

Title:	Suikoden II
Developed by:	Konami (http://www.konami.com)
Published by:	Konami (http://www.konami.com)
Reviewed By:	Tim Maxwell
Official Site:	http://www.konami.com/games/suikoden_2/
Overview:	<i>Suikoden II</i> isn't the prettiest RPG around, but one of the most entertaining nonetheless.
Genre:	RPG
ESRB Rating:	Teen
The Good Press:	Engaging storyline; some innovative battle features; nice music.
The Bad Press:	The game is technologically behind the times; the graphics are dated and there is no support for Dual Shock or Analog control.
Ratings:	Graphics: 6/10 Sound: 7/10 Getting Started: 7/10 Documentation: 7/10 Value: 8/10
Tips:	Be sure to have any unidentified items appraised, you never know when you might have stumbled upon something extremely valuable. Talk to everyone you come across. If you don't, you might forfeit the services of a powerful ally.

Shortly after the PlayStation's inauspicious release back in 1995, one of the first RPG's to christen the new system, *Suikoden*, was released. The game, although it was somewhat short and lacked any real character development was one of the most popular games on the PSX for quite some time. Four years and dozens of PSX RPGs later, Konami has decided to test the market again with the sequel, *Suikoden II*. And although the game lags behind the competition technologically, it has strong enough gameplay and storyline to keep you coming back.

The story in *Suikoden II* picks up shortly after the original left off. You take control of a young imperial rebel who is out to stop the evil doings of Prince Luca Blight and his band of blood-thirsty cronies from the Highland Empire. You seem well on your way to doing so until the leader of your regiment pulls a Benedict Arnold on you and forces you to flee your homeland. It is now up to you and your best friend Jowy to put an end to this madness and end this silly war once and for all. Luckily, you and Jowy won't be alone in your adventure. There are a total of 108 different characters strewn about the game that are willing to join your party and each of them offers his or her own strengths and weaknesses. With so many characters at your disposal, the combinations are nearly endless. Simply put, you won't be finishing this game anytime soon.

Aesthetically, *Suikoden II* is a mixed bag. The soundtrack is excellent and offers dozens of memorable tunes ranging from grim and sordid to bright and cheery. As far as visuals are concerned, if

playing *Final Fantasy Anthology* has taught me anything, it must be the fact that graphics certainly don't make the game. This is something to keep in mind when playing *Suikoden II*. Instead of upgrading to 3D backgrounds and characters, Konami decided to stick with the sprites. It would be unfair to say that the graphics look the same as in the original game – the resolution and quality of artwork has been greatly improved, but the game certainly isn't up to snuff with the newer *Final Fantasies*. I was particularly displeased with the overworld graphics – they're nearly on par with those from, oh...the original *Legend of Zelda* on NES – no joke, they're that bad. Luckily, you'll spend most of the time exploring towns, dungeons, or in battle and the graphics in those sequences are much better. A redeeming quality of not using the fancy graphics is that load times are nearly non-existent which is definitely a nice touch.

Suikoden II's gameplay should be quite familiar to fans of the Final Fantasy series. Basically, you venture from location to location, talk to people, fight in random battles, and view Anime-style cut scenes that move the story along. Battles are turn-based, and the menus allow you to perform standard functions such as attack with the equipped weapon, cast a spell, use an item, etc.. Characters have magical abilities based on the “runes” they have equipped. Similar to material in FFVII, runes can be attached to weapons and have the ability to gain new spells and abilities as the game goes on.

In these regards, the game doesn't bring much new to the genre, but there are some cool nuances that really add to the enjoyment. First and foremost, *Suikoden II* allows characters to merge their attacks together and perform one “super attack.” You might remember a similar feature in the SNES classic *Chrono Trigger* and it is a darn shame that this feature hasn't made it into more RPGs. As you might guess, since there are so many available party combinations, the possibilities with these attacks are nearly limitless.

Battles are an essential element to any RPG, but anyone will tell you that they tend to get repetitive and boring at times. *Suikoden II* addresses this issue by allowing you to have the computer fight the battle for you. This feature is great for those annoying random encounters and allows you to just keep chopping away at the enemies until they finally die. Battles are also faster in that your party members will attack at the same time instead of taking turns. When you combine this aspect with the non-existent load times, you shouldn't have much trouble completing your average skirmish in under 30 seconds. This should be a sigh of relief for those *FFVIII* fans who often have time to run to the kitchen for a snack during a Guardian Force summon spell.

I was able to get over the graphical inadequacy in *Suikoden II* rather easily since more of an emphasis was put into the storyline, but other missing features that are common in almost any other game make me wonder if this game wasn't somewhat rushed. I almost hesitate to use the word “rushed” since the sequel wasn't released until over four years after the original, but that's all I can think of to describe these omissions. Dual Shock or Analog support for instance – whether you're playing Metal Gear Solid or Barbie's Fashion Designer, this feature is implemented in some form in just about every new game that comes out. Yet for some reason, you won't find support for either feature in *Suikoden II*. Not that a vibrating controller has much bearing on the game, but the absence of these simple features seems strange nonetheless.

Despite the few minor problems, fans of the original *Suikoden* will no doubt find a great deal to like about *Suikoden II*. The story is deep and entertaining, you'll be emotionally drawn to the characters, and the efficient battle system keeps the story progressing nicely. If you're a fan of the older *Final Fantasy* games or enjoyed *Chrono Trigger*, I think you'll really enjoy this game.