



Ratchet & Clank Future: A Crack in Time (PS3)

Developer: Insomniac Games
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Genre: Platformer
Release Date: October 27, 2009 (US)
E10+ for Everyone 10+: Animated Blood, Comic Mischief, Fantasy Violence



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The Consensus: Ratchet & Clank Future: A Crack in Time Review

By **Joe Rybicki** | Oct 26, 2009

Say yes to Crack.

GAMESPY REVIEW:
★★★★★
Outstanding!

Pros:
Nice variety; satisfying story and ending; clever puzzles; it's absolutely gorgeous.

Cons:
A bit heavy on combat for my taste; some lackluster weapons; some irritating camera issues.

PRESS AVERAGE:

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GameSpy's Take

Let me tell you what I like about Insomniac games: Since the early days of Spyro the Dragon, the studio has always managed to make its games both accessible and rewarding. Even the comparatively heavy Resistance series is friendly to newcomers, while providing a notable challenge to more serious players and obsessive completists. This is not as easy as it sounds, not by a long shot; it requires careful balance and pacing, plopping progressively more difficult challenges in front of the player while keeping a constant stream of upgrades and collectibles flowing. But the Ratchet & Clank series has managed to consistently deliver the goods, pumping out one wholly entertaining adventure after another.

Still, it's understandable that the designers tinker with the formula from game to game. Some entries in the series focus more on platforming and exploration, for example, while others place a much heavier emphasis on gunplay. For A Crack in Time, the needle swings back toward the "gunplay" end of the spectrum, perhaps to deliberately compensate for the more platform-heavy adventures of Tools of Destruction and its downloadable mini-sequel, Quest for Booty.



I'm a little sad about that. While I enjoy Ratchet's blow-crap-up segments just fine, I prefer when they come secondary to the more classic platforming challenges. Don't get me wrong, the platforming's still plentiful; I'd estimate the ratio at about 40 percent platforming and about 60 percent gunplay. I'd just prefer that ratio to be flipped.

In part that's because I find this outing's weapon selection a bit lackluster. For the first half or so, most of the available weapons are of the indirect, tactical variety: bombs and mines and the like. For a good portion of the game you get only two direct-attack weapons: the Constructo Pistol (which feels strangely underpowered even when equipping the various add-ons the "constructo" format allows) and the Sonic Eruptor (a wide-angle weapon with a clever timing-based element to adjust power).

Neat as some of those weapons are, I was soon jonesing for simpler, more direct weapons of the type that don't show up until later in the game, like a shotgun (you need to plow through several tournaments in the Agorian Battleplex to earn A Crack in Time's version, but the Battleplex is in an area you won't even have access to for a few hours).



Fortunately, the platforming, exploration, and puzzle-solving that make up the rest of the game are as fine as anything in the rest of the series. As in the past couple games, Ratchet handles the bulk of the combat, while Clank's segments focus a bit more on puzzle-solving (since the characters were separated at the end of Tools of Destruction, the game alternates between the two for most of the story). Clank's portion is particularly interesting, with some time-based puzzles that call to mind some of the more interesting ideas in Braid. Most of these puzzles are based on the same concept, so it's a bit of a one-trick pony. But it's a pretty neat trick, regardless.

Ratchet, for his part, gets to roam a bit more freely around the galaxy, thanks to the ability to fly his ship more or less wherever he wants within whatever sectors of the galaxy are open to him. It's here that Ratchet gains access to a fair number of side-missions, some of which involve performing tasks for other ships in the area, and many of which require him to land on tiny spherical planets to fetch the mysterious Zuni that help upgrade his ship.



These tiny planets offer up the most straightforward platforming segments Ratchet sees, but they also deliver some of the biggest frustrations. See, the spherical setup is disorienting; getting your bearings while only being able to see a small part of the planet can be a challenge in the best of circumstances. But the game makes things much, much worse by constantly swinging and shifting the camera depending on what Ratchet's doing. Blast up from a bounce pad and you of course want to shift the camera downward to see where you land... but as soon as you engage Ratchet's hover-boots, the camera moves -- of its own accord -- back behind him, which is so useless as to result in almost instant death. It's incredibly irritating, to the point that it prompted me to devise the following rule regarding auto-switching camera angles in platformers:

Don't.

Seriously, just don't. The only exception to this rule: You may auto-switch camera angles if *and only if* the player has no way to take damage, miss a jump, die, or suffer any other sort of setback. If the player either has no control, or has control but can *in no way* do any sort of harm to his or her character, then you may switch camera angles. Sparingly. And once you've accomplished whatever it is you've set out to do by switching camera angles, you must return the camera to precisely where it was before you took control.



Designers, if you fail to abide by this rule, then at some point in the game experience players will hate you. They will hate you personally and wish you harm. I don't care if (as in A Crack in Time) you give the player unlimited lives. Every player has his or her own reason for positioning the camera the way they do. Why would you tell them they're wrong?

Fortunately, as frustrating as these periodic camera quirks are, the irritation is pretty comprehensively overwhelmed by the game's sheer entertainment value. Sure, we don't get much that we haven't seen in previous Ratchet games; and yeah, maybe the lowbrow slapstick humor that carries the story could use some freshening up. But the game is gorgeous, and funny, and varied, and ultimately extremely satisfying. It offers substantial replay value via the now-standard Challenge Mode (in which you start the game over with all your weapons and collectibles, and earn point multipliers based on the number of enemies you eliminate without taking damage). Frustrating or not, it's pretty barren of dull moments.

It's all about balance, you see. And pacing. And A Crack in Time does as good a job of maintaining both as any Ratchet game we've seen in years.

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The Critics Agree

Everyone seems in agreement that hey, yeah, this is most definitely a Ratchet & Clank game -- and it's unlikely to draw in new fans if its predecessors couldn't.

"If you're a fan who just wants more of the same, you won't be disappointed." -- [Ellie Gibson, Eurogamer](#)

"[A]s Crack in Time still relies heavily on the tried and true Ratchet Formula, gamers that were satisfied with old Ratchet games might not have enough reasons to come back." -- [Ryan Clements, IGN](#)

"[I]f you've really gotten your fill with either Tools or Booty, I'll admit that there might not be enough to tempt you here." -- [Sam Kennedy, 1UP](#)

The Critics Disagree

On the other hand, not everyone seems to feel the same way about the weapon selection this time around.

"The game starts out a tad slow (mainly because of the lack of the really fun weapons)..." -- [Sam Kennedy, 1UP](#)

"The number of guns and gadgets is certainly vast, but the imagination seems to have run a little dry this time around." -- [GameTrailers](#)

"A Crack in Time has some of the most unique, useful, and satisfying ways to kill or incapacitate your foes yet." -- [Vinny Caravella, Giant Bomb](#)

The Word on Twitter

"Will probably play some RCF: A Crack in Time to wash the sour taste of the Browns game out of my mouth." -- [cseology](#)

"I hear there is a new Ratchet & Clank space in Home. Let's have a look... 15 minutes and 5 progress bars later, still not running." -- [jamesthomson](#)

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