



HEADING WEST

Lesley Smith takes a look at the Japanese fascination with RPGs and the PS2

Japan, like the rest of the world, still loves the PS2. Despite being supplanted by its next-gen sibling, the console lives on, playing host to everything from RPGs to anime-inspired visual novels. While most games never see the light of day outside the Land of the Rising Sun thanks to subject or niche quirks, a small trickle of these games has begun hitting Europe thanks to smaller publishers like Rising Star Games.

Rising Star Games has strong Japanese links, most notably with Marvelous Interactive Inc, a company well known for producing a slew of tie-in games for anime series like *Ah! My Goddess*, *Beck*, *Kashimashi* and *Negima*, as well as fan favourites *Harvest Moon* and *No More Heroes*. With this in mind, Rising Star Games' latest releases are two distinctly Japanese RPGs: *Growlanser: Heritage of War* and *Baroque* (which is also being released on the Wii).

Growlanser: Heritage of War is the fifth in a series of strategy RPGs which have been published in Japan since the days of the original PlayStation, and introduces gamers to a war-torn land shrouded in darkness. No one can leave thanks to an impenetrable barrier, and the people are starving, destroying themselves in the process. What makes this game stand out is the distinctly Japanese character designs and the animation of Satoshi Urushihara of *Plastic Little*-fame.

Baroque (originally seen on the Sega Saturn) puts a religious twist on the RPG format, creating a world with a dense mythology and a terrifying premise. The end of the world has come and gone, leaving you - the unnamed protagonist - suffering with guilt for crimes you can't remember as the people around you try to destroy God. It's also notable as the American dub includes industry greats: Wendee Lee (*Ah! My Goddess*), Mary Elizabeth McGlynn (*Silent Hill*) and Michelle Ruff (*Haruhi*).

Baroque is out on 27 June, whilst *Growlanser: Heritage of War* is out now.

