**The Grinch – Game Boy Color (2000)**

Publisher: Konami

Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Nagoya

Themes: Espionage/Stealth, Licensed, Player: Villain

See Also: Bonanza Bros.,

If you ask someone who celebrates Christmas, they’ll probably tell you that one of their brightest memories of the holidays is watching the animated adaption of Dr. Seuss' <i>How The Grinch Stole Christmas</i>. It’s generally considered a classic, so, of course, somebody thought it would be a fantastic idea to ‘update’ the story as a live-action adaption, back in holiday season of 2000. Nowadays, hardly anybody ever mentions the adaption, possibly because of scenes where Jim Carrey as the Grinch mentions hanging himself, shortly before telling the Whos to kiss his ass. Probably not quite what Dr. Seuss intended, that’s for sure.

Even less is said about the game adaptions. That’s just fine for the console versions, which adapt the movie into an awful 3D platformer. The Game Boy Color version, brought out by the same folks who brought you <i>Castlevania Legends</i>, is thankfully far, far better. This particular adaption makes the game into a arcade-like stealth action game, not entirely different from forgotten Sega title, <i>Bonanza Bros.</i>

The game’s plot takes right from the live-action movie, which itself followed more or less from the original cartoon and book. The Grinch is a jerk who hates Christmas, and thus wants to ruin it by stealing all the presents from Whoville. This time, however, the Grinch decides to start stealing all the presents in broad daylight, while the Whos are content leaving their Christmas stuff all over the ground. There’s some very brief cutscenes between each world, but this is one of those licensed games that assumes you’ve seen the thing it’s based on. Each stage is a maze of interconnected screens, in which your goal is to pick up all the presents laying around. Your main obstacle are the Whos themselves, who will start loving on the Grinch should they catch him. Since he’s an antisocial kind of guy, this is equivalent to death.

The stealth part of the game comes from the fact that Whos need direct line of sight to you before they’ll be alerted to your presence. Nothing else will set them off, so Whos can generally be avoided by moving past them when they aren’t looking, making use of walls, and hiding under low cover whenever possible. Different types of Whos will react in different ways. Most of them will chase after you should they spot you, while others are harmless by themselves, but can alert other Whos onscreen. Most dangerous of all are cops, who can shoot you with an ice gun to freeze you in place, leaving you vulnerable to any approaching Whos.

If you get spotted, you’ve got a few options, the easiest of which is leaving the screen you’re on and returning. Should that fail, you can tire out pursuing Whos by running away from them long enough, or make them bump into another chasing Who to knock them down for a few moments. You have a few offensive options as well, although, since this is a Dr. Seuss property, you won’t be go around snapping necks, or such. The Grinch can blow bad breath to knock down Whos for a few moments, although the timing on this is strict enough it’s best save for people who haven’t spotted you yet. If you’re standing over snow, you can roll up snowballs to attack at range, and you’ll occasionally come across rotten eggs on screens where there’s no snow handy. There’s no way to permanently remove the Whos, however, which means you’ll always need to stay on your toes.

The game keeps that basic concept going for the seven stages it lasts, each of them broken up into several sublevels. It does, however, steadily add in new elements as you go. Later levels become much larger, and include buildings you’ll have to sneak in and out of to get all the presents. A few levels even change up the dynamic a little, like a couple of stages where you play as the Grinch’s dog, Max. Max doesn’t have any offensive options, but he can jump over enemy dogs and bark to stun them for a brief moment. Overall, though, the basic concept remains the same, so it’s good that the game provides a password option when things get a little bit too repetitive.

It’s a pretty forgiving game, as well, and it’s not going to be especially tough for anybody with even a little experience with stealth games. You’re given a lot of options for escaping from alerted Whos, and their memory only lasts into the single digits. Even if you lose all your lives, continuing only means you have to redo your current level. The lack of difficulty is forgivable, considering it’s a licensed game, at least. The hardest part of the game is how huge certain levels get, meaning that you’ll have to make a lot of progress at times getting back to where you were, should you lose a life.

While the game takes more after the art style of the movie’s merchandising more than Seuss' own work, the game generally looks pretty nice. There’s a lot of nice little details, like the way different Whos will react upon spotting the Grinch, and his goofy run while he’s being chased. One particularly goofy touch is the facial portrait of the Grinch, who’s eyes and tongue bug out upon alerting a Who. Each of the levels also does a decent job of changing up the scenery, so you’ll go from caves, to houses, to snowy city streets, meaning that the mazes themselves never get too similar. The music is pretty decent as well, although it’s pretty unnoteable for a Konami game. Sadly, there’s no 8-bit rendition of the famous theme to be found.

Overall, of the many, many licensed games Konami’s put out over the years, <i>The Grinch</i> isn’t quite their best work, mostly because of how repetitive the general concept gets, over time. It’s still far from a bad game, and its concept means it’s far more intriguing than if we got some sort of generic platformer. Out of all of Dr. Seuss’s works, it’s definitely the best video game adaption you’ll find, and far, far better than the dreadful console versions.