



FORMAT REVIEWED

PlayStation 3

OTHER FORMATS

Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, DS

PUBLISHER

Activision

DEVELOPER

Etranges Libellules

REVIEWED BY

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TWISTED FIRESTARTER THE LEGEND OF SPYRO DAWN OF THE DRAGON

Of all the games we expected to be reminded of upon beginning the new *Spyro the Dragon* adventure – a series still best remembered for the great platformers on the original PlayStation – a certain hero ripped from the pages of Greek mythology, with a peculiar obsession with causing as much bloodshed as possible, wasn't the first that came to mind. Sure enough though the entire first section of *Dawn of the Dragon* appears modelled on the opening section from *God of War II*; from the frequent QTEs (although the time afforded to the player to press the correct button is far more generous) to the boss that follows both *Spyro* and *Cynder* throughout, it's an affectionate, well-designed tribute that is simultaneously an exciting introduction to this enjoyable sequel.

The *God of War* comparisons inevitably pale as the game progresses, the control system lacking the overall elegance of Kratos' repertoire. There are however enough facets to the combat to prevent the game becoming too repetitive. You can switch between *Spyro* and his female sidekick *Cynder* at any point who both have unique elemental powers such as fire and electricity, as well as the potential to expand their move-set by



collecting crystals (a system also lifted from *GoW*). Their dynamic is best reflected in the co-operative play – though it can't match Travellers Tales' genius in terms of replayability, for the duration of the brief single-player mode *Spyro* is as fun as the classic *LEGO* titles. Flying at will, something that couldn't previously be done in the series, takes a bit of practice but looks great in motion. Later levels put more emphasis on this ability, with expansive worlds hanging in the open sky, and they're successful for doing so.

This is the first *Spyro* game to appear on next-generation consoles and developers Etranges Libellules (nope, we hadn't heard of them either) have ensured that few opportunities for pyrotechnics are lost. The worlds have a vibrancy that recalls the



PLAY ▶

PAUSE ||

STOP ■



"GOD OF WAR FOR CHILDREN"



original PlayStation games, special effects are suitably dazzling and the whole affair is efficiently produced whilst making the most of the host hardware. It's close – but not that close – to the sort of *Spyro* game that, judging by their PlayStation 3 *Ratchet & Clank* adventures, series creators Insomniac would have made had they still an active interest in all things purple dragon. It's certainly an appropriate way to mark *Spyro*'s 10th anniversary.



The Legend of... series of *Spyro* titles have been differentiated from the regular strand by their emphasis on epic storylines and lavish cutscenes (although Square-Enix are unlikely to have sleepless nights). Despite the frequency of these animations, which use the in-game engine, they are well directed and add to the general high level of the presentation. The stellar voice cast, including Elijah Wood, Gary Oldman (fresh from the recent *CoD: World at War*) and Mark Hamill also impress. In fact it's something of a shock for this writer to see the importance and money still invested in *Spyro the Dragon*, a series that we assumed had been pushed to the



'unfashionable' margins of the gaming industry. This expense on the narrative fortunately hasn't been misplaced; rather it's the icing on a superb little package. The camera is the one weak component in this otherwise solid engine, often proving hard to budge if you want to look around. It's also not a particularly difficult game either; in a similar fashion to the aforementioned *LEGO* games, you'll never be truly challenged, but neither will you be left bored.

If this is, as rumours are to be believed, the last ever *Spyro* game (it does bring to an end *The Legend of...* trilogy) then it's a brilliant way to go out. If you're looking for a brief respite from reinventing the run-and-jump wheel courtesy of *LittleBigPlanet* then you could do a lot worse than *Dawn of the Dragon*, a modest little title afforded some fairly immodest resources. "God of War for children": now there's a quote for the box.



VERDICT ★★★★★