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COWBOY BEBOP

ANIME REVIEW

Cowboy Bebop: The Movie (Knocking on Heaven's Door)

By Lancer

If you've never heard of anime before, Cowboy Bebop is the PERFECT way, bar none, to get started. And while people who have seen the series swear that it is the finest story told (animated or otherwise, ever), the movie Cowboy Bebop: Knocking on Heaven's Door is every bit as good.

The premise: A bomb blast on a truck carrying a deadly biological weapon wreaks untold havoc on a city in Mars, and the bounty hunters on the space-faring "Bebop" are out to get the mastermind (who incidentally has the largest price on his head EVER). At least, that's how things will start...

The beauty of Bebop has been in a very many things: the sublime artwork, the fluid action sequences (you'll notice our hero Spike Spiegel

out of the main loop rather quickly... but that's just if you MUST find a flaw. The fantastic thing is how you start the movie, get wowed all over by the action (which truly is breathtaking) and by the end of the credits you sit back and go "WOW!" as the credits roll and you realize it's not because of the fancy stuff... it's because that there really was substance to go with all that style.

The best part is that you can find a copy of the DVD at Rifle's Square... which is more than you can say for most anime. Now, you have no excuse... go get this movie!

<reviewer takes no responsibility for riots at video stores for not subsequently finding the animated series...>

moves almost completely like Bruce Lee... and the fact that you can notice that should tell you a lot), the beauty with which a simple story is told, the characters, the music. You name it!

The artwork and animation I won't mention because it has to be seen to be believed. Studio Bones, who have some amazing titles to their credit, are brilliant as usual... and you'll notice...

The characters, every one of them, are incredible in that they are so completely human - Spike, who's a bit of a doofus, Jet, who's a bit more of a doofus for being eminently sensible, Faye Valentine who, besides being ravishing is quite a handful, the insanely gifted hacker Ed, and even Ein the dog! And there's still the mysterious man of evil who is Cool... and Electra... I guess if there's one flaw, it's how some of the side characters get cut

out of the main loop rather quickly... but that's just if you MUST find a flaw. The fantastic thing is how you start the movie, get wowed all over by the action (which truly is breathtaking) and by the end of the credits you sit back and go "WOW!" as the credits roll and you realize it's not because of the fancy stuff... it's because that there really was substance to go with all that style.



GAME REVIEW

Singles: Flirt Up Your Life

a tragic "sims" clone, focusing on romance

By Niloy

WHAT do you get if you take the popular game *The Sims* and expand its romantic features? A highly appreciable game. *The Singles: Flirt Up Your Life* definitely tried that approach, unfortunately, in vain. The game lets you control the romantic involvement of two singles up in an apartment in a game-play environment much like that of *The Sims*.

The five men and women you'll be pairing here represent various types. The career-minded manager guy might find himself paired with the cold-on-the-surface-boiling-on-the-inside lady scientist. Or the slick ladies-man might move in with the shy girl-next-door. Each pairing requires you to intuit the types of interactions that each would most enjoy. Beyond that, the pairing of a messy and clean Single creates its own problems.

Though your roommates share the same types of needs and seek the same types of satisfaction found in *The Sims*, much of the bathroom-going, food-cooking, nap-taking action is automated. You can still direct each individual shower if you wish - trying to get two people up and out the door in time for work will almost require it - but the real emphasis here is on building up the various types of relationships that exist.

Singles relate on different levels - as friends, as romantic partners, as lovers - and it's up to you to build up each of these meters to unlock new interactions which, in turn, allow for greater intimacy. This loop is really the heart of the game and the interactions between your roommates is genuinely fun to watch...at least the first dozen times. At each new interaction, you'll be treated to a scripted scene between the two potential lovers. The only complications along the way arise when one of

the roommates isn't pulling his/her weight with the housework. And though that's really about it in terms of game-play there are a few other options to consider. For one thing, your Singles earn skill points as the game progresses. These skill points can be used to improve your domestic or romantic skills or to improve the pay you bring home from work every weekday. But these considerations of work or domestic chores are incidental to the romantic aspects of the game. And since the only pastimes in your house are cleaning the toilet or spending some time with your lover, that's probably the way it ought to be.

That's not to say that the more mundane aspects of management aren't interesting or at least problematic, particularly when you consider it takes an hour for one of the roommates to take a shower. Early on you'll need to spend a lot of time repairing things. I appreciate that starting characters should have the crappiest of appliances; it gives them a reason to go to work. But to have a shower, toilet, stove and refrigerator that break down on an almost daily basis is kind of ridiculous.

Eventually you'll want to buy a better toilet just to keep from having to keep repairing it. Though there are indeed several qualities of toilets, there aren't too many types of items to buy for your home. Sure, there are couches and tables and beds and TVs of various qualities, and you can buy plants and paintings and appliances as well. The real issue is that there's precious little that you and your roommate can interact with. You can watch TV or have dinner together but the game really could use lots more in the way of relationship-building objects. More than just board games and chick flicks at least. (This lack of variety is carried over into wardrobes as well; apart from their main outfit, each Single wears the exact same outfits.)

I think it's smart to expand on one particular aspect of life



rather than compete with *The Sims*' more general approach. And romance is probably the best topic to try. But as a consequence of this romance focus, the other areas of your Singles' lives seems pretty flat and uninspired. Unfortunately, there's simply not enough depth in the mechanics of romance here to compensate for the loss.

The game excels in the area of graphics, though. The character models are superb. The faces are quite realistic and are capable of a wide range of emotions. The rest of their bodies ain't so bad either. It's hard to build game characters that are both realistic and genuinely attractive but the developers done that nicely. The environments are a bit of a step down from the characters but they're not really the point, are they? Since you can view the action from almost any angle with your free-roaming camera, there isn't much to complain about.

The apartment has large windows that look out on a very natural seeming neighbourhood. The windows also allow sunlight into the house. The lighting changes as the day moves on

providing appropriate atmosphere for morning, day, evening and night. While it's a nice effect, the game snags and loads an entirely new light model rather than gradually increasing and moving the sunlight across the house.

Sound wise, we're treated to the same sort of unintelligible gibberish that's found in *The Sims*. It's as charming here as it is there and definitely allows you to fill in the content with your imagination. Though this eventually gets repetitive, it's no where near as repetitive as the club music that plays throughout the game.

The main problem with the game is that it's not ambitious enough, relying on the romance angle to generate initial interest without supporting that with over the long term with compelling game-play. Though it's interesting to manage a romance between two roommates, it lacks a sense of complication. The path to reach the goal is fairly standard and, once it's reached, there's nothing beyond it. At least in *The Sims* you can focus on some other aspect of life.

Acer Ferrari 3200

WHAT do you get the formula one racing fan who has everything? A Ferrari laptop of course. Scuderia Ferrari and Acer have joined forces to bring you the Ferrari 3200, a powerhouse of a machine with the style to carry it off.

From the outset you can see this is a machine that means business. The main styling's the shiny red highly polished case that sets the scene nicely. Of course in the real world it's going to be smudged with greasy fingerprints in minutes, but it's still a beauty to behold if you are into that kind of thing. Rather than just make a red laptop (why do laptops always come in black or silver) the tale-tell sign that money has been spent is the addition of the Ferrari logo that is sealed into the finish - no tacky stickers here please.

To match in with the top of the laptop the sides have also been painted red, however open it up and you're dazzled by the silver interior with the odd touches of carbon fibre to give you that racing car feel.

Mouse control is a touchpad as standard or using an enclosed standard optical mouse (also in red with the prancing horse logo). The keyboard has been slightly curved, presumably for a more ergonomic design and there are the usual Acer preset buttons to launch email, internet and two programmable options of your own.

Under the bonnet, you would be forgiven for thinking the unit actually is a Ferrari, it certainly has the performance and power. Running the latest low power mobile AMD Athlon 64 processor 2800+ the machine is no slouch. With a very square and therefore large 15-inch TFT screen, an ATI Mobility Radeon 9700 with 128MB dedicated video RAM, base system memory of 512MB DDR RAM, scaleable to 2048MB, and a 80GB HDD it all ensures a powerful machine inside, rather like the cars themselves.

The side of the laptop presents a slot loading DVD-Super Multi drive that supports DVD-R, DVD RW, DVD+R, DVD+RW, DVD-ROM and DVD-RAM and the drive seems rather similar to the Apple PowerBook range tucked neatly out of the way.

For the photographer the machine also offers a 4-in-1 reader offering support for MMC/SD, SmartMedia and MemoryStick. Rather strangely the

memory card reader doesn't include Compact Flash, used by most professional photographers or the xD Picture card used by Olympus and Fuji the number two and three in the market. Those ports are easily added via USB but it's a minor bugbear at having another piece of plastic to carry around.

Connectivity is offered via either inbuilt 802.11g wireless or Bluetooth while the machine possesses more input/output options that Michael Schumacher's podium finishes. As well as the DVD reader/burner and 4-in-1 memory card reader there's also S Video out, FireWire/IEEE 1394 and four instead of the usual pair of USB 2.0 ports.

Obviously running the large screen, DVD drive and input/output ports has a heavy effect on battery life, but Acer still believe that the battery will give you around three hours of usage and so far in tests we have found this to be true. As long as you don't get too heavily involved in Command and Conquer Generals or Morrowind, even gamers should find this length of power satisfactory.

The unit runs Windows XP Home



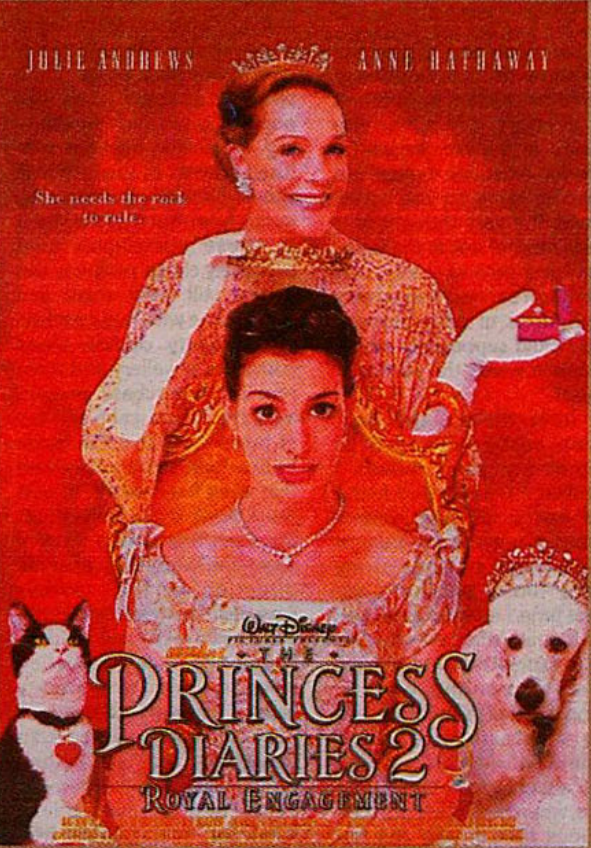
Edition and it's a shame that this laptop currently isn't shipping with either the Professional edition for the more network and business savvy or in actual fact the 64-bit processor version to take advantage of the AMD chip on-board. Admittedly through no fault of Acer, Microsoft is still to ship the 64-bit version of its OS, which is currently stuck in beta with a launch hopefully set for later on in the year. While the Ferrari 3200 works perfectly well with the OS at hand you can't help feeling that it's like one of the prized Ferrari cars merely with a speed restrictor enforcing an under 80 miles an hour limit - but the underlying specification seems like the ideal base for upgrading.

VERDICT
This is a great machine that looks good and more importantly has the performance to match and a vast improvement on the previous Ferrari model that Acer launched. However, you will pay a premium for the Ferrari Red casing. If you are looking for even more power and technological whiz for your money there are better alternatives on the market. That said, nobody takes notice of a clapped out-mini do they? Gamers can still shortlist it thanks to a great graphics system, but had there been an OEM upgrade voucher for 64-Bit XP, that would have earned this an award.

Source: Internet

The Princess Diaries 2: Royal Engagement

Review by Gokhra



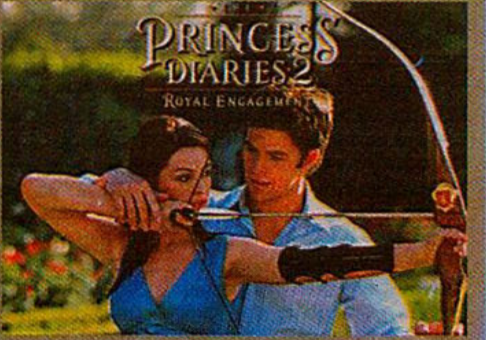
SUPERHEROES are often a male fantasy whereas the princess myth fulfills the little girls dream of glamour and a life lived happily ever after. So is this movie only for little girls?

Beautiful Anne Hathaway (Princess Mia) at 22 was a typical American teenager whose mother raised her in a converted San Francisco firehouse where she could slide down the pole every morning. Queen Clarisse of Genovia (Julie Andrews) visited her to reveal that Anne is actually the queen's granddaughter and next in line to the throne. Then she became a princess following a well-crafted out ugly duckling to swan sequence.

In the sequel she is still 22 and has become the princess of a kingdom the size of a movie set. It is situated somewhere in Europe and populated by citizens who speak American English except for a few villainous types with British accents. Ever wondered why most of the movie bad guys have British accents? In part 2 we are given a few more details about Genovia which looks like a theme park rather like Disneyland.

So there is Princess Mia, who is given a deadline of one month to either marry or forfeit her rights to the throne. Mia is having a great time until she discovers a typically creaky hidden staircase and spies on a parliamentary meeting. She learns of a Genovian law stipulating she must be married if she is to rule. The evil Viscount Mabrey (John Rhys-Davies) wants to disqualify her because his nephew Sir Nicholas (Chris Pine) is next in line to the throne and will ascend if she fails to marry in 30 days. Desperate for a husband and learning that Queen Clarisse was perfectly happy in an arranged marriage, Mia decides to marry for the love of her country.

Using a Microsoft Powerpoint presentation to view all available European royals, Mia A suitable bachelor:



Andrew Jacoby (Callum Blue) Duke of Kenilworth. She accepts his proposal despite the fact that something in the back of her mind keeps nagging her that an elusive "something" is missing. Could it be that her heart sends mixed signals when the supposedly bad guy Nicholas is in the room? According to her Nicholas is all sneaky and smug.....and cute.

The good news is that "Princess Diaries 2" does eventually come down on the side of marrying for love rather than government. A cast of supporting characters, including Mia's love interest and possible usurper Sir Nicholas (newcomer Chris Pine) adds momentum that was missing from the original as well as stronger laughs.

So maybe it is not a movie only for little girls. It does have a decent fairy tale like plot. It makes a nice change from the mindless explosions of almost every other movie. There are quite a few solid laughs including a scene where Mia has a party in her bedroom with all the girls enjoying a good dose of mattress surfing. The movie ends up to be a smooth and ultimately smarter sequel.

- CAST**
- Mia Thermopolis: Anne Hathaway
 - Queen Clarisse: Julie Andrews
 - Viscount Mabrey: John Rhys-Davies
 - Joe: Hector Elizondo
 - Lilly Moscovic: Heather Matarazzo
 - Lord Palimore: Tom Poston
 - Paolo: Larry Miller
 - Sir Nicholas: Chris Pine