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Bits & BYTES

ADAM WILSON

New Dragon Ball Z game rises above its lackluster precursors

This month's review is based on a recommendation from my best friend Andy.

He and I are huge video game addicts and bigger anime fans. So when he recommended playing "Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 2," I was all for it.

I had played previous Dragon Ball Z games, and was not too impressed, but I must say, I was blown away by this one!

The game, like the anime, follows the story of Goku, a Saiyan from the planet Vegeta who was sent to Earth when he was an infant. Goku, along with the Z Fighters, protects Earth from the evil forces of the universe.

There are multiple choices of game play to choose from. The main storyline is called "Dragon Adventure," which takes you through every arc of the DBZ world, including the movies, and even some "Dragon Ball GT" stories.

"Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 2" is available on the PlayStation 2 and Wii platforms.

As in the show, in Dragon Adventure you start in the Saiyan Saga, in which Goku's brother Raditz arrives on Earth. After defeating Raditz, Prince Vegeta arrives, the prince of all Saiyans.

You go through a lot of battles in the game, and even when you win the battle, sometimes you still lose. Sometimes, the point of the battle is just to survive as long as possible. I'm not a big fan of those missions.

DBZ-BT 2 is pretty much your average run-of-the-mill button-masher. But there is also some strategy to it.

If you have the PS2 version, you can hit the square button four times, then up on the D-Pad-plus-triangle to do some pretty cool combos.

If you send your opponents into the air, quickly hit "X" and your character will follow them no matter where they go.

The actors who voiced the characters in the Americanized version of "Dragon Ball Z" voice the characters in the game. Funimation produced "Dragon Ball," "Dragon Ball Z," "Dragon Ball GT" and had a hand in the games.

Also in Dragon Adventure you can play storylines from DBZ movies including "Cooler's Revenge," "The Tree of Might," "Lord Slug," and "The Return of Cooler," just to name a few.

The game brings to life the great attacks used in the show, like Goku's Kamahamaha, and his Kaio-ken Attack. Also Piccolo's Super Beam Cannon and Hellzone Grenade, not to mention Vegeta's Big Bang Attack and Trunks' Burning Storm.

The awesome thing about this game is you can take your Saiyan characters and transform them into Super Saiyans. Goku was the first to become a Super Saiyan within a thousand years.

Another game you can play in DBZ-BT 2 is called "Dragon Tournament." The name pretty much sums it up. You can choose from any of the 129 characters, but you have to unlock those characters first. You are given a good handful though, including Trunks, Vegeta's son, who traveled back in time to warn the Z fighters of the Android Attack.

Another game play is called "Ultimate Battle Z." In it, you take on the role of Goku and fight against rivals throughout the DBZ world. You can get rare items and new courses when you beat each course.

Before you start any game play, go into Ultimate Training, and learn the buttons, combos and techniques. If you don't, you probably will be lost.

Also, you can go to Babo's shop and buy various items to increase your power, strength, and speed. Every time you clear a battle you get a certain amount of Zeni, the currency of the DBZ World. You can use that to buy these items.

The graphics are great, especially when there is a cut scene. It looks as if the creators took the character animation off the show, made a CGI background and put the characters in. When you're, fighting the characters look just as good.

Even though the previous Dragon Ball Z games did not impress me, "Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 2" has blown me away. It is a game for any fan of the anime.

DBZ BT 2 receives 5 out of 5 stars, and is a great game for any fan of the anime.

The center image shows the importance of proper white balance in making pleasing pictures.

WAYNE PALMER/
For the Sun-Gazette

Cursed by color casts?

Try adjusting your digital camera's white balance feature

Bits & BYTES

WAYNE PALMER

The eye is truly a miraculous device.

It can instantaneously adjust for lightness, focus and color. Walking from a dark room into bright sunlight, the eye compensates. The eye can immediately refocus from looking at something close to something far away. Look at things under different sources of light and the eye instantly perceives what appears to be normal color.

All of this happens so quickly that we may not even give it much thought.

In photography the lens can mimic the eye for focus and brightness, but it can't automatically compensate for the difference in color generated by different types of light.

Perhaps you have noticed that different sources of light change how color looks in your images. Images taken under incandescent lights — regular house lights — have a reddish-orange cast to them, while images taken under florescent lights have a cool blue-green cast to them.

Even images taken in sunlight can have color casts depending upon the time of day or whether clouds or trees block the sun.

Although the warm glow of the morning sun may produce attractive images, the cool blue effect of shadowed light is seldom desirable.

Scientifically, light sources are measured using a rating system that assigns light sources a temperature in degrees Kelvin.

This temperature rating has nothing to do with the actual heat generated by a light source, just the color emitted. A higher temperature rating is not synonymous with being brighter. On the low end of the temperature scale is warm reddish light, while blue light is on the high end.

Our eyes immediately adjust to changes in color temperature, but in photography, whether film or digital, adjustments must be made to the camera in order to obtain natural looking color. Failure to do so can create unappealing results with unnatural color casts.

In the days of film, the photographer would control the color temperature through the choice of film used or with corrective filters.

Most films were made to give pleasing results in daylight. When the film was used under different lighting conditions, the images would have color casts.

There were films made for different types of light, but they were not common. Instead of using these, the photographer would usually mount a colored filter to the end of the lens to add the color that would be missing from the light source. For example, using a blue lens filter would add the missing blue color when shooting under reddish incandescent lights.

With digital photography, the color of light is controlled with a feature called white balance.

This feature, borrowed from video camera technology, eliminates the need for filters. The camera can adjust the color automatically, or the user can adjust how the camera sees light manually.

Digital cameras record color through a complex arrangement of color filters over the individual sensors of the camera's recording chip. By modifying that process, the color can be altered to look natural for most types of light.

Most the time, automatic white balance will produce an acceptable image. But there are times it is beneficial to set it manually, as the camera can be fooled under mixed lighting sources or when your images have an abundance of one color that the camera tries to counteract.

A few years ago, one of my interns was puzzled at the diversity of color results he got when shooting a basketball game. Even though the lighting in the gym was consistent, the color of the walls and the player's jerseys had slight color shifts among the images when comparing different images side by side.

That was due to the automatic white balance making a different decision based upon the color it saw when the picture was taken.

If a large section of the picture was filled with a particular color of jersey, the camera would slightly shift the color to compensate for what it read as a color cast.

If you have encountered undesirable color casts in your images, then it may be time to explore the white balance feature in your camera. Most cameras offer some form of manual override. You may have to take the camera out of the full auto mode to do so.

Cameras that have adjustable white balance often have a number of presets for different lighting conditions. Some of those settings can include: Full Sun, Cloudy, Shade, Flash, Tungsten, and Florescent.

Also, many cameras allow you to set the white balance manually if none of the presets give you the right results. To manually set the white balance, you point the camera at a white object under the target light source and have the camera calibrate itself. Professional-level cameras allow you to select the exact color temperature in degrees Kelvin for precise color.

If you do set your color manually, don't forget to put your settings back to normal when you are done. Failing to do so will put a color cast in the next image you take if the light source is different.

If you shoot in Camera Raw format, the topic of a previous column, white balance is not an issue, as it is adjusted when you process the image at your computer. However this is not an excuse for sloppy photography. If you get the white balance correct when you take the photograph, it will be one less step to take in processing your photos.

United States slipping in world's networking race, study finds

By Bradley S. Klapper
The Associated Press

GENEVA — European countries and Singapore have surpassed the United States in their ability to exploit information and communication technology, according to a new survey.

The United States, which topped the World Economic Forum's "networked readiness index" in 2006, slipped to seventh. The study, out Wednesday, largely blamed increased political and corporate interference in the judicial system, which allows powerful firms to limit competition from upstart rivals.

The index, which measures the range of factors that affect a country's ability to harness information technologies for economic competitiveness and development, also cited the United States' low rate of mobile telephone usage, a lack of government leadership in information technology and the low quality of math and science education.

But Thierry Geiger, one of the Forum's economists responsible for the 361-page report, said the U.S. market environment remains the best in the world in terms of how easy it is to set up a business, get loans and have access to market capital.

Nordic countries — traditionally strong in all surveys conducted by the Geneva-based Forum — dominated the top of the rankings. Denmark edged Sweden for the top spot, while Finland was behind in fourth.

Singapore, which topped the poll in 2005, was the top Asian nation in third. Rounding out the top 10 were Switzerland, fifth; Netherlands, sixth; Iceland, eighth; Britain, ninth; and Norway, 10th.

The report covered 122 countries, with Chad, Burundi, Angola, Ethiopia and Bangladesh at the bottom.