

IN KEEPING WITH TRADITION

THE LEGEND OF KAGE 2



FORMAT

DS

PUBLISHER

Square Enix

DEVELOPER

Taito

REVIEWED BY

Rhys Simons

The trend of updating old arcade classics has had rather a good time of it lately. With the booming success of both the DS and PSP, the classics scene has two platforms with huge user bases ripe for quick releases and the potential for fantastic sales. Though there has been a widely variable success rate with these titles, more often than not, they have all shared one common problem: what to do with the tries system.

You see, in an arcade where a try costs an arbitrary sum of money (for a game like the original *Legend of Kage*, perhaps 10p) the threat of death always means something. If you've only got a pocketful of 10 pence pieces then you're sure to be careful about how you use them. On a home handheld this problem doesn't exist and as a result a new threat has to be created - or at least that's the theory.

This latest DS release from Taito is the second instalment in the side-scrolling action platformer series, brought bang up to date from the 1984 arcade classic. As you may have guessed from our spiel above, there is something awry with the threat of death in the game - primarily that it doesn't exist. In typical side-scrolling fashion you guide Kage, the eponymous hero, through various stages encountering enemies as you go. Nothing new there then. But where the *Legend of Kage* differs from the likes of *Streets of Rage* (heh), is that you're not forced into fighting the enemies as they appear on the screen. The screen will only ever be locked into position at the end of preselected levels and during boss fights, and rather than freeing up the player to pick and choose their fights, this tactic, instead, makes them care free.

The Legend of Kage 2 has a particular problem in that, as a ninja, Kage can run very quickly and very easily. This allows the player to simply initiate a run and coast past enemy after enemy - almost as if developer Taito are ashamed of their combat system and don't want you to use it. This issue is exacerbated by a very forgiving checkpoint system which barely punishes the player for dying, and coupled with the relatively short stages, you're only ever a minute away at most from where you died.

It's not all doom and gloom for *The Legend of Kage 2* though. Contrary to what the developers seem to think, the combat is actually rather enjoyable. There are plenty of combos available and Kage upgrades his abilities at a pleasing rate. There's also a mini-game in which you can combine power orbs (Ninjutsu) to create new techniques. The system really comes into its own during the end of stage boss fights. In a guy goes after girl fashion, the story is broken down into stages each beginning and ending with a dialogue sequence to progress things along, and prior to the end stage dialogues are the aforementioned boss fights. Each one of these presents a different challenge and a new way to use your abilities, and they're also the only time death feels like a punishment, proving to be an immensely satisfying challenge.

In addition to enjoyable (though underused) combat mechanics the level design can also be impressive. The backgrounds occasionally feel a little sterile but they're designed nicely and contribute well to the game's old Eastern



theme. The platforming makes good use of traditional jump and dodge mechanics and the wall climb can be a real treat - even if more advanced moves like dropping from a ceiling can prove to a little fiddly.

All things considered, *The Legend of Kage 2* pays homage to its 22 year old father extremely well, with the traditional arcade feel that should really excite fans of the side-scrolling genre. Its biggest flaw is how easy it is to simply bypass the game through simply dashing past anything and everything. Passing by most of the game may seem an odd decision but because it's always sitting there as an option, even if you don't choose to do it, it makes any sense of achievement you might feel from beating the game miniscule. If you can forgive this and long for a taste of those bygone arcade parlors then *The Legend of Kage 2* should satisfy your appetite beautifully.

VERDICT ★★★★★

