

Die Hard Trilogy 2: Viva Las Vegas (Fox Interactive)
PC, PlayStation

The original *Die Hard Trilogy*, released for the PlayStation back in 1996, will forever be remembered as one of the great games of the platform. The reason for gamers' widespread enthusiasm over that title was due to the fact that *DHT* was actually three games in one: a frantic driving experience, an adventurous 3D action mode, and a *Virtua Cop*-style first-person shooter. Each was a completely different gaming experience, yet all three combined to make an exhilarating and cohesive product.

Fox Interactive knows that when it ain't broke, don't fix it. For the highly anticipated sequel, now available on the PlayStation and PC, Fox has again brought out its effective three-games-in-one formula. Same three types of gameplay, with similarly successful results.

Based, of course, on the *Die Hard* movie trilogy, *DHT2* begins with hero cop John McClane smack dab in the middle of a Las Vegas prison riot. It's up to McClane to save the warden's ass...and foil a little terrorism in the process. If you choose to play in Movie Mode, you'll see the storyline unfold before you, and automatically alternate between the three modes of gameplay (3rd Person Action/Adventure, Sharpshooting, and Extreme Driving). For a quicker fix, you can go to Arcade Mode and play the three gameplay types separately, and in any order you choose.

In 3rd Person Action/Adventure, McClane is inside the prison walls after the riot breaks out. From a behind-the-shoulder perspective, you'll guide McClane through the prison corridors and cells, performing various tasks as you go, picking up items and shooting anyone foolish enough to step in your path. In this mode, McClane is armed with a variety of weapons and explosives; it's a bloody battle, to be sure.

In Sharpshooting mode, things switch to a first-person viewpoint, similar to games like *Virtua Cop*, *Corpse Killer*, and *Iron Maiden's Ed Hunter*. Here, you use the mouse to guide the onscreen cursor over the bad guys who keep popping up before you. The pattern of enemies is always the same, and your movement is handled by the CPU (save for the targeting), but it's a ferocious firearm battle nonetheless.

The last mode is Extreme Driving, and it's probably the most entertaining of the three. In it, you drive around vast 3D levels completing various mission objectives (and bending a hell of a lot of sheet metal in the process).

Together or separately, these three modes make for some terrific arcade action. *Die Hard Trilogy 2* is pretty much all about targeting and driving; in other words, it's okay to shut off your brain when you fire up this game. —*Jeff Kitts*

Spec Ops: Stealth Patrol (Take-Two Interactive)
PlayStation

Spec Ops was a slightly flawed yet severely underrated PC game a few years back; a great game of wartime action with some admittedly clunky control and graphic problems. Here we have an all-new *Spec Ops* adventure for the PlayStation—and, believe it or not, Take-Two Interactive has issued this game at an astounding retail price of only \$9.99! It's an incredible breakthrough in this day and age—more than worth it for even a mediocre game. And for an excellent game like *Spec Ops*, it's a no-brainer.

For those unfamiliar with the *Spec Ops* line, it's not unlike the recent (and fabulous) PlayStation game *Medal Of Honor*. It's a 3D combat and stealth adventure, with you in command of a team of U.S. Army Rangers. You and a buddy (a Machine Gunner, Grenadier, Recon/Sniper, Closer Quarter, or Rifleman) head out into the enemy's camp with multiple mission objectives; blow up a truck, knock out a radar station, or whatever. It's necessary to work with your teammates—call them up, send them on ahead, etc. You can also toggle back and forth between Rangers and control whomever you like at any time. Each Ranger is outfitted with various weapons, gadgets (night vision goggles, radios, etc.) and implements of destruction, like

tripwire mines. All the action can be viewed from either a third- or first-person perspective (or use a sniper rifle and zoom in close for a head shot).

Playing *Spec Ops* requires patience and skill; running straight into an enemy base will get you nowhere, but crawling along on your belly or quietly ducking behind trees may bring you some success (be advised, however, that it's extremely easy to die in this game—getting past even the first level will take some time). The game's difficulty is part of its charm—it's frustrating, but certainly compelling enough to make you want to complete each mission. And for \$9.99, I can't imagine anything better. --*Sid Shuman*

Daikatana (Eidos) PC

In *Daikatana*—the years-in-the-making first-person shooter from *Doom* co-creator John Romero—you'll battle through several eras, from a crumbling Grecian empire to a futuristic Japan. Sadly, *Daikatana* squanders this promising premise with average graphics and simplistic gameplay.

The comic book storyline is simple, but acceptable; in short, you'll track a time-hopping tyrant using a mystical sword—the Daikatana. As you bludgeon your way through the bowels of time, you'll team with Superfly Johnson, a wisecracking security guard, and Mikiko Ebihara, a sultry femme fatale. But your computer-controlled companions are hopelessly stupid, often charging unprepared into fierce battles.

Don't expect pretty visuals with this package, as *Daikatana*'s stilted animation and lackluster special effects don't impress. Save for the lavish Grecian and Norwegian segments, *Daikatana*'s level design is embarrassingly uninspired. On the audio front, you'll hear standard-issue sounds and forgettable music, further demonstrating *Daikatana*'s mastery of the mediocre.

Daikatana's not a total failure, but its flaws run deep: The weapons are ludicrously underpowered, the monsters dirt-dumb, and the gameplay monotonous. If Romero and company were striving for the feverish intensity of *Doom*, they failed miserably; *Daikatana* lacks the sensory immersion of *Half-Life* and the sheer ferocity of *Soldier Of Fortune*. Sometimes, history is best left to the textbooks—don't waste your time with this dusty offering. —*Sid Shuman*

Star Trek Armada (Activision) PC

Armed with lush graphics and compelling campaigns, *Star Trek Armada* makes a strong showing in the crowded real-time strategy genre. Sweaty-palmed Trekkies, rejoice: *Armada* is the best *Star Trek* game yet.

After the slick opening movie—a depiction of interstellar war—you'll choose between the crafty Romulans, the honorable Klingons, the ruthless Borg, and the straight-laced Federation. Sadly, you're forced to finish the Federation campaign before you can experiment with the other classes. But that's when the fun really begins; there's nothing quite like assimilating insolent foes with the cybernetic Borg, or ravaging opponents with the Klingon Bird of Prey.

From there, it's mostly business as usual—you'll mine for resources, build fleets, and attack enemies. The ships themselves, including the familiar Enterprise, look somewhat bland, but *Armada*'s vibrant galactic battlefields are stunning, complete with drifting asteroid belts and shimmering nebulae. Sound-wise, you'll hear urgent battle music, and even the vocal talents of *Trek* legend Patrick Stewart.

While not quite as innovative as *StarCraft*, the current RTS champion, *Star Trek: Armada*'s strong visuals and compelling interspecies gameplay offer a compelling

alternative. Though action junkies won't appreciate *Armada's* strategy-laden gameplay, Trekkies and *Starcraft* fans will find that resistance is futile. —*Sid Shuman*

Wild Arms 2 (Sony)
PlayStation

With its unique plot and characters, the original *Wild Arms* enjoyed a cult following. Years later, *Wild Arms 2* emerges to challenge Final Fantasy's PlayStation role-playing monopoly. Sadly, not much has changed since the first *Wild Arms*, leaving savvy players to opt for more interesting RPG options.

As in the original title, you'll use magic, tools, and gun-like relics called "arms" to traverse dungeons and mazes. During your quest, you'll meet numerous characters, including Ashley, a soldier, and Riruka, a young enchantress. Though not as engrossing as *Final Fantasy 7*, *Wild Arms 2* features likable characters and plenty of plot twists. The in-game text, however, is extremely poor; whoever translated the storyline from Japanese to English should register for some basic grammar classes.

Graphically, *Wild Arms 2* is definitely dated—almost no visual improvements were made since the first title. The crude polygonal models, found in combat scenarios, are reminiscent of very early PlayStation titles. The sounds and music are similarly forgettable.

Ultimately, *Wild Arms 2* is just another average RPG; the combat system, visuals, and gameplay are simply behind the times. If you're dying for *Final Fantasy 9*, *Wild Arms 2* might just tide you over. Otherwise, check out *Legend Of Dragoon* for a serious RPG thrill. —*Sid Shuman*

SimCity 3000 Unlimited (Maxis/Electronic Arts)
PC

After a tough day at the office, there's nothing better than toppling a mighty city from the comfort of your PC. Maxis knows this, and offers *SimCity 3000*—a high-tech upgrade to the original (and somewhat primitive) *SimCity*. While it's a worthwhile retreat, *SC3K* isn't quite ambitious enough.

The premise is simple and elegant: In *SimCity 3000*, you'll build a city from the ground up, complete with buildings, roads, and landmarks. As mayor, you'll manage the city's resources, transportation, and zoning—without careful attention, even the mightiest city can crumble in a heartbeat. Designing your city is a snap, thanks to the game's intuitive point-and-click interface. Maxis even included pre-built real-life landmarks, allowing you to recreate existing cities in-game.

While the revamped interface and building options are cool, *SC3K's* slick new visuals are its biggest accomplishment. Intricate cities are complete with monolithic skyscrapers, freeways, and working subway systems—a far cry from the crude shantytowns of the first game.

In the end, *SimCity 3000* doesn't really advance the "God" genre, or offer any particularly unique twists (like *The Sims*). Instead of a revolution, it's a redefinition, but a fun one at that. —*Sid Shuman*

Tech Romancer (Capcom)
Dreamcast

Based on a series of Japanese anime movies, Capcom's new *Tech Romancer* for the Dreamcast is an excellent 3D fighting game with giant robots in place of the usual brawny human combatants. On the surface, *Tech Romancer* certainly seems typical—particularly in that Capcom fighting-game sense—but the truth is that there's more to this game than meets the eye.

For some additional replay value, gamers can enter the Techno Dome, an area filled with bonuses like CG movies, mini games to be downloaded to the Dreamcast controller's VMU, secret characters, character artwork, and more (once you defeat all the computer opponents, that is). Playing through the mini games on the VMU allows gamers to unlock even more Techno Dome options. So, even when you're all punched-out, *Tech Romancer* still provides you with some extra entertainment.

As for the actual brawling, *Tech Romancer* does it about as good as any other game. Giant robots face off against one another in 3D environments, with little buildings nearby that can be trampled underfoot. All the bots come packed with super-duper moves and attacks and even a "final attack," which can completely annihilate an opponent when executed properly and at the right time. All the action is severely fast and furious—*Tech Romancer* is a real button-masher.

Graphically, *Tech Romancer* is a phenomenal achievement—rarely have we seen a game this rich and colorful. It's like watching a beautiful Japanese cartoon on a high- definition TV.

As Japanese fighting games go, *Tech Romancer* plays and looks about as good as anything out there—and its focus on extras keeps the replay value high. —*Jeff Kitts*