

Video Game Review: ‘Rango’ Tie-In Displays Film’s Creativity

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 7, 2011 - 9:05am

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CHICAGO – While most critics were praising the lavish visuals and impressive screenwriting of the animated hit “Rango” starring Johnny Depp (for one such rave, check out Patrick McDonald’s review [here](#) [16]), the video game landed on my desk and I wondered if the pattern of bland movie tie-ins would be broken. If the film is that creative, shouldn’t the video game be as well?



“Rango” the game definitely displays more ingenuity than most kids movie tie-ins — the “Megamind” game was particularly awful and I still have flashbacks to my “Monsters vs. Aliens” experience — with some interesting level design and fun screenwriting. Sadly, the game doesn’t quite live up to its potential, falling victim to the many traps of this lackluster sub-genre, which too often seeks to make a dime off easily-impressed younger fans of a hit flick — repetitive gameplay, dull A.I., awkward camera issues, and unacceptable glitches.



Rango
Photo credit: EA

Of course, one should never forget that “Rango” is a game aimed at elementary school children. And so the gameplay is incredibly simple. Bash your enemies, slam them, or shoot them. There are minor variations in this as some enemies require more effort than others, but the core action of “Rango” will be familiar to players after about five minutes. Throw in a few rail grinds and a couple flying levels and even one that’s based heavily on stealth, and that’s the game.



Rango

Photo credit: EA

As Rango the character progresses through the action of the game, recounting stories of great deeds to set up each chapter, the player moves through waves of enemies on relatively generic backgrounds that all feel a bit underdeveloped. With the exception of an early train sequence, it's not until later in the game when the level design starts to get pretty creative with some truly odd chapters involving graphics that are intentionally basic and some creativity involving zombies and aliens.

The game offers an extension of the world of the movie instead of a straight adaptation but its development is clearly more in tune with the creative vision of the film than most movie tie-ins, which basically take the character and do as little as needed to relate it to the source. The story was developed by one of the movie's writers, the looks is consistent with the film, and the score was done by Hans Zimmer's team. It's a very professionally made game, unlike so many movie tie-ins that just feel cheap.

Like most kids games, collectibles are a major part of the "Rango" experience. Players earn Sheriff Stars from defeated enemies or from smashed crates and those Stars can be used to upgrade weapons or abilities. Rango can also search for spots to mine to earn more stars and find fish bowls that just serve as collectibles to add a bit of replayability to find them all.

As I think about "Rango" and break down what exists in the game, it sounds more impressive than actually playing it. There's a variety of flying and shooting levels, a nice collectible system, and even some creative level design. But a game doesn't exist on paper. All that matters is how it feels as you play it and "Rango" simply feels too repetitive. The levels, graphics, and writing are impressive but I wish a bit more time had been put into enemy design. "Rango" features room after room of the same bad guys that need to be cleared before moving on to the next room and doing it again. I realize the enemy design and weapon choices can't be too complex to scare away kids, but they also don't need to be quite this simple.

As for the camera issues and glitches, there are times when Rango literally walked through rocks and others where the movable camera still couldn't quite mask the fact that the graphics created too shallow a field to make jumping from rock to rock feasible. I fell to my death too many times due to issues that I felt were more flaws of the design than of my play. The game feels like it needed one more trip through the testing process to fine tune it.

Ultimately, the judgment of "Rango the Videogame" needs to be tempered by expectations. Compared to most movie tie-ins games, especially those linked to family fare, it's a hit. It's more creative, more memorable, and just more fun. But it could have been more than that. The enemies didn't need to be so repetitive, the levels could have had even more variety, and the title could have been more consistent overall. "Rango" the movie is allegedly great but "Rango" the game is just okay, even if it is a step in the right direction for the movie tie-in subgenre.

"Rango" was developed by Behaviour Institute and released by EA. It was released on March 1st, 2011 for the PS3, Xbox 360, Nintendo DS, and Nintendo Wii. The version reviewed was for the PS3. It is rated E 10+ (Everyone 10 and Older).



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