

GAME REVIEW

Brütal Legend

Love heavy metal? Buy this now



IMAGE COURTESY OF WWW.SAINSBURYS.CO.UK

Jon Moore
Reviewer

Above all else, fans of heavy metal must know they need to play *Brütal Legend*. EA and Double Fine have filled the disc with so many things true to the genre that fans must treat themselves to a romp through this metal playground.

Headbangers out there: Play

it. No excuses.

The question is, can someone who doesn't listen to Metallica still enjoy this game?

There is no denying every inch of the landscape and every line of programming that went into this game were tailored for metal fans and were done incredibly well. The highlight of the game is definitely its style, with every corner containing fantastic imagery, from whole cliff sides of screaming amps to cymbal bushes that crash and resonate as you walk through them.

Even the voice acting is true to the genre, consisting of metal-culture names any fan would recognize: Rob Halford (lead singer for Judas Priest), Lemmy Kilmister (of Motörhead), Ozzy Osbourne and, of course, Jack Black, among many other surprises.

Black voices the main character, Eddie Riggs, and even though the role was not originally intended for him it's hard to imagine it filled by any other actor. With Black performing the lines of the notoriously funny game design legend (and "*Brütal Legend*" creative director) Tim Schafer of "*Grim Fandango*" and "*Psychonauts*," the game is undeniably hilarious.

Regardless of whether gamers recognize the more obscure allusions of the game, it will make them laugh, even when they don't expect it.

Also bringing a smile to gamers' faces are the characters, endearing and expertly acted. It's not only the big names (like Tim Curry as the game's villain, Doviculus) that pull you in. Even the lowly characters like Headbangers, miners who are forced to break stone with only the strengths of their heads and have developed comically over-developed trapezius muscles and under-developed intelligence, will force a laugh with their quips. And who could not chuckle as they fight hordes of sequined glam rockers or emo teens followed by their own personal storm cloud?

As for the gameplay, "*Brütal Legend*" may spread itself a little too thin. Players of the demo will recognize the hack'n'slash style and occasional action-driving sequence.

But they might not expect that past the game's introduction, it becomes an open road adventure that incorporates elements not only of rhythm-action (such as short blips of a simplified "*Guitar Hero*," used to play "solos" which have certain effects on your enemies) but also real-time strategy (a la "*Command & Conquer*" or "*Starcraft*") during the larger boss battles.

While these elements were added ostensibly to help the players feel like they are truly waging epic heavy metal warfare, those looking for a simple gameplay experience to complement the funny story may be put off. Players may find the game too simplistic to be challenging, though the game does offer various difficulty options which can be changed at any time.

For those interested, the game includes many upgrades for your equipment, collectibles and environments to explore.

So many, in fact, that finishing the main storyline and all the side quests will only net you about 70-75 percent completion.

Do not fear, though. Players who search out these extras will be rewarded, whether it is with increased health, a parallel tale or an expanded sound track.

Artistically, "*Brütal Legend*" is a victory for Schafer and Double Fine, amalgamating epic environments, thrashing music and a funny story that isn't too short or too long to finish if you've got a busy schedule. If that isn't able to carry your interest, though, the gameplay may not exactly be enough to pull you in.

For those looking for a completely metal experience, this game rocks.

BOOK REVIEW

KEVIN WILSON'S FICTION RELEASE:

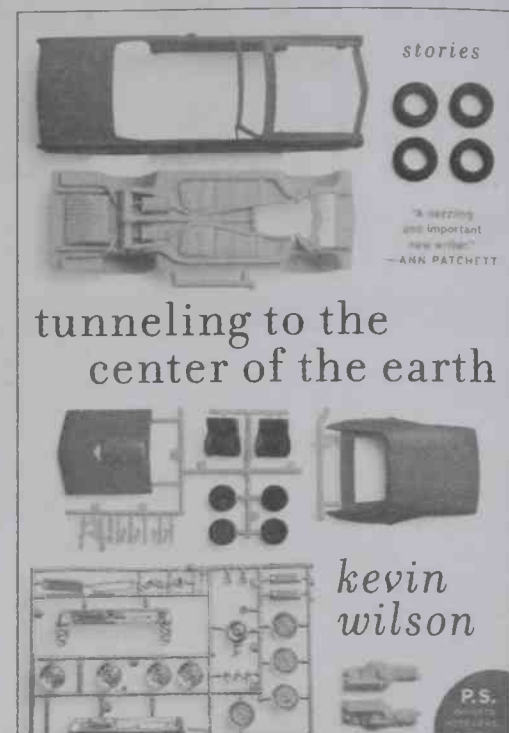


IMAGE COURTESY OF WWW.AMAZON.COM

Kevin Wilson's debut fiction release, "*Tunneling to the Center of the Earth*," is an a collection of short stories featuring fantasy-like topics. Readers can purchase a used copy of the book for about \$5 on Amazon.com.

A treasury of short essays

Caroline Matthews
Design Chief

A compilation of skillfully crafted adventures that drop the jaw and warm the heart, Kevin Wilson's debut fiction release, "*Tunneling to the Center of the Earth*," is a treat for all audiences.

Each of the 11 stories featured in the book can certainly stand on their own.

There's one about a woman in her 60s who is a stand-in grandmother to a family that has decided to "kill off" their own boring blood relative. Another features a Scrabble worker who counts his every step sorting through millions of tiles every day, looking for the letter "Q." He lives simply because he fears the fate of his parents, who spontaneously combusted. In another story, a high school cheerleader falls in love with a 12-year-old weirdo, who has such an obsession with old her and fire that he writes her name in gasoline on her front lawn. Skin grafts abruptly follow.

Why bother reading? Because Wilson is incredibly creative and an inspiration to anyone who's ever thought of taking a pen to paper. There's a shock factor in his work that is incredibly unique.

He's a virgin gem, an unpolished diamond in the rough. His ability to skate along the paper-thin pond of reality is brilliant. He brings believable elements into his seemingly unrealistic stories, like one about a baby born with a full set of teeth. Well, it was kind of hard to find that essay mildly believable. The baby was straight-up creepy, and nightmares of newborns with braces awoke this reader the following night.

But in "*The Dead Sister Handbook: A Guide for Sensitive Boys*," for example, Wilson organizes his work in the style of a genuine handbook that features both sarcasm, laughable hyperbole and the reality of a broken family after a traumatic event: the death of the better sibling, the sister. He skillfully throws in scenarios that any reader can relate to, like the discovery of the powerful fake I.D. and the location of the secret diary.

Pick it up. Putting it down will take some coaxing, since words like "wow" and "are you kidding me?" come to mind. Wilson puts the sexy back in PG-rated fiction writing, laced with almost fantasy-like characters.

CD REVIEW

Sweet tunes mellow out in 'Monsters of Folk'

Sophie Duensing
Reviewer

Halloween has come and gone, but all of your favorite folk candy is haunting the music scene dressed as the "Monsters of Folk."

"Monsters of Folk" is a showdown/collaboration album of Conor Oberst, Jim James, M. Ward and Mike Mogis. For those still off the hay ride:

Conor Oberst is best known as the front man for Bright Eyes. He's also played with his other band, the Mystic Valley Band and has a successful solo career.

Jim James is the front man for My Morning Jacket, and has also pursued a solo career under the pseudonym of Yim Yames.

M. Ward has released several acclaimed solo albums and collaborated with Zoëy Deschanel in her band, She and Him.

Mike Mogis is a producer who plays multiple instruments in Bright Eyes, in addition to preforming and engineering for many releases on the saddle creek label.

While the idea of the collaboration began five years ago, it wasn't until February 2008 that the four finally got together in Mogis' home to begin molding the record that would become "Monsters of Folk." The only bump in the road was when they realized no one was a drummer. They all gave it a shot and cranked out some pretty gnarly beats.

One would think such powerful musicians brought together might bump horns, yet as joyfully sung in "Baby Boomers," the happiest, sure-to-get-your-shoes-moving track reminiscent of Johnny Cash, proves otherwise, with lyrics, "You got to L-O-V-E your neighbors, at least the ones who are still left."

The album is jam-packed with an explosive array of energy that will make you want to both dance and cry.

Reviews of the group's live performances have been positive. Their shows not only include tracks off the "Monsters of Folk" album, but also hits by the individual members' solo careers and bands Bright Eyes and My Morning Jacket.

Oberst and James take turns with lead vocals. Oberst brings his signature story-telling words of wisdom on the darker track "Man Named Truth" with lyrics "So don't think too slow in the syrupy sun/ You'll get buried alive when the caterpillars come."



IMAGE COURTESY OF WWW.PRETENTIOUSRECORDSTOREGUY.COM

Oberst mournfully pours his voice over another classic Oberst tune, "Ahead of the Curve," with "I'm not carefree no, I'm free to care, I just never do."

James' vocal skills are otherworldly. His vocal range is incredible. His signature ethereal sound hits the soul and moves the mind. Even on the tracks he doesn't lead on, his background presence takes the song to a whole new level.

Like Bob Dylan, Oberst has often been praised more for his song-writing abilities than his vocal skills. This makes the pairing of James and Oberst a match fit for the gods.

Other notable tracks include "The Right Place" and "Good Way," which speak to saying goodbye, perhaps a reference to past musical relationships where "You taught me everything I know about taking other people for a ride."

The album is explosive, with perfect variation of speed and tones on the tracks, insightful, meaningful lyrics, impressive guitar skills and top-notch vocals. True to the title, the album is heavily folk. Even those who hadn't previously considered themselves folk fans will dig it. Anyone who has listened to any of the four's previous work must check out this album if they haven't already.