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SQUARE ENIX®



CHRONO TRIGGER®

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VALKYRIE PROFILE®: Covenant of the Plume™

Rhapsody™: A Musical Adventure





My Pet Shop™



DRAGON QUEST®: The Hand of the Heavenly Bride™

AND MORE...

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SQUARE ENIX®

Welcome

If you're a fan of videogames (and, if you're reading this magazine, then there's a pretty good chance that you are) then you've surely heard of Square Enix. They're the company responsible for some of the most breathtakingly beautiful games of the last 15 years, and no other game producer seems able to create such amazingly stylised worlds, packed as they are with imagery that wouldn't look out of place in a high budget Hollywood blockbuster.

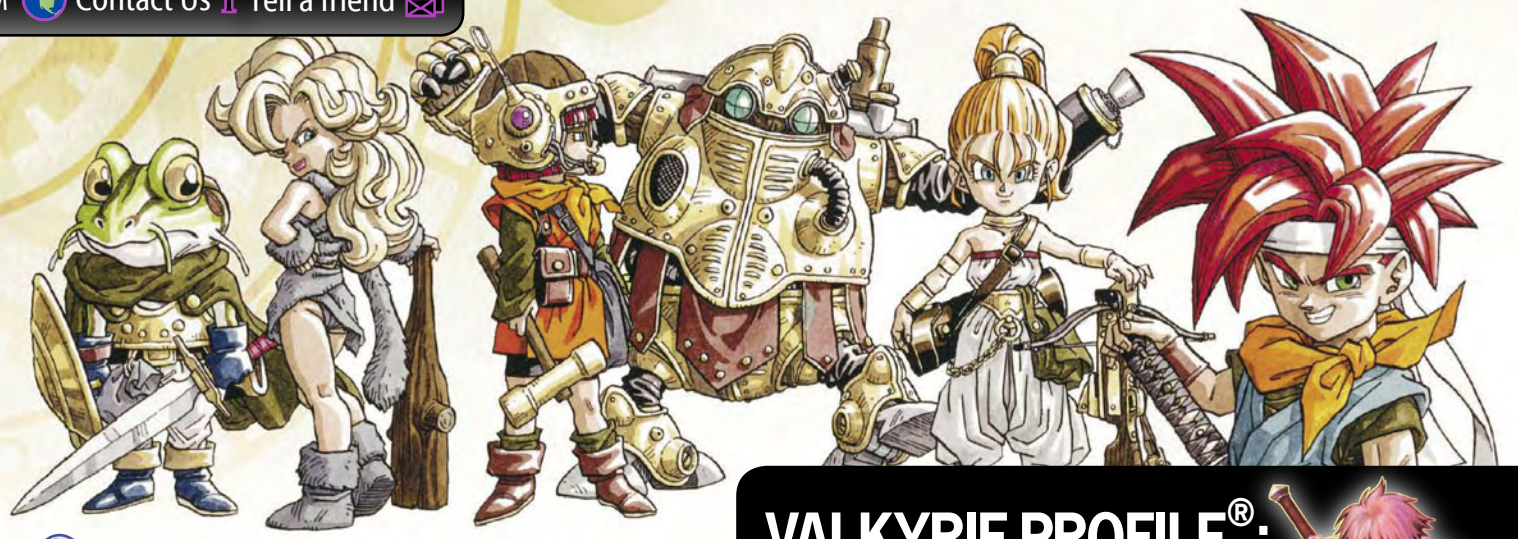
Don't believe us? Take the Final Fantasy series as an example. The first Final Fantasy game was released 22 years ago on the original Nintendo NES console, and since then the series has sold a staggering 85 million units worldwide. Each one creates a world that draws you in immediately from the first frames of the intro movie to the final boss battle. Playing a Final Fantasy game is allowing yourself to step into an alternate reality that'll keep you gripped for weeks.

But Square Enix are anything but a one-trick pony. Their Dragon Quest series, although not so well-known in Blighty, has still managed to sell over 45 million copies. And then there's Kingdom Hearts (which mixes Disney characters with popular ones from Square games) and the superb Chrono Trigger, among many, many others.

So this magazine is a celebration of one of the most original and constantly innovative games developers you'll find. And with a whole range of original and playable titles on the way from them for the DS, there's never been a better time to celebrate.

Enjoy the issue,

Dean Mortlock



CHRONO TRIGGER®

Your chance to play one of the most revered RPGs of all time on your DS.

VALKYRIE PROFILE®: Covenant of the Plume™

Another classic Japanese RPG is heading your way.





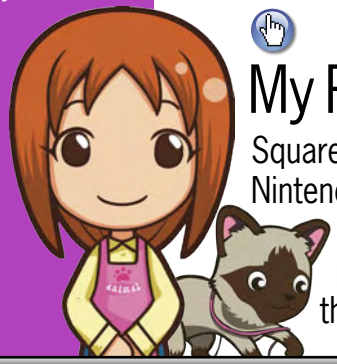
DRAGON QUEST®: The Hand of the Heavenly Bride™

The best-selling 'other' Square series comes to DS.



FINAL FANTASY® CRYSTAL CHRONICLES®: Echoes of Time™

The Crystal Chronicles series continues.



My Pet Shop™

Square does Nintendogs? Yes, but it's much more than that.



Rhapsody™: A Musical Adventure

Music to our ears!



DISGAEA® DS

Find out all about this stunning remake of the PSP title, Disgaea: Hour of Darkness



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"The game shifted 2.5 million copies in the US and Japan"

CHRONO TRIGGER®

From: SQUARE ENIX

A bit like: Final Fantasy III

Link: www.chronotriggergame.com

OUT NOW

The best RPG ever? Quite possibly

If you consider yourself to be a dedicated RPG fanatic then chances are the Super Nintendo classic Chrono Trigger will require no introduction. Shifting 2.5 million copies in the US and Japan following its debut way back in 1995, this sword and sorcery masterpiece is widely considered as one of the most perfect examples of the genre.



The bottom DS display helpfully showcases all of your available options during combat.

However, although the reputation of this near-legendary game is impressive, many European gamers won't have actually played it before because it cruelly never saw the light of day in this part of the world. Thankfully, that oversight is in the process of being rectified, as Square Enix has skilfully updated the original 16-bit version and is preparing to unleash it on our soil for the first time ever, and on the DS.

The story centres on the time-travelling exploits of a young boy called Crono. After stepping into a malfunctioning teleportation device he finds himself on an heroic adventure that crosses the boundaries of both time and space. Along the way he befriends invaluable companions hailing from several different time zones, and eventually unearths an evil plot that has its origins at the dawn of time itself. As you can see, it's hardly the most conventional RPG plotline ever – it's sort of like Back to the Future fused with The Legend of Zelda – but you can take our word for it, this is one voyage you simply won't want to miss.

The time-travel system is literally bursting with potential. We've yet to experience the myriad of mind-bending possibilities that are contained within the game, but here's an example of what to expect: Early on we encountered a character who was selfishly barring our progress. The solution? We travelled back in time and hooked up with one of his ancestors, and by winning their trust we discovered that the previously stubborn descendant was now more than happy to

Trigger happy

Why this is an RPG to get very excited about

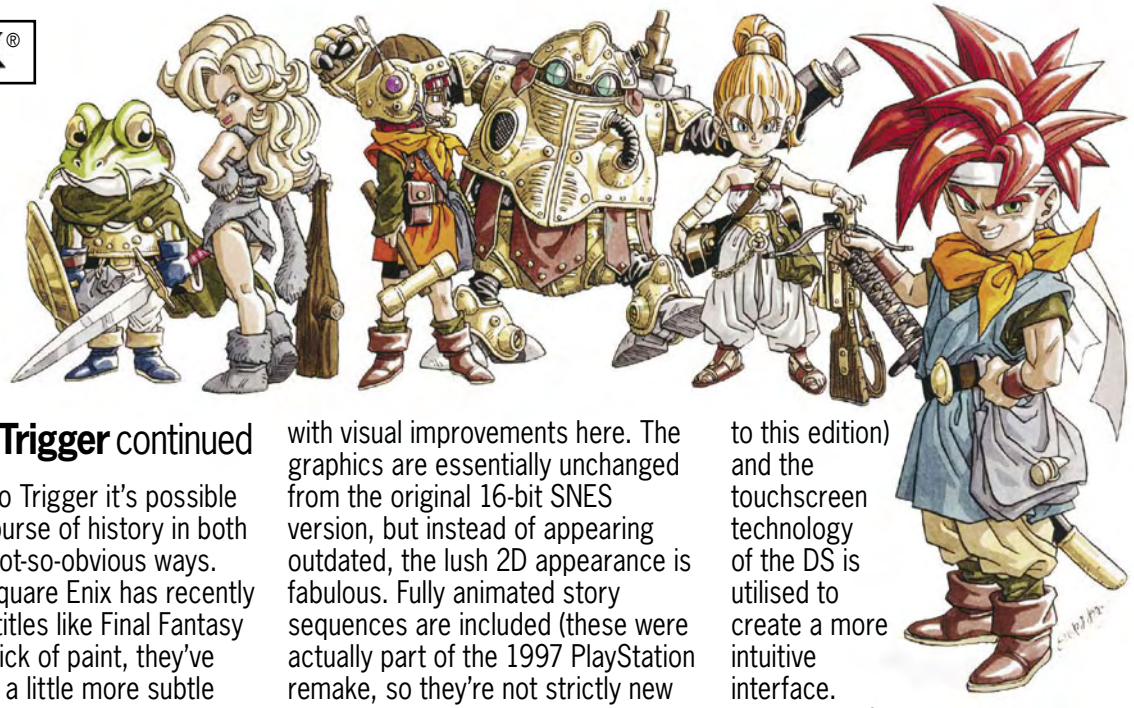


Time warp | Innovation | Replay value

Time warp

The events of Chrono Trigger span several time zones. The 'present day' is a world where steam punk technology and magical folklore rub shoulders with one another. The Middle Ages is a more primitive version of the modern age and Ancient time is populated by hairy cavemen. There's also 2300 AD – an unpleasant future world where mankind is virtually extinct. It's this bleak future than Crono and his companions are trying to prevent from coming to pass.

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> Chrono Trigger continued

help. In Chrono Trigger it's possible to alter the course of history in both obvious and not-so-obvious ways.

Although Square Enix has recently given classic titles like Final Fantasy III a fresh 3D lick of paint, they've decided to be a little more subtle with visual improvements here. The graphics are essentially unchanged from the original 16-bit SNES version, but instead of appearing outdated, the lush 2D appearance is fabulous. Fully animated story sequences are included (these were actually part of the 1997 PlayStation remake, so they're not strictly new to this edition) and the touchscreen technology of the DS is utilised to create a more intuitive interface. Established fans will have exclusive new content to look forward to, including an all-new dungeon and a wireless-play mode.



SLIGHTLY ANNOYED

European gamers may have had valid reason to be slightly annoyed about missing out on such a brilliance RPG for the past 15 years, but patience is a virtue, as the saying goes. This remastered edition is shaping up to be the definitive version of Chrono Trigger and should ensure that DS gamers will be glued to their consoles for weeks on end.

VERDICT

How ready?

How good?

A future RPG classic? Very possibly

"The time-travel system is bursting with potential"



The map on the bottom display helps you navigate your way around the various dungeons that litter the landscape.



Surely brave warriors don't need to gang up on a mushroom?

NINTENDO DS™

Wii™



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POLLUX ENGINE CROSS PLATFORM SYSTEM

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DRAGON QUEST:® The Hand of the Heavenly Bride™

From: SQUARE ENIX

A bit like: The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass

Link: www.dragonquest-game.com

Out: 20th February

This is one bride that's taken some time to reach the altar

Although Western gamers might usually associate Square Enix with the near-legendary Final Fantasy series, in Japan the company is arguably more famous for publishing the insanely popular Dragon Quest franchise. The Japanese are simply potty for this long-running range of RPG titles Dragon Quest: The Hand of the Heavenly Bride is actually a retooled version of the fifth game in the lineage, first released on Nintendo's 16-bit Super NES way back in the mists of time (well, 1992 to be exact). The rather sparse 2D visuals of the original game have been replaced by impressively bold 3D graphics, and the screen can be rotated at will using the L and R shoulder buttons (this is more than just a neat visual trick however, as it's often essential if you want to discover well-hidden passageways and treasure chests).

In terms of gameplay, there's little here that dedicated RPG fans won't have witnessed before (this is a game from the early 90s, after all) but it's the storyline that truly astounds. It takes place over a period of 20 years, during which the main character matures into an adult and even starts his own family.

Don't let the colourful graphics and light-hearted presentation fool you – this game packs an emotional punch, and is widely celebrated in Japan for possessing one of the most riveting RPG plotlines ever written. Dragon Quest: THotHB may have taken almost two decades to reach European shores, but early impressions suggest that the wait has most definitely been worth it. ●

"This is a retooled version of the fifth game in the lineage"

VERDICT

How ready?

How good?

Epic RPG storytelling at its finest

The new 3D visuals are truly breathtaking in places.



Your quest will feature both epic and not-so-epic encounters – guess which one this is classed as...



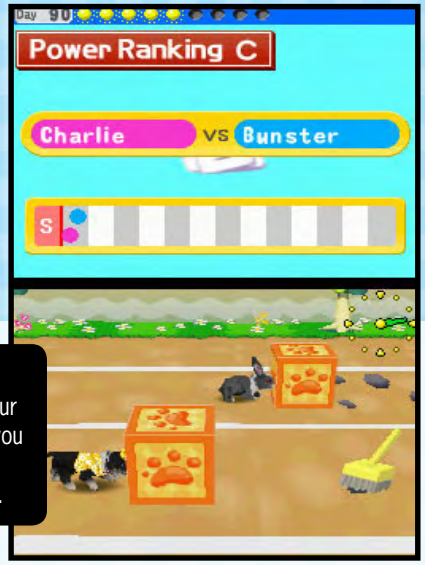


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Once you're confident that your pet is a winner, you can enter it into various contests.

The game uses a mixture of 2D and 3D visuals, and looks strikingly attractive.

My Pet Shop

From: SQUARE ENIX

A bit like: Nintendogs meets Cooking Mama

Link: www.mypetshopgame.com

Out: 27th February

My Pet Shop™

Square Enix does Nintendogs?

To say that My Pet Shop marks a deviation from Square Enix's usual output is a bit like saying that poking yourself in the eye with a sharp stick might hurt a little. In the company's long and proud history, it's hard to recall a game that has broken so significantly from the norm.

However, compared to the glut of similarly themed titles currently available on the DS, My Pet Shop could be perceived as being nothing new, but it would be foolish to write it off as just another 'me too' animal-rearing simulator. The veteran publisher has invested key talent in making sure this game has the potential to take on Nintendo's own Nintendogs series, and win.





Set in the idyllic hamlet of Green Town, My Pet Shop sees you stepping into the shoes of the daughter of the local pet store's owner. It's your job to care for the various animals that pass through the doors of your family boutique, so expect to be tending to the likes of cats, dogs and rabbits, as well as slightly less-conventional species such as pandas and bears.

Visually, the game seems to take a fairly large dollop of inspiration from the massively successful Cooking Mama series, with its eye-catching, bold graphics. The core gameplay revolves around keeping your animals as happy as possible via a program of grooming, feeding, cleaning and training. Those of you with a flair for fashion will no doubt be overjoyed to hear that there are over a hundred different items of clothing to deck your pets in.

"My Pet Shop has the potential to appeal to everyone"

Although it's obviously aiming for a particular section of the market – namely young girls – we are totally convinced that My Pet Shop definitely has the potential to appeal to everyone, just as so many so-called 'casual' titles have done so convincingly on the DS. ●



VERDICT

How ready?

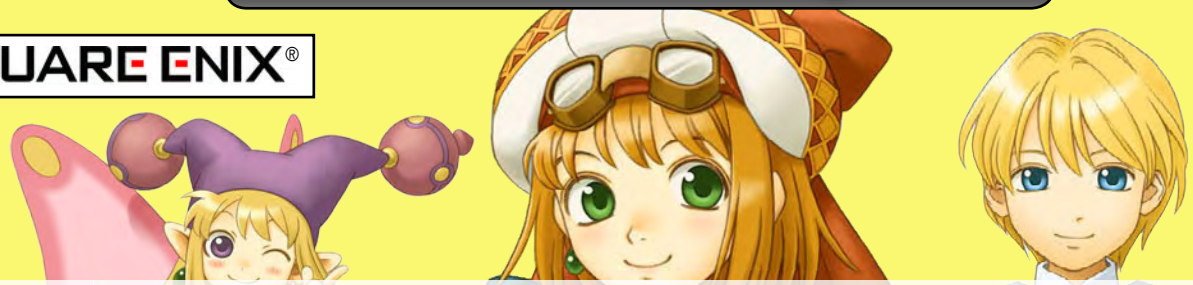
How good?

This should be a great fun pet sim



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Rhapsody™: A Musical Adventure

From: Nippon Ichi Software

A bit like: Mario and Luigi: Partners in Time

Link: www.rhapsodygame.com

Out: Spring



"Rhapsody is the very definition of 'light-hearted'"

Brooding teen heroes need not apply...

If you're sick to death of the atypical stern teenage male leads that seem to populate practically every Japanese RPG these days then Rhapsody: A Musical Adventure could be just the game you're after. With colourful visuals, up-beat music and a loveable cast of fairytale princes and princesses, this is the very definition of 'light-hearted', and about as far away from the dystopian, post-apocalyptic world of Final Fantasy VII as you could possibly get.

However, before the cynical gamers among you dismiss this as an overly effeminate escapade more suited to girlie types, it might be worth pointing out that Rhapsody is a role-player with pedigree – it was originally released on the PlayStation in 1998 and has gone on to become a cult classic, generating several other similar titles that are highly regarded by fans of the genre.

As the title suggests, music plays a massive role in the game, and although some of the tunes border on the 'sickly-sweet' side, they certainly add to the irresistible allure of the title. Gameplay-wise, Rhapsody sticks firmly to the Japanese RPG blueprint, but it's worth noting that this is aimed as younger and more 'casual' players rather than battle-scarred veterans. Whereas other titles might have you tearing your hair out in frustration, Rhapsody is set to offer a much gentler ride – which most definitely isn't a bad thing.

As with the rest of Square Enix's recent DS remakes, Rhapsody boasts a series of enhancements over the original title. You can expect touchscreen capability, as well as an improved battle engine, a map for easy navigation and new characters to control. Whatever your opinion of the cute visual style, there's no denying that the DS is set to receive yet another quality adventure to add to its ever-growing RPG library. ●

VERDICT

How ready?

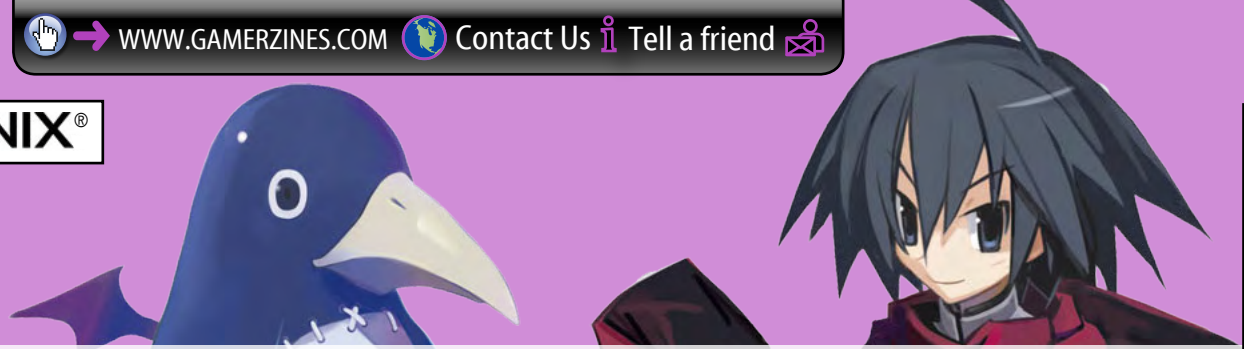
How good?

Give in to your cute side!

With a list of options like that, this could only be an RPG.



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DISGAEA® DS

From: Nippon Ichi Software

A bit like: Front Mission

Link: www.disgaea-ds.com

Out: Spring

Unleash your demonic side

If you like your RPG titles to be blissfully straightforward, with simple combat routines and a generic plotline with twists so obvious you can see them coming a mile off, then Disgaea® DS probably isn't going to be the game for you. A remake of the PlayStation 2 original that kick-started the franchise, this game is astonishingly deep and intricate, with a battle system that is so crammed full of possibilities that it'll make your head ache – but in a good way.

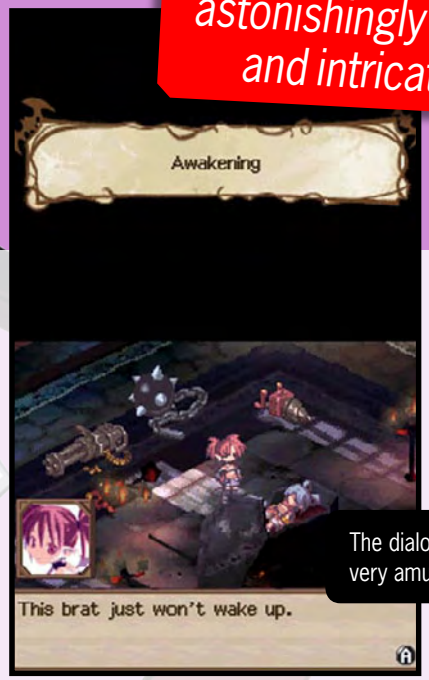


However, all this complexity results in a game that promises to be massively rewarding for those willing to put the effort in. First impressions indicate a standard-looking strategy RPG, but closer inspection reveals that there's much more to Disgaea® DS than meets the eye. Not only is the plot refreshingly original (you assume the role of the demon prince Laharl, whose aim is to reclaim the netherworld from those who covet his dead father's crown) but the gameplay is also intent on bucking trends.

DISTANT ECHOES

For example, the game features a unique 'Geo Symbol' system, where panels on the grid-like playing surface are granted special powers when tagged with the same colour Geo Symbol. Using this feature, it's possible for the player to grant status bonuses to friendly units (and even eliminate enemies) if they happen to be standing on effected panels, making the game even more taxing on the old brain power. Attempting to link together as many panels as possible in one move becomes a total obsession, but it's also incredibly satisfying when you manage to pull it off.

"Disgaea is astonishingly deep and intricate"



The dialogue is often very amusing indeed.

Developer Nippon Ichi Software is promising to make this the ultimate version of Disgaea, so expect a raft of improvements, as well as content lifted directly from the (brilliant) PSP update we saw a year ago. ●



VERDICT

How ready?

How good?

Should be another Square classic



TIME TO MAKE HISTORY

CHRONO TRIGGER®









10/10

"...ONE OF THE BEST CONSOLE RPG GAMES EVER PRODUCED!"

EUROGAMER

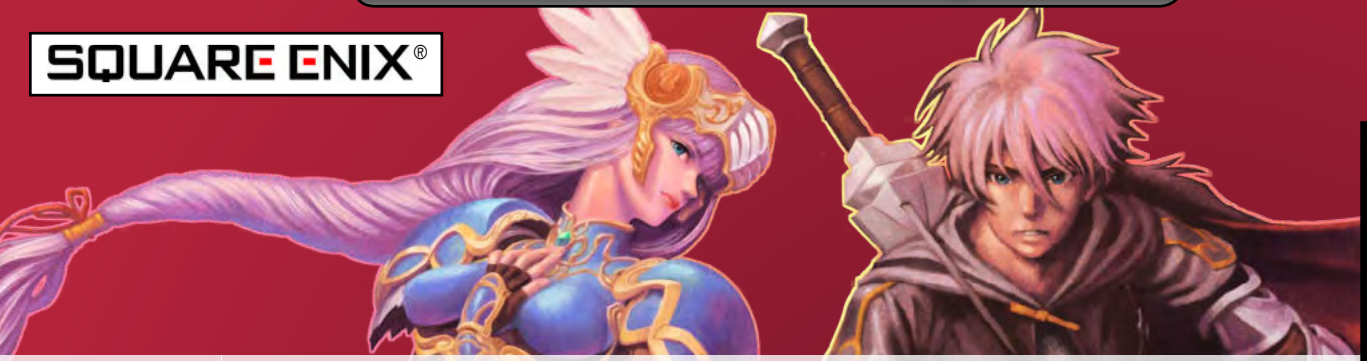


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WWW.CHRONOTRIGGERGAME.COM

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VALKYRIE PROFILE®: Covenant of the Plume™

From: SQUARE ENIX

A bit like: Final Fantasy Tactics A2

Link: www.valkyrieprofile game.com

ETA: Spring

Norse code

Although it's far from being a household name in the West, the Valkyrie Profile series (which made its debut on the 32-bit PlayStation a decade ago) is incredibly popular in Japan – so popular in fact that the original title has spawned a highly successful franchise. Valkyrie Profile: Covenant of the Plume is the latest instalment in this often underrated series and is shaping up to be yet another excellent format exclusive for DS role-playing fans to get their teeth into.

"Valkyrie Profile borrows heavily from Norse mythology"

The game borrows heavily from Norse mythology and the concept of warriors being 'claimed' by spiritual beings known as 'Valkyries' when they die in battle. The central character is a young man called Wylfred, whose father fell in combat and consequently had his soul spirited away by a Valkyrie named Lenneth (who was the lead character from the first game in the series, fact fans). His father's untimely demise leaves his family to starve, so Wylfred swears revenge and forges a pact with the shadowy goddess Hel – and his part of the bargain is to destroy Lenneth once and for all.

The gameplay differs from previous games – the side-scrolling 2D world is replaced with a 3D isometric play area – and the structure of the title owes a massive debt to the likes of fellow Square Enix stablemates Final Fantasy Tactics and Disgaea.

Covenant of the Plume is expected to hit Western shores in the spring, and from what we've seen so far, this will certainly be one to watch. An innovative battle system coupled with great visuals and a surprisingly decent English script should make for a particularly entertaining strategy RPG. ●

VERDICT

How ready?

How good?

Another top DS RPG to look out for

During combat, each of the DS fascia buttons corresponds to a different character, and attacks can be 'chained' in real time.



Each character also possesses a special move that fills the screen with all manner of zany effects.



Roll over screen for annotations



SQUARE ENIX®

"Echoes of Time takes cooperative role-playing to the next level"



FINAL FANTASY®

CRYSTAL CHRONICLES®: Echoes of Time™

From: SQUARE ENIX

A bit like: Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Rings of Fate

Link: www.square-enix.com/eu/en/index_f2.html

Out: Spring

It's better when we play together



During combat you can utter pre-determined comments, which are shown on the bottom screen.

Square's Crystal Chronicles series has been with us since the days of the GameCube, and its unique multiplayer-focused gameplay has allowed the franchise to flourish, despite the fact that it's a whole world away from the more recent (and more mature) entries in the Final Fantasy stable.

The story involves the discovery of young girl who is struck down with a worryingly illness that is seemingly connected to a mysterious crystal hidden deep within a forest. As a young warrior who has recently come of age, it's your task to take your first steps outside the village that has been your home for 16 years and unravel the story behind an unexplained disease that threatens not only the life of this strange girl, but possibly the fate of your entire world, too.

DISTANT ECHOES

First impressions would suggest that Echoes of Time hasn't strayed too far from the remit of the early Crystal Chronicle titles; the same team-based exploration is present, and the visuals retain the gloriously appealing nature of their forebears. However, this time the much-hyped connectivity between separate consoles is now a much more significant affair; Echoes of Time allows up to four players to participate on both Wii and DS consoles simultaneously.

Using the Nintendo WiFi Internet connection or a local wireless setup, Echoes of Time is attempting to take cooperative role-playing to the next level. The fact that it shaping up to be one of the most accessible games of its type is also a bonus, and means that typical RPG traits (such as endless statistics and rambling storylines) aren't going to be a barrier to entry when it comes to enticing casual players to the fold. Keep this one firmly on your radar – we reckon it's going to be massive. ●

VERDICT

How ready?

How good?

Co-op RPG action like no other

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