

Clifford Chao
STS145
2/18/01

Game Review: Tekken 2

Since the days of their early hit arcade game Pac Man, Namco has always been one of the front runners in the arcade and console game markets. To compete against their long-time rival Sega's three-dimensional fighting game series Virtua Fighter, Namco created the Tekken series, the word Tekken meaning "Iron Fist" in Japanese. The series has always boasted unique character designs, a balanced game engine, flashy graphics and, most importantly, an incredibly deep and skillful fighting engine, all of which makes it today the most popular 3-d fighter in the US.

The second installment of the series, simply entitled Tekken 2, was published by Namco in the arcades by the Summer of 1995, and later brought to the Sony Playstation in March of 1996. Directed by Masamichi Abe, produced by Hajime Nakatane and developed by Namco's outstanding Tekken team, which has been responsible for every version of the game since its original incarnation, Tekken 2 is an excellent example to portray the fundamental basics of Tekken.

Tekken was created with one underlying goal: to grasp the player's ego and drive him or her to improve, play more and defeat his or her opponents. Towards this end, graphics, presentation, character designs and even its story are of central importance. However, first and foremost is the game's fighting engine, designed to encourage learning and practice rather than reflex-based game play. Tekken is highly strategic, with various styles of play and mind games one must use to defeat another opponent.

Tekken's graphics, back in its time, were extremely impressive. The game ran at a smooth sixty frames per second with textured polygonal graphics, something which Virtua Fighter lacked (the polygons only had one flat color). In terms of presentation, Tekken's fights are relatively realistic, with moves motion captured from actual martial artists. However, a lot of special effects, flashy throws, explosive hits and attacks which launch an opponent off the ground

make the game much more appealing to watch and impressive than a completely realistic fight. All this serves to grab and keep the player's interest, and drive him or her to learn to perform these painful-looking moves effectively against opponents.

Also key is the game's character designs and storyline. There are characters of all nationalities, both genders, some good, some evil, encompassing a wide variety of personalities: the innocent girl, the punk street kid, the intimidating karate master, the motherly figure, the Hong Kong cop and even a big bear. The characters are all designed to be interesting, unique and full of personality.

Tekken's storyline, while a little long and complicated, provides real character to each of the game's many fighters. The original Tekken revolves around its main character, Kazuya Mishima, the son of Heihachi Mishima. Heihachi, a martial arts master, is the owner of the Mishima Zaibatsu, a large conglomerate containing massive power and wealth. Due to various dramatic events, Kazuya grows to hate Heihachi and eventually leaves the Mishima household. When one day the Mishima Zaibatsu holds a worldwide tournament, called the King of Iron Fist, with a large cash award for the tournament's winner if he or she can defeat Heihachi Mishima in hand-to-hand combat, Kazuya eagerly enters the competition, along with various other combatants, each with their own stories of love, revenge, fame and more.

Tekken ends with Kazuya defeating his father and throwing him off a cliff. Kazuya then runs the Mishima Zaibatsu for one year, expanding it even further as it becomes almost an empire. He decides to hold his own Iron Fist tournament, not knowing that his father, Heihachi, survived the drop into the cliff. Heihachi is the main character of Tekken 2, with Kazuya, this time, as the main enemy.

The game's story and character designs are both important because they also help the game achieve its goal. By having such developed personalities, players can choose to identify with one or a few characters, who they will tend to see as almost extensions of themselves. Players will practice these characters and place their egos into them. Winning with this character

gains the player a confidence boost, and losing can oftentimes infuriate the player, driving him or her to practice more until his or her character can defeat the opponent.

But, most importantly of all, the game's engine lures players into the Tekken world. The Tekken game engine, unlike the Street Fighter engine and most traditional arcade games, relies more on strategy and knowing what to do than reflexes and speed. As a result, the amount of depth and knowledge in the Tekken series is far more substantial than the depth in Street Fighter.

In Street Fighter, the player usually knows what to do. If the opponent is jumping, then dragon punch. If the opponent throws a fireball, then jump over the fireball. The concepts are simple, but the execution is not. Timing a dragon punch to hit an airborne opponent is difficult (in fact, for many, executing the dragon punch at all to begin with is difficult). It takes practice to be able to jump over a fireball correctly, and subsequently land an attack on the opponent.

Tekken does not work this way. If one knows what to do, it is usually a simple matter to actually execute the move. However, the sheer amount of knowledge required to always know what to do in what circumstance is incredible. While the execution of any given move may not take that much practice, knowing which move (out of the 50 or 100 that a character possesses) to use under what circumstance takes a lot of practice and learning. To be good, a player must not only learn how to use his or her own moves, but also how to best deal with the opponent's moves and make him or her pay for improper or risky attacks which fail.

As a simple example, take Kazuya Mishima's demon slayer combo (executed by pushing left punch, left punch, then right punch in succession). A fast and powerful combination that can take over a third of the opponent's life bar away, this move may seem overpowered to the inexperienced Tekken player. However, a player who knows how to deal with this move will know it has two weaknesses which, when used against an experienced player, render it almost useless. First, all three punches in the combination are high, which means that the opponent can duck under the punches. After the last punch, as Kazuya is retracting his fists from the attack (which, if ducked, go right over the head of his opponent), he is unable to block any attack and is

completely vulnerable. During this short time span, the opponent is capable of executing moves on Kazuya and there is nothing the Kazuya player can do about the move to avoid it. What move to do depends on what character one is playing. The move's other weakness is, if the opponent blocks the attack (which is done simply by holding the arcade stick away from Kazuya), then he or she will get a remarkable "frame advantage," meaning that the opponent has a lot of time to execute his or her own move safely while Kazuya is still retracting his fists from his demon slayer combo and is unable to attack. This amount of depth is present in almost every move of every character (easily summing up to over one thousand moves in the game total), some being far more complicated.

Going back to the demon slayer combo, one should note that it is very easy to do the demon slayer and, with proper knowledge of its weaknesses, then it is just a matter of pushing a few buttons to make Kazuya pay for his mistake. By making the execution of moves relatively easy, Namco was able to add in the immense amount of depth and knowledge one can acquire by playing this game, and the amount of depth, as one can see, is clearly enormous.

A player can play hundreds of times and keep getting better, learning more about his or her own character and how to play against the plethora of other characters, learning more and more with each game. This is key to the game's goal of making a player come back for more and becoming involved with the game. Once a player has practiced enough, he or she will inevitably put his or her ego into the game and that character. After all that practice, one wants to see the benefits, and, with so much to learn and such real rewards for each new strategy learned, the payoff provides positive reinforcement for the player to keep playing.

Both Tekken and Tekken 2 ran on Namco's System 11 arcade hardware, which was designed to be compatible with the Sony Playstation hardware. When the original Tekken appeared in arcades, this was really impressive, mostly because it was able to support limited lighting effects and textured polygons. Tekken 2 had some modest graphical enhancements from the first Tekken, but, all in all, it did not boast anything overly impressive from a technical point

of view. It was running on the same hardware which, while impressive when Tekken came out, was not as big a deal when Tekken 2 was released, though it was still by no means outdated.

Equally impressive is the pre-rendered computer graphic FMV's (or full-motion video). The introduction to Tekken 2 has a minute-long video introducing the Tekken characters completely rendered by computer graphics. For its time, these computer graphics were incredibly impressive, with highly detailed character models, fighting effects, motion-captured animation and rendering that even kept track of each hair on Nina Williams' head.

As for the game itself, it succeeds on almost every front. Not only is there a massive amount of depth to the game, but the game is also extremely well balanced. While some characters are a little easier to pick up, all characters have a lot of potential and, in the hands of a master, can defeat any other character.

In addition, the game does an exceptional job of avoiding overly "cheesy" moves. In many fighting games, there are moves which are so powerful and effective that the other moves are not necessary, but Tekken, for the most part, avoids this problem. All moves must be used in concert to play any character to his or her fullest. At first, some moves may seem extremely powerful and cheap, but, against a player who knows what he or she is doing, that move's weakness will be exploited.

Tekken, however, does have a few weaknesses. The game's menu presentations, announcer and music all seem bland and without character, not promoting the game's competitive feel. In addition, some may argue that Namco dumbed down the execution part of the game almost TOO much. The amount of twitch gameplay in Tekken is, for a fighting game, relatively little. Part of this can be attributed to the somewhat slow pace that the game goes through. Characters take a long time to get up from being knocked down, recover from moves slowly, and are lacking in instantaneous attacks. All of this is to promote more strategy over twitch, as strategy takes at some time to allow the player to think.

Tekken 2 was an important stepping stone for Namco in its battle against Sega's Virtua Fighter series and was the beginning of Namco's domination over Sega in the three-dimensional fighting game market in the US. Tekken 2 was a precursor to Tekken 3, which was when Namco really took the market over in the United States, heavily shaping all fighting games to come afterwards, such as Tecmo's Dead or Alive series. Today the three-dimensional fighting game market has grown enormous, all stemming from Tekken's emphasis of strategy over twitch, flashy and oftentimes painful looking graphics, and solid, balanced gameplay which has drawn more and more players to become, and remain, part of the Tekken community.