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[Samurai Warriors 2 Empires](#)

Big in Japan, small in here...

What's this game about? The title covers about eighty percent of the game's topic... It's all about samurai warriors, empires, historic battles, China versus Japan, Japan versus Japan and seppuku. To get a better picture of this game, we should see what the producers' other titles sound like. Koei released mostly stuff like Dynasty Warriors 3,4,5 , [Samurai Warriors](#): State of War or Kessen III, games packed with historic content taken directly from Chinese and Japanese history. So we've got some masters of Asian culture and civilization (not to mention combat) that have just released [Samurai Warriors 2 Empires](#). The expectations are pretty high for this game, since it follows a series of titles with the same topic, the same gameplay and sadly the same graphics. As you can see, the tone's not too merry, so we're not dealing with a masterpiece...On the contrary, but you'll soon find out the game's qualities and flaws. **Story**The game can be a wonderful experience if you're a fan of Chinese and Japanese history or a fan of Akira Kurosawa's films. Call this game a mighty history lesson or an alternative to reading the superb Shogun book. It features the famous battle of Kawanakajima, from 1561 or the unification of Tohoku from the same year. Samurai Warriors 2 Empires tells tales that are not meant to be works of fiction, but rather historic events that changed Japan's history forever. You'll see all those classic armors, combat style and a little bit of Asian philosophy as you ride to death in crucial battles fought in the land of samurai warriors and sacrifice for the sake of honor. **Concept**Right from the start, you'll be greeted by a very Asian-style FMV, filled with the same clichés, people flying around and swords being drawn in the battle. This style continues in the main menu, but it comes with the music. You'll be choosing between the empire mode and a more versatile free mode. After choosing one of them, you'll be prompted to pick a scenario and the difficulty level. All the "bureaucracy" doesn't end here and there are some more options to toy with before playing the game. You can set the time limit on or off, select if you want to have new officers or not and if you want to have a limited number of them. Let's get back to the basics, because this is a complicated game and if I didn't get it the first time I played it, neither will you. The game's not all about hacking and, slashing and conquering. There's also a strategic side of huge importance that makes or breaks a campaign and always remember that the ultimate goal is uniting all the provinces (called fiefs). Each of these territories have their own symbol and lord, some of them friendly, some sworn enemies. You'll use the map to navigate between provinces and select those that you want to attack or invade. Once you've picked one of the territories, you can view their name, symbol and the rank of their lord. Those of you that saw cutscenes taken directly from the game or thought that this title is very much like Onimusha will be extremely disappointed to see that there's a lot of strategy to attend to, before, during and after the battle. Well...of course, it's less of that during the combats... The strategy phase is used to enact policies and prepare for battle and you'll have to keep your eyes on the gold, because it increases once per turn, but decreases each time you use a policy. Also, you'll be limited to a number of orders that you can issue per turn and those numbers increase together with the size of your empire. As the leader of a soon-to-be empire, you'll have to use a list of commands and orders that you'll have to issue. Usually, they'll go to the officers and they'll do everything that you'll ask them to. You can select the consult option, that allows the player to select an officer and let him do the policies that he suggest. Another option is called "delegate" and it implies giving the control of a certain policy to one of the officer for an entire turn. The decree option allows you to execute any of the following categories of policies: domestic, armaments, troops, personnel, training, negotiation or plots. All the decisions that you take will influence

the empire and the fiefs and it isn't all about battle, since there are a couple of economical aspects that you can alter. Before a conflict takes place, you should apply some tactics and formations if you want to make it and avoid enemy invasion. Players get the chance to select the soldiers, officers, generals and the other units that they want to use during the battle. Also, you'd better remember that the tactics you select now will have a great impact as the battle takes place and you'll see some pretty neat strategic effects if you thought it all from a good perspective. Some of you might mistake the tactics for battle formations and those are something entirely different as they allow you to select the formations you want to execute during the battle to adjust to the enemy's deployment of troops. Various abilities can be increased if one of your generals suggests so, for example you can increase the spear ability if you're about to take part in a conflict where long-distance weapons are the main weapons. Now, all the Onimusha fans can come back to life, since we've reached the battle phase. Players can choose to fight one of the four types of battle and a certain location where the combat will take place. The four types are the following: invade, defend (those two are pretty obvious), joint attack (assist an ally in his attempt to invade another lord) and help ally (assist ally's defense, trying to avoid the invasion). If you want to invade another fief, you should prepare yourself because such military actions cost an amount of gold, that's proportionate to the number of troops you'll deploy. Soldiers have to get paid and eat something, after all...As a great troop leader, you'll be the one to select the officers that will lead your army, according to their loyalty and please keep in mind that you can only use those that are next to the fief where the battle takes place. The map will be of great help to those strategy freaks that have already planned each detail of their assault, before the first hit of the war drums. Since we're replaying history here, there's an archive section that you can check out, filled with info about samurai warriors and their history. **Gameplay!** keep mentioning Onimusha for a pretty good reason: this game has about the same gameplay mechanics. Do you know what that means? It's button mashing time and those strikes that kill 20 people at the same time are back. It's no wonder, because this is another cliché, seen in Asian combat sequences, where the cool ninja fellow smithes all the opponents around him with a single move. You should try to avoid getting cocky while playing the game and going out on your own. While in the first missions, if you play on "Easy", you'll be able to complete a few battles by taking out the majority of the enemies yourself, things will get tougher later on. Those are the moments when one remembers that he controls an army that he can move around as he pleases. You'll control the army's main force, made out of three generals and three lieutenants and there's a very visible 1P mark that shows which general is under your control. Aside from the main force, there's also a relief force, if available, created by selecting a general and a lieutenant. Do you remember policies? They were available before the battle and during the conflict you'll have some active policies to toy with, too. Such selections can affect your army and you should choose carefully in the info menu. One player can choose the request active policy that requires the support of your ally during the battle. Also there's the entice enemy policy, that lets the enemy join you or the invite attack policy, that makes the opponent's army invade your fief. By selecting the hard march policy, soldiers will start a journey towards fiefs that are not next to your own territories, with the purpose of invading the lands. Specially, when you're a noob, things can get pretty ugly, so there's a policy called civ troops that calls the civilians to the defense. Assuming that you're about to invade someone, you're given a chance to see the info on that fief, stuff like harvest points, defense points, number of ronins, specials, disasters or the enemy generals. Those mighty warriors come with a lot of details like names, post, clan, friendship level, troops or level, because it's better that you know your enemy before striking him. I'm not going to quote Sun Tzu for the rest of the article, but there are some neat tricks that you can do if you're a little bit diplomatic and not so fond of bloody wars. Samurai Warriors 2 Empires features huge environments to battle on, and knowing what things mean on the map is crucial. The blue flags are allied bases, red flags are enemy bases, while the yellow indicators are the army's main camp. The huge level of details present in

the game will make you spend dozens of hours customizing, choosing, selecting, issuing orders and all the stuff that would make this game a great strategic combat simulator. There are even settings that modify the equipment and you'll have to adjust your weapons, mount and skills to match your strategies. Back to the third person action/ beat 'em up side of this game, there are some sequences that can be compared to God of War without exaggerating too much. The moves list is impressive for such a title and so is the number of weapons and playable characters - 400 of them. Keep in mind that each of those guys has his own ability, skills and specials moves and that is what makes the whole database impressive. Moves are divided into combos, normal attacks, charge attacks and special attacks. Speaking of which, you might have heard the word "Musou" mentioned in the game's manual or in the options menu. Don't worry, nobody's swearing, instead these Musou attacks are combos that require the assistance of your officers. Depending on their number, you get spectacular finishing moves, for example two officers can give you the power to unleash a lightning attack, three of them will give you the power to freeze the enemies, and last, but not least all four of them can help you perform wind attacks. Those are the most powerful ones and they'll even damage the blocking opponents. However, remember that you have to carefully select your officers, because their friendship level will affect the combat and Musou moves. Sometimes, the battle tends to become a waste of time, because the enemies keep coming back and getting reinforcements. That's why it's best that you know the conditions for victory or defeat, in order not to wake up the invaded one, when you've been kicking the enemy's ass for hours. Let's speak about the action now, a bit. Button mashing! That's all! Seriously speaking, there's not much to do while playing the game, except doing the same button combos over and over again. If it weren't for the strategic side, I would have called this an Onimusha rip-off giving the game a straight 4 out of 10. It might be sword fighting, using the spear or a massive battle in the field, it's all the same: use the left analog stick to move around, press the X to jump and the action buttons to kick some Asian asses. The AI is too pathetic to mention, and they either attack you at the same time, outnumbering and defeating you or just watch your general slash them.

Video If the flaws I mentioned so far didn't seem much, wait till you get to see the graphics... They're bad, even for a Playstation console and I can't see any progress when I compare this game to the previous title in the series. As a fan of Japanese and Chinese movies, I'm disappointed to see such field battles being mocked through bad graphics. Pixeled characters, bugs in pathfinding, only 2 or 3 main character prototypes... I mean, come on, couldn't they make the soldiers more varied? Seeing the same faces on 50 different bodies kind of describes the producers' care towards character design. Apart from that, there are plenty of sparks and cool moves to feast upon, while performing combos, but those are only a consolation, when the confusing camera angle costs you a couple of soldiers. The environments look decent, so there's no point in criticizing them too, as the armies look bad enough to ruin one's play. At least the cutscenes are nice, again I compare them to Onimusha, but they're half as spine-chilling as those, relying more on pure action than on dramatic sequences. **Sound** What is this? Some genius thought that it might be cool to mix a medieval tune with a techno one and feature it in a strategy/action game filled with Asian clichés. Why would I control a samurai warrior and slash thousands of enemies while listening to remixes of house songs? Unless the soldiers have walkmans, that's pretty useless... Dialogs are extremely poor and some of the lines get so repetitive, that you'll hear the same phrase being said three times... in a minute! That makes you mute the TV and play this game while listening to some quality traditional Asian music. Oh and also... there's an extremely annoying sound to be heard once you select an option from the menu.

Multiplayer Not much to say here... The multiplayer is available for two players, in split-screen co-operative mode. You can form alliances and assign the defense to the other player, while you take care of the offensive efforts. All the captured officers can be hired and turned into your own troops, making the battle a little more interesting. What's annoying is that once you start making a good-looking combo that involves a long FMV-like sequence,

the other player will just have to sit and watch, not being able to use the split-screen mode, because he's been paused by your combo. **Conclusion**If you want quality samurai action, watch one of Kurosawa's movies. If you want a decent strategy game combined with the elements of a third person action game, well....you could try Samurai Warriors 2 Empires, but I won't guarantee you'll like it. Doing extremely well in the strategy field, the game fails a bit too much in the action department not being able to deliver an experience that's unique enough to set the game apart from hundreds of other samurai-filled titles.