A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

NONY KHONDAKER

The Walking Dead: Michonne
Developer & Publisher: Telltale Games
Engine: Telltale Tool
Platforms: PC, OSX, PS3, PS4, X360, XB1, Android, iOS
Release Date: February 23, 2016 (First episode)

I, personally, found the second season of Telltale's *The Walking Dead* to be a disappointing and desperate attempt at re-enacting everything we loved about the first season and the lack of creativity and fresh ideas was painfully obvious. When *Michonne* was first announced, I sort of expected it to go along the same lines. After having finished the game, I can now confidently say that I was wrong.

The *Walking Dead: Michonne* tells the story of Michonne, a former lawyer and a zombie apocalypse survivor. Her two daughters, Colette and Elodie went missing during the outbreak of the apocalypse and the incident makes her constantly hallucinate about them. In the present timeline, she is on a boat with a group of men. Suddenly, they get a distress radio call and Michonne and her friend, Pete, go out looking for the source of the signal. Soon after, they are captured by Randall and his crew after being the subject of a misunderstanding. What follows is an emotional roller-coaster that you should play yourself to find out about.

The first episode of the miniseries is very dull as it spends most of the time introducing the characters. It is from the second episode the game really takes off. The emotional ups and downs that one should expect from a Walking Dead game are all there. The third and final episode keeps up the good work and features what is probably one of the most

intense climax sequences I have ever seen in a video game.

The first change I noticed is that the HUD of the game has been given a comic book-inspired overhaul. I also liked the inclusion of slow-motion action sequences. The violence in *Michonne* is a lot more graphic than anything we've seen in the franchise so far. The "missing daughters" subplot has added a lot of depth to Michonne's character and consequently to the plot; though I would have liked to see that subplot flourish a little more than it actually did.

The two departments where *Michonne* failed to entertain me are its graphics and gameplay. Graphics is quintessentially the same as TWD Season 2 and the same goes for the gameplay. Since the TWD games are based on the comic books and not on the TV series, the 2.5D graphics is justifiable. However, sticking to the same, old, QTE-heavy gameplay seems redundant to me. Considering how the violence in the franchise has been taken up a notch, it would have really been interesting to be able to make creative environmental kills instead of relying on the pre-conceived cutscenes.

If the graphics and gameplay are overlooked, *Michonne* is a strong return in form for Telltale. Hope this improvement continues in TWD Season 3.

Nony Khondaker is an introvert with immense passion for tech and music. Feel free to send your constructive feedback at nonykhondaker@live.com or follow him on twitter.com/NonyKhondaker
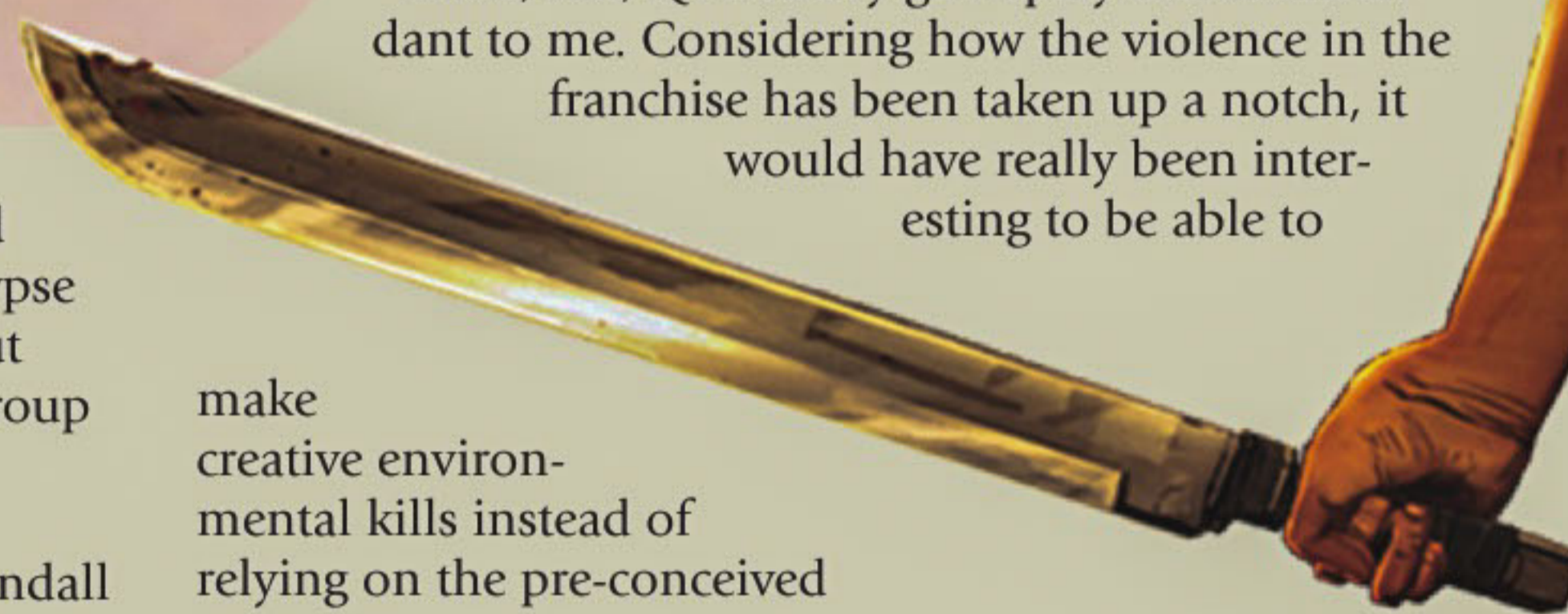
NIOH ALPHA DEMO PREVIEW

TAMIM BIN ZAKIR

Be aware of the fact that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and when it comes to Nioh, it is a pretty evident fact that Ninja Gaiden developer, Team Ninja is quite smitten by From Software's Souls franchise. From the dark and oppressive environments to the methodical combat to the outrageously punishing difficulty, Nioh proudly wears its inspirations on its armored sleeve.

It is not entirely a mere imitation of Dark Souls, rather it is a very challenging as well as a competent RPG played by Geralt of Rivia's cousin during his days in the Warring States Period of Japan. Jokes aside, those who have cut their teeth on any From Software titles will feel right at home as they step off the rocky shores in Nioh's opening area. The ruined village is littered with corpses of fallen players and ghoulish swordsmen. As you step up for attack, your 'Ki' meter, which is essentially your stamina, will be drained with each attack, block or evade. Depleting this meter will leave you at the mercy of the vile swordsmen or Yokai beasts.

The games tight sword-based combat system is honed to a Katana's edge. Proper stances ensure victory as you'll have to find a balance of both offensive

and defensive stances to make it far into Nioh. Stances help to add an extra layer of diversity too. Any weapon can be held in a low, medium, or high stance, changing the speed, power, and range of each strike. For example, the high pose will enable a sluggish but brutal overhead blow. Ninja magic and secondary weapons like caltrops, shuriken, and the bow can also be employed for a more diverse approach to combat. Other primary weapons include spears, axes and hammers;

each with their unique set of moves and variations.

You collect 'Amrita' like Souls as you kill enemies. It is the currency through which the character's stats are leveled up at certain checkpoints scattered throughout the world called Shrines. Also, points are unlocked and can be used to unlock advanced combo moves and variations. These will allow you to restock your supply of healing elixirs and assign various Guardian Spirits. Represented by different

animals, these entities each bring a different bonus to your character when assigned. For instance, one grants you a special melee ability as well as various stat buffs such as improved stamina, agility and other useful bonuses to give you an upper hand. You'll want to return back to these shrines as well because if you die and are unable to recover your Guardian Spirit, you'll lose any Amrita you had previously acquired for good.

Notable for a console game, Nioh allows players to select between frame rate & resolution. The movie mode bumps up the resolution and caps frame rate while action mode uncaps framerate and reduces the resolution. When switching to action mode, the particle effects go away and the textures seem washed out & muddy. Going forward, I found the increased frame rate more appropriate for the game and especially during Boss Battles as 60fps delivers the better experience. Besides, as the game approaches completion, there is plenty of visual polishing to be done.

Nioh's sudden rise in popularity demonstrates that Team Ninja has certainly struck the right chord with the gamers. The end result is refreshing and has a lot of potential to carve its own niche.