gollum , knocking him into the lava and destroying the Ring forever .

= = Development = =

 Following the success of the video game tie @-@ in of The Two Towers film , an adaptation of The Return of the King was announced on April 25 , 2003 . While The Two Towers was released on the three major consoles (PlayStation 2 , GameCube and Xbox) and the Game Boy Advance , The Return of the King was also set for release on PC . Executive producer Neil Young revealed playable characters would include Gandalf , Aragorn , Legolas , Gimli , Frodo , Sam and two to four unlockable characters . He also stated the characters ' fighting styles would be much more differentiated from one another than they had been in Two Towers , and he explained the game would offer three separate story branches rather than one , but the player would be unable to complete the game or get to the final level by playing through only one branch . Young stated " there are certain gates that prevent the player from progressing that might break the fiction , but that motivates them to essentially bring a party of characters through the game to its conclusion . "

 EA debuted the game at the 2003 E3 event in May , announcing that compared to Two Towers , Return of the King had more playable characters , larger and less linear levels , multiple narrative paths , bigger and more intelligent bosses , interactive environments , and a co @-@ op mode . Footage from the films and parts of Howard Shore 's score would feature , and members of the film 's cast would lend their voices and likenesses to the game . On May 15 , a playable demo was made available for the PS2 , featuring the first Minas Tirith level along with a non @-@ playable demo of the co @-@ op gameplay in a customized level specifically designed for E3 . EA also revealed they were working on having Gollum as a playable character , although this ultimately did not happen , except in the GBA version .

 The developers called The Return of the King " bigger and better " than The Two Towers . " In The Two Towers the player would occasionally run into 10 or 15 enemies , " said lead game designer

Chris Tremmel , " in The Return of the King there are areas where the player faces up to 40 orcs [...] Fans familiar with The Two Towers will find that the combat experience in The Return of the King feels familiar but much deeper . " Before creating levels , the developers would initially look at the script and determine what parts from the film to highlight in that particular level , and how to structure that event as a mission . They would then write in @-@ depth level designs out on paper , going into details such as combat setup , special props and enemy types , all the while using the film as their main reference point . They would then create an animatic of the level , working out problems and fine @-@ tuning design concepts . The levels would then be created in the game environment . The game is also graphically improved over The Two Towers . According to Neil Young , " we 've developed some new lighting techniques to allow the characters to look richer . We are pushing 2x the number of polys & 2x the texture density [...] we also stream our geometry and textures from the disc so the game has a much higher density of imagery . " Enemy AI was improved , and developers also spent a lot of time working on the sound of the game , which was THX certified .

Producer Glen Schofield stated the biggest challenge the developers were facing was " just trying to match the breathtaking look and feel of the movies " . Similarly , Neil Young said " We wanted to make something that 's authentic and true to the movie . The people on our team really care about making a game that aspires to more than just a sequel , they want to make this equivalent to the movie experience itself . " EA Redwood Shores worked closely with New Line Cinema to make the games as authentic as possible , using the actual reference photos , drawings , models , props , lighting studies and motion capture data . EA 's partner relations director , Nina Dobner said

Both New Line and the film production company in New Zealand are integrally tied into the entire development process of the game . Right from the conceptual stage down to the final production builds , their input is sought and listened to . We don 't consider New Line a licensor , but more a true partner . As soon as we have the earliest storyboards and bare bones outline for a game , New Line are right at the table with me , giving their feedback . This is also the stage at which we introduce Peter Jackson , Barrie Osborne and the rest of the film production team to the key concepts and get their feedback . From here on , I meet with the actors , the film @-@ makers and New Line on a regular basis to illicit feedback and new ideas as we move forward with the development . We are so deeply tied into the film production that we actually opened our own offices within the 3 foot 6 Weta offices in New Zealand during the pick @-@ up shooting so we could be closer to the action and the assets .

Dodner said that during development of the game , she travelled to New Zealand once a month with builds of the game for the filmmakers to play , and on which to give their feedback , and that in total , EA had acquired a quarter of a million different assets from the production . Schofield further pointed out " we even hired the same stunt doubles from the movie to help us render the most realistic movements in the game . " Dobner also said " we want the game to not just look like the films but to be exactly like the films . " She commented that no details in the game were made up ; " when we were reproducing Minas Tirith [...] we felt the team would benefit from being able to see and feel a piece of the actual movie set . Unfortunately , the set had already been dismantled . So , while in New Zealand , I searched the various warehouses to find remnants of the dismantled set . After much work , I returned to San Francisco proudly bearing four bricks from the Minas Tirith set . "

= = Reception = =

The Return of the King received " generally favorably reviews " across all systems ; the Game Boy Advance version holds an aggregate score of 77 out of 100 on Metacritic , based on thirteen reviews ; the GameCube version 84 out of 100 , based on twenty @-@ three reviews ; the PC version 78 out of 100 , based on eighteen reviews ; the PlayStation 2 version 85 out of 100 , based on thirty @-@ one reviews ; and the Xbox version 84 out of 100 , based on thirty @-@ one reviews .

As an adaptation , the game was praised by GameZone 's Michael Knutson as " the best movie to game conversion that has come out in a long time " and by GameSpy 's Raymond Padilla as setting

" a new standard for video game adaptations of movies . "

The graphics and THX @-@ certified audio were lauded by critics . The game 's animations , scenery , player models , cutscenes , music and voice acting were particularly well received . " Sound effects used in the game will also blow you away , " Knutson said , " Everything from the explosions , swords clashing , hundreds of incoming enemies storming your way , all sounds like it came directly from the movie ! " GameSpot 's Greg Kasavin noted that " Frame rate issues do affect each version of the game , to varying degrees , and none of the character models for the main characters look all that remarkable , " but conceded that " all other aspects of The Return of the King 's graphics are outstanding [...] The game 's audio is even more effective than the graphics at conveying the intensity of the action . " Ian McKellen 's narration of the game as Gandalf was also praised .

The game 's combat was praised by most critics . Electronic Gaming Monthly 's Crispin Boyer described the game as " a thrill ride . And not just ' cause Return of the King unleashes larger hordes of foes than last year 's equally slick Two Towers prequel . Many of Return of the King 's levels actually force you to multitask while you hack and slash . " PC Gamer UK 's Tony Ellis wrote " combat in RotK is superbly satisfying . Your blows connect with a solid , visceral thud you can almost feel . " He also noted the variation between levels . Eurogamer 's Kristan Reed praised the " subtleties of the combat . " In contrast , Game Informer 's Matthew Kato found the gameplay to be " repetitious " , writing " sometimes I got the feeling that I was working harder only to have less fun than in Two Towers . " The co @-@ op mode was also praised .

The Return of the King was criticized for its poor camera placement . " What 's the use of a new graphics engine and character models when the view is from so far away ? " asked Kato . Reed complained about " camera switches which reverse the controls , or worse , completely obscure your viewpoint . On just about every mission the camera switching confuses the hell out of you . " The game 's save function was also criticized . Ellis commented that " You can only save after completing a level [...] which is not so good when you 're forced to slog through the same sequences over and over again . " Critics also complained about the unskippable cut scenes , occasionally unclear objectives and relatively short length .

The GBA version also received good reviews . GameZone 's Steve Hopper found it very similar to the GBA version of Two Towers , but wrote " all in all this is solid action game that I can wholeheartedly recommend for gamers who loved The Two Towers and want more of the same brand of hack and slash action . " IGN 's Craig Harris wrote " the enhancements to the gameplay definitely enhance an already solid action game , and it 's also a very recommended two player experience as well . The Return of the King is a nice compliment to a great film , and a decent follow @-@ up to an already enjoyable action title on the handheld . " GameSpot 's Frank Provo called it " more satisfying and ultimately more playable " than Two Towers , and praised the differentiation between the characters , the graphics and the experience system . GameSpy 's Matt Chandronait was less impressed , criticizing the game 's " technical flaws , " especially its collision detection . He called it a " repetitive beat- ' em @-@ up that require [s] dozens of hours of devotion to unlock every last item , level , and character . "

= = = Awards = = =

The wireless version of Return of the King , developed by JAMDAT , won IGN 's " Wireless Game of the Year " award for 2003 . At the 2003 Spike Video Game Awards , Return of the King was nominated for two awards ; " Best Animation " and " Best Game Based on a Movie " . It lost in both categories , to Dead or Alive : Xtreme Beach Volleyball and Enter the Matrix , respectively . The console version won in two categories at the DICE 2004 awards : " Outstanding Achievement in Character Performance : Male " (for Elijah Wood 's voice role as Frodo) and " Outstanding Achievement in Sound Design " . In 2014 , IGN included the game in their list of the " 5 Best Lord of the Rings Video Games . "

= = = Peter Jackson reaction = = =

Despite the game 's receiving general critical acclaim and selling well , Peter Jackson , director of the Lord of the Rings film trilogy , stated that the video game tie @-@ in for his next film , King Kong , would not be developed by EA but by Ubisoft . Jackson 's manager claimed that despite EA saying the filmmakers were heavily involved in the making of the game , the developers were not interested in Jackson 's input on the game . Additionally , Jackson had played Beyond Good & Evil , and wanted to work with producer Michel Ancel , who was at Ubisoft .