

Review

## XBOX GAME REVIEW



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Editor

Virtua Fighter 5 Online is the latest installment in the decade-old fighting game franchise by SEGA. The series has always been associated with innovation. In fact, it was one of the first 3-D fighting games to hit the market.

But even after five incarnations and countless imitators, Virtua Fighter 5 Online provides a deep fighting experience made all the more rich by the addition of fully functional online play.

Interestingly enough, the game's biggest strength is also its weakness. The incredible complexity of the fighting system ensures players, especially those new to the Virtua Fighter world, will spend hours learning each character's 60 plus combos.

### Graphics

Graphical expectations run high on next-gen games, and Virtua Fighter's looks set the bar even higher. All 17 fighter's animations are fast and beautiful, and each successful blow looks like it really packs a punch.

Every combatant fights with a unique style, and their costumes can be altered to provide an even more distinct look. The fighting environments range from inner-city arenas to Japanese temples, and there are enough of them to keep each one from growing old too quick, even though every stage is basically an unchanging square.

While VF5 looks shiny and new, the menu systems feel clumsy and overly complicated. They don't detract from the experience, but do slow down the pace of the otherwise lightning-fast gameplay.

### Sound

VF5's sound provides the sort of heavy beat techno rock you would expect from a modern fighting game. It serves its purpose, but that is about it. The voice acting from the characters is horrendous, but again that is typical for this genre.

The characters each speak their home country's language, which is a nice touch, even if it leaves the American characters sounding a little silly.

### Gameplay

The bread and butter of a fighting game. VF5's combat stands out as the deepest in the genre. Each character possesses dozens of moves unique to them, although learning how and when to use them takes hours of practice.

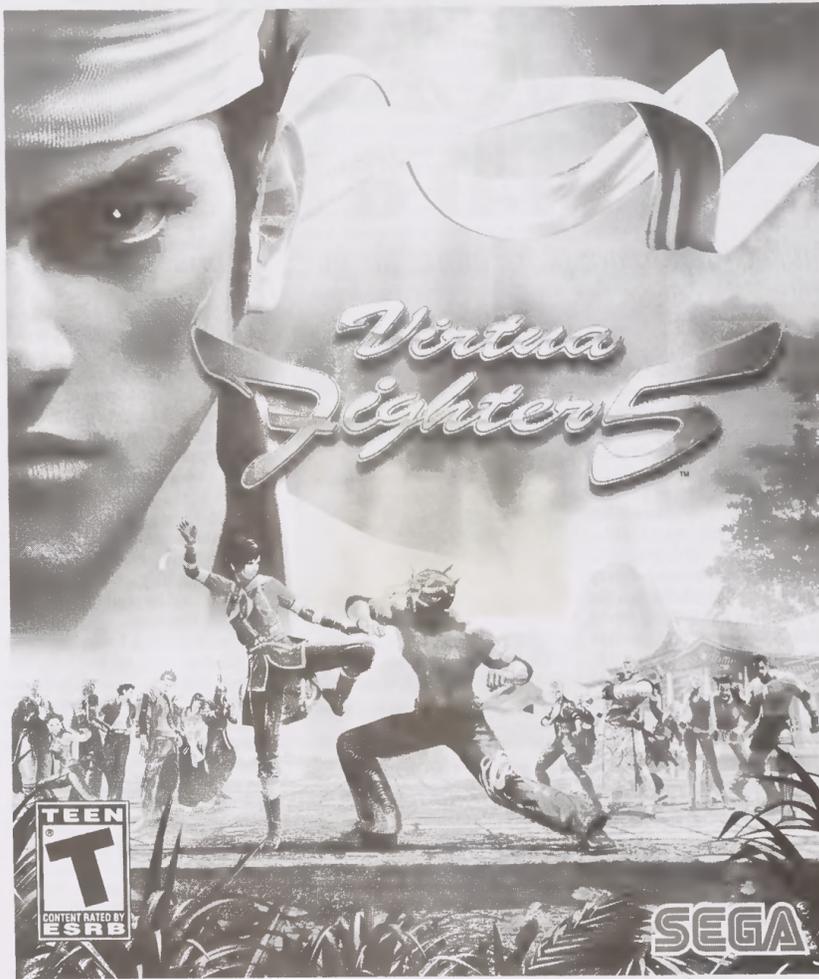
Unfortunately, all that practice means very little in single player mode. Even on the higher difficulty levels, the computer opponents can be defeated using one or two combos. A lengthy quest mode lets you hone your skills and unlock special items and costumes, but for any sort of real challenge, you need to go online.

VF5 features some of the smoothest online gameplay found in a fighting game. What it lacks in features (there are only two options — ranked and unranked matches), it makes up for in practicality.

### Overall

Fans of the fighting game genre have no need to worry. VF5 looks great, plays great and has enough replay value to keep you glued to your Xbox 360 until after Christmas.

If you are not a die-hard fan of this style of game, VF5 is probably not the best place to start. VF5 definitely caters to hardcore gamers, so those looking for a casual pick-up-and-play experience should look elsewhere.



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