



Wrangling ghosts is like trying to land a giant fish: hook 'em, tire 'em out, and then slam them into a trap.

GHOSTBUSTERS: THE VIDEO GAME

It's not quite what I hoped for, but it's a lot better than I expected.

PS3 Xbox 360 ESRB: T

Developer: Terminal Reality/Threewave Interactive Software Publisher: Atari

I was a little kid when the *Ghostbusters* movie came out, and I went nuts for it. If it was playing in a theater, I snuck in to see it. If a friend's family rented the video, I invited myself over for an extended stay. I quoted dialogue lines and sang along with the theme song. So it wouldn't sur-

prise you to hear that the prospect of actually joining the team set my inner ten-year-old loose like he's on a sugar bender. Sadly, *Ghostbusters: The Video Game* doesn't quite live up to my childhood fantasies but it's still a solid game that manages to capture at least some of the magic.

WHO YA GONNA CALL?

That starts with the game world that the developers have created. The game takes place in New York and everywhere you look you'll find little touches that harken back to the movie. The major players have all returned—no Rick Moranis or Sigourney Weaver, though—to give voice to their slightly awkward 3D caricature counterparts, and everything from the proton pack on your back to the ECTO-1 is recreated in detail.

The game takes place in 1991 and puts you in the shoes of a new recruit who joins the Ghostbusters. The Natural History Museum is set to unveil an exhibit dedicated to the warful god Gozer; as you can expect, things go awry and one enormous wave of energy later, New York City is once again crawling with ghouls, ghosts, and other things that are far stranger. After getting a lesson from Ray on the basics of how to "zap 'em, cap 'em, and trap 'em", it's onto the main goal: ridding the world of paranormal evil.

REEL THEM IN

Grappling ghosts into submission in *Ghostbusters* is the supernatural equivalent of bass fishing, with a brightly colored particle stream instead of a hook and line. As I struggle with "hooked" spirits, my slam gauge fills, which enables me to hurl the lassoed entities into hard surfaces with the flick of a trigger. For a while, the whole process looks and feels wonderful, despite the occasional



In *Ghostbusters: The Video Game*'s multiplayer Destruction mode, concentrate on taking out the evil relics first, or you'll quickly find yourself overrun with all sorts of inter-dimensional insanity.

drop in frame-rate, and I come to fancy myself an urban ranger at a paranormal rodeo. Still, I perform this same dance with my opponents countless times over the six or seven hours it takes to complete the solo-only campaign, and I'd be lying if I said it never got repetitive.

Ghostbusters stirs in some interesting ideas, but doesn't build them up enough to stave off monotony entirely. You'll track down haunted artifacts and scan troublemakers with the PKE Meter, but constant reminders of when to do so kill any sense of sleuthing. New weapons appear at predetermined points, but their effects seem subdued. For instance, the Stasis Stream promises to slow down creeps, but in practice seems effective only against golems and select bosses. There are fun possibilities, like using Slime Tethers to rubber-band specters into traps, but they're always less practical than hosing the floaters down with the blast stream.

RESCUE 911

More alarmingly, what begin as minor frustrations pick up steam over time. I loved visiting the old Sedgewick Hotel, and battling the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man in Manhattan, but the story is often less a sequel than an alternate reality highlight reel from the first film, and the surprisingly inconsistent environments vary from polished set-piece arenas to tedious trudges through dull corridors. Meanwhile, any time my entire squad was together to dispatch a boss, I wished I'd selected casual difficulty, because I spent more time running around reviving ineffectual teammates than I did actually fighting.

I never found these annoyances truly aggravating, apart from the poorly balanced final encounter, but they certainly put a ceiling on my enthusiasm. What bothered me more was that the script simply lacks the exuberance of the movie. Maybe what was riotously funny in the '80s comes off as tepid now. Maybe it's just far more difficult to nail comic timing in a game. Whatever the case, apart from a smattering of laugh-out-loud moments, the comedic elements are only mildly amusing at best, leaving only light horror to pick up the slack.

PULL TOGETHER

Thank heaven for the six different job types of instant multiplayer competition. Roping in increasingly more powerful kinds of creep with three pals is as simple as it sounds, whether you're working to destroy evil relics or activate PKE Disruptors, but you're virtually guaranteed to have a great time. There's no better way to enjoy the sheer variety of imaginative creature designs, the dazzling weapon effects, and the destructibility of public spaces. Even the different weapons seem more purposeful, especially in the presence of power-ups like ghost shrinkers and pink slime that turns attackers into allies.

Though I was ultimately somewhat disappointed by the flawed and fundamentally repetitive nature of my time as a green recruit, Ghostbusters' tight online component renewed my long-term enthusiasm for slam-dunking slimers. Now I just need to figure out how to get Ray Parker, Jr.'s theme song out of my head.

—Cameron Lewis



I guess the undead don't have much use for lotion and other skin care products.



For Protection mode you'll want to work together to defend PKE Disruptors, but try to put ghosts in your own traps to rake in the most cash.



FUN FACTOR



PROS: Catching ghosts just feels right; engaging multiplayer options; snazzy special effects; environmental destruction.

CONS: Repetitive overall; not-so-bright teammate A.I.; some dull environments; disappointing dialogue.