Video Game Review: Adaptation of 'Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs' Tastes Rancid

Submitted by BrianTT [1] on September 29, 2009 - 1:24pm

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CHICAGO – Even with the long history of awful video game adaptation of hit films, shouldn't "Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs" be a slam dunk? The clever family comedy plays like a video game already with a very fun story that should be easy to turn into something playable with a controller. But the video game version of "Cloudy" has already his stores well past its expiration date.

Video Game Rating: **1.5**/5.0

The PS3 version of "Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs" plays more like a retro title, honestly resembling something closer to the Sega Genesis version of "Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs". The graphics and gameplay are that generic that if a player only saw five minutes of the game and knew nothing about when the film was released, there's no way they would guess that it was a 2009, next-gen console title.
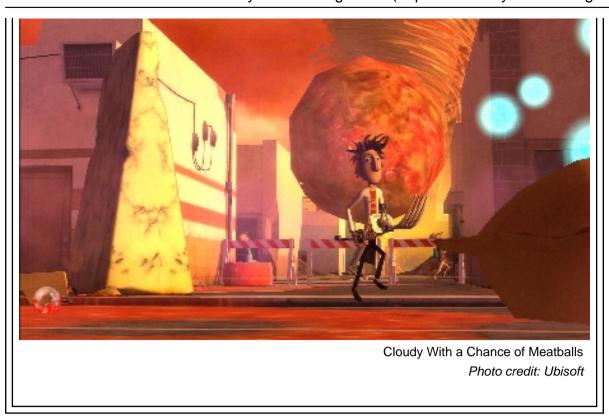
Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs
Photo credit: Ubisoft

Even the storytelling on "Cloudy," something that would be easy to adapt from the film, feels incomplete and poorly done, as if the game was created by a ten-year-old drawing in his sketch book after seeing the movie. Of course, players take on the role of Flint Lockwood (Bill Hader), the inventor who designs the machine that causes food to fall from the sky.

Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs
Photo credit: Ubisoft

The game skips the first two acts of the film entirely, missing an opportunity to really capture the feel of the movie from "Start". It picks up in the final act, when the food weather has gotten out of control, dropping large, deadly entrees from the sky. Flint has a series of missions based only on the concept of over-sized food, not even really based on any of the set-pieces from the film. It honestly feels like the creators of the game knew they were making a movie about possibly deadly food but nothing more about what actually happens in it.

So, Flint goes through tasks that are all variations on getting from point A to point B while food either falls from the sky or impedes his progress. Lockwood has oversized devices like giant forks and a hose that, for example, squirts guacamole on chili so Flint can walk over it. The levels don't even make sense on a surreal food level. Why not design levels that work together thematically like chili dogs ingredients or Italian food? Why am I bashing giant macaronis while dodging meat falling from the sky and fighting gummi bears? Being edible is the only common link and it hints at a lack of creative energy that there isn't more to the design.

Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs
Photo credit: Ubisoft

The same low-energy approach applies to the graphics, which could politely be called kiddie. It's one thing for a game to be designed for the youngest member of the family but the older kids should be able to play it and not have the graphics actually impede the experience. The look of "Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs" is so incomplete that it can actually make it difficult to see where to jump or go next on a 52-inch TV in the same way it wasn't that easy to tell where to go in the original "Golden Axe". Bad graphics can lead to frustrating gameplay and that happens more than once in "Cloudy."

Even the dialogue doesn't match the clever, often adult-driven repartee from the film itself. There's not a single memorable line and, to a shocking degree, a majority of Flint's dialogue just repeats ad nauseam. I know kids have higher thresholds for hearing someone yell about guacamole a hundred times, but even the little ones will want to turn down the volume eventually. There are moments where the title threatens to become a consistently good time, mostly due to residual goodwill from the film, but the level designs or so short that the game never develops anything approaching a rhythm, even with a second player cooperatively playing as Steve the scene-stealing monkey.

Only a very young audience will be kept entertained by the video game version of "Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs," which may sound like enough for a movie game adaptation of a family film, but the big-screen edition of the adventures of Flint Lockwood has clearly appealed to a wider audience than those that have yet to graduate elementary school and it's a shame that the game couldn't cook the same meal.

'Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs' was released by Ubisoft and developed by Ubisoft Shanghai. It is rated E (Everyone). The version reviewed was for the PS3, but the title is also available for the XBox 360, DS, PSP, Wii, and PC. It was released on September 15th, 2009.

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