

A MAGAZINE FOR GAMERS OVER 25

202P

MAGAZINE

VOLUME 5 - AUGUST 2006

New Super Mario Bros.

Retro gaming on the DS

Inside Issue 5

- Big Brain Academy in review
- A BookWorm review
- Life Simulations!
- Playing Games on the Cheap
- Gaming: Real Gold for Virtual Gold?

Interview: LargeAnimal

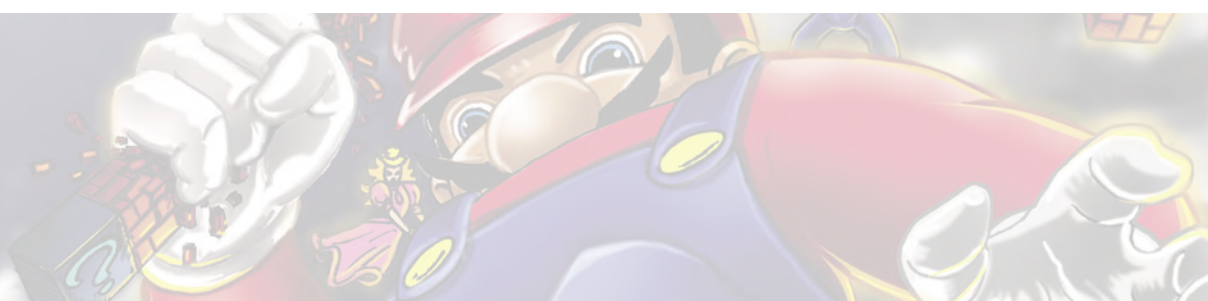
An exceptional interview which takes a look inside an independent game company

WHAT DRAWS US TO LIFE SIMULATIONS WHEN REAL LIFE IS TANGIBLE?
THE 202P TRUE HOLLYWOOD STORY: MARIO AND MORE...

2old2type Podcast | Archived Editorials | Ask MikeJames | Retro Games

IN THIS ISSUE...

10



FEATURES

26 | EDITORIALS

- Mario Galaxy: Out of this World?
- Real Gold for Virtual Gold
- Why do we Prefer Sequels over New Creative Games?
- Life Simulations
- In-Game Advertising: Ads in Games can Reduce Cost
- Playing Games on the Cheap

35 | ARCHIVED EDITORIALS

DEPARTMENTS

04 | COLUMNS

- Credits
- The Editor Pwns You!
- Feedback
- 2old2type Radio
- Tank Reports
- You Blogged This!
- Ask MikeJames

10 | REVIEWS

- New Super Mario Bros (DS)
- Big Brain Academy (DS)
- Frogger (XBL)
- Bricktopia (PC)
- PopCap Games (PC)
- Tritton AX360 Headset

24 | GAMER PROFILE

36 | RETRO GAMES

45 | SOON IN STORES

FLASHBACK



PHOTO OF THE MONTH



ON THE COVER:

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. FOR THE NINTENDO DS REVIEW ON PAGE 10



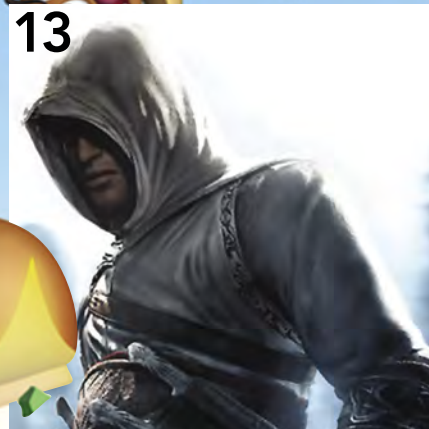
24



45



13



2



CREDITS

FRONT PAGE ILLUSTRATION:

Kirk Manley & Josh Diffey

CHIEF EDITOR:

Derrick Schommer (CodeMonkey)

EDITORS:

Daniel Plouffe (DanLeCrinque)

Cory Cheney (Drost)

Derek Nolan (DSmooth)

Eddie Barnes (edd9139)

James O'Dea (Fetal)

Jennifer Schommer (ChaosNation)

KingDrewsky

Paul Szczublewski (webmonkee) a.k.a Trupundit

Rebecca Jones (CapnHun)

Rob Dunn (DeadDrPhibes)

Todd Burbo (prododgeball)

Terry Griffith (bigeks)

DESIGN & LAYOUT:

Luke Leidal (Broken Design)

Jean-Philippe "Lunatik" Lambert (Lunatikzx)

ILLUSTRATIONS:

Kirk Manley (BATMANKM)

website: <http://www.studiokm.com>

Josh Diffey (Darth Cestual)

Chris Pierce (Gatsu Godhand)

ARTICLES, REVIEWS, INTERVIEWS, AND CONTENT:

Christopher Hemstad (TheSeeker)

Derrick Schommer (CodeMonkey)

Eddie Barnes (edd9139)

Fred Giombolini (Derrf)

Iain Farrell (iainf)

Kevin (TANK 2old2play)

Mike Serpe (MikeJames)

Tammy McCoy (TwistedCaboose)

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

LargeAnimal for the taking time to answer some questions about their company, the industry and gaming.

Wikipedia.org for providing facts and figures for information. It's nice to find a group of people that are driving to collect all the facts of the world.

THE LEGAL STUFF:

© 2006 2old2play.com and MediaCrumb, LLC.

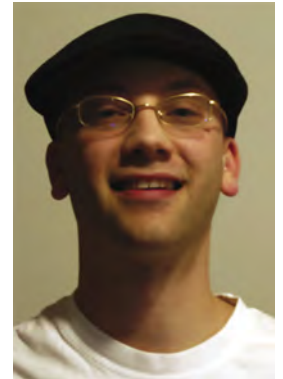
Use of the name of any product without mention of trademark status should not be construed as a challenge to such status. Copyrights are owned by the respective companies and are not claimed to be owned or operated by 2old2play.com or MediaCrumb, LLC. Articles are the opinions of the writers and no author will take claim for any injuries, damages to hardware, or silly methods of hurting yourself. Be safe.

MY BRAIN AGE WAS 24

THE EDITOR PWNs YOU!

by CodeMonkey

I must admit that I am hooked on thinking games. I am not sure what draws me to them, but puzzles and thinking games are indeed entertaining and valuable tools. I'll admit it, I really suck at math. My wife destroys me in the Brain Age calculation tests. I do not remember the last time I needed to actually remember my multiplication tables until now. What used to be boring school studies of 6x8, 7x4, and 12x5 have become a "game" to me. Perhaps I find this enjoyable because of the challenge and I feel that perhaps it might just kick my brain into shape.



"It's not that I'm lazy, Bob, it's that I just don't care." A great *Office Space* quote which rings true more often than not. Until now, I never really cared to remember how to add, subtract, multiply, and divide – that's what computers are for, right? Well I'm pleased to say that I had a brain age of 24 according to Nintendo's *Brain Age* for the DS. Unfortunately, I was only able to be smart for one day. My age has gone up since. For those that have no idea what I'm talking about, *Brain Age* ranks your brain based on tests and having an age of 20 is the best you can get. I wasn't too far off. Now I must practice each night to try to beat my prior *Brain Age* score and reach 20. Holy crap, I'm doing homework for fun.

There are many interesting games out there for a good price, which will challenge your thinking skills and keep you on your toes. You are getting older, and with age come pains and flabby brains. Don't let this happen to you. Take a twenty dollar bill you might normally spend on Pizza or a Calzone and get *Brain Age*, *Big Brain Academy*, *Sudoku* for the DS. If you're a PC gamer, you can download *Word Harmony* or *Bookworm* from PopCap Games and whip your brain into action.

Many puzzle games can also help to keep you on your toes. I've found challenge in many varying puzzle game genres. You can even stretch the truth and call games that require extensive thinking like *Oblivion* a puzzle game. Many RPG's incorporate puzzles into quest scenarios to increase the difficulty and make the rewards a higher value. However, with strategy guides and the Internet it is easy to just call it "impossible" and look up the answer. I challenge you to put that guide book away and do it the hard way, just as you did back in high school (when you weren't smoking up in the bathroom). Granted, if someone asks what you're playing you may not want to say "a puzzle game" if you're truly playing *Oblivion*. Just tell them you're playing an RPG. For a true experience, *Tetris* on the DS and *Hexic HD* on the 360 are a few well designed puzzle games.

This issue attempts to bring you closer to the heart of Mario. With a recent release of *New Super Mario Brothers* for the Nintendo DS and the hype over *Mario Galaxy* for the Wii, I think it is time to reflect on our past. That's the 2old2play way of doing things, and this month I've written a slightly "made up" version of Mario's history dubbed "The 202P True Hollywood Story: Mario." After watching the biography of Johnny Depp on the *Biography* channel, I thought to myself (being the geek that I am) "I wonder what Mario's life would be like." Therefore, in true geek fashion, I decided to bring Mario to life and see what a popular star of video games would be like.

I hope you enjoy the issue. This was a very trying month for many of us due to family vacations, summer-time fever and my *Oblivion* addiction.

Thanks,

Derrick Schommer (CodeMonkey) [level 20 battlemage]

editor@2old2play.com

GAMING ROOMS AND RIGS

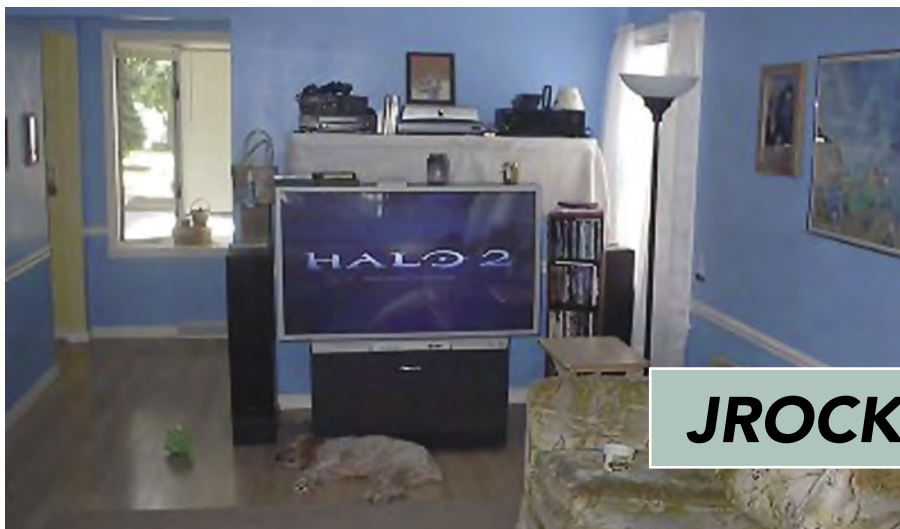
COMMUNITY MEMBERS SHOW OFF THEIR GAMING SETUPS



CYBERGLYPH

Optoma 50' DLP HD TV
Denon 3805 Receiver 7.1
Jamo speakers w/1000 Watt subwoofer
Xbox & Xbox 360 with matching Alien
theme from DecalGirl.com
I love my system. I hope you do too!

Cyberglyph



JROCK3x8

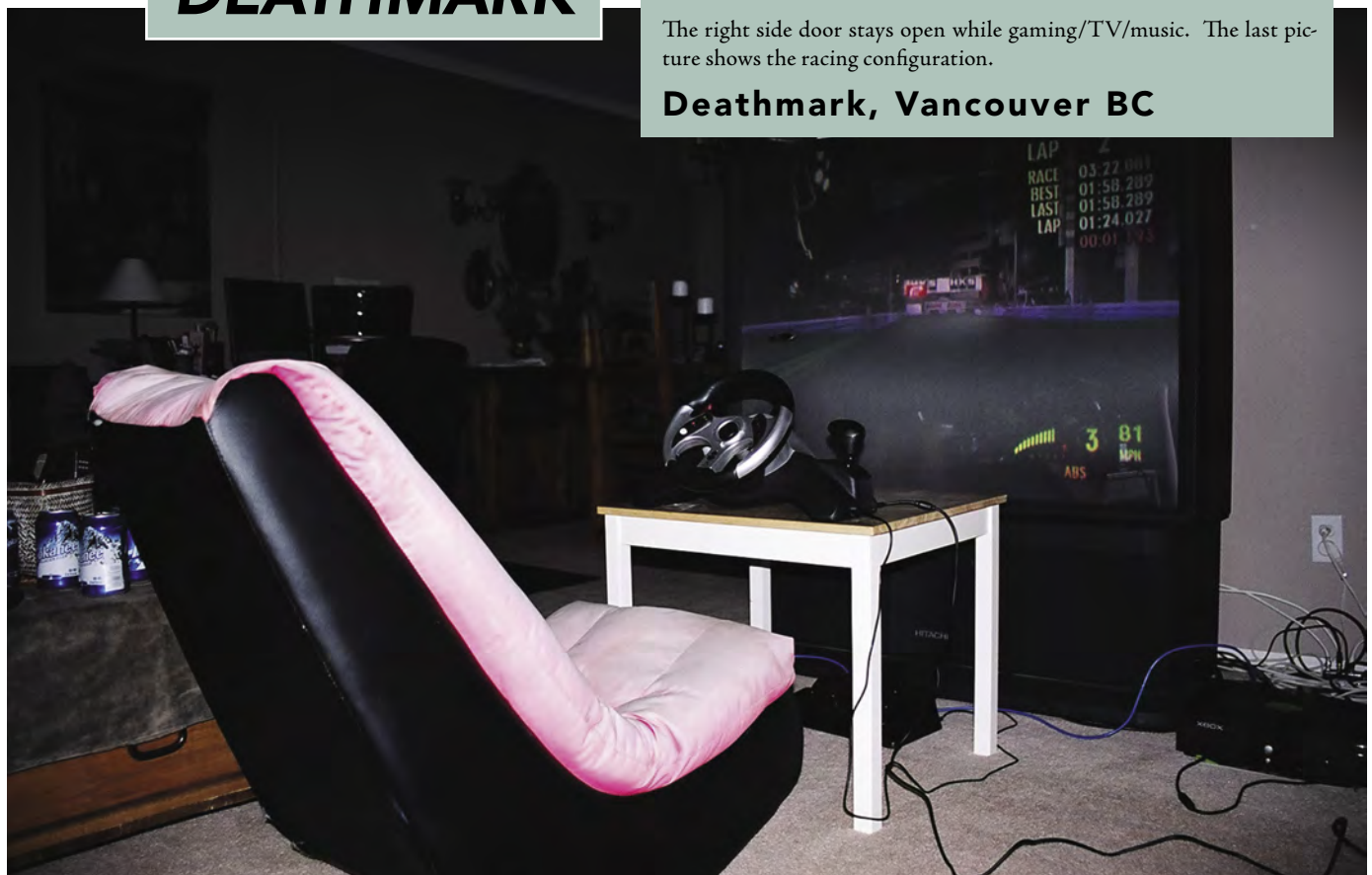
GAMING ROOMS AND RIGS (CONTINUED)

**DEATHMARK**

This is mine. Not exactly Uberl33t. The TV is about 7 years old and I really need to upgrade to widescreen. My wife has a thing for Mexican style furniture so this was a compromise to use this cabinet. She almost crapped her pants when I started drilling holes in it.

The right side door stays open while gaming/TV/music. The last picture shows the racing configuration.

Deathmark, Vancouver BC



2OLD2TYPE

AUDIO STIMULATION FOR GAMERS OVER 25



This episode consists of three personalities:

Doodirock: *The man with the master plan to bring news and information to the twenty-five and older populous. His opinions can sometimes be extreme but his questions are on target with what a gamer is thinking.*

Bliznot: *Often sarcastic attitude towards gaming and life in general (and anything doodirock says). Bliznot is there to break the seriousness with some off the wall topic of conversation that may make you say "wtf?" and spit your cola all over the keyboard.*

CodeMonkey: *The man that usually has no clue as to what he's talking about, but will convince you that he's right and you're wrong.*

EPISODE 28

This week we tried to get Aaron Greenberg, the Group Marketing Manager for Xbox Live, on the show to talk a little bit about the Xbox Live Arcade. Unfortunately, a miscommunication in time did not allow us to have him on the show. Therefore, we had to make due and simply go with the hot news of the day.

The crew discussed the Valve announcement of the Half-Life 2 series on the Xbox 360. They give their opinion of what it means for this next generation game. 2old2type also looked into the acquisition of ATI via AMD and predicts what it could mean for the graphics card industry. Next, we delve into the new leaked video of the Star Wars tech demo and try to piece together its importance on next Generation consoles. Last, we look into the latest rumors with the PlayStation 3 console and its shipments. What will Sony need to do to stay in the game?

What is this podcast you speak of?! For those of you new to the world of podcasting or currently own an iPod yet have never subscribed to a podcast, you are missing a good deal of great information. A podcast is a radio show, similar to what you would hear on a radio station in your home town, but typically more focused towards something you actually want to hear. Many podcasts contain zero commercials and can offer hours of entertainment.

Like a radio show on your way to work, you will learn the personalities of the show and begin to relate to their perspectives (or argue against them). Podcasts such as 2old2type focus on the game entertainment genre, but you can find podcasts that cover all topics in all languages. It's simply amazing, and one of the best features of the Apple iPod.

You can obtain the 2old2type podcasts on www.2old2play.com for free by clicking on the episodes directly on the homepage, or through iTunes. If you're new to podcasts, you can download episode 1 through episode 25 from iTunes and start filling up your iPod's disk capacity (episodes usually run about 50-60 minutes).

If you would like to ask the team a question about gaming, you can leave them a message at (733) 527-2961.

2OLD2CON 2006



TANK REPORTS

ALL THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE FRONT LINES

MICROSOFT WILL SPONSOR YOUR OWN LIVE ARCADE PARTY

Microsoft has announced a new community plan to help promote Live Arcade. You have to email Microsoft and they will give you 1 free pizza, 1000 Microsoft points and a free digital music download. The only thing you have to do is send them a party report. They want pictures, who partied, a note on what music you downloaded and what type of pizza you ordered. Sadly, no beer will be provided. To get your party started, email xlmail@microsoft.com with the subject line "Arcade Party." Send your request along with your gamertag.



XBOX 360 HAS REACHED THE 5 MILLION MARK

Since launch, Microsoft has shipped 5 million 360s, half way to the 10 million milestone many analysts hold as a benchmark. The theory goes, based on past console performance the one to reach 10 million units first generally leads that generation. Can Microsoft get another 5 million out before year end?

Link: <http://xbox360.ign.com/articles/720/720151p1.html>

TRITTON HAS RELEASED A TRUE DOLBY DIGITAL 5.1 HEADSET FOR THE XBOX 360



If you have a need to game and not disturb others or have other surround sound consumer electronics devices, this headset will interest you. The kit comes with a Dolby 5.1 digital decoder and can accept optical or coax digital inputs. The headset has 4 speakers in each earpiece that can individually be tuned via an in-line front, rear, center, and bass dongle. If you're on Live and want to talk some smack, there is a removable adjustable mic boom that snaps on and plugs in. At \$139 MSRP, these are very affordable, especially considering they're Dolby Digital certified.

Link: <http://trittontechnology.com/products/TRIGA600.html>

DRAGON RELEASE NEW DUAL FAN VERTICAL STAND FOR XBOX 360

Similar to the Pelican fan stand but much more refined, this stand has dual fans, one in the back and one in the front to blow in cooler air. There is an on/off switch on the front as well as a status indicator LED. The MSRP on this fan stand is also \$2 cheaper than Pelican at \$1795.

Product Info: http://pictures.xbox-scene.com/xbox360/dragon-xbox360/big_img1.jpg

Buy it here: <http://www.divineo.cn/cgi-bin/div-cn/60-pcvs.html>



ASSASSINS CREED XBOX 360 PREVIEW

Looks like Sony and the PS3 loses another exclusive to Microsoft. There is an online preview now of *Assassins Creed* for the Xbox 360, a new title by UBISoft. One less reason to spend \$200 more on a PS3.

Preview: <http://www.computerandvideo-games.com/article.php?id=143343>



NINTENDO WII TO HAVE 20-30 VIRTUAL GAMES AT LAUNCH

This is a rumor right now, but given how overwhelmed the Xbox Live Arcade team is at this point, you can bet owners of legacy game code will be jumping on the Wii bandwagon to get in the door. You can read about the buzz here:

<http://wii.ign.com/articles/720/720002p1.html>



GOT A CRACKED DS LITE? NINTENDO WILL FIX IT FREE

Nintendo has decided to do the right thing and fix cracked DS Lite hinges free of charge. They have looked into the cause of the cracking and it's due to over-tightening.

Link: <http://kotaku.com/gaming/top/nintendo-capitulates-offers-free-repairs-for-cracked-ds-lites-188778.php>

SONY LOSES DEVELOPER RELATIONS MANAGER

With all the recent news of developers dropping titles for the PS3, I guess it's not a huge surprise that well-respected industry veteran Mark DeLaura, Sony's Developer Relations Manager, has decided to step down.

Link: http://www.gamasutra.com/php-bin/news_index.php?story=10186



EDUCATIONAL GAMING

YOU BLOGGED THIS: SOUND OFF LIKE YOU'VE GOT A PAIR

Microsoft's Pandora's box was a highly addictive and educational game where you traveled the world and completed puzzles. <http://www.microsoft.com/games/pandorasbox/>

DanLeCrique, Montréal, PQ

I can help you out with the starting kids early aspect as a teacher. Our school district starts kids with a reading and math program in Pre-K or kindergarten (depending on when they enter our school). It tracks them all the way through high school and is used as the #1 factor in their placements. Am I glad that Rogue and I started our daughter on the computer before school? Heck yeah!

DixieBelle

I love the idea of portable educational games like Brain Age and Brain Academy. There are no studies that tie these specific games to making you smarter. However, there are plenty of studies that show that an underutilized brain loses its effectiveness and makes you higher risk for brain related diseases as you age. Logic games such as Crossword Puzzles or Sudoku help exercise your brain and reduce your risks. So exercising your brain through thought evoking logic puzzle games must also help reduce your risks. Kind of like if $A=C$ and $B=C$ then A must also = B .

TANK, Fremont, CA

Brain Age Check [More](#)



Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego! I say anything that helps you enjoy learning is all good. I loved playing this as a kid.

d0od, Tacoma, WA

How about The Oregon Trail? Back in grade school that was my sh*t!

Irion, Birmingham, Alabama

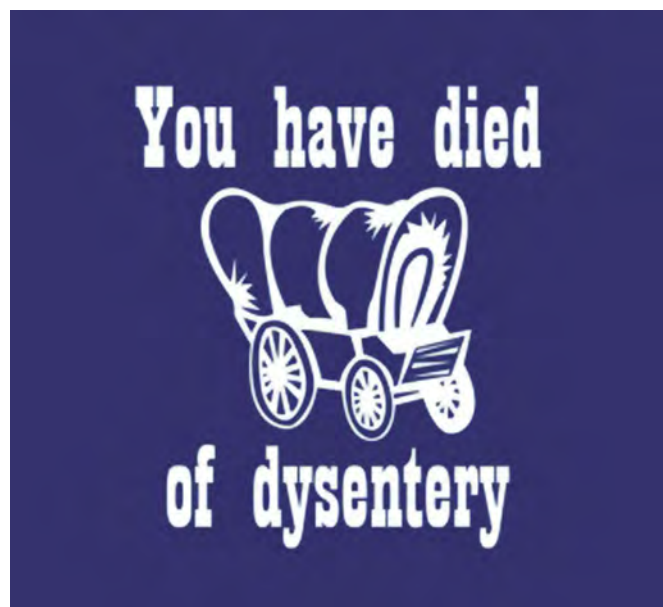
Not really a specific game, but a website full of them... www.starfall.com Best site ever. I found out about it through a friend and passed it along to my mom (she works for a school district.) She told her teacher friends, and they all rave about it. My 2-4 year old kids could spend hours on it.

LadyisRed, Beaverton Oregon

Educational software is a great tool for parents and teachers to use in educating students. If you try to make the computer a substitute teacher or parent then you will be making a mistake. However, if the computer is used as a PART of the educational process, then it can be used to supplement and reinforce lessons learned in other classroom activities.

The computer is also great at a few things that would drive a human crazy - they are infinitely patient and can repeat the same lesson over and over and over until the student is satisfied.

Plus, software can be written to take advantage of the various learning styles of students to make learning more effective and productive. I worked for an Apple Educational Sales Agent for a few years. It looks like some of it rubbed off. J



GIJoeBob

I still think this game is the sh*t as far as learning games go, and it's been around for a long time. Doesn't teach stuff like math and grammar, but it teaches Geography, economy, and other cultural stuff. I always had a lot of fun playing it though. Carmen Sandiego, Oregon Trail

Eksessiv, Cabot, AR

I found recently the Mystery Case Files games a great remake of the always fun Find the hidden items game from the magazine High-lights. I feel it is a great tool to help build the power of observation. my wife and I love this game and it is always fresh and new and challenging on every replay.

This and many other quality kids' games are at www.bigfishgames.com

selden007, Long Island, NY

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS

NINTENDO DS
By CodeMonkey



Gamers of every generation can appreciate *Super Mario Brothers*. You do not have to be an old school side-scrolling master to understand the value of a Mario game. Over the years, the retro gamer inside each of us has wanted to reach out and relive our gaming history. The *New Super Mario Brothers (NSMB)* is the first step in this process. The title is misleading; this game is not a port of *Super Mario Brothers* to the Nintendo DS. This is a brand new game that is very much a “greatest hits” of all the sequels wrapped up into a tiny DS cart.

back to get things you missed in previously conquered sub-worlds. Some sub-worlds contain hidden exits that warp you to new areas on the map or new worlds that are not achievable by following the game linearly.

If you simply travel from world to world defeating every stage that gets in your way, then you will miss world four and world seven. In order to find these worlds you must warp to them, similar to the old warp pipe mechanism in the original *Super Mario Brothers*. However, you cannot simply jump up off screen and walk to a set of pipes! You must find concealed entrances in a more imaginative way, but they do exist.

Every world has a tower midway through completion and a larger, more difficult, castle at the end of the world. Of course, you are rescuing the princess and she always seems to be in another castle. Darnn!

SIDE SCROLLING FUN

This game takes place in a graphically enhanced world similar to all of the Mario releases. You can tell the base setting is similar to the mushroom world of *Super Mario Brothers*, but many obstacles and desert settings are reminiscent of *Super Mario Brothers 2* while some game areas look and feel like *Super Mario Brothers 3*. Just when you think you’ve seen it all, you encounter a ghost house that brings back scary memories of *Super Mario World*.

The actions in this side scrolling adventure are what you would expect from a Mario game.

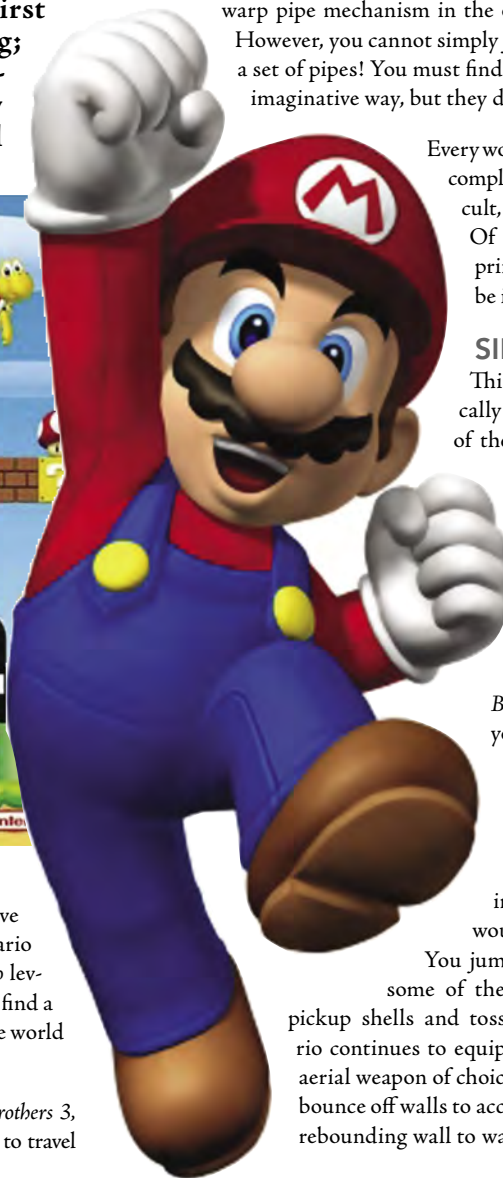
You jump, you can “butt stomp” (like some of the later releases), and you can pickup shells and toss them at your enemies. Mario continues to equip his trusty “fire power” as the aerial weapon of choice. Mario also has the ability to bounce off walls to access to new areas by continually rebounding wall to wall and inch his way higher and



THE WORLDS

A *Super Mario* game would not be complete if it didn’t have “worlds.” For those greenhorns that have never played a Mario game, this is what we gamers call a complete set of *Super Mario* levels. This release holds true to the name and the layout. You will find a total of eight worlds, each containing sub-worlds, denoted by the world name with a dash and a numeric value like 1-3 or 2-4.

This new DS release uses the map travel similar to *Super Mario Brothers 3*, which allows you to travel forward and defeat new sub-worlds and to travel



NEW SUPER MARIO BROS (CONTINUED)

higher. This takes some skill initially but becomes a valued skill later in the game and can remove you from sticky situations, especially when you are mini-Mario and have the ability to jump higher and longer.

In *New Super Mario Brothers*, you have access to the Blue Shell power-up, which allows you to duck into a shell to avoid damage and spin off into the enemies while running. There are three variants of mushroom power-ups: standard, mega, and mini. The standard mushroom is exactly what you'd expect from *Super Mario Brothers* while the mega and mini mushrooms, adopted from *Mario Party 4*, allow Mario to become extremely small and light on the jump or extremely huge and destructive to the environment. All variants of mushrooms have their advantages and disadvantages. The mini mushroom also plays a big part in finding secret areas, new warp zones, and running on water, but if an enemy hits you then you're a dead man.

If you yearn for a good side-scrolling action adventure game then this might be your cup of tea. The environment looks and feels like *Super Mario Brothers* with the 3D graphics that would match *Super Mario World* and the feature set closer to *Super Mario Brothers 3* with a hint of *Super Mario Brothers 2* thrown in.

The ability to save a power-up for later is the last major feature of this side-scrolling Mario release. If you already have Fire Mario and you find another flower, you can take it for later. Your saved power-up remains if you lose a life. This is handy when encountering bosses while in stock Mario form. You can release your saved power-up and put it to use against the bossmans or at any time during the game. You simply hit the power-up with your finger on the lower touch screen and it drops from the sky into your eager hands.

THE CHARACTERS

The character selection is just as limited as the original game release in 1985. You play as Mario while playing single player, with a secret option to play as Luigi if you load your saved game while holding the L and R bumpers. This does not take away from the game mechanics or worlds but is slightly upsetting to big *Super Mario Brothers 2* fans. To round out the game series and cover all areas this release would need to include the character selections from the second US release.

THE ANTAGONISTS

The enemies inside the *New Super Mario Brothers* are as retro as the game. The Goomba and Koopa Troopas are back in full force along with Bowser and Bowser Jr. Again you will find yourself annoyed with Kakitu, the turtle like creature in the cloud tossing spiny shells down on your head.

Many boss levels are similar to that of *Super Mario Brothers 3* mixed with a little *Super Mario Brothers* for added retro flair. You must indeed run under Bowser, grab the axe, where the bridge beneath him mysteriously disappears and he falls into the lava. The added graphical affects and smoking bones reflects the new facelift for this franchise. When you're not fighting Bowser or his little Jr. friend you meet other combatants; however, Mouser from *Super Mario Brothers 2* does not seem to make a guest appearance.

The game environment is the greatest antagonist. Some levels seem simple on the surface, but then you jump on a mushroom, it tilts sideways, and you begin to fall to your death. On occasion, a level will have mushrooms that raise and lower when you land on them or spring you into the air on a well-timed jump. The game is not complete without moving blocks, disappearing bridges, riding clouds, and all the other methods that lead to great leaps of faith. In many of the later worlds it is better to look first and try to figure out why things seem "so normal" before making a jump or trying to be tricky. The final castle also has a nasty habit of tipping upside-down when you hit certain blocks.

THE COINS

There are three types of coins that you will encounter in *New Super Mario Brothers*. The three types are the standard gold coin, a star coin, and a red coin. Red coins, similar to *Mario Sunshine*, are special coins that give you a power-up if you obtain them all. The trick to the red coin is the time limit -- you trigger a button which causes the coins to appear and you must collect them all in short time.

The standard coins work just as they did in the classic: obtain 100 and gain a 1UP. The star coins are special to *New Super Mario Brothers*. There are three hidden in each sub-world (including castles) which you can choose to hunt down or just bypass them and complete the level normally. Once you beat the game you can go back and collect the entire set of star coins you forgot before calling the game truly finished.

One can use star coins to open new paths for secret areas on the world map. Once you finish the game, you can find a new mushroom house in world one that sells wallpapers for the game and requires 20 star coins to make the purchase. The wallpapers "skin" the background of the lower DS touch screen while you're playing the game.

THE MUSHROOM HOUSES

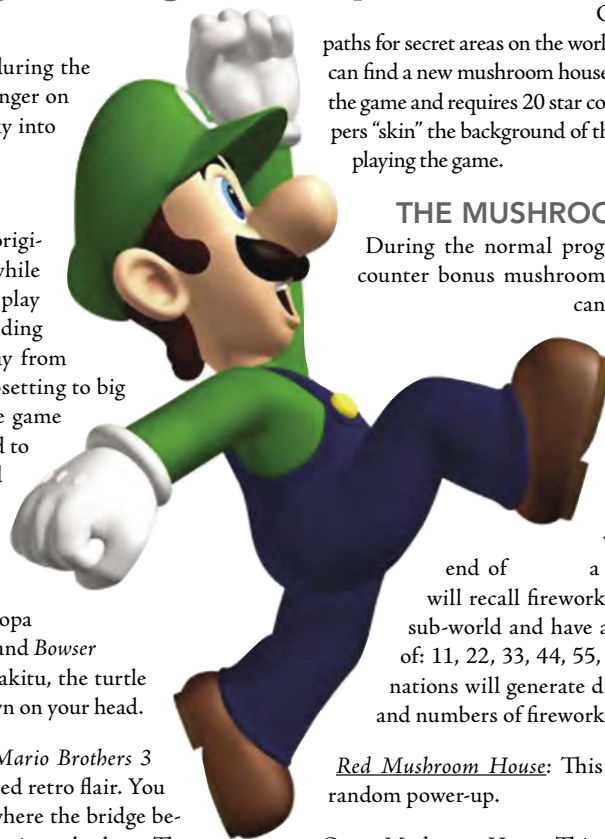
During the normal progression of the game, you will encounter bonus mushroom houses. These mushroom houses can be found throughout the world and you must pay five star coins to open the path to a house. These houses also seem to pop up "randomly" as you complete sub-worlds. The mushroom houses are not, in fact, random, but appear when you set off fireworks when hitting a flagpole at the end of a stage. For those retro gamers you will recall fireworks firing off when you complete the sub-world and have a timer that has the last two digits of: 11, 22, 33, 44, 55, 66, 77, 88, or 99. Different combinations will generate different types of mushroom houses and numbers of fireworks.

Red Mushroom House: This house provides Mario with some random power-up.

Green Mushroom House: This house provides Mario with a "shell game" of sorts and the end result is one or more extra 1-UP mushrooms.

Orange Mushroom House: A guaranteed Mega Mushroom, which you can save for later use on a difficult stage.

If you yearn for a good side-scrolling action adventure game then this might be your cup of tea.



NEW SUPER MARIO BROS (CONTINUED)

The mushroom houses come in handy during tough levels but it seems that the Green Mushroom House makes the game easier than need be. This mushroom house appears fairly often and usually offers five to fifteen additional lives. A few green mushroom houses and you find yourself easily carrying 30 to 50 extra lives in times of trouble. That is a great deal of extra lives!

SURROUND SOUND

The sound is one of the great improvements over the original NES Mario games. The surround sound is amazing on the little handheld. The DS instantly immerses you into the colorful world of *Super Mario Brothers* just as if you were wearing headphones and in a land far, far away. Although few Mario games have a complex musical score, the game holds true to the classic sound effects and game music with the bonus of clarity and surround.



UTILIZING DS CAPABILITIES

The *New Super Mario Brothers* game uses very little of the DS' touch screen capabilities. The dual screen does come in handy while playing a level. It gives you a sense of how far you are through a given sub-world and allows you to see how many star coins you have to obtain in the level. The additional screen frees up more game real estate on the playable screen. This allows you to be immersed in the level and compensates for the small screen size compared to standard TV sets.

The only touch screen activity is selecting your saved power-up. The power-up icon is conveniently stashed near the edge of the screen close to the buttons, so it's easy to tap it with your thumb to hand it to Mario.

If you close the DS while you're mid-game, the system will fall into sleep mode and Mario will say "bye bye" and remain frozen in time until you get a chance to play again. Now you are able to play at stop lights during your commute to work (don't do this)!



MINI GAMES

The cartridge comes with a large set of Mario mini games that take full advantage of the *Nintendo DS* capabilities. There are action, puzzle, table, and variety game sections. These include 18 challenging Mario-themed games. Some games involve you launching items up into the air using the touch pad, blowing into the microphone to push Yoshi in his hot-air balloon, poker, memory, identification, and a highly addictive Mario trampoline game.

Each mini game keeps the high scores so you can play competitively against family members. My two-year old daughter found a few of the games fun to play even though she did not fully grasp the concepts. Children get a kick out of being able to "touch" a character and have them react. She did hold the record in Lakitu Launch for a few days before I finally beat that record.

TWO PLAYER

This DS game includes a "versus mode" where you and a friend can battle it out as Luigi and Mario. You have a selection of stages where you pummel the coins out of each other and try to collect them all for the win. At first it seemed simple, but fifteen games later and it was time to go back to work. One player needs to own the game and the other downloads it dynamically to play the versus mode option.

CONCLUSION?

This is *not* the original *Super Mario Brothers* with a graphic overhaul. *Super Mario All-Stars* re-made *Super Mario Brothers* with a graphical facelift in 1993. This is an entirely new game with completely new levels heavily influenced by prior Mario games. If you are hesitant to again re-buy *Super Mario Brothers* then have no fear. This is a "new" *Super Mario Brothers* side-scroller that contains enough of the Mario heritage to make you feel like a child again.

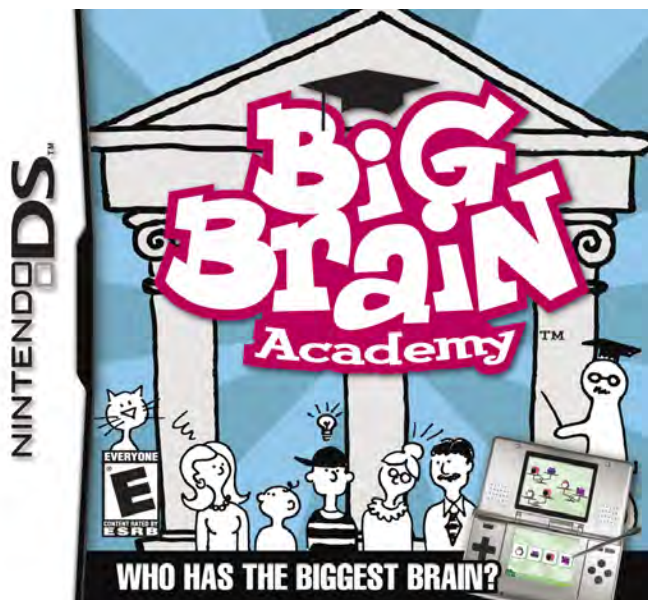
Rating: BUY

BIG BRAIN ACADEMY

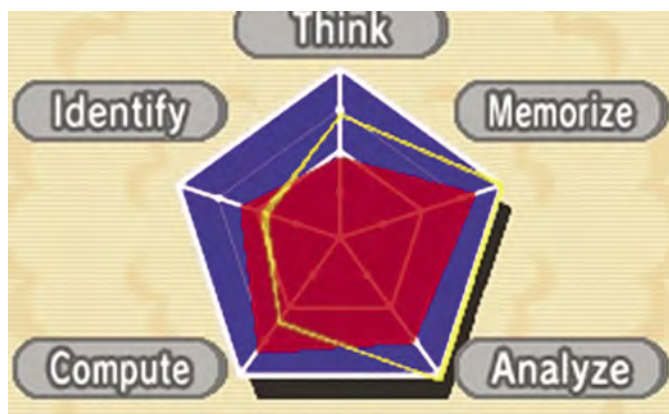
NINTENDO DS

by Derf

Nintendo has followed up its widely acclaimed (see 202p Magazine issue #4) *Brain Age* with a new game – *Big Brain Academy (BBA)*. Since I loved *Brain Age* I couldn't wait to pick this one up.



While *Brain Age* was based on Professor Kawashima's brain research, *Big Brain Academy* has no reference to the good Doctor. I found this disappointing because some of the draw of *Brain Age* was the research indicating that playing the game might improve brain function. I think it would be interesting to see why the Professor was written out of this release.



The premise of *Big Brain Academy* is by mastering a set of mini brain games, your brain weight (score) will go up. I seriously doubt my head weighs any more. In *Brain Age*, the goal was to exercise your brain in a fashion that stimulated the prefrontal cortex, the center of intellect with the goal of keeping your brain young. This has an appeal to me especially since I am 50. *Big Brain Academy*, although fun to play, isn't backed by research and the game itself seems to cater to a younger crowd. Your mentor in BBA is Professor Lobe. I'm guessing the character is a hunk of brain tissue but to me it looks like a slug with a graduation cap on. Professor Lobe will initially give you a weight. Your goal is to improve your score (brain weight) by doing the practice exercises. Exercises are divided into five groups, with results displayed on a pentagram graph. The five groups are:

Think: Involves thinking through a problem. Sets of animals are placed on scales and you are to deduce which ones are heavier. In another game you trace a path to get the animals to meet up.

Memory: Memorizing sounds or numerical sequences.

Analyze: Counting blocks that fit into patterns or connecting dots to finish a diagram.

Compute: Solving simple mathematical problems.

Identify: Identifying moving shapes or putting shapes together.

All 15 mini games are fun, and on the easy setting it's not difficult to progress. Every exercise has three difficulty levels – easy, medium and hard. After some practicing you'll want to retake your test and see how much weight your brain has put on. Also, your brain weight and pentagram are combined to give you a profession, such as artist or engineer.

Playability is excellent. The main reason for this is that both the speech and handwriting recognition are not used, as they were problematic in *Brain Age*. You simply tap the correct answers with the stylus. I really don't miss shouting "blue" at my DS while it thinks I'm saying "black." But on the down side the recognition, when it works, made *Brain Age* interesting.

The game includes a "Versus" mode where you can play with up to three other players. *Big Brain Academy* will even download the software to the other machines making it a one card game. In versus mode a problem is asked and each person answers it. The first person that gets the problem right gets the most points and the other players are ranked accordingly. An initial goal is set, so the first person that achieves that score wins.

You can download the demo of the game to another DS as well. The demo version only includes the testing module.

My game store clerk misled me by telling me this was the follow up to *Brain Age*. Don't make that mistake. There is a follow up to the *Brain Age* program in the works. That said, I enjoy playing *Big Brain Academy* even though it seems to be aimed at a younger crowd. Since there are no features to unlock, once you master the mini games there doesn't seem to be anything to keep you coming back to the game. *Big Brain Academy* has no *Sudoku* module like *Brain Age* does to keep you engaged.

Rating: BUY



FROGGER

XBOX LIVE ARCADE

by Codemunkee



It's been an admittedly rough summer for the Xbox 360 owner. Sure, there are many great looking anticipated titles coming down the pike soon, but this season has brought little for the discriminating gamer (at least the critics will have you believe that). Arcade, in particular, has taken a hard hit, with many announced titles mysteriously disappearing into the ether. After the release of *Uno*, the Arcade community has been buzzing in anticipation and impatience, wondering where our promised content was.

The Arcade drought was finally broken with the promised release of an *Xbox Live Arcade (XBLA)* title every Wednesday, beginning with *Frogger*. When it was announced at E3, a lot of "awwws" were heard throughout the gaming community - suddenly we were George Costanza in the pizzeria, the joystick with the right amount of grease, yada yada yada... you got the high score.

Now that it's here, have the good ol' days of our youth returned? Are we going to be delivered back to our tender pre-teens, spending inordinate amounts of time pushing that frog across traffic and the river to his home?

CONTROL

Frogger is best played with the D-Pad, as the analog stick does not respond well to the rapid taps you need to make to move Frogger through obstacles. Even with the D-Pad, *Frogger* will sometimes do whatever he damn well pleases. Several times while I rapidly tapped up on the pad, I heard the "boink" (or is it a "splat"?) associated with my movement, but *Frogger* didn't feel like moving - and I'd die. Alternatively, if I wanted to go left or right, I'd end up going up or down, straight into the river or into oncoming traffic.

As you feel your frustration level bubble and rise, you take a deep breath and give it another shot. Then you notice the collision detection. Konami should be ashamed of itself; it looks as if they gave this port assignment to a student game designer. The collision detection, in a word, is absolutely poor. It is especially awful on the river, where finding the "sweet spot" to get Frogger to home is just rough. Hitting the spots on the farthest left and right of the screen is a complete crapshoot. Moving Frogger through traffic as it speeds up amounts to moving and praying that you don't get nailed by some phantom corner of a car.

It's around then where you're really tempted to turn your controller into a deadly projectile, possibly resulting in a trip to your electronics store of choice for a replacement.

GRAPHICS

Frogger won't win any awards. The sprites have been obviously tuned up - you can see cracks in the sidewalk, fumes from the exhaust of the cars, and river waves, such as they are. The tune-up looks inconsistent, though. The snake in particular is a laugh riot. The thing that floats in the river, the ratdog/otter/weasel type creature, makes me wonder why I'm using my \$400 machine to play this average looking game.

The graphics also lag pretty badly in 2-player mode. For a game that relies on timing and precision this is troubling, but when you consider that at the core it's just a 2D tile based game it's REALLY puzzling. How many network packets does this thing send during 2-player games?

SOUND

Unremarkable. The music is repetitive, but not unpleasant. You may want to fire up your favorite soundtrack for this. Don't expect anything more than a semi-rousing version of "Yankee Doodle" when you bring Frogger home. The sound effects are also pretty generic, but appropriate.

GAMEPLAY

It's *Frogger*, it is simple, and when you manage to learn the quirky controls, it's actually pretty fun. The levels get progressively harder, and only truly skilled, patient players will make it past level five. This isn't so much a challenging game in itself, but the controls make it far more challenging than it really should be.

These controls complicate some achievements, especially the time based ones, but most of *Frogger's* achievements are reachable by just about everyone. The *15 frogs home without dying* achievement is particularly vexing.

OVERALL

Frogger is frustrating, mediocre looking, and occasionally irritating. Yet you will still be drawn back to play. As much as this game screams to be panned, it's a fairly addicting game. People who have played the game back in its heyday will not find any major surprises - it's a pretty faithful representation of the arcade original. Players who have not tried it may want to play the demo first. The initial experience with the controls and collision detection is sure to turn people off from a real purchase. If you are patient and willing to stick with it, you'll find yourself firing it up over and over again.



LEGO: BRICKTOPIA

LARGE ANIMAL
by CodeMonkey

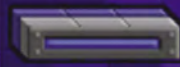
Arcade games in the home and office are building momentum and Bricktopia is here to help push it along.

Bricktopia is an updated version of a classic arcade style game similar to breakout or arkanoid, in which the objective was to eliminate a wall of 'bricks' at the top of the screen. The player controlled a paddle at the bottom of the screen to 'hit' a ball at such an angle to hit and destroy a brick. The ball would then 'bounce' back towards the bottom of the screen and the player would hit it again. When the wall was completely destroyed, the level was over. With Bricktopia, LEGO! has made a refreshing spin on the breakout genre. For \$19.95, this game yields hours of entertainment by granting the player a seemingly endless supply of new stages (over 160) to complete.

The uniqueness of *Bricktopia* lies in the LEGO! Pieces, which are uncovered as the player smashes the bricks into small bits while obtaining dropped powerups that help to accomplish his or her goals. Once the bricks are broken and all the LEGO pieces found, the level is complete. If the player is talented enough he/she can catch each dropped LEGO piece on the paddle for bonus points. As the game play continues, there are new types of powerups that become unlocked. Occasionally a little "LEGO team" dude pops up throughout the level via a hidden window and chucks out the unlocked powerups to the player to assist his/her cause. He may not be an all-star nose tackle, but he sure does help out in some sticky situations! The next stage is unlocked by reaching it via the *Full Game* mode. After a stage is unlocked, it can then be played in *Single Level* mode.



Since there are 150 levels of normal play (not including bonus stages), *Full Game* mode takes a long time to defeat.



System Requirements
Windows 98, XP, 2000
Pentium 600 mhz
256 mb ram
64 mb free disk space
16 mb video card
Direct X 8
Audio Card



The ultimate goal is to collect all the fallen LEGO pieces and stack them on the paddle. The stacked LEGO pieces, however, offer a unique challenge because they do not always fall in a nice orderly pattern. Deflecting a small white ball with a LEGO staircase is not as easy as it sounds! After the player has stacked three LEGOs on the paddle, he/she has the option to 'right click' the mouse and store the LEGOs as an über LEGO shield that protects the ball (for a number of hits) from falling into the void of no return when the player misses. LEGOs left on your paddle at the end of the round translate into *bonus points*. Points after all, are what make an arcade game. There is no better reward than getting your name on the scoreboard and having your friends fail to beat you!

If you are after a fast-paced *breakout* type game then *bricktopia* may not be to your liking. This game is slightly slower in game speed than games like *breakquest* by Stardock Entertainment. Although the game play is slower, the levels are more difficult, and it gets harder to unlock and catch all the LEGO pieces from the puzzle while juggling a moving ball. Some animated levels add a high degree of difficulty to what seems like a fairly simple stage. Moving platforms can slap the ball back in the player's face before he/she expects it, and people who get overconfident by pushing the ball faster via left-clicking will find themselves in a world of hurt very quickly.

Once the first 150 have been beaten, "blitz" mode is unlocked. This mode is simple craziness, with randomly changing weaponry and effects as the game is played. It also offers random access to many of the game's powerups: fireworks firing off, arctic blasts, hammers, and more. This mode allows the levels to be cleared fast with *all* the additional powerups available through the levels. This feature is a 'just for fun' reward for defeating all the stages.

The look and sound offered by *Bricktopia* are just what is expected from a new release. The colors are bright and flashy, the animation for powerups and effects are great, and the sound is thumping. However, *Bricktopia* is not breaking any new boundaries in arcade graphics. It is not the game for a person who considers eye candy the primary factor for a purchasable game. Indeed, it would almost seem silly to expect more from a *breakout* style game. This game offers the expected quality for the price and genre.

If you're an arcade gamer with a love of *breakout* and are looking for a game with more goals, challenges, and methods to earning points, then you may want to take a closer look at *Bricktopia*. The demo is free to download from <http://www.largeanimal.com/node/94/> so you can try before you buy. The full deluxe download will cost you \$19.95 and will be fun for the entire family.

Rating: BUY

POPCAP GAMES

WORD HARMONY, TYPER SHARK AND BOOKWORM: DELUXIFIED by CodeMonkey

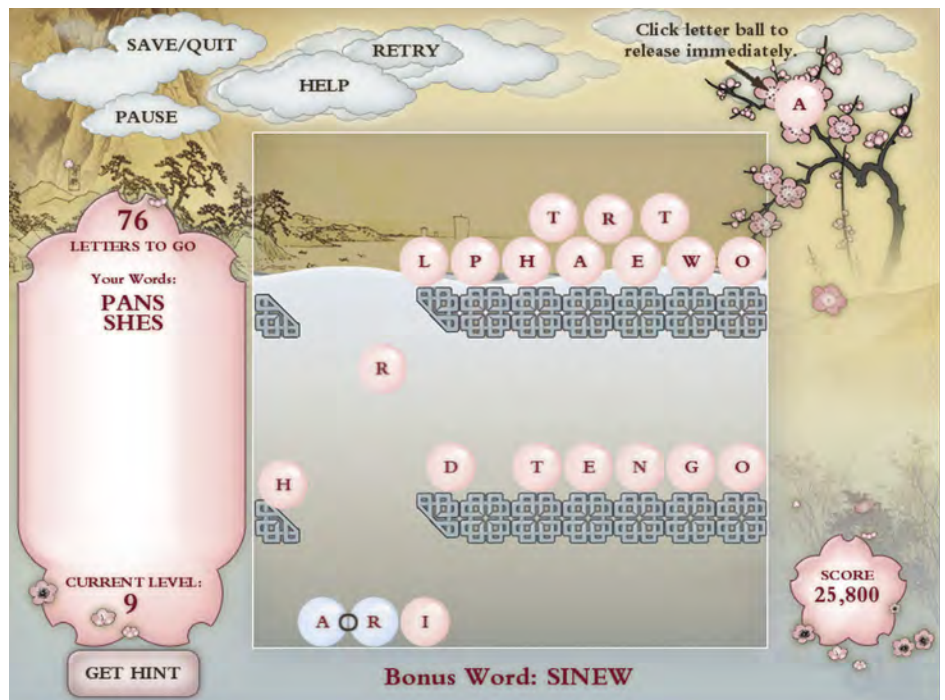
LEARN THIS: THINKING GAMES ARE FUN.

Our parents once told us that video games deteriorate our minds. Years later and thousands of hours spent blasting aliens, capturing the Triforces, and tackling quarterbacks has taught us a few things about video games. They keep us sharp, expand our imagination and entertain us when we're lonely. Unbelievably, there are many great educational games that exist on the market which do more than entertain. *PopCap* creates a few addictive arcade style puzzle/learning games to grow our brains larger and full of wrinkles.

If you are looking for a good puzzle game that will also increase your brain size, then *Word Harmony* may be what you need. You have three unique modes of play: Relax, Tsunami, and Think. Each mode uses the same premise of building words out of letter bubbles. If you are looking for a simple game to entertain your brain during lunch or before you tuck yourself into bed, check out *Word Harmony*.

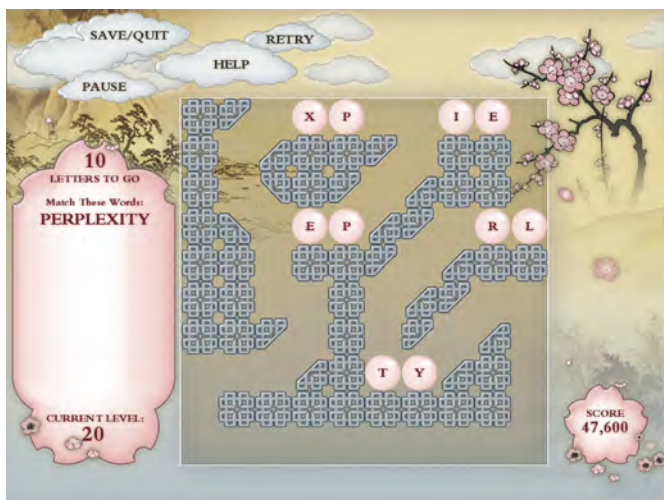
In Relax mode, you must build a word out of the supplied letter bubbles that are mixed up in an environmental maze. Only one word must be spelled, but you must first order the bubbles correctly. To order the words you must drag them through the maze and line them up in the right order. The starting levels are simple, but rapidly increase in difficulty. It is not hard to spend ten minutes trying to solve some of the more difficult barriers.

In Tsunami mode, you must build words in a short period of time before the water rises to the top of the screen and finishes you. You can build any words you want; there is no list to choose from but you click "Get Hint" when you are stuck and running out of time. The concept seems easy until you find yourself racing against the clock to spell enough words to make it to the next level and reset the water timer. Your brain almost seems to get bigger as you defeat each level. This mode is almost the complete opposite of Relax mode so pick the one that fits your mood.



In Think mode, most of your time is spent thinking of words to complete the puzzle. You have as much time as you need but the mode is very open ended in word choices. You can build any words you want but you **must** use every letter bubble supplied to move to the next level. If you find yourself out of words and only have bubbles like "E," "I" and "E" you may have to choose to *recycle* one of your prior words to build a longer word (or two better ones) to consume all the letters. Unlike Relax mode, the environment does not cause you too many barriers, but the assortment of letters you have to choose from can make this mode extremely difficult.

If you want to spend your \$19.95 on a game that will increase your brain capacity or assist your kids in school, then think about *Word Harmony* as a solution. The game allows for different styles of play depending on your mood and helps you to think quickly on your feet. This is a graphically pleasing puzzle game with a hint of educational value.



Rating: BUY

Demo: <http://www.popcap.com/launchpage.php?theGame=wordharmony&src=leftnav>

PC System Requirements

Operating System:	Windows 98/ME/2000/XP
Memory:	128 MB RAM
Processor:	500MHz or faster
DirectX:	7.0

POPCAP GAMES (CONTINUED)

Many PC gamers have a tendency to use their computers for other non-gaming related tasks, such as work. Many computer users are hooked into the Internet and spend a good deal of time sending e-mail messages and instant messaging with friends.



These tasks require a good bit of typing, so it's important to have decent typing skills. There are a lot of typing tutor programs out there that are designed to improve your typing skills, but most are bland and boring. Typer Shark is a good game to entertain you, challenge you, and improve your typing skills.

Typer Shark offers three modes of play: Adventure, Abyss, and Typing Tutor. If you are a newbie typist you may want to start off with the Tutor mode or Adventure mode. This game can be extremely difficult for all levels of skilled keyboard typists. Those that are more experienced will want to skip out on that Tutor mode because it's not going to push your words per minute past 35 WPM.

Your typing skills are tested when selecting a game for the first time. This will allow the game to best fit you into its difficulty levels. After running the test, my WPM was 72 and then the game adjusted my WPM to 71 for all errors I made. "Expert" was suggested as my level of difficulty – not too shabby. The highest skill is X-Treme; I did not make the cut for that level.

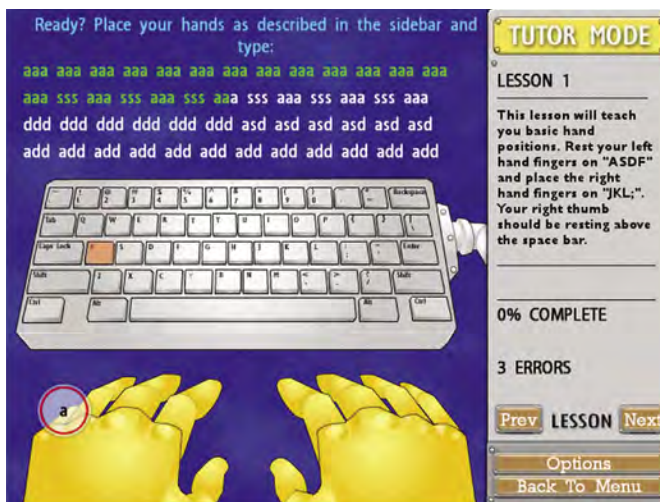


Adventure mode brings you through many levels of game play. Each level ends with a map selection where you can choose a new scenario to play, similar to the *Super Mario Brothers 3* world map. The goal of adventure mode is to dive to the bottom of the ocean and find treasure in a sunken ship. Along your way, you encounter sea life that wants to kill you. All beasts, usually a set of sharks, contain words on their bellies and you must type them on the keyboard to kill them. If you miss and they reach you, it will be all over for your life. Type fast!



Abyss mode is an infinite dive that grows in difficulty as you dive deeper into the ocean. Your first encounters will be a few sharks, but face more difficult sharks the deeper you get. You must solve the word on their belly and then the next word that appears and a third before they fall to your might. Every 400 feet, the game saves your progress so you continue later.

The variation of fish makes this a challenge for experienced typists. Little piranhas that charge at you may only have one letter on them but they come in large schools. Furthermore, you will find that it can be harder to type random characters than full words (for those good typists). Some of the sharks bolt towards you partially visible and your goal is to hit them before they get too close in order to make them fully visible and slow them down. As you're killing off your attackers, you will build a charge in your "Shark Zapper" that will destroy everything on the screen so use it when you're in serious trouble.



If you have learned to type and need to refresh your skills, then this is the game for you. The game offers great challenge for all skill levels, but I highly suggest it for those with weak typing skills to assist in their typing dexterity. Those that have never typed before can work on the Tutor mode, but I suggest purchasing a real (boring) typing application first and then move to this for practicing. It may be the best typing tool for the low cost of \$19.95.

Rating: BUY (if you need typing practice)

Demo: <http://www.popcap.com/launchpage.php?theGame=typer shark&src=leftnav>

PC System Requirements

Operating System:	Windows 98/ME/2000/XP
Memory:	128 MB RAM
Processor:	500MHz or faster
DirectX:	7.0

Also available for play on the Web using your browser.

POPCAP GAMES (CONTINUED)

I must be honest with you up front. When I first downloaded BookWorm, I was just trying to be nice and give the “thinking game” a chance. An hour later, I was unable to walk away from my computer – hooked like a video game junkie. I was not prepared for the amount of fun I would enjoy with a “simple word game.” Sometimes you have that, “I just wasted so much time on this video game” feeling after a four-plus hour World of Warcraft session. I can honestly say I walked away from BookWorm feeling like I “used” this game – not “wasted time” on it.

BookWorm is a puzzle game where you must build words out of the letter pieces on the board. Each piece contains a single letter and you must click an adjacent letter and build a string of characters into a word like “chicken.” After you successfully string a word together, the tiles in the word disappear and the tiles above drop into place. As you build words and gain points, you move through higher ranks of *BookWorm* and the game becomes significantly more difficult. The difficulty lies in the flaming letter blocks. Over time, you will be presented with a letter that is on fire, and if you do not spell a word with that letter it will begin to burn through the lower letter on the playing board. Each time you build a word that doesn't use it, the fiery letter melts further. If it hits the bottom, the library goes up in smoke and the game is over.

At first, I thought I had the best method to beating this game: design small words. “hut,” “car,” “are,” “RAM,” and I was on a roll! However, you receive minimal points for three-letter words (unless it's with a tough letter like “Qu” or “J”). The game also penalizes you with additional flaming letters to teach you that larger words offer more reward. As you progress in levels, you will find flaming letters appearing more often and it becomes a rush to squelch them all before your ultimate failure. The flaming letters definitely build up the intensity of the level.



There are gold letters and green letters that you can find in a stage as well. The green letters show up fairly often as you're completing words, but gold letters are special and only show up if you create great words. This encourages you to complete words that are more complex to get big points for complexity and massive bonuses with all the green and gold letters.

BookWorm offers two modes of play: Classic Game and Action Game. In the Classic setting, you can take your time finding the words, but the Action mode gives you limited time before it starts lighting letters on fire. You must race to build words out of the burning letters before the next random letter begins to burn. Before you know it, you're building two or three words at a time (in your head), trying to predict the next catastrophe. The action mode challenges your brain in ways you never thought possible. You will walk away from the game satisfied, and with a little ache in your head; that feeling is called “learning.”



The need to build high scores and ridiculously long words is extremely addictive in *BookWorm*. It might be due to its obvious focus on points as you complete words. As you get better you begin to look for those high scoring letter blocks like “Qu” and work to make odd words that you may or may not even realize exist. I found I could learn new words if I started building a word that simply looked like it could be something in a dictionary, and often times it was! Once in awhile, the Book Worm that watches your game will tell you what some of the more difficult words actually mean. That is handy because I also learned something. It's nice to learn something every now and again.

Your final score is shown once you've been defeated along with a textual rank for your profile. The game then displays your highest scoring word as well as your biggest word. You can post your scores on the Internet. I posted my score on the Internet because my game lasted roughly four hours, not constant play mind you, and I thought I did well. Alas, my score was several hundred thousand less than some of the high scoring people! Apparently, I am not nearly as smart as I thought I was. My proudest moment was reaching the game rank of *Editor*, which is prophetic.

The game graphics are excellent for the game genre, and the music score is entertaining. The replay value is simply amazing. Classic mode does not rush you through the levels – you can move at your own pace. The action mode allows you to work your brain while having a fun time.

I suggest this game to older gamers who have many distractions at home, with the kids, or are often on the go. It makes a great lunch time activity at work. If you want your kids to learn using educational games this is a great idea. They might just become addicted to high scores and want to play the game without you forcing it upon them. There is no better puzzle game on the market today for the low price of \$19.95.

Rating: BUY

PC System Requirements

Operating System:	Windows 98/ME/2000/XP
Memory:	128 MB RAM
Processor:	500MHz or faster
DirectX:	7.0

Macintosh System Requirements

Operating System:	Mac OS 10.2.8 and later
Memory:	128 MB RAM
Processor:	G4 or G5

Also available on PalmOS, PocketPC.

SURROUND SOUND DIRECT TO YOUR SKULL

A REVIEW OF THE TRITTON AX360 DOLBY 5.1 HEADSET/MIC

by TANK

A few people have a need for a headset while gaming. Whether the wife doesn't want to be disturbed by the noise, the kids are sleeping, you're up late and can't crank the volume or maybe you're taking your gaming rig on the road and don't want to lose your surround sound, there are a number of scenarios that may deem the need for such a product. Tritton has come to the market with their Audio Xtreme 360 headset, which has a true Dolby Digital 5.1 decoder at a reasonable \$150 MSRP price tag (look around though, you can find better prices).

WHAT'S IN THE BOX

Tritton has put together a very complete package. Here's what you get:

- 5.1 headset
- Detachable mic
- Mic cable extension cable
- Decoder box
- Decoder box power brick
- Optical digital sound cable
- Coax digital sound cable
- PC G9 analog sound card interface cable
- Stylish carry bag
- Almost useless quick start guide

COSMETICS

The headset is fairly stylish. It's a full over-the-head style headset with large ear cups. The set is predominately black with the exterior of the ear cups a metallic steel-blue color. The metallic steel-blue color theme carries over to the Decoder Box. The finishes all appear to be a nice quality and it doesn't look or feel cheap.

HOOKING IT UP AND MAKING IT WORK

The main problem with the headset is that it comes with a ton of things to connect and extremely poor documentation. The quick-start guide simply labels the components and tells you how to adjust the volume and basic things like that. However, there is no wiring guide; you're left up to your own creativity to figure that out. But I'll help you with that if you're hooking up to an Xbox 360.

First, take the round plug of your headset cable (which is about 12 feet long) and plug it into 1 of the 2 headset jack ports labeled with a headset symbol (you can purchase a 2nd headset for \$60). Next, take the included optical cable, plug one end of it into the optical port on the decoder (which is on the opposite side of the headset jacks) and plug the other end into your Xbox360's optical

port. If you're already using an optical cable, just take the optical cable from your amp and plug it into the optical port on the decoder. Whichever is easier for your setup. Then on the decoder you'll notice a switch between the optical and coax inputs, flip it to the optical side. Then take your power brick out, plug one end of it into your wall socket and plug the other end into the decoder. You'll find the power jack is on the same side as all the buttons on the decoder. Finally, on the in-line adjustment, set Front, Rear, Center, Bass all to 5 on the dials. Now you should be good to go. Press the power button on the decoder (same side as where the power plugs in) and you'll see the lights on the top of the decoder light up. Now turn on your 360 and see how loud things are. Use the volume up / down buttons to adjust the master volume. The volume increases in 1dB increments from 1dB up to 40dB.

THE MIC AND VOICE

The microphone is totally removable and adjustable. It's almost as if it's a stand-alone product that is attached. The Mic must be snapped in on the left side of the headset, and you'll see a nub sticking out where it snaps on. Then you can bend the flexible bit to get a good location in front of your mouth. Get the mic extension cable out, plug it into the cable on the mic and plug the other end into your 360 controller. You control the voice volume and mute through the guide button. Press the controller's guide button and go to Personal Settings, then Voice. In here, you can turn the voice volume up/down (which actually isn't needed) and mute your mic. You may also be interested in the Datel Xbox1 to 360 adapter, which will add an in-line mute/volume option and costs around \$10 at Circuit City. Also in this panel, you're going to need to set the Voice to come through your Speakers. Remember, you're not wearing a 360 headset, you're wearing a set of speakers, so you need to make that adjustment and then you'll be able to hear people fine.

DESIGN & COMFORT

The AX360's are padded in all the right places. The top band has nice, thick padding you would expect to find in a headset of this style. The ear pieces are adjustable both in tilt and distance from the top band, making for a very adjustable, very comfortable fit on a variety of melon sizes. The ample ear cup padding seems to be designed go around your ear, sealing in your ear. Normally this headset your ears are inside the cup and the padding is touching the side of your head. This is probably to maximize the 5.1 experience; whatever the reason, it's very comfortable though a tad warm. Each ear piece has 4 speakers inside. The Center, Subwoofer and Rear speakers are all 30mm drivers and the front are 40mm drivers. Each sound dimension has its own individual volume control for fine tuning, which is located on the in-line dongle.



SURROUND SOUND DIRECT TO YOUR SKULL (CONTINUED)

SOUND QUALITY

This is what it's all about, isn't it? Does this headset replace a full Dolby Digital 5.1 amp and speaker setup? While I don't believe I'd prefer to play using this headset over my amp, the sound reproduction achieved in this headset is incredible. I didn't think it was possible to reproduce the sound setup in a full sized room with corner speakers in a headset form but Tritton has done it. Having in-line volume controls allows you to fine tune the surround experience in the headset to be very good. If you increase the rear speaker volume on the dongle and adjust the rear delay via the decoder box, you can further enhance the 5.1 experience. Multiplayer voice comes through loud and clear and there are no issues hearing your teammates.

The rumble feature is adjusted by tweaking the bass volume on the dongle. Now, not only can you feel an explosion in your controller but you can also feel it in your head. I thought the bass reproduction was acceptable though not to the same quality of an active subwoofer. Maybe using a 40mm driver would have given that little extra oomph, but all-in-all I thought the bass was fine for a headset. For those who really want to fine tune their experience, the decoder box has options for Dolby Digital or Prologic, Dynamic Range Compression (just turn it on) and you can adjust the time delay from 0-5ms on the center channel and 0-15 ms on the rest.



NEGATIVES

It's hard to find many negatives about this product, but there are some. First, the weight is definitely heavier than a traditional Xbox 360 headset or a standard set of over-the-head component stereo style headphones. Not overly heavy, however. The ear cups can get a bit warm because your ears are totally sealed inside the cups. Also, you have 2 sets of cables to worry about, one optional set for the Mic and one mandatory set for the audio. The audio wire is hefty as well as it's not that really narrow, light 360 headset style wire; this stuff is meaty, but the length is outstanding, as the cable is 12 feet long.

SUMMARY

If your gaming situation calls for a headset, you absolutely can't go wrong with this choice. For the price, you're going to be hard-pressed to find anything equal to or better than the Tritton AX360s. Tritton has given you lots of hookup options for a portable DVD system, home stereo, PC, Xbox, Xbox360, Playstation2 and pretty much anything else with an optical or coax digital audio output. The headset also comes with a travel pouch and folds so it's a perfect portable audio solution. The AX360s have been awarded Dolby certification, which says a lot right there. These are a perfect substitute for a full amp setup if you're traveling or need to game in silence. The only thing more you could ask for is a wireless version.

You can get more info and full specs at Tritton's website <http://www.trittonsales.com/products/TRIGA600.htm>



Rating: BUY

LARGE ANIMAL

THE 202P INTERVIEW

Large Animal was founded in January of 2001 by partners Josh Welber and Wade Tinney, both graduates of the MFA program in interactive design at Parsons School of Design in New York City. Since then, Josh and Wade have been lucky enough to build a team of incredibly talented and hard-working artists, programmers, musicians and producers. With this team, we've made games of all types; puzzle games, celebrity name games, role-playing games, action games and word games. In the fall of 2006, Large Animal will release our 50th game!

Large Animal has produced many great arcade style games such as RocketBowl, Bricktopia, and alpha-QUEUE. They're games are great for parents on the go, arcade fans, and puzzle solving fanatics.



Where did the company name "Large Animal" come from?

Well, we were initially called Game Kitchen, but then found out that there was a game company in the UK with an almost identical name. We decided to bite the bullet and change our name, to avoid potential confusion down the road. We wanted something memorable that would spark the imagination and that had an available web address. It's incredibly difficult to find simple web addresses that aren't already spoken for these days. After going through literally hundreds of possible names, we settled on Large Animal and never looked back.

How many people does Large Animal currently employ for game development?

We have 10 people on our team.

What type of atmosphere is Large Animal? T-Shirts and shorts, or business casual?

T-shirts and shorts, and ever since we got new wall-to-wall carpeting...slippers!

Is the Large Animal team more of a family or just a tight knit coordinated team?

A touch of both, I'd say. We're not quite as close as say, my family, but we're certainly more coordinated!

What occurred in your youth that made you decide "I want to make games when I grow up"?

Actually, I wanted to be a chef when I was younger. I played games, but I think it simply never occurred to me that one could have the job of making them. It wasn't until I was in graduate school that I realized that it was what I wanted to do. I studied interactive design and realized that games were the most challenging and interesting design problems. Plus, the response that your work gets from users is FAR more rewarding than if I were making corporate websites or something.

Do you believe being based out of New York gives you any advantages or disadvantages? Do you work with clients locally or is most of your work over the Internet?

As far as I'm concerned, easy access to a wide variety of quality ethnic cuisine is always an advantage. There are also several very good art schools in the city, and a few good technology programs. The game development community is very small, but I see that as a good thing. Disadvantages? Expensive as hell.

We don't do much work-for-hire these days. It used to be our bread and butter, but now we work primarily on self-funded or publisher-funded titles. So far, most of our publishing partners haven't been in NYC, but it's never posed a problem.

Your webpage says to contact you about "custom game development" – can you explain to me what that means? You guys build games "on demand" for clients?



Hmmm...that means we need to update our website! We used to make lots of flash and shockwave games for clients, but as of about two years ago, we're almost entirely focused on downloadable games that are sold to consumers. These titles are typically deeper than the



LARGE ANIMAL

client work we used to do and they also give us more creative freedom. Occasionally we'll still do a small client game, but usually we turn that sort of work down.

What struggles do you face as an Independent game developer when creating new games for the public? Funding, team size, marketing, etc?

All of the above. I think all the struggles boil down to cash flow and resource management (kind of like an RTS!). Game development is a risky creative process; it's not something you can plan out completely and predictably in advance. You simply have to iterate to some extent in order to get it right. So we've had to learn how to plan in a way that accounts for this variance.



Being a small company, do you find yourself working longer hours to compensate for a smaller team compared to big firms like EA, Rockstar Games, Microsoft, and the like?

As far as I can tell, we actually work more reasonable hours than the folks at those companies. Our team typically works like a nine hour day on average. My partner Josh and I will work longer hours, but that's because we own the business.

Certain games that you develop are also available on the Macintosh, why aren't all the games available on the Macintosh?

We're working on it. We've ported over a few of our titles that were created with Macromedia Director, since that was an easy conversion. We're now in the process of bringing over our C++ games, but that is a more costly project. Our goal is to have Mac versions of all of our titles by the end of the summer. In the meantime, I encourage all the Mac gamers out there to download Bootcamp!

Do you have any games on the Xbox 360 Marketplace, or plans to produce games for the Xbox 360 Marketplace?

We don't have any games there now, but we're working on a deal right now to bring one of more popular titles to that platform. The game will have a bunch of great new multiplayer modes, so we're pretty excited.

You have e-card games, web games, and downloadable games. Which "platforms" do you find have the most success and offer the most business?

Downloadable games without a doubt. We see the ecard games as a way to encourage our customers to tell their friends about us. They also are a fun way for us to quickly try out a focused game mechanic. The other web games are intended to give players a small taste of what the down-

loadable version has to offer. We are currently working on a relaunch of our site which will offer much more in the way of community features and at that point, the browser-based games will hopefully become more of a revenue generator for us.

When you start a new game concept how long, on average, does it take to go from concept to release? Do you find it hard to avoid feature creep?

Most of our games are on a five to eight month production cycle right now. Typically, the concept has been floating around the lunch table for several months before we actually start production on it. If we're working with a publisher, there is also a month or two of lead time before the project is "greenlighted".

Feature creep is a beast that must be battled continuously and never truly dies. Informally, we all take turns playing the role of "creep cop".

Bricktopia, a Lego themed breakout game, is new to your collection of cool games. What inspired you guys to build a Lego based breakout?

We've got an office full of former LEGO builders, so it was not hard to find inspiration in that brand. We'd built a bunch of small games for LEGO over the years, so when they approached us about co-publishing a downloadable game with them, we jumped at the opportunity. We pitched several ideas that involved adding a LEGO twist to some classic game mechanic. Bricktopia was the one that rose to the top.



I noticed games like Rocket Bowl use the Torque Engine from GarageGames. How much game development time is saved by using a 3rd party game engine like the Torque Engine?

Tough question. Since we've never rolled our own game engine from scratch, it's hard for me to estimate just how much time was saved by using Torque. It was a significant savings, to be sure, and with each subsequent game that we develop using Torque, the time savings is more significant. We have a library of custom tools that speed things up, and our knowledge of the engine has also gotten deeper.

What game do you believe was the most difficult to develop out of the 45 games you have currently produced?

I'd say the game we're developing right now is the most difficult, but I think I would have said the same thing if you'd asked me a year ago, or three years ago. There is always some new type of play experience or technology that challenges us, which is a good thing. Our current project has a strong content-creation and sharing aspect to it which is a real challenge to design and balance.

LARGE ANIMAL

Recently you have been able to bring some of your games to the Mobile Phone by working with a few other companies. Is it your goal to bring more games to the mobile phone or was this just a good opportunity to test the waters?



We plan to bring our games to mobile any time it makes sense for the game. We think it makes the most sense to focus on developing for one platform really well, and we've been lucky enough to find some excellent development partners who are focused on mobile. RocketBowl is available on most carriers already and Girls Inc. TeamUP will be rolling out in the next few months.

Your games seem to be targeted at an older age gamer or casual gamer. What do you think draws the older crowd to your games? Is it the short nature of the games, simplicity, or lack of massive time commitments?

Well, we're trying to create games that are accessible to a broad demographic that includes our peers, our parents, and our nieces and nephews. We don't want people to have to climb a steep learning curve, beating their head against a difficult control scheme or an impossibly difficult set of goals. People with busy lives don't have time for that. We think games should be challenging without being frustrating. We want to make stylish games that empower the player and actively help them have fun, rather than beating them into submission. If we've attracted an older gamer, hopefully it's because this design philosophy results in play experiences that fit into their lives better.

What makes a game fun to play?

Fun means something slightly different for everyone, so this is a very hard question. I think the most successful games have a general category of player or a category of fun in mind. The fun of solving a really difficult puzzle is completely different from the fun of annihilating waves of alien attackers. The fun of exploring an expansive world is different from the satisfaction of throwing darts. Good games are aware of which type (or types) of fun they are aiming for and hopefully every element in the game supports that aim.

Do you believe that games really have to sell for \$59.99 or are big publishers just trying to make a little extra cash? Many people just do not want to pay (or cannot pay) an extreme high price for games that are not always top-notch in quality.

I can believe that it's 20% more expensive to develop for the next generation consoles.

Large Animal is relatively young, founded in 2001, where do you see the company in five years from now? Growing larger and expanding into more complex games, or do you believe you have your vision set and it's all about more high quality titles?

While we will certainly work on games that are larger in scope and more challenging to implement, hopefully this will not result in a more complex player experience. For us, part of making high

quality titles is continuing to bring something new to the player, and to mask the underlying complexity and offer the player a play experience that is simple yet rich. That's our goal and we'll keep pursuing it.

As an independent game company do you find yourself trying to help new game developers that are trying to get into the market space? Do you offer any courses, or lessons on what you've learned as a team?

Several of us have taught at local colleges over the past several years, and we often have someone speaking at the various game conferences. I always enjoy speaking with folks who are just getting started, and I always learn from those conversations just as much as they do.

When you're not developing games for Large Animal do you go home and play games for fun?

Not as much as I'd like! I have all the consoles at home and play both hardcore games like Halo and God of War, as well as more casual games like TopSpin Tennis (with my girlfriend) or Marble Blast on Xbox Live. I also enjoy board games like Ticket to Ride, Lost Cities, Puerto Rico, etc.

For anyone that is thinking "I want to make games" – do you have any advice on how they can break into the industry?

Go to GDC. It's expensive, but worth it. Find the local chapter of the IGDA and get involved. If you do these things, you'll meet many developers. Ask many questions and be a good listener. Identify the area(s) of game development in which you might make the most valuable contribution and start making things that will demonstrate this ability. If it's game design, create design documents or paper prototypes. If it's art, create screen shots or concept art, if it's programming, create a demo that shows off your abilities. If you think you'd make a good tester, then get involved with the online beta test programs that most developers have. Basically, you need to demonstrate that your interest in making games goes far beyond simply wanting to "play games all day".



Do you have any inspiring words for the young indie game developer just trying to make their first game?

Focus on finishing. In any creative industry, good ideas are a dime a dozen. The difficult part is executing on them. Ideally, you'll execute really well on a really good idea, but even a well-executed but mediocre idea is more valuable than the best idea in the world that never gets finished.



TANK

2OLD2PLAY.COM COMMUNITY MEMBER SHOWCASE

Real Name: Kevin

GamerTag: TANK 2old2play

Location: San Francisco, California

Age: 33

Status: Married

Children: 0

Occupation: Digerati

FAVORITE DRINK:

Alcoholic: Dark and Stormy (Ginger beer and Goslings dark Rum), Rum and Diet is ok.

Virgin: Diet Coke regular and variants.

FAVORITE FOOD:

Prime Rib with all the trimmings (grilled veggies, mashed taters, Yorkshire Pudding, gravy slathered over everything is it lunchtime, I'm hungry!

FAVORITE MUSIC GROUP:

AC/DC for life!

FAVORITE TV SERIES:

24 and South Park. South Park doing a spoof of 24 would rock.

FAVORITE MOVIE:

Gone in 60 seconds. Who didn't cry when the Shelby was crushed?

FAVORITE SOLO MUSIC ARTIST THAT YOU WOULD ALMOST BE EMBARRASSED TO SAY YOU ENJOYED HEARING:

I AM embarrassed to say I don't mind Avril Lavigne.

WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO 2OLD2PLAY.COM AS A MEMBER?

I thought I could use my mad skillz to beat up on some geezers so I could boost my self confidence. Every time I kill BOBS67 I feel a little bit better about myself.

IF YOU WON 5 MILLION DOLLARS, WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH IT?

I could put a down payment on a 4 bedroom fixer upper house here in San Francisco.

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT MOST PLAYED VIDEO GAME?

The game I've put the most time into on the 360 is Oblivion, I wrapped it up at about 90 hours (though it easily could have gone on to 200 hours). I put 67 hours into Battlefield : MC. Looking ahead through the summer I'll be playing OverG, Lord of the Rings and Prey.

WHAT GAME CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE TO YOU BECOMING A GAMER?

Christmas 1978 I got Mattels handheld LED Baseball game. I also had the Parker Brothers Merlin LED game also in 1978. Those hooked me on electronic games. My first console was a Colecovision PONG machine I think my Dad either had or bought for me.

WHAT VIDEO GAME CHARACTER BEST PORTRAYS YOURSELF?

It's more a class of character. I tend to play characters with the big weapons, swords or whatever. They're slower and it may take longer to get to the battle but once I get there, jibs are gonna fly.

WILL YOU BE BUYING A WII, PLAYSTATION 3, OR BOTH?

If I buy a 2nd console, it'll be Wii. Trying to sell someone a PS3 when they already own a 360 is like trying to convince a Ferrari owner they also need a Lamborghini.

WHAT DEVELOPMENT GROUP/ PUBLISHER DO YOU BELIEVE HAS HAD THE BIGGEST IMPACT ON THE GAMING WORLD, AND WHY?

Since I'm an FPS junkie, ID Software with Castle Wolfenstein back in 1992 was a genre maker. Most recently I'd say Epic for creating & licensing their Unreal engine. I also have to give props to Origin for taking MMO's to the next level with Ultima Online. Their Ultima RPG series also took the RPG genre to the next level, really the first RPGs to feature a fully interactive world and non-linear gameplay. Oblivion owes a lot to Ultima I think.

OLD SCHOOL GAMER OR GRAPHIC GAMING ENTHUSIAST?

I love eye candy. At one point in my life I played (and liked) those Scott Adams text adventure games and played lots of CGA (4 color) games on my 286 PC, but I could never go back to that.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE WILL SEPARATE THE SONY PLAYSTATION 3, THE WII, AND THE XBOX 360 FROM EACH OTHER?

Wii will be the innovative and fun gameplay with an attractive price point. Xbox has LIVE which has always been it's #1 innovation. Sony's got BlueRay and most of the market share. The people who waited for PS2 to drop to \$199 before buying (approx 70% of PS2 owners) probably will be looking at Wii or 360. Sony's lost a lot of exclusives, all they have left is Grand Turismo and MGS which Forza and Halo3 trumps. Unless you're a hard core PS fan, I just don't see a reason to spend all the extra money on one. Not only is the console going to be hundreds more but the games may be \$10-\$20 more compared to 360 titles.

WHERE DID YOU COME UP WITH YOUR GAMER TAG "TANK"?

The name's origin came from another side of my life, Paintball. I've been playing since 1988. Guns at the time were single shot pump action with a 10 or 40 round ammo capacity and 12 gram quick change Co2 air. I bought one of the very first blowback semi auto paintball guns, a PMI3. It was big, heavy and was an air hog so I modified it to run on two 20oz. Co2 tanks on the back and one 14oz. on the front. I also modified my shot capacity to 200 rounds which was unheard of at the time. Eventually because of my firepower on the field, people on the other team would yell 'here comes the tank, take cover' as I pelted their area with 200 paintballs. In video games I play characters who are slower moving but with all the heavy artillery. In GRAW I'm the Grenadier. In Battlefield 2 I'm the Support guy with grenades, SMG & artillery strikes. In Oblivion I'm an Orc with Ebony armor, the biggest sword I can get my hands on ... much fun!

IF YOU HAD TO GIVE A YOUNGER KID ADVICE ABOUT GAMING WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Do your chores & homework before turning on video games. You can't game if your parents take your console away now can you? Veggies help make you a better gamer too! If you're stuck or can't unlock that last achievement, try some veggies first. Brussel sprouts, green beans, peas, spinach or carrots all good stuff! If you're stuck on a puzzle, try thinking about it as you clean your room. Sometimes distracted thought helps freshen the mind.




STUDIOKM.COM

TANK



SUPER MARIO GALAXY:

OUT OF THIS WORLD?

by TheSeeker

Pretty much any gamer over 20 has fond memories of playing at least one of the three *Super Mario Brothers* games on the original Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) console. In my case, those memories are fond ones of my sisters and I huddled together planning the best way to make it to the 8th world. Do we use every single warp pipe and get there in a few short levels? Or do we go the long way 'round and go for the marathon win? My sister always wanted to go the long way around. Myself, I was never that patient, and figured we would need every life we had to get by the 8th world madness. That was the great thing about the first few *Mario Brothers* games. In my opinion, they were aimed at such a broad audience. Boy, girl, child, adult -- it didn't matter with *Super Mario Brothers*.

The good times continued with *Super Mario World* for *Super Nintendo Entertainment System* (SNES). New characters were introduced, new abilities gained. Some would argue that it wasn't quite the success that the NES versions enjoyed. But in 1996, *Super Mario 64* ushered in 3D platform gaming and did it in style. Here was the great platforming action that gamers were really craving. There had been a slew of quirky non-platform style Mario games released

over the years, but *Mario 64* really brought the series back to its roots, and then some. This is a game I remember sinking hours into. The coolest aspect to me was the newfound non-linearity of this game. Sure, you needed a certain amount of stars to get into the separate areas, but you could choose which order to do them

in. If one world was getting rather difficult and you needed a break, as long as you had enough stars you could open up a new area and try that out. In addition, there were 120 stars in all, with only 70 needed to fight Bowser. But the secret reward for getting all 120 was enough to spur many gamers into putting hours of extra time in to get every last star.

I know I did.

Now, you might be wondering, "hey, I thought this was an article about *Super Mario Galaxies*?"

What gives? Well the above two paragraphs were merely the ramblings of a long-time gamer and wannabe writer, so please forgive the standard comments. My nonsensical ramblings now lead me to the present, and the ill named *Wii*. After nearly a decade with no "real" Mario platformer worthy of the name, *Super Mario Gal-*

axies is poised to fill that void left in our gaming hearts. Not much is known yet about *Galaxies* except that it was originally slated for release on Gamecube as *Mario 128* until that plan was scrapped in favor of a release on the *Wii*.

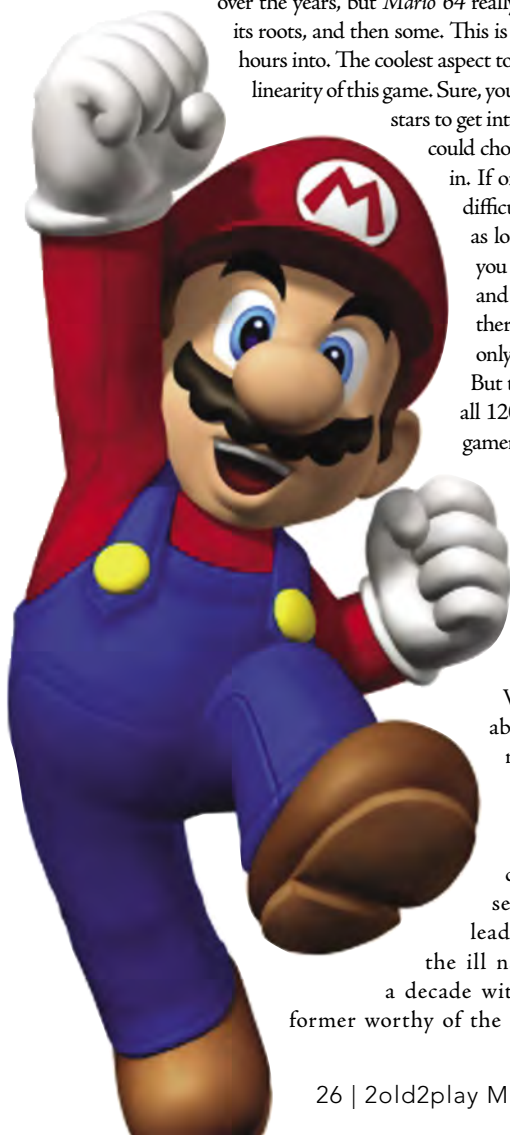


Large-scale landmasses have been thrown away in favor of more, shall we say, spatial, environments. According to one reviewer who actually got to play the game at E3, *Galaxies* saw Mario jumping and twisting across asteroids and star shards in typical platformer action. Mario is moved around with the nunchuk's analog stick, and he jumps with a tap of the 'A' button on the remote. Using the *Wii-Mote's* motion sensitivity you can control an on-screen reticule to grab coins without actually moving Mario to them. A slight flick of the wrist (of either hand) makes Mario perform a spin move ideal for taking out goomba's and possibly knocking back incoming fire. As before, performing three jumps, each after another, has Mario jumping high into the air, giving his trademark cry to the heavens. One rather cool feature is the ability to do a complete 360 around an asteroid. So, you could walk right off the edge of the asteroid you are on and, in essence, be walking on the underside of the asteroid. Needless to say, this has exciting gameplay implications. All-in-all the handling sounds to be top notch, despite some worries about the use of the nunchuk and remote.



The game reportedly has a very nice cell-shaded style look to it, with very nicely done particle effects in all the right places. Visually, it's very well put together. It not only supports progressive scan and a 16:9 aspect ratio, but also supports Dolby Pro Logic II sound.

Galaxies really sounds like the platformer Nintendo fans have been drooling over ever since the release of the much-loved *Mario 64*. I certainly am looking forward to its release with great anticipation, and from one gamer to another, I think you should be too.



REAL GOLD FOR VIRTUAL GOLD?

by edd9139

Massively multiplayer online role playing games, often referred to as MMORPGs, are more popular than ever. In the past few years, these games have become powerful sources of income for more than the games' developers. The trading of virtual services, items and currency has evolved, and such transactions are now no longer restricted to the game. Players today trade, sell and buy items and in-game currency for real money.

It is now common on websites, such as eBay, to see virtual currency and rare items listed for sale. *World of Warcraft* provides a prime example of virtual currency selling for real money. *Gold Farming* is a term with which many WoW players are familiar. The farming of gold in *World of Warcraft* is a practice whereby players collect in-game currency for the sole purpose of selling it for real money. *World of Warcraft* Gold farming factories have become common in China, and at least 100,000 Chinese citizens, 0.3% of China's large gaming population, works as a gold farmer in *World of Warcraft*. Some 'farmers' work up to eighteen hours a day or more, generally for less than 100 USD a month.



This virtual island sold for 26,500 USD in Project Entropia in December, 2004.

So how does that affect an average gamer? The trading of virtual services, items and currency can both help and hinder gamers. Purchasing in-game currency and items can help new players, and can help them advance further and more quickly than they could have without such purchases. It can also be a good shortcut for gamers who do not have as much time to dedicate to *World of Warcraft* and gaming as they'd like.

The buying and selling of gold can create many disadvantages for 'genuine' players, who sweat for many hours, hunched over their keyboard and mouse, leveling up and earning gold the traditional way. Does buying gold in *World of Warcraft* increase or detract from the level of enjoyment? It depends on

your point of view. Having gold allows gamers to purchase better items, but, in my opinion, it is not as satisfying as if you had spent many hours earning that gold. Obtaining gold or rare items without earning them is deemed cheating, and *World of Warcraft* does not allow in-game virtual services, items or currencies to be traded (although this still occurs). If you are found to sell gold on *World of Warcraft* your account is banned.

Project Entropia is another perfect example of virtual cash and items being traded for real money. *Project Entropia* uses *Project Entropia Dollars* (PEDS), with 10 PEDs equaling one US dollar. For example, a battleaxe currently costs 45 PEDs, or \$4.55 USD. In December 2004, an exclusive, virtual 'Treasure Island' was auctioned in *Project Entropia* for a record 265,000 PEDs. This means the buyer paid \$26,500 USD for the exclusive island, which contained 60 blocks of land which could be sold, and provided opportunities to sell mining and hunting rights as well. Then in October 2005, a virtual space station in *Project Entropia* was auctioned and sold for a staggering 1,000,000 PEDs, with the buyer paying \$100,000 USD for the virtual space station. The space station was named 'Club Neverdie,' after its owner, and opened in April, 2006. So can these two sales in *Project Entropia* be considered investments? To an extent these can be considered high risk ventures, as there is

no guarantee you will gain any revenue from your newly acquired asset, no guarantee the game will remain popular, and no guarantee you'll ever be able to recoup your investment.

The trading of virtual services, items or currencies dates back to the likes of such games as *Ultima Online* (1997), but the buying and selling of virtual items for cash has surged in popularity over the past few years. It makes you wonder if this trend will continue to grow. Will online gaming one day be limited to those willing to splurge real money on virtual items and currencies?



WHY DO WE PREFER...

SEQUELS OVER NEW CREATIVE GAMES?

by Derf

In 2005, Electronic Arts released 26 games. Of the 26 only one was new. Video games seem to be following a sequel pattern similar to the movies. This summer on the movie scene we have *X-Men 3*, *Superman 5*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean 2*. On the videogame front we are looking at *NCAA 5* (I think) and *Madden 6* (or is it 7?). I think *Final Fantasy* is on XII! Why are there so many sequels? What has happened to innovation in our video games? Are corporations purposely cheating us by limiting our choices?

Companies have many reasons to produce sequels. For a game producer, sequels are cheaper to make, predictable, and sell well. Most sequels use the same game engine with only a few new features added, because adapting to both changing technologies and different platforms can suck up a lot of a producer's budget. From the business standpoint, a sequel often produces a predictable revenue stream, which is rare in an unpredictable video game market. However, not all the blame can be placed on the game companies. Gamers are ultimately what drive the market, and if gamers continue to buy sequels, the companies will continue to make them for us.

So why do gamers continue to buy them? There are several reasons. For one thing, most of us started playing games in an online community that focused on one game. In my case, it was *Jedi Knight Dark Forces 2* playing online in Microsoft's Gaming Zone. Many more people jumped in with *Halo2* and its clan feature, or in MMORPGs like *Everquest* or *World of Warcraft*. After you have been in an online community that focuses on a single game, most members eventually move on to other games. Sequels tend to reunite that group and give us back that feeling we had when it was all new.



Sequels also tempt us with the "New Feature" ploy. "If you loved 'X' feature in the first game, then you are really going to love 'Y' feature in the sequel." Sometimes this pans out as in the case of *Halo2* and dual wielding. Many times, how-



ever, these new features don't really add a new dimension to the game. Most sequels are graphically superior but not necessarily more fun to play.

Another reason we buy a sequel is that they have similar game mechanics. Sequels make us feel comfortable. Control schemes and gameplay doesn't need to be totally relearned.

If you train to be a sniper in *Halo 2*, hopefully you will still be a good sniper in *Halo 3*. I still remember the disappointment I felt when they totally changed the light saber controls when *Jedi Outcast* came out. For an "old school" player like me with many hours of practice, a new control scheme was just too much to relearn. A good sequel will retain mechanics to retain the existing user base and hopefully add new players as well.

In addition, as is the case for many sports games, these sequels are simply updated editions. We buy the new game to get the current rosters and statistics. It is just not as fun playing a sports game during the season with last season's roster. It would be nice if the video companies could

make the game so you could just download the new rosters, but perhaps more money is to be made in selling a new 'version' of the game. Are video game companies unfairly profiting off these upgrades? Electronic Arts, the largest and most profitable of the video game industries, has sought out contracts with the NFL and NCAA to limit competition and thereby lock up the sequel market.

It is interesting to note that in the last few years sequel sales have been slipping. Many gamers have expressed frustration of paying \$49 now \$59 to play essentially the same game each year. Are sequels starting to lose their appeal? Although video game sequels will probably always be with us, there is one way we can influence game companies to change their business models. Let's fan the creative spark to roar into a blazing fire by spending our money on new creative titles! Pass on your experiences with a great new game so it can catch on. Vote with your hard-earned cash so we don't all spend eternity in sequel hell!



WHAT DRAWS US TO LIFE SIMULATIONS

WHEN REAL LIFE IS TANGIBLE?

by Iain Farrell

From mechanical chess-playing machines that pitted you against a wooden opponent straight out of *Arabian Nights* to flea circuses where we controlled infinitesimally small creatures for our own amusement, as human beings we've revelled in the creation of something that mimics the real world but which, unlike the real world, we control.

We like to understand the world around us, feel in control of it, which could easily explain the success enjoyed by the wealth of life simulations available to gamers today. Browse forums and logs across the Internet and you'll find detailed journaling of people's escapades in small forest towns where their best friend is a bear, or of the ships for which they're saving up. Read about adventures endured so the Alliance will have enough extra fire-power to spank an opposing corporation that is getting too big for its boots.

Recently a devoted inhabitant of *Second Life* had to fight for the right to post the pictures of his *Second Life* on 'Flickr'. Around 600 of his 1500 pictures documented his virtual life experiences, but many were removed from his account by a site administrator. *Flickr* explained that they had done this in keeping with their terms and conditions and for the benefit of other users searching the site for photos relating to a keyword, not screenshots of a virtual representation of that keyword. The user in question was outraged that his pictures should be removed because, to him, these screen shots were every bit as valid as any photos of his real life. It provoked strong reaction from the *Second Life* community and even prompted blog posts with titles like "I hate Flickr".

What's striking about this story is that not only did a virtual pastime play such a large part in this person's life that they would want to share their experience in the same way that people like to share other real life activity, but also that it gained such support from the community of other players. Such loyalty to complete strangers in the real world is almost unheard of. Try getting money for the bus when you're short in London. Yet in the virtual world, if you mess with one *Second Lifer* it seems you're messing with the whole community.

In the beginning, games were a simple form of distraction, an experiment in escapism where any player could be freed from the real world and placed in a situation where life was a great deal simpler. Games generally had one objective, blow this up, capture that, get from here to there and so on. For a time we were liberated from real life responsibilities and the consequences of our actions were over and above completing our stated objective. Sadly, a common problem with people is that we get bored easily, and in our search for new types of play and ways to use the increasingly powerful hardware available to us we started to place these games in ever more realistic contexts.

Sooner or later games like the *Little Computer People* were born. Start the game and you were presented with a house. This house was occupied by a little male computer person who would pass his time doing

the sorts of things that people like to do in their houses. He would enter the house, decide if he wanted to live there and if he did settle in, he would start to read the newspaper or sleep, feed his dog or any number of real life activities. Players could interact with this person using simple commands, read letters from him that explained how he was feeling and even play poker with him. As players we became not just participants in the game. We were elevated to a godlike status where we had absolute control over this person. We told them what to do, we controlled their environment, their happiness and ultimately we controlled their life-span with the simple press of a power button.

Since then, games like *The Sims* have taken this idea and carved out a whole new genre, where players choose to sit down at a computer and engage in real world interactions, such as jobs, trips to the pub and social grouping, but using a keyboard and mouse, stylus or joystick to interface. The attraction of the life simulation is surely that it offers players something that they don't have in the real world. In *The Sims*, we control these people. They can have lives more successful and virtuous than our own as easily as they can indulge in overeating, drinking and affairs that we wouldn't dream of. Similarly, games like *Animal Crossing*, *Eve*, or even *World of Warcraft* borrow real world qualities such as a sense of community, working routine, and a form of personalization which helps validate the experience. Real life may be more tangible, but it doesn't always offer the sense of control and the direct rewards we see our actions having in the real world. The world they take place in is less complex than the real world, and the factors that affect our second selves are easier for us to understand and the communities usually more democratic.



Recently in *Eve*, a devious player decided to solicit billions of ISK, the in game currency, in a scam where he claimed he was developing exciting new technology to sell to other players. He managed to con many of the games richest players into taking part in his scam, and in doing so, took so many influential players money that CCP, the game's creators, had to step in and give everyone their money back. The consequences for him personally are huge, too, as he will never be able to maintain his current identity and join any group in the game again. In a simulated world there is often more self regulation to ensure that bad behaviour is dealt with in a way that satisfies your peers. Compare this to a real world where too often it's perceived that scammers get away with hurting people.

The more time you spend looking at it the more you can see the attraction of some of these real world simulations. You can be whomever you want to be. You're free to find like-minded individuals or create offline worlds which you control. When people misbehave, often they are judged by the community for their crimes and dealt with accordingly, and you can often choose your position in that society. Pick a class or type of player and indulge in the fantasy of being a top flight businessman, pizza delivery guy, or pilot. These games are a sandbox. The attraction is that they can be turned on and off, escaped to and restarted when the experience becomes tiresome. They're as real as we want them to be and can even mimic many basic human interactions to help us validate the time we spend on them. These worlds may be virtual, but we can mould them so easily that in some ways they're every bit as tangible as our real lives.

IN-GAME ADVERTISING

SEQUELS OVER NEW CREATIVE GAMES?

by Edd9139

Advertising has been a way to promote and sell products for centuries, although only now is it starting to make its way into the gaming industry and our video games. Yes, our beloved gaming industry is becoming bogged down with advertisements. Not just sidebar advertising in online games now, but actual merchandise and trademarks of brand name companies and products appearing in games, such as Coca-Cola and Sprite in *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*.



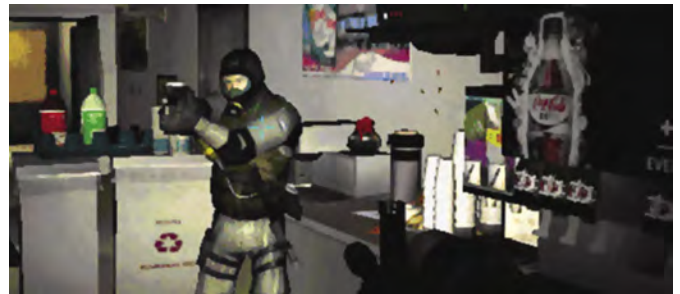
In upcoming games, would you be happy replenishing energy by drinking a can of Coca-Cola or eating a brand name product? How about walking into a McDonalds in *Grand Theft Auto 5*, or being able to purchase Nike shoes? Advertising in games is likely to appear a lot more in the not so distant future, with several games, such as *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory* and *Anarchy Online* already having shown featured advertising with very subtle implementation. *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory* presented the advertising in such a way that many may not have noticed, subtle advertising such as posters and soda machines, all bearing trademark names and products. I actually enjoyed seeing brand name soda machines in *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*, and felt that it added a little more realism to the game.

[Massive Incorporated](#) claims to be 'the world's first gaming network' in which it implements advertising into video games. Massive incorporates advertising generally in the form of billboards and posters, vehicles, pizza boxes, soda cans, screensavers, and TV screens. It claims to have

successfully incorporated subtle advertisements into over 40 games, including *Major League Baseball 2K6* and the online game *Project Entropia*. It caters mainly for the 18 to 34 male gamer, which is the focal point for their advertisements in games.



The idea of using brand name products in games is a novel idea at first and may entice gamers just because it's different, but where is the line drawn on in-game advertising? At first, it may seem "cool" to replenish health by eating a brand name burger, but after a few times the subtleness wears thin and the advertising just becomes annoying. Would it be suitable for game characters in a game suitable for younger people to drink brand name alcoholic drinks?



Companies are paying big money to advertise in our games, and since it is the consumer who will be viewing the adverts, should that benefit not be passed onto the consumer in the form of cheaper video games? If games were released at a cheaper price to the consumer as a result of a corporation advertising in the game, would it be so bad? One possible thought is how it would be possible for a game to have two versions, one being the normal version at RRP (without in-game advertising), and the second version being cheaper at release as a result of it including in-game advertisements.

The gaming industry is now becoming more popular and more profitable every year. It is now large enough to attract the attention of advertisers, and if it helps to make the games and future games I play better and cheaper, then in-game advertising is a great concept. So long as adverts are kept realistic and relevant, in-game advertising seems to have great potential, and will surely be seen in more upcoming games.

PLAYING GAMES ON THE CHEAP

by Tank 2old2play

My wife is coupon and rebate crazy and some of it has rubbed off on me. Seems like the new median price for a next generation game is \$60, and it doesn't matter if the game should command a next generation price or not. The good news is that you can buy new next generation games the day of release for \$25-\$35. You just need a system, and I'll outline one for so you can game on the cheap, too.

TRADE IN

There are many used video game shops around, the biggest being EBGames (EB) / Gamestop (GS). There are a couple things to look for when trading in your games. The key is that you want the biggest dollar amount you can get for your game to lower the price of a new one. EB and GS usually give you a trade-in credit increase if you trade in your game for a pre-order. So take full advantage of that (it usually works out to about 3 bucks). In addition, if you've kept a couple games around so their trade-in value is pretty low, wait for deals. Sign up for the store's mailing list and check their sites frequently. I find that once every other month you can get \$10 additional for trading in two Xbox 360



games at EB/GS. Now if you combine that with the 3% extra for pre-ordering, you're starting to save some substantial money. On rare occasions, EB/GS will have "trade in 2 get 1 free" deals, so watch for those, especially if you have some older games! Also, check your store to see if they have a membership program. Some of them for \$15-\$20 a year will give you a membership with lots of benefits, and one of them usually includes getting more for your trade-ins. You'll have to judge for yourself how many games you'll play and trade in to see if a membership is worth it, but you should go for it if the economics make sense. Typically you also get a free gaming magazine subscription as well so you can keep tabs on what's coming out and know what to pre-order.

BUY THE DAY OF THE RELEASE

Just like new DVD's that come out, you can find places that will sell a new release game at a discount. Fry's Electronics (outpost.com) is such a place. Typically, through the 1st weekend you can pick up a newly released title for \$10-\$15 off the full sticker price. This isn't as good of a discount as you would get trading in at GS or EB, but if you don't have anything to trade in, this is a good route to go to save some money. I like to buy a new game for \$45 or \$49 from Fry's Electronics and then trade it in at EB/GS for \$30-\$38 on a pre-order when I'm done with it.

BUY OVERSEAS

This is a growing trend that I've never tried out myself. Apparently, on the Xbox 360, the game developer needs to enable region encoding. If they don't, you can play the game on any 360 in any country. There is quite a list of titles not region encoded that you can buy from Play-Asia.com for \$40 and they only charge \$3 for shipping. Just read the game description and make sure it says 'No Region Protection', if it says that then you can play it on your USA

360. Only downside here is that you have to wait for it to arrive from Asia. The current list of games include: *Hitman: Blood Money*, *Blazing Angels*, *Call of Duty 2*, *FarCry*, *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter*, *Gun*, *MotoGP*, *Quake*, *Tomb Raider* and *X-Men*.

BUY GAMES 4-6 MONTHS AFTER RELEASE

Games sell their highest quantity typically within the first 30 days of release. After that, sales drop off a lot and four to six months later, retailers are looking to clear their shelves to make way for new games. Watch big-box store ads for deep discounts on titles that are past their prime. When a game reaches a year old you can really start to find bargains. Circuit City not long ago was clearing out old titles for \$9. Fry's Electronics (outpost.com), Best Buy, Target, FutureShop, and Wal-mart all have weekly sales on games. Check their online ads every Friday to see what's on sale for the weekends and you can find some good deals in the \$20-\$30 price range a lot of the time.

TRADE

Look for online gaming community sites that have trading circles. 2old2play.com as of April, 2006 has a game trading bulletin board. If you've finished with a game, you can post it up there and trade for some other game you're looking for. You can't get a better discount than free! Take full advantage of game trading for maximum savings, but I'd recommend only doing it within a trusted community; trading with strangers can be risky. There are also a few websites specifically for trading; www.tradegamesnow.com is one example of this type of site.



RENT

2old2play Magazine issue #4 had a summary of rental options, the top one being Gamefly. For a fixed monthly rate (around \$25) you can play as many games as you can cycle through in a month. Their most popular plan is a 3 disc plan that lets you have three games to play at any given time. Simply send one back when you're done with it and they send you another one. Blockbuster and Hollywood Video also rent Next-Gen games but the selection is typically limited and they're \$4-\$5 to rent for 3-five days. Therefore, an online service like GameFly is a much more economical option with much better service. The one down side to renting is that a lot of the time you don't get the printed booklet with instructions. So you have to figure the game out on your own or by reading stuff online. I believe GameFly does have at least the controls online for each game. GameFly also has good deals on used games.

PLAYING GAMES ON THE CHEAP

BUY USED

This is my least favored option for playing on the cheap. EB-Games and Gamestop have ridiculous prices on used Next-Gen games. They buy it from you for \$30-\$38 and then try and sell it for \$54. If I wanted to spend that much on a game, I'd spend \$5 more and get it new, what are they thinking? However, you can pick up some great deals at EB/GS online. If you watch their website you will see that they often times have "buy 2 get 1 free" or "take an additional 20% off" and things like that. So take full advantage of those offers. Also, prices go down in stores (and online) as the games age. So after they've had a used game on the shelf for a few months, you can find some good discount prices; however, these games are generally way past their prime by that time. One good thing with buying used from EB/GS is that they do give you a warranty with the purchase, so if it doesn't work you can exchange it no questions asked. Blockbuster and Hollywood Video also sell used games and movies with a guarantee, so check those out as well if you have one close by. Amazon.com offers used game options to purchase, but you're buying from individuals so you may not get a guarantee. If you buy used, make sure the store has an exchange policy just in case the disc is bad.



USE ONLINE RESOURCES TO FIND DEALS

One of my favorite online resources for finding games on the cheap is Cheap Ass Gamer (www.cheapassgamer.com). Their front page has big news items for sales but you can find many other gems if you sign up for their free forums. People will post sales and deals they've found on a daily basis, making this site a great resource for the budget minded game hunter.



BID ON AN AUCTION

eBay can be a good source for buying new and used games on the cheap. New games I find usually go for \$49-\$59, so you can do just as well using other methods. If the game is a low-key release like *Over G Fighters*, you can probably save \$10 buying it on eBay. However, a hot game like, say, *Gears of War* will go for full price and in some cases more. eBay is a good source for used games though; you can usually find them listed for \$30-\$40. Just make sure you buy from people with a good amount of feedback and a rating of no less than 98% positive. Also, read the auction to see if they offer a return policy in case the disc doesn't work. You also want Paypal or Credit Card payment options for your protection. Never send cash or Western Union money transfers for eBay purchases or you will probably be ripped off.



PUTTING THE SYSTEM TO WORK:

Armed with all these ideas, here's an example of how you could use this system to your advantage over a three game timeline. The sticker price on three new games off the shelf is \$180. Taking advantage of discounts and trade-ins, those same three games could cost you \$95. Here's how: Buy game #1 from a place that offers new release discounts like outpost.com for \$45 saving \$15. Trade game #1 in to EB for \$38 on a pre-order for game #2 making it cost \$22. Play game #2 and then trade it in to EB on a pre-order for game #3 for say \$32.

This makes game #3 cost you \$28. In total, you saved \$85 over going to Target and buying new off the shelf.

Just because the developers are TRYING to get \$60 out of you doesn't mean you have to just give it to them. There are many ways I've outlined to obtain games well below the \$60 sticker price. Just walking into a store and picking up a game at full price is by far the most expensive way to game. Don't do it; save your money for more games or cool new accessories.

ARCHIVED EDITORIAL:

ARE WE REAL FRIENDS

by Twisted Caboose

T*his editorial hit 2old2play's website back in February of 2006, had 741 diggs on digg.com, and was read 16,720 times by site browsers. The article discusses the difference between virtual and real-life friends, defining what a friend truly is.*

In today's world of online chat, online gaming, and Xbox Live, the definition of a "real" friend has been questioned. Comments like, "he's got a life and real friends," and, "he and so-and-so are friends in real life," come to mind. But what defines a friend? If you research the word friend, you will find the most common definitions as follows:

- A person whom one knows, likes, and trusts.
- A person whom one knows; an acquaintance.
- A person with whom one is allied in a struggle or cause; a comrade.

The definition of friend in itself is flawed and too vague. The words "likes" and "acquaintance" are too blasé. It should read something more like:

- A person with whom one shares a common interest or passion.*
- A person with whom you can share your life.*
- A person whom accepts you as you are.*
- A person whom makes you feel wanted or needed in this world.*
- A person you can disagree with, but still care about.*
- A person whose very voice can change your day and mood by just hearing their voice.*
- A person who wouldn't mind coming over and feeding your monkey while you are away on vacation.*
- The definition could be endless.*

Being not only a female gamer but also a single parent, these outlets have given me something that I cannot obtain in "real life." With limited time away from my house and limited money, meeting people is not easy. "Real life" friends are limited to the people I work with. At that, once you leave a job, keeping up with those people becomes difficult. Meeting people in the "real world" is hard. Finding people who enjoy gaming as much as you do, or meeting someone of the opposite sex and not having the physical aspect fall into play is almost impossible.

The definition of friend does not state that you have to meet the person in a grocery store, bar, at your son's school, church, or actually have had physical contact. Because you met a person via the internet or Xbox Live, are they less of a friend? I answer that question with a resounding NO. My belief is that friendships made in this setting can even be stronger than "real life" friendships. It is easy to terminate a friendship over something small in the gaming world. Someone makes you angry, you go to your friends list and "click;" friend removed. No big deal, you've never met the person, and who cares how they feel about it? But with "real life" friends, you've seen them and have spent physical time with them. Instead, I choose to work harder at understanding what caused the problem and resolve it with that person and continue the friendship. Being a female, the friendships I make with male gamers are based upon who I am and not how I look. These things just don't take place that often in the "real world".

To my relief, communities like ours exist. It is These communities are a place to share a love of gaming and, for some of us, a place to share our lives.

When a member became an uncle recently, he called to share his news. Sometimes I get phone calls at night from various members when I'm not signed on asking, "Phreak, you getting on? We are playing Cat and Mouse in Halo 2 right now." Or New Year's Eve, when I was not able to get online, I received a phone call came from a member wishing me a happy New Year and asking where I was, all the while having me on speaker phone so everyone in the pre-game lobby could hear me. Currently, I am anticipating a Charity LAN Party, so that we can all meet and play together and enjoy each others' company. I once made a call to a member who had not been himself lately online and making sure he was alright. Entering a pre-game lobby, and hearing a greeting like I'm Norm walking into Cheers.

Are these "real life" friendships? I believe they are. We all share a part of our lives with each other. Be it our passion for gaming, our good news or bad, and even some of us, our personal or home lives. This community, and ones like it, defines friendship as it should be. You meet people with common interests, you share all or part of your lives with them, they accept you for who you are, you feel welcomed and wanted, you work out disagreements, and you have a big group of friends who can change your whole day.

If this does not define "real life" friends or friendships for you, then you have missed the entire point of online communities such as 2old2play or Xbox Live, and I pity your loss.



SWEET BUTTERCUP

Buttercup sweet buttercup your are forever
my friend even if after that little message
youll hate me forever

Luna

THE 202P TRUE HOLLYWOOD STORY:

MARIO

By CodeMonkey



© www.excelliorstudios.net

The game designer Shigeru Miyamoto invented one of the most powerful gaming mascots of all time: Mario. For the last 25 years, Mario has brightened the lives of gamers all over the world. In 1981, Mario made his first screen appearance in *Donkey Kong* and followed with *Donkey Kong Jr.* In 1983, Mario would get his own feature title *Mario Brothers*. From that watershed point, there was no looking back for this shining star.

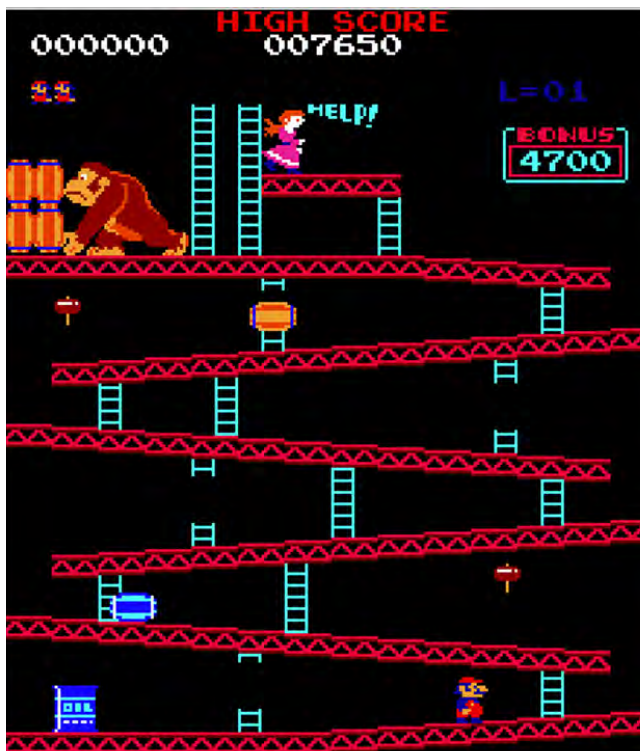
Mario and his brother Luigi take credit for some of the worlds most popular game titles. They did not do this all alone. Mario and his friends guest-starred in *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out*, where Mario donned a referee outfit to provide assistance in the ring. His friends appeared in the crowd as onlookers while Little Mac pummeled his opponents to the mat over and over. This 1984 arcade game was just a stepping-stone for great advancement in Mario's career.

In 1985, Mario would star in the best selling game of all time, according to *The Guinness Book of World Records* (1999). One cannot deny Mario's fame in *Super Mario Brothers*. The name "Super Mario" would be synonymous with classic gaming. Mario, Luigi, Princess, Toad, and some of the world's most renowned enemies would set foot into the history books. The 1980s would never be the same.

It is hard to nail down one key feature that made *Super Mario Brothers* an ingenious work of art. The game laid the foundation for the side-scrolling genre, and future side-scrolling games duplicated many of the features of this classic. The beauty of *Super Mario Brothers* lies in its simplicity. Mario does not wield a gun, sword, or black-ops gear. His most powerful weapons, excluding the invisible star power, are his abilities to shoot ranged fireball attacks and hop his enemies into submission. Mario uses his steroid-like "magic mushroom" effect to grow larger and more powerful, stomping his way to victory. This one title vaulted Mario's career to magnificent proportions and children of the 1980s would recognize Mario more than they would recognize Disney's Mickey Mouse, something of which was no small feat.

At first glance, we base Mario's outstanding success on the fact that *Super Mario Brothers* shipped standard with the *Nintendo Entertainment System (NES)*. However, *Super Mario Brothers 3* may be the best selling non-packaged game of all time, proving he helped console sales and not vice versa. The success in the NES product line and the recovery of the video game crash of 1983 may be to the credit of Mario himself. How can one little plumber be responsible for such great feats? It was a time when everyone needed a hero like Mario.

Mario claims to be the inspiration for many game designers. Case in point, the designers at ID Software say they developed *Commander Keen* in the likeness of *Super Mario Brothers*. Wikipedia.org claims that this game began as a PC port of *Super Mario Brothers 3*! That type of inspiration sent Mario to new heights. He then went on to produce a sequel to his *Super Mario Brothers* success and got himself on the cover of the first issue of *Nintendo Power* for his efforts. Mario was becoming a fictional living legend in the making.



Super Mario Brothers 2, released in 1988, was not the true second sequel to Mario's claim to fame. Japan saw the release of *Super Mario Brothers: The Lost Levels* in 1986, which never made it to the United States. People say this release is one of the most challenging games produced in the NES *Super Mario* series. The US release of *Super Mario Brothers 2* was unique because Mario brought on new supporting roles for Luigi, Princess Peach, and

Toad. The player could select one of these characters every time they chose a level of play. Each character had traits that made them desirable or best fit for a given stage. Mario was, of course, the most well balanced character, but Princess Peach could levitate, Luigi could jump high and drift (which he also could do in *Lost Levels*), and Toad could pickup items faster than any other selectable character in the game.

The *Super Mario Brothers 2* release brought new enemy types that would reappear in follow-up sequels, including the *New Super Mario Brothers*

THE 202P TRUE HOLLYWOOD STORY:



released in 2006. This game also introduced a life meter similar to that of *Zelda*, but more simplified. Gamers could now take more than one or two hits before losing a life. This gave the game a little more “adventure” type game play than the typical Mario action arcade approach.

Although Mario experimented with different game genres before his *Super Mario Brothers 2* release, none of them brought him as much fame as his own side-scrolling action adventures. He enjoyed some time in Nintendo’s *Golf* game and *Wrecking Crew*, both released in 1985. These games simply reinforced the idea that Nintendo had chosen their platform mascot. It was *Super Mario Brothers 3* that proved, beyond any doubt, Mario could sell copies without being a bundled game solution.

Super Mario Brothers 3, released in the US during February 1990, was a departure from the *Super Mario Brothers 2* game style. Mario decided to seek the roots of his success, which meant losing Princess Peach and Toad in their roles as playable characters. Peach found herself captured again in the clutches of King Bowser. Toad became a helper character that made appearances in “Toad Houses” throughout the world, but would not be playable by the gamers. This version contained a new feature that replicated itself through many other Mario adventures: the ability to move around the world backwards and forwards.

This concept put Mario in more of an action adventure genre more than simple arcade side-scrollers.

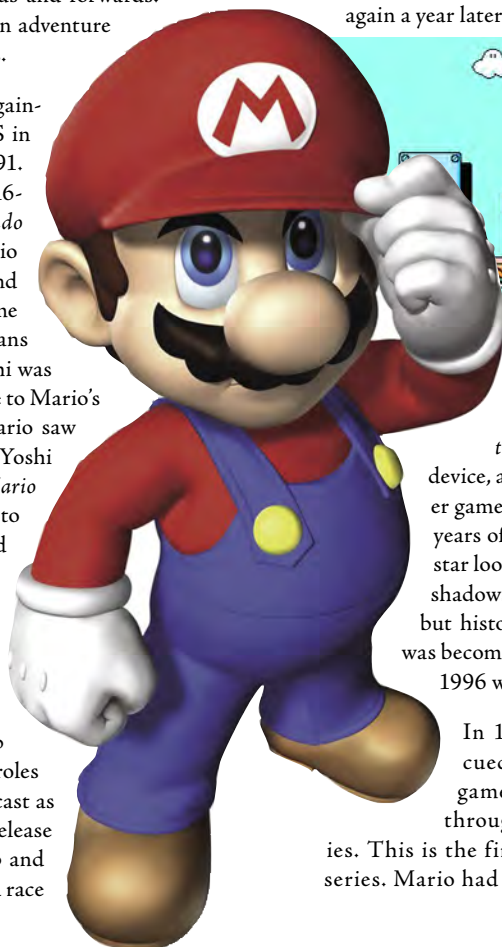
After a small stint earning his PhD and gaining the title Dr., Mario returned to the US in brighter colors during the late summer of 1991. His new title *Super Mario World* contained 16-bit graphics and ran on the new *Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES)* platform. Mario could see the success in the SNES console and wanted a piece of that coin. He knew this time he would have to work hard to keep the fans interested. After many screen castings, Yoshi was chosen to add a unique game play experience to Mario’s popular franchise. Yoshi filled the void Mario saw in his side-scrolling mayhem. This placed Yoshi on the front cover artwork for the *Super Mario World* box. Although Yoshi would go on to create his own spin-off game in 1992 called *Yoshi’s Cookie*, he never experienced the same fame as he did in *Super Mario World*.

Up to this point, Mario had guest-starred in many Nintendo platform games, found an arch enemy known as Wario, and created spin-offs using his name to bring up Nintendo sales figures. Mario tried many roles in the gaming industry but always felt typecast as that wacky plumber. Then 1992 saw the release of *Super Mario Kart*, where Mario suits up and competes against some of his co-workers in a race

to the finish. This classic racing game used a new technology known as Mode 7 to show off the impressive graphics of the SNES. Mario was finally included in a game considered a success story that didn’t involve him constantly jumping and side scrolling around the world of mushrooms. Mario said, “I might not be the star of the show, but it breaks me out of the action adventure genre.” This game helped launch Mario into a new genre of gaming, but it wasn’t the boost he was hoping. The next year Mario was back to his side-scrolling role.



Many retro gamers can recall the *Super Mario* series clearly in their minds. However, it is important to differentiate the graphical changes that occurred to the classic games over time. Lucas Films most likely got the idea of re-releasing their films with revised coloring from Mario’s historical decision-making. Mario was no fool. When he complained to the producers that his old games needed a severe face-lift to bring them “into the 90s,” it was immediately put into production. In 1993, the *Super Mario All Stars* SNES cartridge was an instance success. The original *Super Mario Brothers* fit the look and feel of the 1990s with clean cut lines, bright 16-bit colors, and a few minor tweaks and fixes in the game system itself. This bundled cartridge contained enhanced versions of *Super Mario Brothers*, *Super Mario Brothers 2*, and *Super Mario Brothers 3*. After some struggle, Mario convinced the producers to re-publish it again a year later to include *Super Mario World*.



After his successful remake, Mario burned most of his coin on drugs and alcohol. His various roles in games involved tennis on a failed *Virtual Boy* system, *Mario Clash* on that same failed device, a few Japanese only releases on the SNES, and other games that contained his name but not the fame. A few years of trying to find his way back into the industry as a star looked bleak. One quickly forgets a mascot lost in the shadows and Mario was becoming a classic history legend, but history does not bring in bright yellow coins. Mario was becoming a Nintendo platform legend and it wasn’t until 1996 when he saw his chance to bounce back.

In 1996, the fifth generation of US consoles rescued Mario from the bottle. His flagship “killer game” pushed the initial sales of the *Nintendo 64* through the roof and sold a total of 11 million copies. This is the first three dimensional (3D) Mario game in the series. Mario had the chance, once again, to become the founda-



THE 202P TRUE HOLLYWOOD STORY:

tion for the new 3D platform adventures. Mario claimed to have birthed the side-scroller genre and now he was claiming the 3D environment as well. The 3D realm was all new to gamers around the world but this game held true to its signature look and feel. Mario again was in the coin.



Mario used the *Nintendo 64* platform to launch a remake of his popular Kart game with *Mario Kart 64*. Racing now occurred in a beautiful 3D world with colorful landscapes, hills, bumps, and unique track locations. New items were added to bring in more dynamics, CPU racers were made slightly more realistic (no longer having infinite weapons) and the Karts could now drift! This was a great remake of an original classic, but it did not break Mario into a new genre. Mario broke into the RPG scene with *Paper Mario* for the *Nintendo 64* to bring in some additional cash to pay for his game-fame lifestyle. This game met critical acclaim from a number of reviewers and was one of the *Nintendo 64*'s only RPG games.



The following years gave Mario a chance to reflect on his success and spend some of the coin he had pulled in from these new platforms. Yet again, Mario was the mascot for many more *Nintendo 64* and handheld games. Most of these were simply sequels to NES and SNES games with the number "64" tacked on the end (i.e. *Dr. Mario 64*). The last great genre breaker for Mario was *Super Smash Brothers*, but his role in this game was as a selectable character - nothing special. He once told a reporter "I wasn't even an unlockable character!" - The ego of Mario was swelling. He even scoffed at Luigi for having his own *Luigi's Mansion* hit title a few years later.



The *Nintendo Game Cube* gave Mario his chance for another great action adventure. The next well-received game, *Super Mario Sunshine*, boasted high scores by IGN, Gamespy, and GameSpot. However, many game critics called it a reshaw of *Super Mario 64* with no ground-breaking features. Others said it lacked innovation and the addition of FLUDD, the water backpack, was simply a gimmick. Mario fell to the shadows again, wondering to himself if this was finally the end.

The next few years saw Mario in the drink once more. A famous star now making cameos in games like *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes* and a few *Paper Mario* RPG games helped keep him floating with positive financials, but much of this went up his nose. A lifestyle of the rich and famous can be tough on a superhero like Mario and a few too many magic mushrooms could put him in the gutter for good. In 2003, Mario produced yet another *Mario Kart* sequel known as *Mario Kart: Double Dash!* for the *Game Cube*. This exciting *Game Cube* racer was yet one of many racing games for the new console. It seemed to compete well with the likes of *Need For Speed*, but many called it more of a "kids game" and not a true racing classic. Die-hard *Nintendo* fans knew otherwise, but it is hard to face the wrath of a few cynical critics. This did not help Mario's habitual mushroom problems.



In 2006, Mario returns with his old friends from *Super Mario Brothers* to build a hand held classic game known as *New Super Mario Brothers*. The title is a little plain, but the game content holds this title true to the Mario series. Mario finds himself back to his old tricks with some of his good friends on a smaller hand held device. If he could have seen how far the game production technology would go back in 1981 he would have fallen dead on the spot. Mario now arrives on a cartridge a little larger than a quarter!

Rehabilitation has gone well for Mario and he will be returning in the next ground breaking classic on the *Nintendo Wii*. *Mario Galaxy* is supposed to be his next innovative creation that no competitor will beat. When confronting Mario, he simply states, "all is on schedule, but due to my NDA I'm not allowed to comment further on the project." Mario may be getting up in years but his enthusiasm still remains. Perhaps we'll see him again this Holiday Season.

ASK MIKE JAMES: DRUNKFEST EDITION

Due to the lack of questions for the Ask Mike James section, I have decided to tell you about the *Mike James Drunkfest*. If you have questions for "Ask Mike James," e-mail them to mike@2old2play.com.

So you're surfing the *Halo* forums and you suddenly see "Mike James Drunkfest" and say to yourself, "what the hell is a Mike James Drunkfest?" Even though you read the posts that announce that it's open to everyone, you're still shy about joining. You're worried that it's competitive and you're worried that you'll feel like an idiot because you don't know anyone. You may even think, "I don't have the skills to play in a tournament."

Completely NOT TRUE!

The Mike James Drunkfest started back when 2old2play was in its infancy. There were already several of us that played together on the weekends and got 'drunk' together while playing, so we decided why not make it into a tournament? It would give people new to the site a chance to mingle with others they normally didn't play with. So, voila, the "Mike James Drunkfest" was born.

After everyone signs up I set up the teams. You should only sign up if you're going to participate! It's really hard finding people to fill into slots with the way that the teams are set up.

Now many people have asked, "how do you set up the teams?" There's a ringer team that always plays. The first thing I do is take the higher skilled players and separate them immediately. I start with the highest ranked player and go down the list of eight teams and each of the eight teams get a highly skilled player. Next, I take the lowest skilled player and put them on the highest skilled player's team. From there, the rest are generally average players, which are usually separated if they're on the same clan.

I do not like putting people that play together nightly on the same teams. It's all supposed to be fun, not competitive. The only way a ringer team will be made is if people don't show up and we have to find alternates...SO SHOW UP!

Teams would look something like this as far as skill level:

Team 1:	30	17	21	24
Team 2:	29	19	20	25
Team 3:	27	21	22	24
Team 4:	27	20	22	23
Etc.....				

Now that you know how the teams work, you wonder what's next. Setting up the game types is next. Game types can be anything from a needler capture-the-flag or a beat down game to a regular CTF. There really are no specific game types and I usually make them up as we go along. The funkier games come later in the night.

Having a mind-altering experience must be the main part of the game. How you alter your mind is something you must figure out on your own. Please note, I do not condone excess drinking or the use of drugs; you know how those damn lawsuits come along.

It normally takes about three hours to finish the tournament and by that time, you're pretty lit. Personally I have not played in a single Drunkfest. I host them. I have probably just as much fun in the lobby as most do in the games. Several people have spent hours after the games just to hang out in the lobby.

I took the time to ask several people what they liked and disliked about the Drunkfests and here's what I got for answers:

What was the worst part of playing in a Mike James Drunkfest?

Getting up for work the next morning and driving a fire truck in a holiday parade (I.E. Memorial Day). **Copes**

If I work the next day. **The Lotus Eater**

Hitting my head on the toilet seat at the end of my first Drunk Fest (don't ask me why my head was in the toilet!). **Kung Fu Fenster**

Waiting for games to start and wanting to be in Mike James' room. **PMS EM**

Cursing the Tequila gods. **BC Kinetic**

What is the best part about playing in a Mike James Drunkfest?

Not caring too much about watching me get my ass handed to me while watching it through the bottom of a jug of "Jack & Coke". **Copes**

Meeting up in the room Mike James has set up to discuss the outcomes of the games. The conversations that take place in this room are extremely funny and some are legendary. **Umbee**

I love just getting together with a group of cool people, hanging-out, and playing some goofy-ass games. Oh, that and the mandatory 'Social' before each round. **Kung Fu Fenster**

The best part about it was the new people I got to meet. My friends list grew a lot from it... and the fact I got to see how much alcohol my body could stand in one night (or maybe that's the bad I don't know)!!! **Wife_of_F1R3**

What would you suggest to someone that's thinking of joining a Mike James Drunkfest?

It's like a "right of passage." If you really want to experience 2o2play then you have to get into a "Drunkfest". **Copes**

Get an ice chest, fill it full of beer and ice, and put it next to the TV. This way you burn less energy running to refill your drinks so much. Also, don't be scared -- sign up and show up. You will be glad you did. **Umbee**

Get drunk a little before it starts but make sure you keep drinking, don't sober up midway through. **PMS Em**

Check your beer supply - whatever you have, it's not enough. **BC Kinetic**

So don't only take my word on it, take it from those that have played. Don't be scared to take part in a Mike James Drunkfest or any other part of 2old2play. It's always more fun when you meet new people and become a part of the 2old2play family. Whether it's the 2old2play magazine, a Drunkfest, or a tournament that's currently going on - get involved, you'll be happy you did!

Next month I will be telling you about an interesting site project I've started. Make sure your wives read it because 2old2play wants to get them involved!



AUGUST RELEASE WATCH

THE ULTIMATE LIST OF GAMING GOODNESS SOON IN STOCK

TITLE	RELEASE DATE	TITLE	RELEASE DATE
PLAYSTATION 2		XBOX 360	
Barnyard	8/1/06	Timeshift	8/1/06
FlatOut 2	8/1/06	Ninety Nine Nights	8/15/06
Super Monkey Ball Adventure	8/1/06	Madden NFL 07	8/22/06
Veggie Tales	8/1/06	Saint's Row	8/29/06
Brave: Search for Spirit Dancer	8/8/06	Bomberman Act Zero	8/29/06
Final Fantasy VII	8/15/06	Enchanted Arms	8/29/06
World Tour Golf	8/15/06	NINTENDO DS	
Ford Street Racing	8/22/06	Hardcore Pool	8/1/06
King of Fighters 2006	8/22/06	Bubble Bobble Revolution	8/8/06
Madden NFL 07	8/22/06	Rainbow Island Revolution	8/8/06
One Piece Grand Adventure	8/22/06	Deep Labrynth	8/15/06
Pac-Man World Rally	8/22/06	Harvest Moon DS	8/15/06
Dance Factory	8/29/06	The Suite Life of Zack and Cody	8/15/06
Disgaea 2	8/29/06	Tenchu Dark Secret	8/21/06
Fast and the Furious	8/29/06	Madden NFL 07	8/22/06
Xenosaga Episode III	8/29/06	Fox Command	8/28/06
XBOX		Mech Assault Shadow War	8/29/06
Flatout 2	8/1/06	WINDOWS	
World Tour Golf	8/15/06	Dungeon Seige II	8/1/06
Madden NFL 07	8/22/06	Flatout 2	8/1/06
Ford Street Racing	8/22/06	Mage Knight Apocalypse	8/1/06
GAME CUBE		Timeshift	8/1/06
Boneyard	8/1/06	World War II Online	8/1/06
Backyard Baseball 2007	8/8/06	NeverEnd	8/2/06
Madden NFL 07	8/22/06	Pony LUV	8/11/06
One Piece Grade Adventure	8/22/06	El Matador	8/16/06
Pac-Man World Rally	8/22/06	Coffee Tycoon	8/21/06
PLAYSTATION PORTABLE		Panzer Command	8/21/06
Crisis Core Final Fantasy VII	8/1/06	Ship Simulator 2006	8/21/06
Super Monkey Ball Adventure	8/1/06	UFO Extraterrestrials	8/21/06
Madden NFL 07	8/22/06	Ford Street Racing	8/22/06
Mercury Meltdown	8/22/06	Madden NFL 07	8/22/06
Pac-Man World Rally	8/22/06	Pac-Man World Rally	8/22/06
		Fuel	8/22/06