HURRY UP AND DIE SO I CAN PLAY

video game reviews

PlayStation2

Thunderstrike: Operation Phoenix

Eidos



The *Thunderstrike* series of games has always been a lot of fun, and it lost nothing when it made its leap to PlayStation2. And with the current events in the news, I won't be surprised if this game becomes a sleeper hit. Due to current events, war movies, video games and even toys (such as G.I. Joe) have become quite popular. I'm not sure what this says about the way we view war, but I do know that Eidos picked a good time to release *Thunderstrike: Operation Phoenix*.

Terrorists have struck all over the globe and people are afraid. The United Nations use their vast resources to not only pull their armies together but also create one of the most technically advanced helicopters ever created to stop this threat. Play ranges from Eastern Europe (where players must take out enemy camps) to Alaska (where players must defend a base that controls some powerful satellites) to Africa (on a mission to rescue a antiterrorist leader) and finally to the Middle East to fight the enemy on their home turf. Players are given a large arsenal of weapons to choose from and with each mission's success, you move higher up in rank, depending on your performance.

The graphics are very good, although not as spectacular as some other games. The controls are pretty good, although turning around isn't always easy. Also it will take some players time to adjust to the controls, but once they do it will be well worth it. The big problem this game has is the targeting. While it's easy to target and isolated enemy, it's hard to target a specific one when they're gathered together. Also, in an area with a lot of allied vehicles, it's easy to target them instead and cost yourself some trouble.

The missions are quite well-varied, and only a few are simply blowing-up-the-enemy style missions (and when they are they make it more challenging than expected. Much of it involves defending other ships, trying to prevent enemies from escaping or even rescuing hostages. It also involves finding strategies of how to approach and attack your enemy while trying to get as little damage as possible done and still complete the mission. Some are full-out attacks while others may require a lot of missile dodging, which means you'll scramble for cover.

The view can be altered from first person to third person or even the feel of being in the cockpit. Look for the Pokemon-esque key chain dangling around in your cockpit. The game is a truly fun helicopter game with a lot of variety and originality. I hope Eidos plans on more *Thunderstrike* games, because this one is a lot of fun. Now if only they could find a way to make a slightly less frustrating targeting system.

- Stefan Robak

★★★★

PlayStation2

Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force

Majesco



In all honesty, I never got into *Star Trek: Voyager*. Capt. Janeway was never too interesting, Tuvok seemed like a poor man's Spock and Neelix was mostly an annoyance to me. The plot weren't particularly interesting and doing something to the engines or using holograms solved every problem. But *Elite Force* proved to be a surprisingly fun game that somehow works *Star Trek* into a fun First Person Shooter. And while the timing of its release isn't great (*Voyager* ended last season), it is a fun game.

In the game you are a member of a Hazard Team (either Alexander or Alexandria depending on your gender preference), a team for very dangerous missions that require some serious life-risking. When a strange vessel attacks the Voyager, it sends them to a strange area, where they are trapped in orbit around a strange space station called the Forge. Trapped by the Forge are hundreds of ships, some survivors banding together under an uneasy alliance to survive, with others (like the Borg) trying to adapt to life trapped by the Forge. But what is the Forge, and what is its purpose? That's what Hazard Team has to find out, if it can survive.

The major problem with making a *Star Trek* game a first person shooter is the fact that *Star Trek* was largely more about diplomacy rather than blowing up foes. It handles this setback surprisingly well by simply using enemies that can't be negotiated with (such as the Borg and the Harvesters) as well as training missions in the Holodeck. The voice acting is good compared to some games (in fact, I think games are trying for better voice acting these days - wise choice) and the original cast all play their own characters. The graphics are decent and the play control is good as well.

The game isn't just point and shoot insanity with the exception of the final stage of the game, where it gets a little boring (the final boss doesn't even move, though he is hard to beat). There are stealth missions, decisions to make (don't attack the Borg until they start attacking you), and a few puzzles (not real challenging ones, but they add some spice to the game). While all of this is good, there is nothing terribly original about the missions themselves. They play well and are fun, but don't expect anything revolutionary.

Elite Force probably isn't good enough to buy, but it makes a good rental game. The weapons are pretty good and the missions are decently designed. It's a decent game for fans looking for a *Star Trek* game, until they are a few more lurking on the horizon.

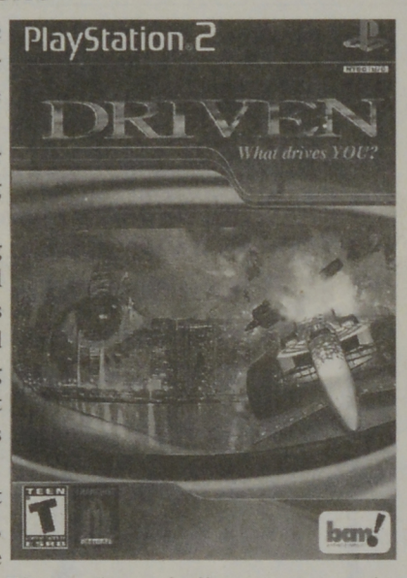
- Stefan Robak

★★★½

PlayStation2

Driven

Bam! Entertainment



Based on the failed summer blockbuster of the same name, *Driven* is about two CART championship racers. One is Joe Tanto, a former CART champion, who fears he's lost his edge, and the other is the newcomer Jimmy Bly, whom Tanto is called in to train.

Tensions mount and injuries are plentiful as the racers prepare for the big championship. In story mode you alternate between playing Bly and Tanto; in arcade mode you may choose even more players.

This game has potential. Bam! has come up with some interesting ideas and innovations in game play. One is that whenever you hit a wall and your car goes flying, you get to see the crash and surprisingly this doesn't interrupt the game too much. Also when you increase the speed an incredible amount, there is nothing but the eerie sound of the rushing wind. The controls aren't realistic but it's decent for players who aren't looking for the most realistic racing game. Another flaw is that driving is inhibited when parts literally fly off your car as the result of a crash.

As a game company Bam! shows potential with this game but sadly it fails overall. While the 'seeing yourself crash' holds appeal, it might have been better if a different camera showed it in the corner so the player would have an easier time trying to recover. The wind sound effect was a neat idea but it was not really exploited properly here and just feels out of place. Also, when your car is damaged enough you lose lives, which is kind of cheesy. The game had potential but in the end, players are left with a substandard racing game with slightly below average graphics.

Driven isn't a horrible racing game but it isn't anything compared to other more recent racing games. The idea of having a story is new but it's really just paper-thin narration. Having an interesting story throughout would have made the game at least more interesting.

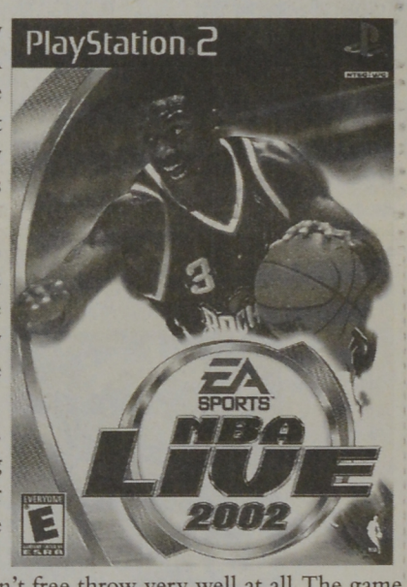
- Stefan Robak

★★

PlayStation2

NBA Live 2002

EA Sports



While many complain *NBA Live 2002* didn't have too many improvements over the original, I still think it's a good game. EA Sports seems to dominate the field of sports games and so far the only problem is their graphics aren't the best of the best - but that doesn't matter. The graphics are still good and the game play is admirable. Though there are few differences, the game has added the 'franchise mode' into the mix.

The game has a few problems - very few. As mentioned before, there aren't many improvements which is kind of a problem because this year the NBA has discontinued the illegal defense call, but it has been kept in this NBA game. Changing that may have made the game seem a little more timely. (As well, the graphics could have been improved a bit.)

Despite these flaws, EA continues maintaining decent quality. Each character has his own strengths; some are good at stealing and speed, while others have higher accuracy, others use their size to help obtain the ball. When Shaq slams the ball into the net, you can practically feel the building shake.

Conversely, every character has their own weaknesses. Shaq can't free throw very well at all. The game also has the advantage to take place in multiple seasons and allows trades, free agents, and drafts. The game also has a some fun in one mode where you and an opponent hit the street court for a little B-Ball action. The character likenesses are also spot on and look quite nice.

As basketball games go, you probably won't find much better than *NBA Live 2002*. It's incredibly fun, and easy to get into. This is a game that never lets its player down. Check it out if you're looking for a good sports game.

- Stefan Robak

★★★★

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