

Video Game Review: ‘Where the Wild Things Are’ a Missed Opportunity

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on November 2, 2009 - 11:36am

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CHICAGO – Have you ever liked a movie so much that you’re willing to play through a sub-par video game tie-in just to spend more time in its universe? As I played through the adaptation of “Where the Wild Things Are” in only two marathon sittings, I realized that the reason I couldn’t turn it off had a lot more to do with Spike Jonze’s incredible film and really nothing to do with this inferior game.

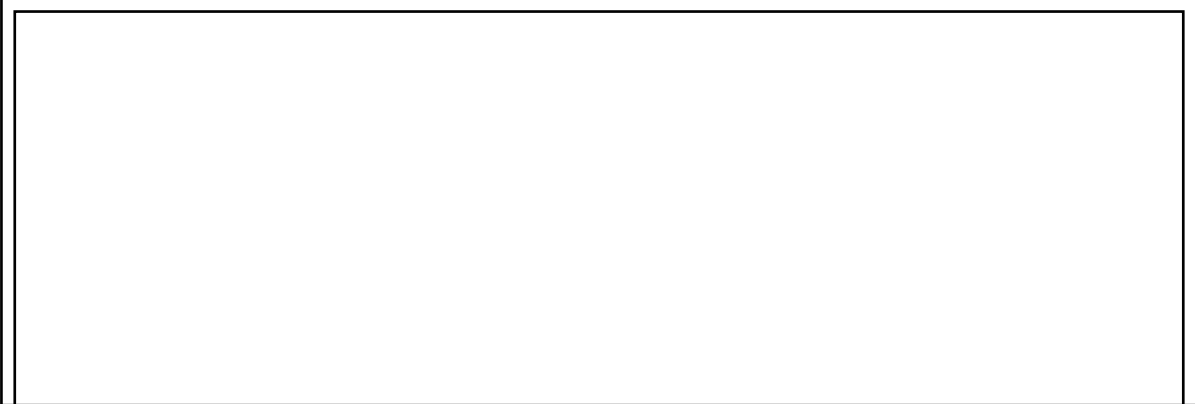


Where the Wild Things Are starts promisingly enough. One of the elements of the film that I adored was the way Jonze and his team incorporated a natural setting into what is essentially a fantasy story. And the first thing one notices about the game is the lovingly recreated natural world. As water splashes on the coast, clouds float by overhead, and trees and rocks play an immediate role in how you climb around the island, “Where the Wild Things Are” starts as an impressive, nearly zen-like title graphically. The New Age music helps with that aesthetic. Sadly, the warm, peaceful feelings don’t last long.



Where the Wild Things Are
Photo credit: Warner Bros. Interactive

Naturally, the player takes on the role of Max. No, you don’t get to play the opening act of the movie so don’t strategize how to ruin mom’s date. Expectedly, you start with your arrival in the land of the wild things, where you spot one and follow it to the camp. Immediately, you find a scepter, which will be the only weapon you carry throughout the game. And shortly after that, fireflies are coming after you, ready to meet the bad end of your royal death dealer.





Where the Wild Things Are

Photo credit: Warner Bros. Interactive

After a prologue, the player finds himself in a base camp known as the village. From here, Max can practice his scepter-wielding skills, throw rocks at fireflies, or play with the wild things, including dancing, getting healing hugs, or basically just assaulting them. Yes, you too can now have a wild things dirt clod fight.

The free-form experience of the village is off-set by the story missions, which can be shockingly repetitive and frustrating. Max essentially has a pretty short set list of moves and enemies on which to use them over a series of loosely connected “point A to point B” levels of the game. Max starts at one point on the island and has to smash and jump to another point. The level repetition is shocking with only a few experiences - riding on Carol’s back or sailing - that deviate from the norm. And even those “alternate” levels feel half-assed in their design. Every section of the game, including the village, features a variety of collectibles, most of which are designed around things Max is trying to find for his wild friends.

What’s most shocking about “Where the Wild Things Are” is the repetition of the enemies in the latter half of the game. The loose story includes a black goo that’s taking over the land of the wild things, forcing Max and his friends to find a new place to play. The sticky substance requires the player to smash spider-looking goo creatures and rescue the wild things from being sucked down by them. It’s a fun boss battle the first time and a mind-numbingly repetitive experience by the 50th time. Essentially, after you’ve played the game for a few hours, you’ve seen all of its tricks (and you’re halfway through what is a very short title).



Where the Wild Things Are

Photo credit: Warner Bros. Interactive

By their very nature, kid’s games are usually pretty simple and repetitive. They need to be for younger players to be able to enjoy them from beginning to end. But Spike Jonze’s masterful film was made for parents as much as their children and the game seems like a missed opportunity to be the same. The levels could have been more free-form, allowing the playful spirit found in the village to also be a part of the meat of the game. And the camera work needed to be seriously refined. (The number of times I fell because I couldn’t tell where to jump due to bad camera was far too many.)

The big problem is that “Where the Wild Things Are” simply isn’t wild enough. The designers could have and should have taken more chances to make this title a better companion for one of the most ambitious films of the year. The game delivers as a reasonable child’s diversion and a time-killer for fans of the flick and/or the Maurice Sendak book, but the movie, divisive as it may be, is so much more.

‘Where the Wild Things Are’ was released by Warner Bros. Interactive and developed by Amaze Entertainment. It is rated E (Everyone). The version reviewed was for the PS3, but the title is also available for the Xbox 360 and Wii. It was released on October 13th, 2009.

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