

Reviews of recent video game releases

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**Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service
(KRT)**

CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION: REMIXED

For: PSP

From: Capcom

The name is a misnomer, because "Capcom Classics Collection: Remixed" is hardly a minor remix of the similarly-named retro collection recently released on consoles. Save for a few ubiquitous favorites, in fact, it's practically a brand-new collection, chock full of great games you may never even know existed.

Capcom connoisseurs have no doubt heard of (and played) "Final Fight," at some point in the last 15 years, but how about "Captain Commando," which takes the same engine and throws in mechs, rockets and one wacky lever after another? Shooter classics "Forgotten Worlds" and "1941" are here, but you also get the less heralded "Side Arms" and "Varth." You might've played "Strider," in the arcades, but have you tried such other sidescrolling goodies as "Magic Sword" or "Black Tiger?" A total of 20 games await you, and while some are less than stellar _ the original "Street Fighter" has not aged well at all _ there's as much quality here as quantity.

It helps, too, that Capcom actually cares about its workmanship. "Remix" emulates every game just as it should, and you're able to play games in original, stretched and even (in the case of shooters) vertical aspect ratios. Rotating your PSP 90 degrees and playing it that way feels weird, but it's always nice to have the option. Wireless multiplayer is available for all two- or four-player games, and there's even an Xbox 360-like achievement system in place. So if the quality of gameplay doesn't motivate you to play though, say, the bizarre RPG-quiz hybrid "Quiz and Dragons," the desire to knock out all of "Remix's" achievements just might.

DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES

For: PS2 and Xbox

From: Reflections/Atari

There comes a point when calling a game a "Grand Theft Auto" clone is as cliché as a game actually being a "Grand Theft Auto" clone. But it needs to be said here. If you've played any "GTA" game released since 2001, then you can ignore the "Driver: Parallel Lines" instruction manual, because you don't need it.

The same, of course, could have been said for the previous "Driver" game. And here's where the good news seeps in: Where "Driv3r" was a broken, buggy, choppy mess, "Lines" actually plays like a game that's been through quality control.

Also encouraging is how "Lines" actually tries to refine the "GTA" formula. The employment of a full-blown physics engine, for instance, means you can wreak a new kind of havoc around New York, which comes in both 1978 and 2006 flavors (complete with changes to architecture, cars and more) to

compliment the 28-year arc in the storyline. "Lines" also features a useless but awfully fun "slow-motion" button that lets you watch your troublemaking in a whole new light. (The director's mode from "Driv3r," sadly, has been scrapped.)

But "Lines"' best contribution to the genre is how it handles police heat. Unlike "GTA's" all-for-one system, "Lines" applies different heat to your car and your person. So if, for instance, the police are looking for you but you lose them, lose your car and hop into a clean one, you can do your best to stay under the radar and carry on with your day. It's about time someone did this, and "Lines" does it, along with enough other things, well. There's still only one "GTA," but if you're desperate for new content, this is probably the best wannabe available at the moment.

UNTOLD LEGENDS: THE WARRIOR'S CODE

For: PSP

From: Sony Online Entertainment

Once upon a time, there was this PSP launch. And there were a smattering of games of varying quality that launched alongside it. One of those games was "Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade," a fairly unremarkable hack/slash game made better by its novel status on the PSP. It was colorless, derivative and a bit on the sluggish side, but gamers forgave because it was still the most advanced game of its kind on a portable.

A year later, that status hasn't changed, mainly because a challenger has yet to surface. So "Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code," which improves graphics, adds a multiplayer component, shortens load times but otherwise feels way too much like "Blade," is now the undisputed champ of portable hack/slash games. Unfortunately for its developers, PSP games in general have improved drastically in that same time span. And thus "Code," despite being a slightly better game than its predecessor, still becomes much harder to stomach.

Like pretty much every game in the genre, "Code" is 90 percent a case of "press the X" button. Such repetition can be mindless good fun when the game moves at a good speed and mixes up enemy attack patterns, but "Code" makes you feel like you're fighting the same enemy over and over at 75 percent speed. Even when you inexplicably transform into a crazed animal, it feels like the same game: There's never a sense you're wreaking the kind of havoc you'd like to be wreaking.

In other words, the same story as last year. It'll once again do if you're a junkie in need of a fix, but the wait for greatness continues.

(Billy O'Keefe writes video game and DVD reviews for Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service.)

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