Review of *The Legend of Spyro: A New Beginning*

(or as I like to call it: The Spyro Game to Skip)

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Platforms:	PlayStation (primary), Xbox, GameCube, Game Boy Advance, Nintendo DS
Genres:	Action, Fantasy
Developer:	Krome Studios
Manufacturers/ Publishers:	Sierra Entertainment and Vivendi Universal Games
Series:	First game of the Legend of Spyro Trilogy
Players:	Single-player
Rating:	Everyone 10+
Gameplay:	~ 6 hours
Price:	(new): $8.00 - $20.00
	(used): $5.00 - $16.00

Introduction

For those of you who have neither played nor heard of Spyro, I am so sorry that you've missed out on this unforgettable franchise. Spyro is a young purple dragon originally developed by Insomniac Games in 1998. His first three games were a trilogy that set up the franchise to be one of the most iconic PlayStation games ever created. In summary, the first trilogy featured: a yellow dragonfly best-friend that collects jewels for you to buy your way into other levels; bouncing, bleating sheep that give you health points when you head-butt them; lush rolling hills, scenic Spanish verandas, towering spiral towers, and worlds created out of nothing but clouds. Spyro is not just an iconic PlayStation character. With his sarcastic eyebrow lift and spunky can-do attitude, Spyro became a piece of our 1990's childhoods.

I will freely admit that I was excited, maybe even ecstatic, when I first heard the news that there was a second Spyro trilogy—and the first one was coming out in 2006. I'm a 90's kid. Back then, you either had a Nintendo or a PlayStation. I had a PlayStation, so my days were full of the original Spyro series and Crash Bandicoot. From 1998 to 2000, when I was eight/nine/ten, my absolute favorite games were the Spyro games. I loved dragons, and the chance to play as one (and a purple one, at that) was just too exciting for my little mind. For three years of my life I ripped through the first three Spyro games like a true gamer, piling on my hours of gameplay by foregoing sleep, eating in my room, and doing my homework during school. After I finished the third game, my soul felt like there was

a gaping void that could never be filled. I took up reading instead, which was quite lovely once I got hold of the classics. Books became my new obsession, while my gaming frenzy took a backseat.

Then I was 16 and a sophomore in high school, and I heard about the new Spyro series that would start releasing that same year in 2006. I was beside myself with glee. One of the main draws of the Spyro franchise is that the power of flight is always present to some degree. I was obsessed with this aspect of the game, but Spyro could never fly for very long periods of time. Instead, there would be one teensy morsel of additional flight abilities with each new game to keep me obsessed. For example, in the second game the programmers added archways that would supercharge Spyro's wings so he could fly for longer than just a 5 second hover. In the third game, they more than doubled the flying time to around 30 seconds. Then the new series was announced and I thought: "Oh for sure he's going to be a fully developed dragon and have his big wings and can fly for minutes!" Then I heard the title: *A New Beginning*. Spyro was even younger in the new series than in the original. My archways of 30 second flight were out the window. Despite my excitement over the fact that the new series even existed, my expectations were shattered from the get-go.

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Synopsis

Differences:



Photo of game title from Google images

I'll try to stay as unbiased as I can, but as you can tell from the introduction, I really, really did not like this game. I apologize if some of my disappointment leaks through in the gameplay summary. *The Legend of Spyro: A New Beginning* is very different from the original series. Before, the main object of the game was to defeat one crazy dragon, but you had to do little side quests and go through dozens of portals/levels in order to eventually reach the end. *A New Beginning* is totally different. While the goal is ultimately the same (defeat a crazy dragon), how you arrive at that point is much less complicated. There are no more side-quests to defeat; instead, there are battles within 6 specific levels. *A New Beginning* is much more focused on action than the original series. The developers even changed Spyro's abilities to better suit the heavier combat focus. Instead of just being able to head-butt and spit fire, Spyro can spit fire, electricity, ice, and dirt clods with varying degrees of success depending on who the enemy is. *A New Beginning* has only six levels, which is quite a significant decrease from the original series that had an average of 28 (Spyro the Dragon 25, Ripto's Rage 26, Year of the Dragon 32). There are two flying levels, but it just seems to stress the inability to fly anywhere else. In addition, there are some differences in the DS version of the game as well. Spyro is able to do multiple combo attacks and can also create a

shield to protect himself. There is some saving grace in the DS version if you've missed the side quests, because there are puzzles you can solve. Hooray?

Game in a Nutshell:

When the game begins, you watch a short animated clip (just as in the original series) about a blood-red dragon named Ignitus keeping watch over a little egg inside a scenic temple. Three guesses who's in the egg, and the first two don't count. Here's the interesting part: it is the Year of the Dragon, which occurs every ten generations, wherein a purple dragon is born to determine that era's fate. Krome Studios is already trying to justify this series' existence. The Dragons have a ritual where they bring all the new dragon eggs into the Homeworld realm. So now we know that Ignitus is keeping watch over the little egg that will become the savior or the destroyer of their world. I have to admit that the beginning was vaguely intriguing.

Opposition comes in the form of an inconspicuous enemy called Cynder who is aware of the egg-gathering ritual and attacks the temple to destroy all of the eggs. Ignitus flees with little egg-Spyro and optimistically sends the egg down a river which leads to a pretty gross swamp. Obviously the egg isn't harmed, and is found by some dragonflies, which is how Spyro meets his best friend Sparx. A dragonfly family raises an ignorant Spyro, who really believes he is a dragonfly until he discovers that he can breathe fire. This introduction to the plot ends when Spyro, accompanied by Sparx, heads out of the swamp to find other dragons. They meet Ignitus. How convenient. Ignitus tells Spyro that the temple and the dragon's Homeworld has been overtaken by a crazy dragon named Cynder, and that they need to drive out her evil forces. Driving out the evil forces (monkeys of all things) from the temple is the first level, and is almost profoundly irritating because Spyro doesn't know how to fight yet. He's just a baby dragon. It is only after the battle that Ignitus bothers to teach Spyro how to attack with fire. You don't get to learn how to use electricity, ice, or earth until later when you go through each level defeating Cynder's armies and rescuing one dragon per level: Volteer (electricity), Cyril (ice), and Terrador (earth).



Photo from Google images of Spyro gaining the ability to control ice.

The goal of the game is to stop Cynder from releasing (the creatively named) Dark Master, who was sealed by Ignitus and the three dragons Spyro rescued. The last battle is with Cynder herself. Spyro fights Cynder in a dark and dingy realm of the Dark Master. Whether or not Spyro defeats all evil and saves his homeworld is up to the player; however, the game ends before you know the exact fate of the Dark Master. *The Legend of Spyro: A New Beginning* is only the first of a trilogy, after all.



Spyro fighting the Dark Master; photo from Google images

Verdict

You know how I feel about *Legend of Spyro: A New Beginning*—I hated it. I will say, however, that I wasn't completely bored with the game. I'll go over some of its more redeeming qualities, but first let's take a look at some of the new additions/differences in *A New Beginning*.

Additions: Combat, Upgrades, and Endless Fighting

In *A New Beginning*, the three new attacks (electricity, ice, earth) were exciting and I dearly loved shooting dirt clods at creatures and watching them fall from parapets. My personal favorite attack was spitting electricity and causing enemies get shocked to the point of steaming. The attacks are much more combat-based and developed than the old games. One additional feature is a drop-down menu where you can select what attack you want to upgrade to a higher level, then the baddies turn into pretty gems that you collect to boost whatever attack you chose (fire, ice, electricity, earth).



Spyro fighting the monkey king with an electricity attack; from Google Images

You go into combat with multiple baddies, but it isn't overwhelming. There's a higher degree of one-on-one attack styles that makes battles manageable. My complaint about the battles is that they never really seem to end. To me, the fighting almost felt like the moment you finish one battle, you end up going into another one, and you can't progress until you kill every last creature. The endless fighting turns into a nightmare. I got to the point where I just had to stop and pick it back up again in a couple weeks. This game is not for those who get bored with fighting battle after battle, especially if you hate bosses with high health levels that take longer to defeat.

Appearance: Visual Presentation

On a more positive note, the best thing about A New Beginning is the presentation. The whole thing is in a 3D format that is very crisp and downright pleasant to behold. The developers have sorted out that annoying camera bug during action gameplay (you original Spyro players know what I'm talking about) where it doesn't catch and it flows smoothly with a surprising knowledge of cinematography. That's really the big draw for this game: its cinematography. The camera angles are far better. If you're in a fighting situation with multiple enemies, the camera doesn't stick tight and close, it zooms out to where you can actually see what the crap is behind you—unlike the old games where you had to stay vigilant and turn fast whenever killing something that had friends. I admit to having a respect for A New Beginning's visual presentation.

Sounds: Soundtrack and Voice-Acting

One more area of this game that earned my grudging respect was the soundtrack. I'm a soundtrack nerd. Although I haven't bought any of its songs, *A New Beginning* has a pretty fantastic soundtrack (Rebecca Kneubuhl and Gabriel Mann). The main theme is catchy and cute, and the battle music is appropriate but not overwhelming to the point where you want to turn the volume down. It's definitely no Nobuo Uematsu (savior of the Final Fantasy franchise through his lauded compositions), but the soundtrack to A New Beginning ain't too shabby. Although the music was pleasant, the voice-acting was annoying. *A New Beginning* not only seemed to try over and over again to convince players that it was necessary to the Spyro franchise, but also seemed to clumsily hold itself up by casting famous celebrities as the main voices. Elijah Wood (Spyro), David Spade (Sparx), and Gary Oldman (Ignitus) performed their lines to a degree that was almost cringe-worthy. I admit to being biased, as the voices were recast completely from the old game, but I am not alone in hating the voice-acting for this game. A New Beginning was a finalist in GameSpot's "Worst Use of Celebrity Voices" category in the Best and Worst of 2006 competition. As GameSpot is a notorious video game website for gamers, I rest my case that the voice-acting was horrible, but not necessarily because of the actors themselves. It was the script they had to bring to life that was cheesy, boring, and cheesy.

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Summary

I'm an original Spyro trilogy traditionalist and judged this game harsher than a mother-in-law, so I implore you to take my review with a grain of salt. I liked the attack styles, cinematography, and soundtrack; however, I hated the endless battles, irritating voice-acting/script, and the overall game. I can't honestly say whether you'd enjoy it or not, fellow player, but I say that if you enjoy a pretty game with excellent attacks, endless battles, and a dark (albeit cheesy) plot: go for it! I do recommend, however, that you simply rent it instead of buying it if you're adamant about catching up on the Spyro franchise. Happy gaming!

