

Review: 'Disney Infinity' invites you to dream big

August 19 2013, by Lou Kesten



This video game image released by Disney shows characters from the films "Monsters University," "Pirates of the Caribbean" and "The Incredibles" in the game "Disney Infinity: The Toy Box." (AP Photo/Disney)

In ancient times B.V.G. (Before Video Games), here's how kids played: Take all your toys—dolls, soldiers, cars, blocks, that thing you got from a cereal box—and dump them on the floor. Forget about logic or plot consistency because the most important goal is to create an entertaining adventure. (My neighborhood is still reeling from the sordid G.I. Joe-Barbie affair of 1974.)

That's the essence of "Disney Infinity" (for the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Wii U, Wii, \$74.99 for starter kit). Why not let Buzz Lightyear ride Dumbo? Or invite Mickey Mouse to hang out with Wreck-It Ralph? There's one limitation: the characters have to belong to The Walt Disney Co. But given the depth of Disney's roster—which now includes "Star Wars," Marvel superheroes and the Muppets—the possible combinations do seem endless.

The starter kit comes with figurines of Mr. Incredible, Capt. Jack Sparrow and Sulley, and "play sets" for their corresponding movies, "The Incredibles," "Pirates of the Caribbean" and "Monsters University." Additional characters cost \$13 each; "Cars" and "The Lone Ranger" play sets cost \$35 each. It's hardly the optimal lineup: Disney's hand-drawn animated classics are absent, and I'd happily trade Tonto for, say, Scrooge McDuck. (I suspect the game's developers would have, too.)

The introductory package also includes the Infinity Base, which plugs into your game console and has two round spaces for characters and a hexagonal space for a play set. Park Sulley and his play set on the base, for example, and you're off on an adventure at Monsters U. By providing different game worlds for different characters, the play sets distinguish "Disney Infinity" from its obvious inspiration, Activision's blockbuster "Skylanders" series.

The initial play sets offer an engaging mix of video-game genres. The Incredibles leap tall buildings and battle evil robots. Capt. Jack engages in swordplay and commands a pirate ship. And the Monsters U. students conduct a stealthy war of pranks against their rivals at Fear Tech.

Each of these solo campaigns lasts about four hours, but you'll want to spend more time collecting the hundreds of capsules scattered across each open world. They contain the components you'll need to build your own virtual playground in the "Disney Infinity" Toy Box.

Your Toy Box begins as a small, flat plot of land that you can upgrade with trees, hills and other natural features. As you gather more capsules, you can add people, animals, vehicles and buildings. And if you're ambitious, "Disney Infinity" gives you the tools to build drivable racetracks or playable pinball tables.

If you want to jump right into the Toy Box you'll be frustrated, since you need to explore the play sets to find enough objects to build with. And there's an unfortunate element of randomization, so you may not be able to find that one item you need to top off that paintball sim you've worked so hard on. Some items are available on power discs that are sold separately—two for \$5—but they come in blind packaging so you never know what you'll get.

With its amusing, movie-specific adventures and its deep yet easy-to-use Toy Box, the "Disney Infinity" starter kit provides more than enough activity to be well worth the \$75 price. But cost-conscious parents should be wary. Once you start adding characters, play sets and power discs, your future investment in "Infinity" could be, well, infinite. Three stars out of four.

More information: infinity.disney.com/

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