

A MAGAZINE FOR GAMERS OVER 25

202P

MAGAZINE

VOLUME 7 - NOV/DEC 2006

INTERVIEW:

RED VS. BLUE

HALO GONE WILD

HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF COMPUTER ROLE PLAYING GAMES
FROM AKALABETH TO ELDER SCROLLS - RPG HISTORY IN THE MAKING
CHROMEHOUSES, SAINTS ROW, NHL 07, SODOKU REVIEWS AND MORE...

Inside Issue

- HOW GAMING IMPACTS LIFESTYLES
- NINTENDO IS FOR KIDS?
- MADDEN DS REVIEWED
- POPCAP'S HEAVY WEAPON

HALL OF FAME | FEEDBACK | GAMER PROFILE | RETRO GAMES

IN THIS ISSUE...

11



FEATURES

- 23 | EDITORIALS
 - Game Patches
 - Nintendo is for Kids (and Here's Why...)
 - How Gaming Impacts Lifestyles

DEPARTMENTS

- 04 | COLUMNS
 - Credits
 - The Editor Pwns You!
 - Feedback
 - You Blogged This!
- 08 | SPORTS HALL OF FAME
- 09 | REVIEWS
 - Chromehounds
 - Madden 07 DS
 - Saints Row
 - Sudoku
 - Heavy Weapon
 - NHL 07
- 19 | INTERVIEW
- 21 | GAMER PROFILE
- 27 | RETRO GAMES

FLASHBACK



PHOTO OF THE MONTH





ON THE COVER:

WE PUT THE CREATIVE MINDS BEHIND RED VS. BLUE AT ROOSTER TEETH UNDER HARDCORE INTERROGATION.

CREDITS

FRONT PAGE ILLUSTRATION:

Kirk Manley (BATMANKM)

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 (Lunatikzxx)

ILLUSTRATIONS:

Kirk Manley (BATMANKM)

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

Josh Diffey (Darth Cestual)

ARTICLES, REVIEWS, INTERVIEWS, AND CONTENT

Brian Edey (Faleorn)

Christopher Hemstad (TheSeeker)

Derrick Schommer (CodeMonkey)

Eddie Barnes (edd9139)

Elliot Rodriguez (CodeMunkee)

Fred Giombolini (Derf)

Jason Shurt (Shurtdown)

Jimmy (JollyRoger)

Kevin (TANK 2old2play)

Tammy McCoy (TwistedCaboose)

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Rooster Teeth Productions, LLC for taking the time to give us the facts about Red vs. Blue with a bit of humor and a whole lot of pwn.

Wikipedia.org for providing some facts and figures for information. It is nice to find a group of great 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. MediaCrumb, LLC is doing business as "2old2play." 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.

THE EDITOR PWNs YOU!

THE CONSOLE WARS

The holiday season is approaching faster than most of us want to admit. This marks the start of the next-generation console war. For those living under a rock, this is the seventh generation of consoles and should be a hell of a blood bath.

Over the last few months, I've been tracking news and updates on all of the console systems along with the rest of the crazy gamer fans. So far, I am most impressed with the direction Nintendo has taken its concept of an interactive entertainment system. Nintendo has always been known for following no one and inventing its own market. This is how the NES became the most popular home console system in the mid-1980s. Nintendo did not take denial sitting down – it jumped over the barriers to produce a new concept that caught on like wild fire.

Twenty years later, Nintendo is trying to push new barriers yet again by standing in the face of "this is a gimmick" and telling critics, "this is gaming." Nintendo understands that the console will not compete directly against the Microsoft *Xbox 360* nor does it have Microsoft's deep pockets. It also faces a monster of a company known as Sony Entertainment. Sony has pushed many companies off the mountain of console leader and owned the sixth generation of consoles as if it were its only job.

Sony's solution is to create the most powerful console system seen in the market. Sony's console, created for gaming, will be thousands of times more powerful than many industry computers from the late 80s and early 90s. The *PlayStation 3* (PS3), a system far ahead of its time, will still be a powerhouse in four years. Microsoft's console, the *Xbox 360*, may not be as powerful as Sony's PS3 but it has been in the market gaining traction for almost a full year ahead of all others.

Nintendo is fighting for the casual gamer and bringing games back into the home with family participation. Multiplayer may be online and offline; games are made to play together amongst friends. The Nintendo *Wii* offers interactive games with a "get up and go" requirement. The controller, known as the *WiiMote*, will be your main device to poke and prod your way through games.

Sony is fighting for the hardcore gamer, the technophile and those that want a cheap Blu-Ray solution. Some call it a "Trojan blu-ray player" surreptitiously forced upon us. Others consider it a high-resolution storage solution for massively detailed games running in a 1080p resolution not yet seen on HDTVs.

Microsoft just wants to continue its run as the dominating next-generation console and own market share. Who will win? The consumers will win in this battle. No matter what system you want, you will have three different systems to choose from, each platform providing definitively unique experiences. You can choose from a high-end graphic powerhouse, a system with a broad range of games and a year's worth of experience under its belt, or a fully interactive gaming system where movement is key.

The war has yet to begin. Until we've seen all three consoles readily available to the mass marketplace, no one can predict with 100% certainty which solution will rise up as the victor. History books are filled with failed console systems or systems that just couldn't stand the test of time. Nintendo has never posted a financial loss directly attributable to a console release, but it has not seen a number-one spot in many years. Sony plans to bleed financially for at least four years, while Microsoft will continue to take losses until roughly 2008. However, we do not care about their financial success; we care about fun and entertaining games.

Thanks,



Derrick Schommer (CodeMonkey)

editor@2old2play.com

GAMING ROOMS AND RIGS

COMMUNITY MEMBERS SHOW OFF THEIR GAMING SETUPS

Site News

2 great sources of 2old2play content, 1 source to claim them both.

Subscribe in iTunes today.

SUBSCRIBE

WIZARD101

A look at PopCap's latest

2OLD2PLAY MAGAZINE

Magazine 07 review

Configuring a D-LINK

FOR GAMERS



Here's mine... 32" Flat screen HDTV with 5.1 system. The previous owner had already wired the rear speakers through the walls (nice) so I only needed the stands for the front. And with the non-symmetrical room it sounds pretty good in there.

If only I could crank it up after the kids went to bed instead of only during The Incredibles.

QUOHOG, Columbus, Ohio

GAMING ROOMS AND RIGS (CONTINUED)



Here is my humble setup.
Sony 32" HDTV (good old CRT)
Logitech THX certified 5.1 System (Z-5500) 500 watts Cool
The 10" subwoofer is by the left.
StunGib, Honolulu, Hi



Allright ladies and gents:
My Xbox den (also known as the living room).
Teufelhunden11, Jacksonville, NC

HOW OLD IS 2OLD2PLAY?

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

What do you think it is that defines an older gamer and how do you see yourself fitting into the demographic?

I am 33 but do not consider myself old. I hold fast in the belief that you are only as old as you feel (today I feel about 125 but that is because of the weekend).

Falelorn, Edmonton, Canada

The older gamer is one who realizes there are more important things than your gamerscore. Joke all you want but if really put to it every one here can find several things more important to them than their last tournament.

tarbs, Nixa, Missouri

I believe the older gamer is the one that doesn't have the option to pause: it's now a requirement. You are not pausing for dinner... you're pausing to stop your kids from fighting, fixing the mailbox the teenage neighbor knocked down, closing on a mortgage, getting your children ready for school and spending time with your loved ones. The day you realize that "being a kid" has to be scheduled after 9pm and it can only last a few hours.

CodeMonkey, New Hampshire

I think the whole thing with 2o2p is that at 25 you've gained a bit of wisdom in life. You can respect others; you probably have a full time job, a steady girlfriend or wife and maybe kids or pets. We are all at a similar place in life so we can all relate to each other's life experiences. Where as if you throw a teenager in here, their outlook on life and their maturity level would be such that they wouldn't fit in. I have 2 teenage kids and they go and on about stuff and I just think in the back of my head, this stuff just isn't important in the grand scheme of things. Their outlook and attitude is so small minded because they haven't experience life to the extent a 30 year old has.

TANK, Fremont, CA

To me, older gamer describes someone who has been around to experience a multitude of gaming arenas and gaming mediums. An older gamer remembers what it meant to "reset" Asteroids as well as getting "phat loot" in the new MMORPG's. An older gamer brings a more mature clerical attitude.

DreadPirate75, Carlsbad, CA

My four year old daughter just told me to grow up.

Rashanii

I feel I became an older gamer about 4 or 5 years ago. My hand-eye coordination is not the same anymore. And I can't track as many movements on screen anymore. That doesn't mean I don't have fun anymore. Because of this site and my clan, I am having more fun then ever as a gamer.

Blue_Stiehl, Michigan

Our free time is so limited. There just isn't enough time (for me) to hop around genres that much. I'm pretty much into one game at a time.

Deman267

Around age 25 one realizes that they don't know everything, they still have a lot to learn, and that their parents were actually quite smart!

Bodaget

First and foremost, one thing has brought us all here, the love of gaming. By 25 we all pretty much understand that we are not the best gamers and never will be so we want to play with or against people who understand that and really don't care. We want to play for the pure enjoyment of it.

Twistedcaboose, Ohio

The main reason why we created the website was that, although everyone's life experience is different, after you reach the ripe age of 25 lots of similarities start to show. Being 25 doesn't make you "old" by the standard definition, but as far as gaming goes, it really does. We have jobs, spouses, families, mortgages, responsibilities, etc. We are not able to game as we did in our youth, participating in 36 or 48 hour sessions fueled by alcohol or whatever. We can't guarantee that every week we'll be playing at a certain time. Life happens.

DSmooth, Boston, MA

Although 26 isn't old by life's standards and my parents always tell me "oh your not old," some days I feel really old though. However, it's not the age... it's the experiences. Over just the past two years being with my current girlfriend/fiancé, I've learned a great deal about life in general and hopefully have grown into a somewhat decent person. I've learned life is too short to live in past mistakes, just pay for them, learn from them, and then try to move on. Have fun when you can, because ya don't know when life's sh*t is gonna drop. In addition, make sure you have a good umbrella. And, don't judge people. Everyone makes their own choices in life just as you do. Just because it's not the same religion, music taste, sexual orientation or any of those things doesn't make them a bad person.

Now gaming. I've been a gamer since I could hold a controller. I'm not an elitist by any means and not really competitive (except in old-school fighting games). My intent with gaming much like my other hobbies is to just have fun. That's it. If I don't have fun, I don't do it. Life's too short to not enjoy it. Enjoying my hobbies with other people is always a plus.

Gatsu, SC

CodeMonkey summed it up nicely. Being a gamer that has serious responsibilities. I think he said it best with "being a kid has to be scheduled after 9pm."

Biorod, Durham, North Carolina

An older gamer is able to enjoy the game for what it is, knows what it takes to be able to afford an Xbox, TV, video games or pc and does not go around in a match spewing unnecessary profanities. Unless the Timmy of the other side starts spewing these types of things, then it's time to show them to respect their superiors!! Well maybe right hand, malice, Ken, soup can do that. I just kind of hide in the corner and let them do all the hard work.

Lbsutke, Orange County, CA

All of what you said makes pretty good sense. Also, I have been reading about changes to the brain as you get older and how younger gamers use a different part of their brains (instinctive, reactionary). (It is one of the arguments against violent video games for younger people) This starts to change in the young 20's when we start to rely on a more analytical part of our brain (it's a different lobe) which pretty much gels coincidentally about the time we are 25.

CapnHun, Iowa

Being an older gamer to me means that I am that "cool dad" that can kick all the neighbor Timmies around online, but only after the homework is finished!

UnwashedMass, La Crescenta, CA

BLADES OF STEEL – NES

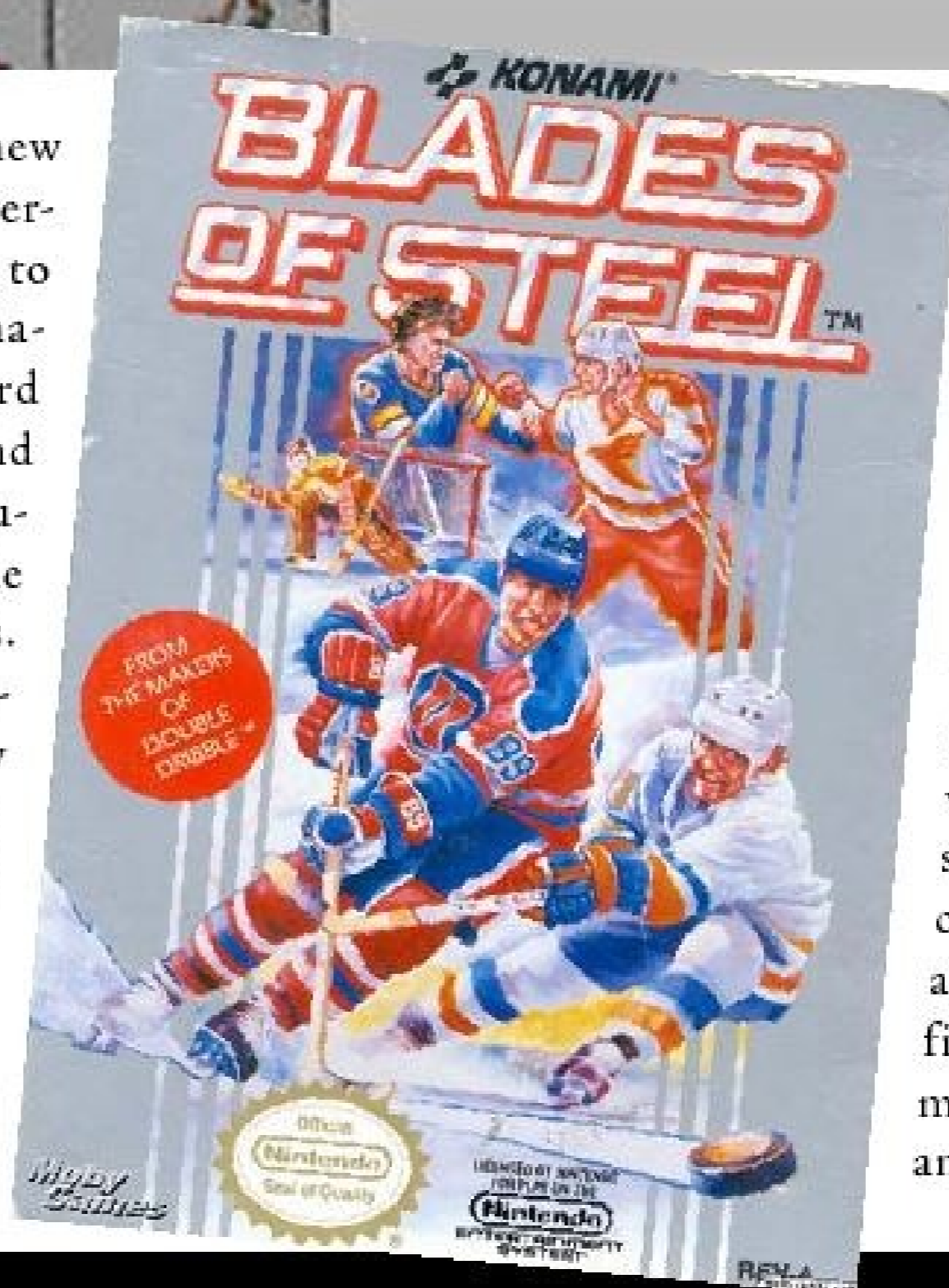
VIDEO GAME SPORTS HALL OF FAME

By Jason "Shutdown" Shutt

Each month the Video Games Sports Hall of Fame will induct and take a look at a sports game from our past and honor them for all they have done to pave the way for the games that we play today. This month we are proud to present to you Induction #1: *Blades of Steel* for the Nintendo Entertainment System.

Blades of Steel, released in December, 1988, let you know right from the start that you were not playing your average hockey game. As soon as the title screen came and uttered those words, "Blades of Steel," you knew that you were in for a great game. Upon entering the screen, the user was given the choice to play an Exhibition Game or play in a Tournament. The Exhibition mode was your standard single game, where the player chose teams and competed against the computer or another human player. The Tournament mode was the standout feature of the two main choices. This is where all eight teams in the game (Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, Edmonton, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Minnesota) competed in a bracket tournament with the winner getting the Konami Cup.

The game play was rather simple, but balanced. The game consisted of three periods. If the game was tied after that, a shootout would take place, with each team getting five shots. If the shootout ended in a tie, there would be another shootout that would only give each side one shot at a time until a winner was declared. The actual flow of the game itself was filled with poke checks and slap shots. There was very little checking in the game but players did collide, resulting in the player being slowed down and thus doing the same damage as a body check. Considering the technology of the time, *Blades of Steel* had a good up-and-down-the-ice flow. The game flowed so well that you were using the intermissions to rest your fingers, unless it was the second intermission – but I will get to that in a second.



While Tournament got the prize for best mode and the game play was top notch, this game has several features that scored and made it an easy choice for the Hall of Fame. The first feature of note is the voice technology that was state-of-the-art for its time. You would hear the announcer say, "face-off," or "fight." This technology allowed for some early signs of play-by-play commentary. You would hear the announcer say, "with the pass" when a pass was made. Another feature to note was the ability to play Gradius on the big screen during the second intermission.

A feature that often gets off to the side when this game is mentioned is the credits that played if you won the Konami Cup. Music played and the credits rolled with the backdrop of a team yearbook showing pictures of your team throughout the tournament. This was a rewarding feeling after you battled through the teams and hoisted the cup. The final reason that *Blades of Steel* has reached this legendary status can be summed up in a two sentence exchange. The first person says, "Hey, do you remember a game called *Blades of Steel*?" and the second person says "Yeah, that was the one where you got to fight, right?" That sums it up. *Blades of Steel* allowed the user to control the fights. All a player had to do was hit another player three consecutive times and the fight would start. Each player would have a life meter that would drop with each landed punch and the loser of the fight would be ushered into the penalty box. The ability to fight would become synonymous with *Blades of Steel* over the years.

In closing, we here at 2old2play.com would like to congratulate *Blades of Steel* for being a pioneer in the area of hockey games and sports games in general. It is truly an honor to walk down memory lane with such a worthy combatant. Ladies and gentlemen, the first game to let us drop the gloves and make the loser sit in shame in the penalty box, I give you *Blades of Steel*.

CHROMEHOUNDS

FOR THE XBOX 360

By CodeMunkee

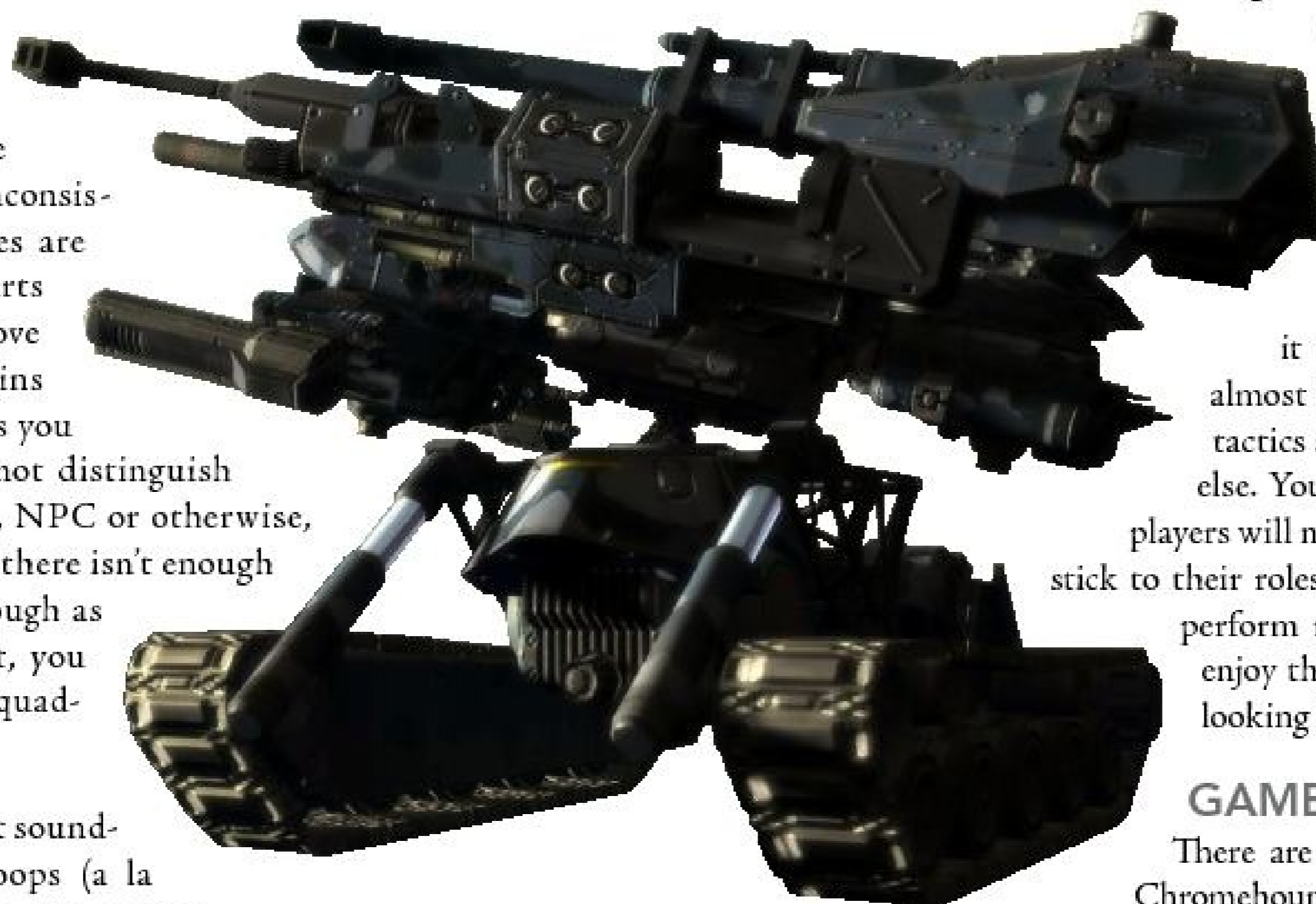


While I don't like speaking in generalities, *Chromeounds*, like many things, is not going to be for everyone. If you liked the *Gunvalkryie* game or anything in the *MechAssault* series, chances are you will not like Sega's newest release for a variety of reasons. However, if you're a gamer that enjoys spending countless hours tinkering with your giant war machine, a persistent MMO-type war world, and working as a unit with your teammates/friends, you will grow to LOVE *Chromeounds*. This game is held back from being a ten due to a variety of implementation issues, however, which will certainly frustrate gamers that love or hate this release.

GRAPHICS AND AUDIO

This game is a very good looking Xbox360 title "in spots". The particle effects and dynamic lighting are very impressive; night vision is awesome looking, the effects of flares, in particular, is beautiful. HDTV owners will really like the explosions and weapon after-effects. In other areas, though, it's pretty bland. The landscape is devoid of any real color, and the terrain, in a few places, is inconsistent. The mechs themselves are gorgeous - many moving parts churn and grind as you move your mech. The color begins to be a real pain, though, as you realize that often you cannot distinguish players on your own squad, NPC or otherwise, from you, simply by color - there isn't enough diversity to tell quickly enough as to who is who. As a result, you end up shooting your squad-mates at least once.

Audio is ok. There is decent sounding ambient music that loops (a la UNO) in the menu system and during the missions. The voice-acting is, in some places, brutal. The dialogue will sometimes get you looking for an airsickness bag. There are noticeable pauses in speech, particularly from the narrator, at the same time as the screen subtitles switch - causing very robotic, unnatural speech. And while your single player character works as a mercenary for three different nations, all the NPC accents sound the same - bad Eastern European. You may want a custom soundtrack for this one.



CONTROL

The control is incredibly accessible to players of any skill type. Your mech is very responsive, and weapons fire right when you want them. You'll use the analog sticks to steer your mech's chassis, and aim your upper body's weapons. Switching to the zoom view is as easy as a thumbclick, while switching weapons is a click of the bumper. The only pain I encountered was occasionally popping on my mech's light without meaning to, which sometimes caught the attention of other mechs.

You can map your buttons to fire multiple weapons on a single shot, which is a very nice feature. The macro system for the Commander can sometimes get unwieldy in the heat of battle, but it's a decent implementation. Overall, Sega fit a lot of functionality into the controller, and it works very well.

Your mech, while easy to use, will be a slow mover. And this is where gamers need to decide which pill they want to take. The game moves at a much slower pace than does *MechAssault*. In fact, comparisons with that series are almost unfair, because it's much more like *Steel Battalion* than *MechAssault*. There is definitely a feeling of weight to your mech, and it is magnified as you get into the heavier

classes, like the Heavy Gunners. Those looking for a twitch gaming experience should probably steer clear of *Chromeounds*. It is designed to be a more methodical approach, and it works very well. The speed almost forces you to consider squad tactics and strategies above anything else. You will find that lone wolf type players will not excel in battle. Players who stick to their roles and are communicative will perform really well in game, and will enjoy the game a lot more than those looking for a run and gun experience.

GAMEPLAY

There are two modes in which to play *Chromeounds* - Single Player and Online.

In the single player mode, you are a mercenary, fighting for three different countries across the storyline. You work your way through six different types of mechs (called "RTs", or "Role Types"), completing missions and training, earning parts as your reward. Upon completion, the mission is graded based upon a variety of factors - such as accuracy - with bonus points awarded for accomplishing additional objectives, such as speed of completion, or keeping your CPU-controlled squad mates alive. Earning top ranks (the "S" rank) nets you an extra, higher-end part.



CHROMEHOUNDS (CONTINUED)

Given you start without any parts, you are given a "borrowed" mech, which you will use to complete your missions, at least the first time around. Eventually, you earn enough parts that you'll have enough to create your own mech that may or may not conform to a particular Role Type.

The Role Types are pretty straight forward and mostly self-explanatory. The Soldier is a front line fighter with a nice balance of armor, weaponry, and mobility. The Sniper is a long distance specialist. The Scout is a speedy, lighter weight recon-type mech. The Defender is an effective escort for squads that need something beefier than a Soldier, but faster than a Heavy Gunner. The Heavy Gunner is the artillery specialist, making bullets rain down on enemies from extreme distances. And at the center of it all is the Commander, who works as the backbone of communication for the entire squad.

The Single Player campaign objectives are tailored to each RT's ability. For example, the Scout missions will mostly involve securing COMBASes, towers that, when controlled by your squad, will facilitate communication on the battlefield. If you wander outside of a COMBAS's range, you will not be able to speak to, or hear, other squad-mates. Since Scouts are the fastest of all RTs, this is one of the primary functions for them, and the missions in Single Player are designed to get you accustomed to that role. The same holds true for the other 5 RTs.



This, in and of itself, is an interesting idea, as it gears you up for online play without dumping you in the middle of a war not knowing what to do. The problem is that it's sometimes just not that compelling. The overarching storyline, which is meant to be a lead-in to the online war (known as The Neroimus War), is difficult to follow, and in many cases, incredibly hokey. In between suffering through the dialogue, you'll work your way through missions that are uneven in terms of compelling content. The Soldier, Sniper, and some Heavy Gunner missions are fun, but others are pretty tedious to finish. The tedium is exacerbated by some often vague instructions that are provided by NPCs - and there is no in-game method of retrieving your objectives if you happen to forget. Waypoints on your map help this some, but there were still many times where I wandered about an area waiting for something to occur, not sure of what to do. It also would have been helpful to know what the bonus objectives were before starting missions, so that I'm not forced to repeat them; you're not told what the extra objectives are until after you get your mission grade.

So the single player, by itself, is a mediocre ensemble of fair to middling content, with the main driver being in earning parts for your own custom mech.

Then there is the online play. This is where *Chromebound* turns into some good digital crack. This game opens up into a whole new animal online. There are a huge variety of options to choose from.

Most of your online time will be spent in the persistent conflict - the Neroimus War. When you first start, you will have to declare your allegiance to one of the three countries fighting the war. Once you do that, you can join squads of up to 20 people and run missions against CPU or human opponents, with each victory earned counted towards

your country's overall conquests. For each mission you win, you earn cash that you can use to purchase more parts, or save to donate to your country's war chest. You also earn renown and merit points, which accumulate and "level up" your rank in your squad. If you just want to earn money or if your country is losing the war and you have no territories, you can run Individual missions for some cash. These are a lot like the solo campaign, though, and mostly involve destroying CPU squads of tanks and mechs, or destroying the CPU HQ.

Online, you can buy parts from captured countries, trade parts, mech setups, enter lotteries for special parts, do trial runs, design your squad's emblem, add decals to your mech; the list is far too long to show everything. There are countless options for creating, modifying, and playing with your mech. Throw in five more people and a squad of six enemies waiting to blow you up, and this becomes one of the most satisfying Xbox Live experiences out there.

Free play offers Deathmatch, Capture the Flag, and several other options for those who don't want to play in missions that are exclusively for the war. While the box says 20 players in multiplayer, this is kind of misleading. Your squad can hold up to 20 players, and you can communicate with all of them in the squad lobby, but missions hold a maximum of six players per side, 12 total. Therefore, if you're all on at once, you'll be breaking up into four squads of five to fight.

Despite all this, there are problems with the online implementation, mostly related to squad management. You can't join a squad if no one from the squad is online. Squad leaders cannot invite other players. The briefing time for joining missions can sometimes be excessive (up to 15 minutes) when waiting for an enemy opponent to be "ready". Your squad leader can change your country's affiliation without you even knowing every time the war ends. Players who rely on sonar will find it very hard to tell based on sight who is an enemy and who is a friendly. The menu system is kind of a mess, and could really use some streamlining. The server messages when you log into the war are excessive and unnecessary. The weapon explanations are not very thorough, and the font is too small in a few places to read.

However, if a COD2 type patch were implemented for *Chromebound*, this could easily become one of the most popular titles on Live today.

OVERALL

If you can stomach the single player mode, *Chromebound* is an OK experience, and will certainly leave you frustrated in some places. But take it online and you won't look back. Those who are achievement score freaks will want to finish the single player campaign and earn all S ranks, but the majority of achievements, and fun, are to be had online. It's an incredible idea that in some ways is before its time, and is evident in the implementation, but Sega has some time left to make the wrongs right. And if they do, they will have an undeniable hit on their hands. It happened for Call of Duty 2. There's no reason to believe it won't happen here.

Then you'll wish you had the game on release day, because most of us will be blowing your ass up while you figure out which way is up.

MADDEN 07

FOR THE NINTENDO DS

by Derf



The *Madden* series from Electronic Arts is one of the most successful video game franchises ever developed. I'm sure that without it, EA wouldn't be an industry leader as it is today. I have played the *Madden* games over the years, most recently *Madden 2006* for the PSP and the 360. Wondering if *Madden* would incorporate the stylus into Nintendo's DS play, I picked up a copy.

The first thing I noticed was the blocky graphics. Comparing the graphics to *Madden 2006*, the PSP puts the DS to shame. I'm assuming that the DS just doesn't have the power to push out better graphics, although games like *Super Mario* look really nice. Sound effects are excellent and the music is typical of an EA game. The commentary featuring Al Michaels and John Madden is repetitious and many times the comments don't fit the game situation. But as with many DS games, what makes *Madden 2007 DS* a great game is its playability.

You can either play *Madden 2007* in classic or touch mode. In classic mode you play much like you would on a console or on the PSP, using the directional pad and buttons. If you prefer to play this way and have a PSP, I would suggest you buy the PSP version, as it looks much better. Using the touch system is what makes this game worth buying. By using the stylus you can call your play, snap the ball, execute jukes, spins, and dives by the way you drag you stylus across the screen. At first this seemed hard, but by playing the mini camp games (sort of a mini training camp), you can quickly learn how to execute the moves. The same thing applies for passing. After you snap the ball, you change which receiver you are going to throw to by dragging the stylus on the screen. This also changes the quarterback's field of view so that you can scan the whole field. To me this is much more fun than just punching a button.

Kicking is performed using the stylus in an interesting way: To kick you touch the screen once to set a starting point and then touch the screen near the intended target. Draw a line between the 2 marks for power and

direction. For instance if want the ball to curve right a bit drag the stylus slightly to the right. Hot routes can be drawn on the touch screen after touching the HR on the screen and then selecting the receiver. Audibles can be called by either touching the A on the touch screen and saying the color of the audible you want to do or by touching the play. Yelling the color is fun although my family occasionally thinks I'm going crazy. Well, maybe not occasionally. Using the stylus is a great way to put a new twist on this game.

The DS version includes a complete "Franchise" mode if you enjoy team management. In Franchise mode you can control rosters, depth charts

and trade and sign players. Other game modes include:

Season - Lead one or more teams through a single season

Custom League - Create a single or double round-robin league for up to 8 players

Tournament - Set up a single or double elimination tournament

Two Minute Drill

Practice - Practice any play you wish

Situation - Pick a great game situation or make up your own

You also get the standard features:

Create a Team

Create a Play

Mini Camp - This is a good way to train with the stylus.

One feature that would have been fun would be online matchmaking, as available in *Mario Kart DS*. However, you can play a game locally or compete in mini-games through the wireless connection.

If you enjoy the DS's unique interface then you need to head over to the store

and grab a copy of *Madden 2007*. They have managed to fit a lot into the tiny DS package. The only feature I'm missing is online matchmaking. With that aside, I recommend *Madden 2007 DS*.

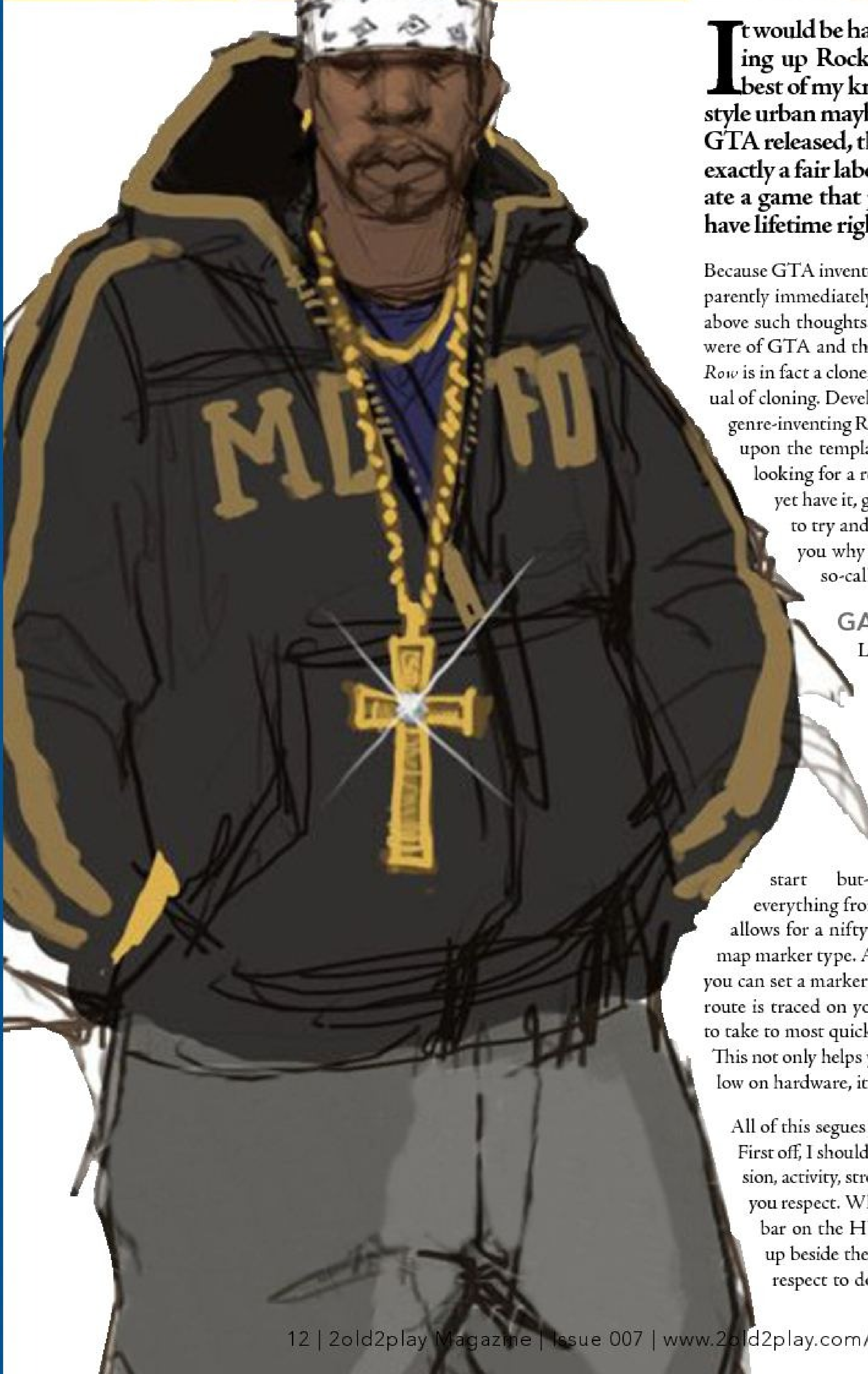
RECOMMENDATION - BUY



SAINTS ROW

FOR THE XBOX 360

by TheSeeker



It would be hard to talk about *Saints Row* without bringing up Rockstar Games in the same article. To the best of my knowledge, Rockstar invented the sandbox style urban mayhem genre, and since 1998, when the first GTA released, there have been many “clones.” Clones isn’t exactly a fair label, because all Rockstar really did was create a game that pretty much invented a genre; they don’t have lifetime rights to that genre.

Because GTA invented an archetypal game, every game thereafter is apparently immediately considered a derivative. I will admit that I am not above such thoughts. Upon hearing about *Saints Row*, my first thoughts were of GTA and the word clone may have come up. That said, if *Saints Row* is in fact a clone, it should be taught in school as the “How-To” manual of cloning. Developer Volition proved it could not only compete with genre-inventing Rockstar in its own game, Volition could even improve upon the template a little. Let me put it very simply for those just looking for a recommendation, *Saints Row* is a keeper; if you don’t yet have it, go get it. With that out of the way, I will now proceed to try and break the game down a little further and explain to you why you should spend your hard-earned money on this so-called clone.

GAMEPLAY

Let’s get right to the heart of the matter. Gameplay in *Saints Row* is pretty much the same as GTA at its core. The story is bolstered by very well done cut-scenes that really show off the next-gen graphics, but for the most part aren’t mind-bending in any way, and is actually one of the few downfalls of this game. This is made up by strengths in other areas, however. The first thing that comes to mind is the map. It’s brought up with a simple push to the start button and is quite detailed. Not only does it show everything from missions to activities, strongholds to cribs, it also allows for a nifty filtering feature that filters out all but the selected map marker type. Another great thing about the map is that at any time you can set a marker anywhere on the map and immediately a GPS style route is traced on your in-game mini-map showing you the exact roads to take to most quickly get to your intended destination. Very cool stuff. This not only helps you find the Friendly Fire weapons store when you’re low on hardware, it also helps you find your next mission objective.

All of this segues nicely into my next topic: mission/story progression. First off, I should explain that nearly everything you do, be it story mission, activity, stronghold, or even just killing rival gang members, earns you respect. When you earn a certain amount of respect, your respect bar on the HUD will fill up completely and a small x1 will come up beside the gauge. What this means is that you can now ‘spend’ respect to do one of the stronghold missions, or one of the story

SAINTS ROW (CONTINUED)

missions. Either one will take one full respect bar away from you (but also give you respect in return), at which time if you don't have any further full respect bars built up you must then do activities to gain enough respect to move on. I really like this system as it gently prods you to explore the town of Stillwater and its myriad of activities.

I think I must now back up just a bit and explain the difference between a story mission, a stronghold mission, and an activity. A story mission is, as it sounds, a mission that progresses the minimalist story. This is essentially to take over your rival gangs' territory and be the last one standing. I shouldn't be quite so harsh on the story of *Saints Row*, for even if the story so far has been rather derivative, the characters have proven likeable, and the voice acting, if sometimes over-the-top, is usually very good.

it is rather simplistic. Enemies rarely take cover, but they do sometimes. And when the AI gets tougher it usually just means more enemies with bigger guns.

Let's move right along to more destructive matters. The aiming/shooting engine and button layout greatly resembles that found in *GTA: SA*, with two glaring oversights. The first problem is that there is no auto-target lock-on. I loved this feature in *GTA:SA*, it was especially handy in the territory wars when you were facing more than one enemy at once and could quickly change targets with little to no thought. However, the manual aim reticule does move in a very fluid, usable fashion, so it's really not that much of a hassle. Admittedly, the absence of auto-targeting isn't huge, but it would have



A stronghold mission basically involves you (and possibly some of your 'homies', recruited by pushing up on the digital pad when close) killing every rival gang member in the specified stronghold territory. Once this is complete, you then gain that building as a save point, and the surrounding territory adds to your money made per day (which can then be picked up at any one of your cribs, which are gained by completely taking over a rival gang's territory).

Activities are definitely one of the nicest additions that *Saints Row* brings to the table. They aren't all based on the same principle with a different setup (like *GTA's* taxicab, and police missions, etc.). They range in difficulty and run the gamut from drug trafficking (protect the dealer as he drives from deal to deal), to escort (escort a prostitute so she can do her business in the back of a car with a client, while avoiding paparazzi), to insurance fraud (jump in front of traffic to reach a monetary goal in injuries) and that's only three of the many possible activities you can perform to gain respect and money.

The AI in *Saints Row* is a little more intelligent than *GTA's*, and does a rather nice job of straddling that middle ground, although



SAINTS ROW (CONTINUED)

been nice to be given the choice. The second problem is more of an annoyance, but it's a pretty big one. To change weapons you must press and hold the B button and then use the left analog stick to choose the desired firearm. This is a clumsy way to do this for the obvious reason that you must completely stop walking, change weapons, and then continue on. It's just not as fluid as if you were to use, say, the L and R buttons to cycle through your arsenal. But given the lack of free buttons, Volition did a fine enough job with the layout scheme.



Speaking of arsenals, the available weapons are about the same as in GTA, with a few amusing additions. You can get a knife, bat, and even find a billy club from your friendly peace officer. You get two different SMGs to choose from, as well as three different assault rifles, one being a sniper rifle – which would be great if not for the amazing recoil and reload time. On top of all that, there is of course an RPG for max destruction and a pipe bomb, as well as good-old-fashioned hand grenades.

One thing that is kind of nice, yet at the same time rather annoying, is the day/night cycle. Sure, it simulates reality, which is good of course. But sometimes you just have to have more ammo for your assault rifle and if it's during the night, well – too bad, Friendly Fire is closed. Sometimes, but not often, I find myself just driving around waiting for dawn so I can buy some hardware and continue on with the game. Not a big deal, but worth mentioning. You can hardly fault Volition for wanting to inject the game with a healthy dose of realism to more fully draw you into the game.

To draw you even further into the world of Stillwater are an abundance of customization options. You can buy clothes, jewelry, CDs, and car mods, as well as have plastic surgery, all in the name of making your character your very own. Here is a tip if you plan on using your own custom music in-game. Don't cue up your music via the Xbox button and then using the Xbox guide console. Use the in-game audio player to play a playlist you have created which includes all your music, and put it on shuffle. This has two benefits. First, you can change tracks simply by pressing the digital pad left or right. Second, the music will stop for cut-scenes and lower volume when you get

phone calls. Otherwise, you will have to go into the Xbox Guide console and pause the music during cut-scenes if you want to hear what's going on. Customization is one area where *Saints Row* has really tried to set itself apart from GTA. Volition has given gamers many, many customization options, and dare I say GTA may have a trick or two to borrow from Volition when the next-gen GTA comes out.

GRAPHICS

Ever since the next generation of consoles appeared and ushered in the 'HD era,' as Microsoft likes to call it, I have been anxiously awaiting a next-gen GTA. The thought of urban mayhem in high-definition is very appealing to me. Thankfully, Volition has stepped up to the plate and provided me with my fix.

Saints Row looks beautiful on nearly all levels. The plethora of different textures used to dress up

each new neighborhood employ bump and normal mapping of course, and look great.

Character models, buildings, and cars are all gorgeous with not a jaggy to be found.

Particle effects are especially pretty.

Try blowing up a car and you will be warmly rewarded with fantastic

smoke and fire particle effects, as well as flying debris going all over

the place – not to mention drastically improved car damage

models (over GTA). Lighting is top notch, with full use of high

dynamic range lighting. Even the full-screen blur filter applied

when you drink a 40 oz., or the wavy-blur filter applied

when you smoke a blunt are well done and actually rather amusing.

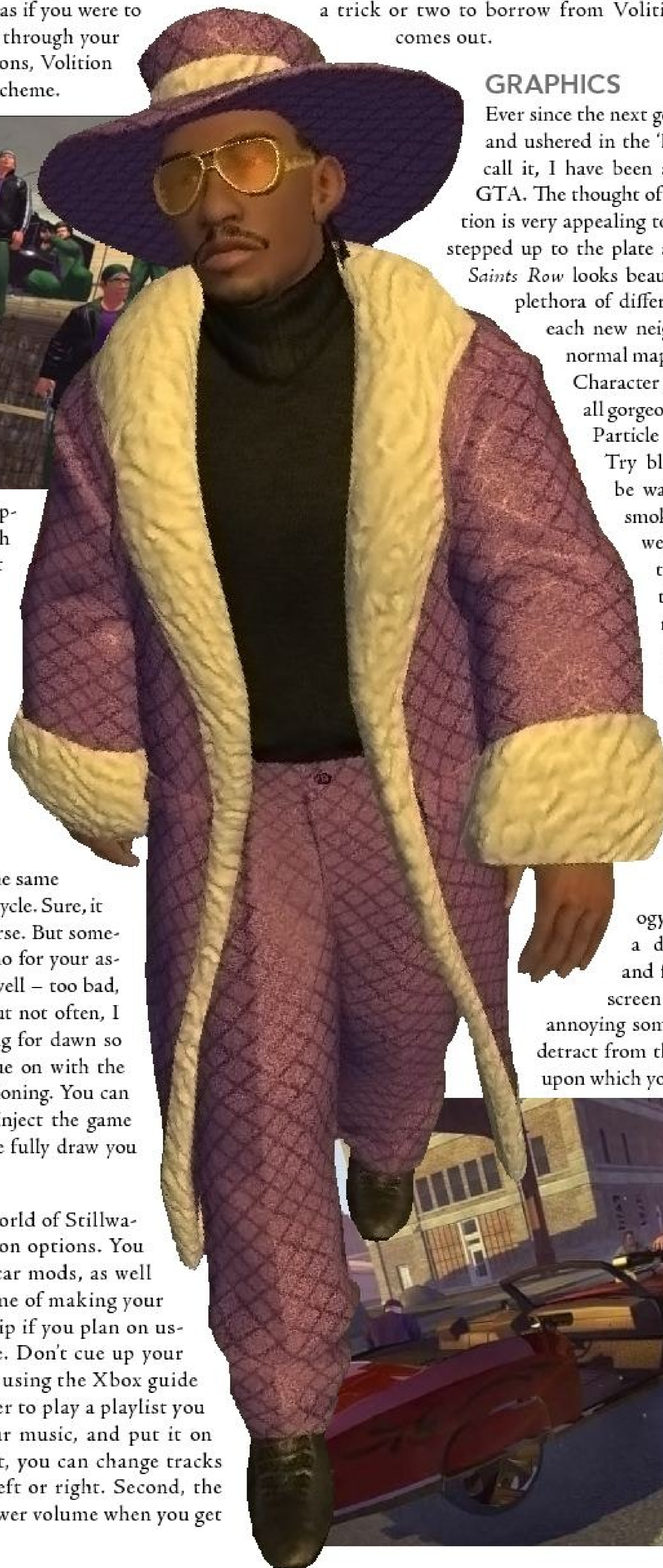
Volition definitely uses

Xbox 360's shader technology to its fullest, giving this title

a distinctly high-definition look and feel. One thing you will see is

screen and texture tearing. It can get annoying sometimes, but it's not enough to

detract from the rest of the gorgeous visuals upon which your eyes feast.



SAINTS ROW (CONTINUED)

ONLINE

Volition's implementation of Xbox Live functionality in *Saints Row* really feels thrown together at the last minute. Despite this, there are a decent amount of modes from which to choose: team and single Gangsta Brawl (deathmatch), team and single big ass chains (gather chains from fallen comrades or enemies and bring them to a designated spot for points), blinged-out ride (your team collects money to pimp your ride to a certain level), and protect the pimp (team based attack and defend mission). You also get the typical Quick, Custom, or create a party Xbox Live options, as well as the option to create a gang. Another option is co-op missions, which aren't nearly as fun as they sound. The online lobbies are actually pretty fun, you can create a public or private party and this takes you to your lobby. Here you can meet up with your friends and just shoot at each other endlessly with no points earned, but it's a fun placeholder until the next match gets started. The problem with Volition's implementation of the Live component isn't with the modes (although a persistent territory gang wars mode would have been fantastic), the problem can be described in one word: lag. *Saints Row* suffers from some of the worst lag that I have ever seen in any game I have ever played on Xbox Live. Enemies that were right in front of you a second earlier will disappear and then you will be dead and spawning before you even knew that you were in trouble. The lag can get so bad that it will make it impossible to even enter a vehicle. Despite this, I find myself coming back and playing *Saints Row* online. A simple patch released by Volition will hopefully take care of the lag issues, and maybe some DLC will add more maps to the scant three that are currently available.

Let's now take some time to talk about the co-op missions, though not much can be said. Don't get too excited, because these are mediocre at best. Co-op missions come in two varieties, Mob Rule and Turbulence. In one, you race to the end of the level and try to survive; in the other, you must carry valuable boxes to a designated point. Nothing special about either of these and they aren't nearly as fun as the other Live modes. However, I think that with a decent DLC release, maybe some fun co-op modes could actually get added, and make this a viable option.

CONCLUSION

Saints Row is a very impressive game in most respects. It has a ton of side missions to accomplish, a sick amount of customization options, decent voice acting, and great visuals. The game progression flows nicely, maybe even more so than GTA, and is definitely superior to any of the other GTA clones.



Although I am of the opinion that *Saints Row* doesn't quite oust GTA from the top spot, it is, like I mentioned previously, a how-to manual in making a clone. Achievements set it apart from GTA, and they are actually decent achievements. However, the script could have been a little less forced hip-hop, the story could have been a little more intricate, and the production could have been bumped up a notch. Despite a lack of originality, *Saints Row* looks great and is fun to play, and that's more than you can say for most games.



HANDHELD SUDOKU

GO SUDOKU, BRAIN AGE, AND SUDOKU GRINDMASTER

by Derf

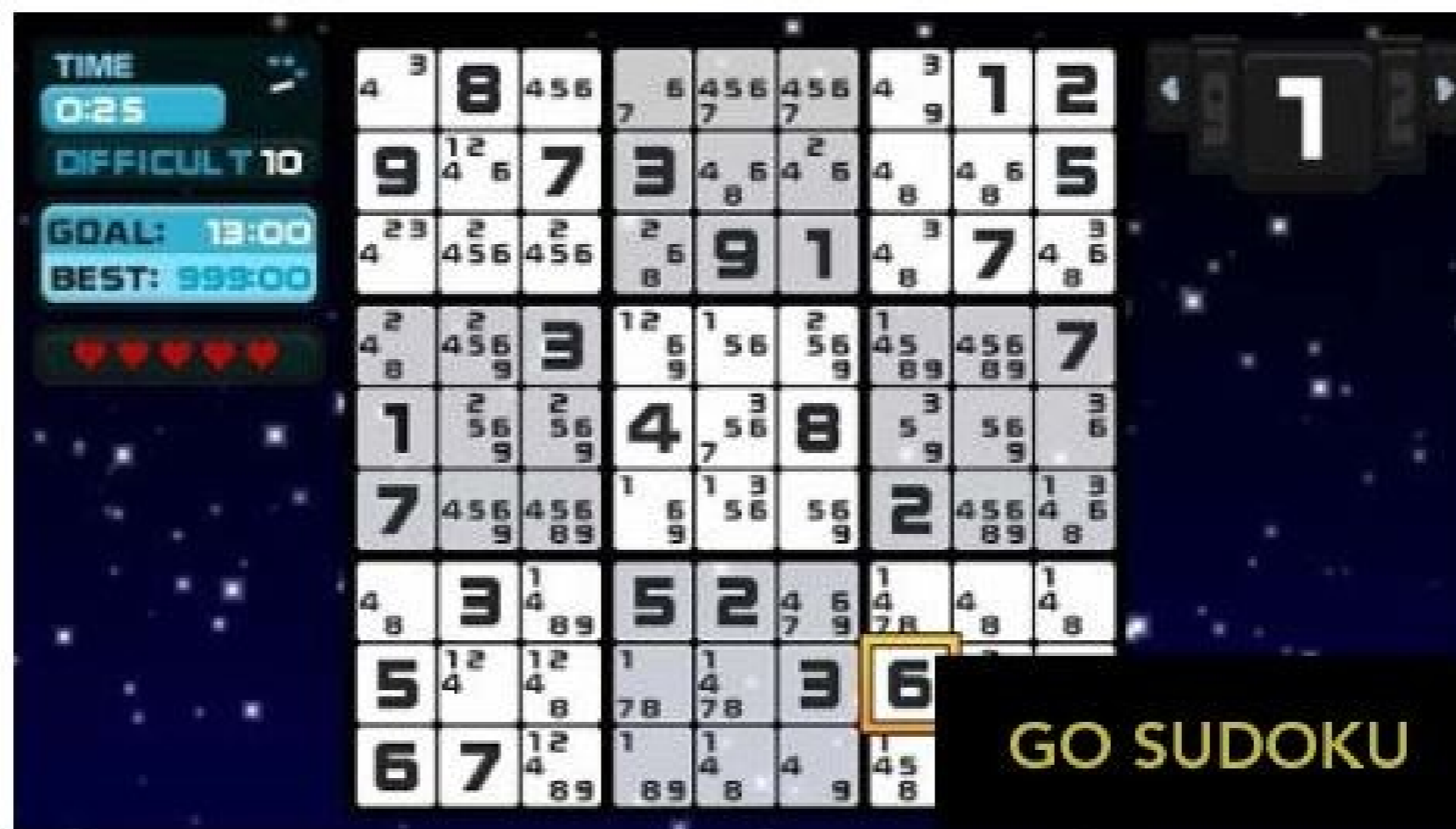
No one can deny the popularity of Sudoku. This number-grid game is fun and can be quite challenging. While most do their Sudoku on paper I prefer doing mine on either my DS or my PSP. On paper, a mistake usually shows up at the end and it's practically impossible to redo the puzzle. On the handhelds, you can be warned if you make a mistake and if you prefer not to be warned you can always reset the puzzle or undo a few steps. With that said, on to the reviews.

GAMEPLAY

The first Handheld Sudoku game released was *Go Sudoku* by Ubisoft for the PSP. Since the PSP has no stylus, you select the square you want to fill in with the analog stick, change the numbers with the left and right triggers, then hit x to select the number. You can place small note numbers in each square (up to 5) by hitting the 0 button. The Triangle button undoes your moves while the square button erases. Although this method seems inefficient, it works fine. This program has a thousand puzzles split up by difficulty.

Your times are recorded, so you can always try to better your time. You can also download more games by navigating to the Ubisoft website. If you make a mistake, you are informed, and a time penalty is assessed. One major problem with the game is that while you are playing, you frequently get a message that says, "LOADING." My guess is that the music buffer is loading. While it loads, your timer continues to count up and you are unable to see the puzzle while you are being penalized time. There is also a tutorial mode for new players. Multiplayer modes include a pass-around game, or you can compete wirelessly against other players in the Ad Hoc Mode. A demo mode can be downloaded to another PSP. You can set up multiple users on one PSP so others can keep their own stats.

The second Sudoku to come out is *Brain Age's* Sudoku module. This is my favorite version. In this version you use the stylus to tap on squares and write in numbers. To make notes you write a small number in a corner or center of the box. To erase you can tap erase or draw a 0



in the box. You can select to be notified if you get a wrong answer. If you input five wrong answers, you will fail the puzzle. There is a nice tutorial module in case you have never played the game before. The handwriting recognition is good. Times are kept and you are rated as to how fast you complete the puzzle. Multiple users can track individual stats. My only complaint is that there are only 120 puzzles divided into three ranks.

The latest Sudoku to be released, *Sudoku Grindmaster*, is also for the DS. This version utilizes the stylus to either tap on a number or write in an answer. I found the handwriting recognition a bit flawed and caused frustration especially in the non-practice modes. Tapping a number worked great. By hitting either shoulder button, you can turn on highlighting, which lights all the squares affected by the square at which you are looking. I found highlighting to be useful, because it isn't always easy to track across the grid on the small screen. In tap mode, when you have all nine of the same number

correctly answered, the number changes color so you won't be tempted to use it again. You start out with 10 practice puzzles, 50 easy, 50 normal and 50 hard puzzles. In practice mode, you are informed when you make a mistake. Subsequent puzzles in easy, normal and hard modes have to be unlocked with stars.

Stars are awarded after each puzzle completion. After completing a few puzzles, you can try a Ranked test. If you pass that you can get a Bronze, Silver, Gold or Platinum Award. Unfortunately, there is only one user per card and no multiplayer modes are available.

FEATURE CHART

Game	Go Sudoku	Brain Age	Sudoku Grindmaster
Platform	PSP	DS	DS
# Puzzles	1000	120	400
Multiple Users	Yes	Yes	No
Multiplayer	Yes	Yes	No
Recognition	None	Excellent	Poor

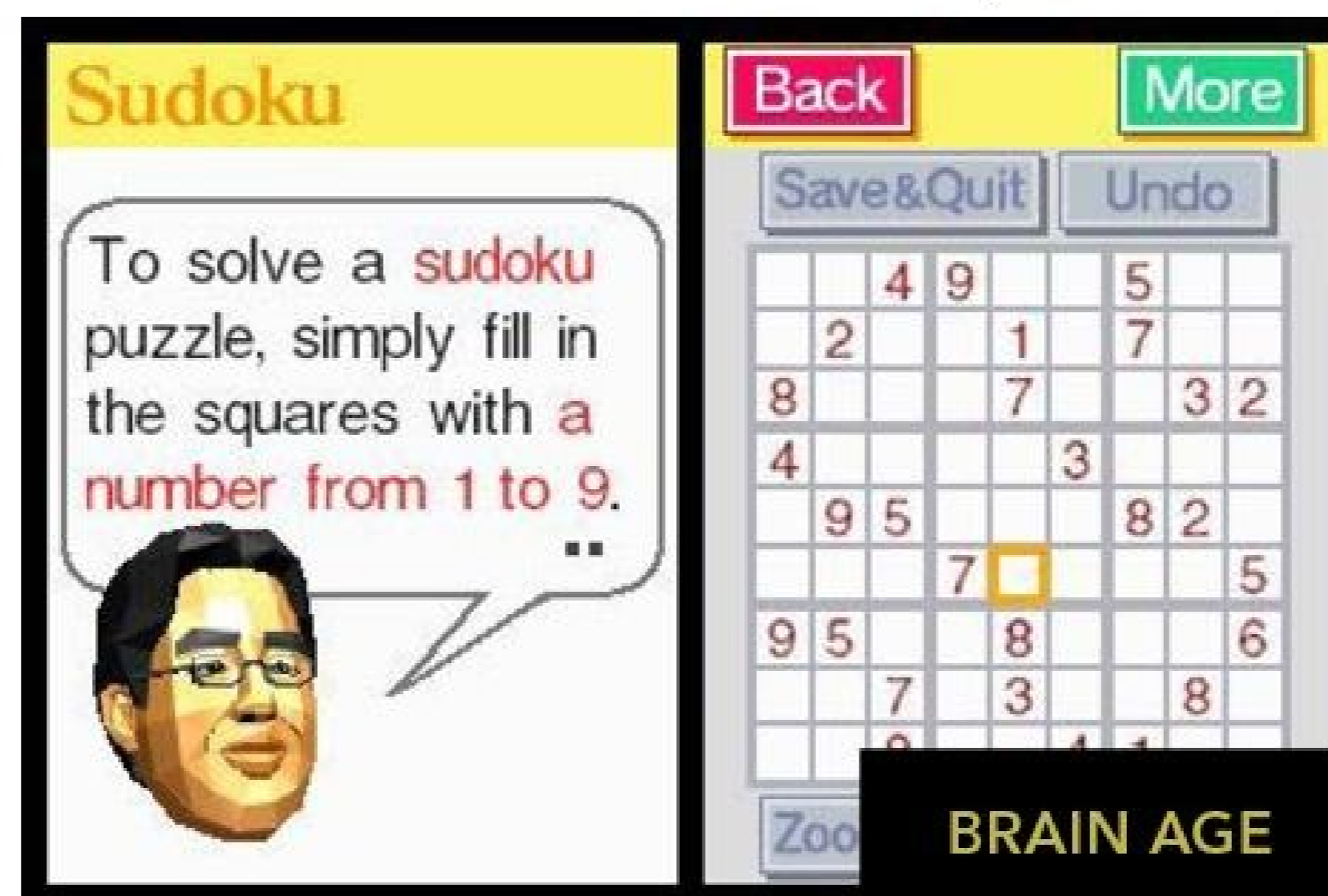
CONCLUSION

I recommend getting *Brain Age* (DS) and playing the Sudoku puzzles in that game first. As a bonus, you get a fun brain training game on the side. My next recommendation would be the PSP *Go Sudoku* because it has the most puzzles. I'd pass on the *Sudoku Grindmaster* (DS) until you crave more puzzles, due to its lack of a multi-user set up and finicky handwriting recognition.

Brain Age Sudoku DS – Buy

Go Sudoku PSP – Buy (if you don't have a DS)

Sudoku Grindmaster DS – Pass (Unless you crave more puzzles)



HEAVY WEAPON

ONLINE, AND FOR PC & XBOX LIVE ARCADE

by JollyRoger

Hheavy *Weapon* is the latest classic side-scroller from Popcap Games. Yes, the same people who brought you *Bejeweled*, *Zuma* and *Talismania*, have jumped into the world of arcade side-scrolling creamy goodness. There are two versions of this game: the free version, playable on the website, and the downloadable deluxe version that can be purchased on its website.

SIMPLICITY IS KEY

The game is fairly simple to understand and play. First, you choose from the two available game types: *Mission* or *Survival*. The *Mission* game type is straightforward; make your way through each level and defeat the evil boss at the end of the stage. You can also take on the ever-frustrating *Survival* mode, where you face endless hordes of enemies. The enemies continue to pursue your death while you're being timed to see how far you get before reaching your doom.

MISSION MODE

Mission mode begins with minimal weapons and shields. Your progress is tracked at the top of the screen to see how close you are to the end of the level. As you make your way through the stage, a rescue helicopter drops weapons upgrades, shield upgrades, and even the ever-popular nuclear bombs. As each level passes, the levels get increasingly harder because new enemies arrive and the frequency at which they come at you grows shorter. The bosses at the end of these levels get much more difficult to defeat, which adds a higher degree of challenge to each stage.

MISSION MODE UPGRADES

After completing each mission, you are then rewarded a point. These points can be used in the Armory to add weapons to your vehicle (codenamed: Atomic Tank). You can customize your weapon combination setup to include Defense Orbs, Homing Missiles, Lightning Bolts, Flak Cannons, Rockets, or Lasers. All but nukes can be upgraded on your vehicle. A piece of friendly advice, gather as many nukes as you can to use against the stage bosses.

THE MEGA-LASER

The Mega-Laser upgrade item is only obtainable while playing through missions. While pulverizing massive amounts of enemies, every so often one of these enemies may drop a piece of the ever sought after Mega-Laser.

You need to be quick to catch it, before it hits the ground, otherwise it shatters on impact. Each piece you find will account for 25% of the Mega-Laser. Once all four pieces are picked up, it's total PWNAGE!!! Beware, the Mega-Laser is only available for a short period of time and there is a timer that counts down in the upper-right hand side of the game screen to remind you of its limited duration. Using the laser speeds up the countdown, so use it sparingly. One blast from the Mega-Laser annihilates enemies upon contact which makes it the ultimate weapon and most desired game item.

SURVIVAL MODE

Remember that song *Staying Alive*? That's the premise. You go and go until you die. The enemies never stop, no bosses, just pure carnage. Remember, you are being timed!

OVERALL

Heavy Weapon is like *Moon Patrol* on steroids. From my in-depth experience with this game, I would definitely recommend it for purchase. Your inner arcade enthusiast will really love it. The beauty of *Heavy Weapon* is you can try before you buy on the Popcap website. In the demo version, you only get to try a couple of levels of play, but it gives you a glimpse into what the game is all about. But wait, there's more! According to a press release dated back in May:

SEATTLE, Wash. - May 8, 2006 - PopCap Games®, the leading developer and publisher of casual games for digital entertainment platforms, today announced that its hit PC game *Heavy Weapon*™ will be showcased in the Microsoft booth (booth #1246) at the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) in Los Angeles next week. This marks the first time in PopCap™'s history that

the company has publicly unveiled a game prior to its official release date. A new multiplayer mode added exclusively for the Live Arcade version of *Heavy Weapon* highlights a raft of new features and enhancements to the game on Microsoft's hugely popular new console, Xbox 360. *Heavy Weapon* will officially launch on Live Arcade later in the year, and will join other PopCap titles including *Bejeweled*® 2 and *Zuma*® which are already among the most popular casual games on the Live Arcade service.

If you don't want to purchase it for your PC, you will soon be able to download the game via the *Xbox 360 Marketplace*. I'm sure you will find me doing the same.



NHL '07

FOR THE XBOX 360
by Shutdown



Each year when sports games are released, the gaming world can usually expect the same old roster update and maybe that one new feature. That is not the case with *NHL 07* for the Xbox 360. The developers at EA Games took a year off from lacing up the skates and it showed.



As soon as the game loads up, the user is greeted with a tutorial video that explains the new controls. The left stick basically controls the player's skates, while the right stick acts as the player's hockey stick. The bumper buttons and triggers handle the rest. As soon as the video is complete, a shootout starts in order to put into action what the video just explained. The results of this change are a streamlined experience that, after just a few games, will feel natural and you will wonder how you ever got along without it. In contrast, there has been a great deal of gripes about the lack of the turbo button. The only time that you will miss it is when you are really out of position on a play of being caught from behind on a breakaway. So, some people will miss it while others will loathe the lack of that burst.

Another area where *NHL 07* lights the lamp is in the area of atmosphere. When

both teams are in a tight game, the crowd lives and dies with every hit, shot, and save. Another nice feature is the fact that if the home team scores, the crowd goes crazy. In contrast, if the road team scores, it gets so quiet that sticks are heard hitting the ice as the players skate. Atmosphere is a big part of hockey and this game has a good feel for the pulse of a hockey game. Atmosphere is only good if immersion is part of the experience. Thankfully, I



can say that the team at EA took that into account. The rinks are detailed, complete with ice degradation and nice new ice to start the game and after intermissions. The player models are some of the best in a sports game this side of the *NBA 2K* series.

Now, I don't want you to think that *NHL 07* is flawless. One thing that EA has placed in the game is new puck physics. The puck does indeed act like a puck, but the downside to the new physics design is much

greater. Since the puck does its own thing, weak goals are commonplace. There are many times when the puck hits the goalie's shoulder and just bounces in the goal. There are other times where the puck is saved and, while the goalie is magically sliding back while on his knees, he just pushes it in his own net. There was even one time when I tried to pass the puck using my goalie and the puck flew into my own net, rolled around the net and out the other side to my defenseman, without a goal even being counted. There was even an instance where a player pressed the puck against the net and the puck popped through for a goal. This is the kind of issue that needs to be fixed before a game is ready to ship.

EA has made it clear that they were concerned with getting the core game play solid before they focused on the online side of things. EA did just that. Their online offering is just about as bare bones as a sports game can get online. Think exhibition mode with *Xbox LIVE* thrown in.

The bottom line for this game is if you are remotely a hockey fan, **BUY IT!**

ROOSTER TEETH

THE CREATIVE
MINDS BEHIND
RED VS BLUE
ANSWER TO US



Whether you favor the Red Army or Blue Army, you love the characters and creators. Quotes like “Bow Chicka Bow Wow” or “I like me” and “It’s not pink, it’s lightish red” stick in your head and reverberate in your game play. **Red vs Blue** seems to be everyone’s favorite Halo spoof. With four seasons under their belts and a fifth on the way Rooster Teeth Productions, LLC seems to have found their niche.

Matt Hullum at Rooster Teeth Productions, LLC was kind enough to answer some questions for me regarding the Red vs Blue series and Strangerhood. And it goes a little something like this:

Who was responsible for creating RvB and how did the idea come about?

Burnie came up with Red vs. Blue while working on Halo game play videos and trying to make them more interesting. It was for a website called drunkgamers.com that was destined for failure. I only say ‘destined for failure’ because Gus and Geoff started it, and also because it actually did fail miserably. Luckily, RvB sprang like a phoenix from its pathetic, obnoxious ashes.

Who actually writes the content for the videos?

Burnie. The rest of us try to ad lib our way in to express our creativity. Or answer interviews.

How did the idea become a reality?

Hard work, determination, alcohol, determination, slacking off, and more alcohol. And also determination, in case I didn’t mention that yet. Burnie and Geoff just started doing it in their spare time, and then the rest of us jumped on the bandwagon when it appeared it might be mildly successful. I might add that the jumping on the bandwagon part really took determination.

Are the creators avid Halo players?

Burnie was a huge Halo player. We all are now, but we have seriously let our competitive skills atrophy. Most of us are only good at nodding our heads.

Is there a history to each character or a resemblance to the creators; If so who and why?

I tell people I based Sarge on my high school football coaches, but that is a complete lie. I didn’t even play football; I was all “Badminton to the bone!” in those days. Jason is really a ladies’ man / womanizer like Tucker and Joel is just like Caboose. Only shorter.

Could you briefly explain how the videos are made, what awards or recognition you’ve received because of the processes?

Why does every other answer have to be brief? Ok, fine. We just record video game footage on our computer(s), edit it, and slap on some silly dialog. A bunch of mumbo jumbo happens and then it goes on a website. Shazzam!

The biggest awards we’ve received are our “Mackies” - the Machinima Academy’s official award. RvB took home Best Picture in 2003 and we now have 6 different ones, including one for each series. We’ve also been featured in a bunch of magazines and newspapers and MTV and stuff like that. But of course we’re most proud of our interview in 2old2play.

What makes this process so different from others on the net?

As far as we know there is no one else doing ongoing machinima series work on the net. Most other machinima pieces are one-offs, and actually there aren’t that many ongoing series of any genre out there.

How many views do you actually receive per month of the RvB episodes?

We think somewhere over a million just on our site. We stopped counting after the number got so big it would take us hours just to parse the log files with all the data. That would’ve taken the kind of determination we just don’t have.

Did the creators have any idea that RvB was going to be as big as it is?

Yes and no. We knew we were all uber-geniuses and that one day the rest of the world would realize that and lavish us with unending praise and adoration. However, we thought it would be for one of our many incredible inventions, like the Stashy-Tooth Ultra(TM), a combination mustache and teeth whitening system for ladies. Sadly, it was RvB instead.



ROOSTER TEETH (CONTINUED)

Why do you feel that RVB is so popular?

Not sure. Maybe because we give it away for free. At one point that was kind of a novelty on the Internet. We hope people like it because it is funny and the characters are interesting. But the subliminal messages we embedded are probably the actual reason people KEEP WATCHING RVB keep watching RvB.

How did everyone handle the huge growth and following of RVB? What changes did you have to make on the site...etc...?

That has actually been difficult. There are just five of us, and it takes a lot of hours to create the shows and keep the website updated, etc. We've upgraded our site numerous times to handle all the traffic. We're at close to half a million users on our community site now. Plus, we all like to save time in the work day to tinker with our aforementioned kick-ass inventions. Check out the Cloon(TM) coming this fall: half toe nail clipper, half spoon. It will solve all your soup / ingrown toe nail problems - with style!

Could you please explain, briefly, what Strangerhood is about?

Briefly, no. Here's the long explanation: it is about a group of eclectic strangers with amnesia that are trapped together in a mysterious quasi-suburban neighborhood. They have no way out, and no idea why they have been brought together.

Hmm... actually I guess that answer was kind of brief. Let me add more: It was intended to spoof reality TV shows and sit-coms, as well as other popular yet detestable media. Hmm... was that long enough to not be brief? It is social commentary enclosed in an allegorical framework of pop culture pastiche, interwoven through a referential mélange of video game paradigms. I didn't figure out a way to add the word 'zeitgeist' to that answer so if you could please fit it in somewhere that would be great. Also, please include the phrase 'massive pole-cattin.'

Do you have any plans for other types of videos or series in the near future?

Oh yes.

"What?" you ask.

Wait and see!

"Jerk," you reply.

....Wink!

With the promise of Halo3 are you in the planning stages of continuing and do you have any insider info on Halo3?

No. We went to visit Bungie right before the Halo3 trailer launch and security was so tight they wouldn't even let us out of the lobby. And I really had to use the bathroom so that sucked.

What happens if there is no Halo4, will you still continue RVB since it is somewhat of a stand alone series?

We're not good at long term planning stuff like that. We'll probably just keep going until we run out of alcohol and/or determination. Hopefully one of our inventions will take off so we won't have to worry about anything. I just hope the world is ready for the Pizza Cat 3000 (TM).

Great information Matt, but some of our site members have inquiring minds:

Sha asks: *With Halo the movie planned. Has there been any talk of a Red vs Blue episode to be shown along with Halo the movie?*

I hope so; please start talking about it now and hopefully the idea will spread like wildfire.

Lbsutke wants to know: *When is the chick character going to do a topless episode of Red Vs. Blue?*

To be fair, we would then have to also do a pant less episode with Donut. And trust me; you don't want to see that.



RED VS BLUE STAFFERS AND GUS AND BURNIE

T3MuJin demands: *When will they be doing another appearance in Austin at the Alamo Draft House? And can we get Burnie to take his shirt off this time instead of Gus?*

Gross. Can Gus take his shirt off in a place that serves food and not have the place get shut down by the health inspectors? I think his eyebrows alone are a major deduction. Regardless, we'll probably make another appearance soon. Don't blame us if your taco is hairy.

Rock craves: *How do the site moderators and admins cope*

with all of the timmies and the mindless bullshit, flame wars, etc... in their forums?

Not sure. I personally use a highly effective combination of hostility, apathy, and gross incompetence.

Do they feel that the mod point and karma system they use is effective, and what would they change about it if they could?

We like the mod point / karma system, but we hope to close some loop holes in the near future to make it harder for cheaters. Nobody who plays video games would ever cheat, so they don't belong on our site anyway... right?

And one last question for me personally:

Why is Caboose SO hot?

He drinks anti-freeze.

There you have it; the skinny on the now fat chicken, Rooster Teeth Productions, LLC. Thanks Matt for your time and all the guys at Rooster Teeth for providing us with hours of entertainment and laughter. Keep up the good work.

TWISTED CABOOSE

2OLD2PLAY.COM COMMUNITY

MEMBER SHOWCASE

Real Name: Tammy McCoy

Gamer Tag(s): Twistedcaboose (2o2p),
PhreaksxB1tch (Wheezin Geezers),
V3rba1assault (Profanity)

Location: Findlay, Ohio

Age: 37

Status: Single, but happily spoken for.

Children: 1 son 15 years old

Occupation: Medical Management

FAVORITE DRINK (ALCOHOLIC):

None really gave it up

FAVORITE DRINK (NON-ALCOHOLIC):

Everybody together now...SODA, Diet Pepsi to be precise.

FAVORITE FOOD:

Cheesecake

FAVORITE MUSIC GROUP:

I really don't have one; I like a lot of different music and groups.

FAVORITE TV SERIES:

Umm I don't watch TV but LBsutke and drk knight01 kindly recorded the first season of 24 for me and brought it to Chicago, I must say I am addicted to it now, thanks guys.

FAVORITE MOVIE:

Lord of the Rings trilogy and of course the Matrix series

FAVORITE SOLO ARTIST THAT YOU ARE EMBARRASSED TO ENJOY:

Geesh do I have to? Ok Ok Christina Aguilera

WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO 2OLD2PLAY AS A MEMBER?

Actually I was brought to the site by Bodhi for the first ladder season; I was their ringer, ha. The team didn't pan out so we started a new one with ZeroCD, Skurdy and a couple of other guys. We did quite well actually. And the rest as they say is history.

WHAT VIDEO GAME DO YOU FIND YOURSELF PLAYING THE MOST?

Do you really have to ask? Ok, it's Halo2, that is pretty much all I play.

WHAT VIDEO GAME CHARACTER DO YOU THINK BEST PORTRAYS YOURSELF?

Pac man, because the little bugger is persistent and doesn't give up, just keeps going and going and going.

WILL YOU BE BUYING A WII, PLAYSTATION 3, BOTH OR NONE?

If I buy anything Wii will be it. Definitely a Wii, much cheaper and Zelda, need I say more.

HOW DO MEN REACT TO PLAYING WITH A FEMALE GAMER?

How do they react when they lose to one? Most men are cool playing with a female, young men and boys are a different story. Most respond with vulgar remarks about sex or call me every name in the book. There are generally two reactions when they lose to me; they either don't say a word or their remarks get worse.

DO YOU FIND THAT MEN RESPECT YOU MORE BECAUSE YOU'RE PART OF THE "IN CROWD" OF GAMERS?

I never really thought about whether anyone respected me because of being a gamer. I suppose other gamers do.

MANY MEN SAY "I'M GLAD MY WIFE ISN'T A GAMER BECAUSE THAT MEANS I GET MORE TIME ON THE CONSOLE/PC" – DO YOU BELIEVE THAT OR DO YOU THINK THEY'RE JUST JEALOUS BECAUSE THERE ARE WOMEN OUT THERE THAT ARE AVID GAMERS?

I believe it is because they want more time to game AND because some don't want their wives to be better gamers than they are OR because they are afraid an argument will ensue because of gaming.

WOULD YOU RATHER PLAY ONLINE GAMES WITH OTHER WOMEN OR MEN?

Men definitely, many (NOT ALL) female gamers play for different reasons, pretty much men play to play.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE GAMING GENRE AND WHAT GENRE DO YOU FIND YOURSELF SHYING AWAY FROM?

FPS games are my favorites; my least favorite games, RPGs.

WHAT DRIVES YOU TO PROMOTE AND, IN A WAY, "LIVE FOR" 2OLD2PLAY'S MISSION?

I do what I do because I understand and appreciate what Doodi is creating here. I mod because he asked me to and because he is a friend I do my best at it. A member once sent me a PM stating that his life doesn't revolve around the site like mine does. It really isn't a matter of my life revolving around the site, it is more about many of the people being part of my life, even the ones I don't know as well as, let's say Righthand or LBsutke or Doodi or Eksessiv. I do what I can for the site because I believe in Doodi's dream.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE YOU TO GET USED TO THE "COLORFUL" LANGUAGE MEN USE AGAINST WOMEN THAT PWN THEM IN A COMPETITIVE MATCH?

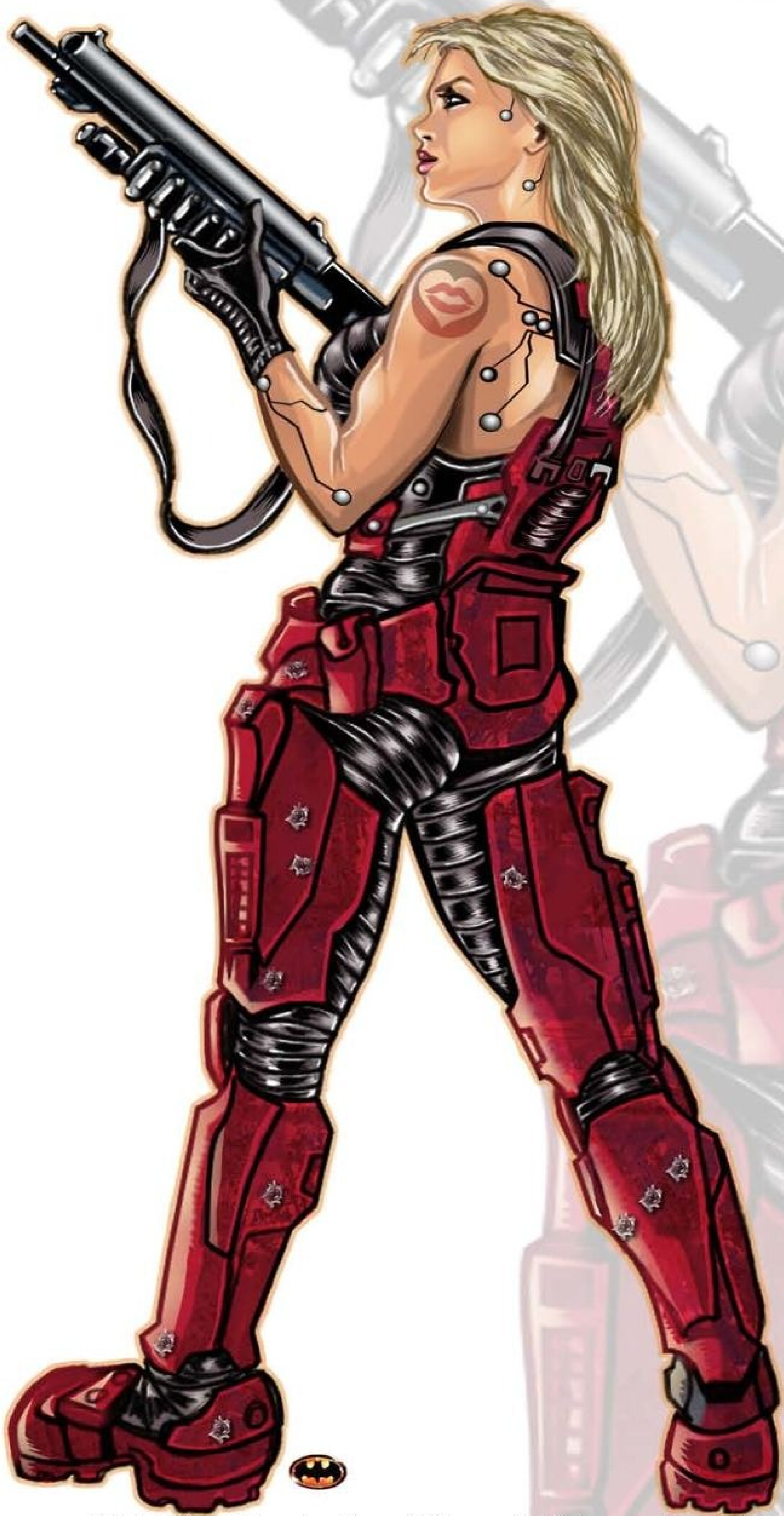
Seriously, is this a real question? Anyone that knows me or has played Halo2 with me knows I have never nor will I ever have an issue with smack talk. I am one of the few people from the site that would still rather go into Match Making than play custom games. Personally I've heard it all and it doesn't bother me in the least, I rather enjoy it sometimes.

IF YOU HAD TO GIVE A YOUNGER KID SOME ADVICE ABOUT GAMING AND ONLINE PLAY, WHAT WOULD YOU TELL THEM?

First I wouldn't let a kid play online. However, when a kid becomes a young adult I would just him to be himself and have fun and never take the game too seriously.



Twisted Caboose



POST RELEASE PATCHING: GOOD OR BAD FOR THE XBOX COMMUNITY?

By Tank

I gave up on PC gaming when the Original Xbox launched. By that time, I was tired of the constant upgrade game, online cheating and my perception of game publishers' "ship it now, fix it later" mentality.

I went back to console gaming because I remembered playing games on my SNES and SegaCD, where I never noticed any flaws, bugs or problems. It seemed games were much more stable because the hardware was all the same and there was no way to fix it later; it had to be right the first time.

Therefore, I decided it was time to go back to consoles. The promise of a closed system and online play seemed like a great combination. It seemed like that would give me no-hassle 'plug in and play' gaming sessions without bugs or cheaters. Boy has that changed. However, I'm still sold on console gaming over PC gaming.

Since the 'ship it now patch it later' development style of PC gaming was one of the key things that drove me back to console gaming, I started writing this article prepared to let loose a hurricane of development procedure bashing.

Look at three examples from the 360. Call of Duty 2 corrupted your saved game when playing on the hardest difficulty level, usually just after you'd finished the hardest mission (D-Day). It was fixed three months post-release.

Battlefield 2: Modern Combat shipped with a speech problem, so half the time you couldn't communicate with your team in a team-based war game. How does something like that get past testing and certification? Someone didn't notice the speech didn't work? Come on! One patch was released two months post-release but it still hasn't fixed the problem.

To me this is unacceptable and very ridiculous. These games are on a closed platform. How are these problems not being caught in the testing or certification process? Each game should be going through two testing teams – the developers and Microsoft when they certify it (three if you count the publisher). To me, this seems like XBOX LIVE is becoming "The Patch Network," something you need in order to make your games work properly, rather than something to use to enhance your game for multiplayer action.

I thought I would get a larger perspective by talking to the xbox.com community. I was surprised at the responses. Most users I talked to were impartial, and didn't care as long as patches were quick to download and free. I have to admit that the patches are effortless. Just click "yes" to the "download now" pop-up the first time you play the game after a patch is available. It downloads the update and then loads your patched game. It's easy, convenient and automated.

Another point people have made justifying patching is that games are much more complicated now than they used to be. I'm not sure I totally agree. Back in the SNES days, those games were "complicated" for the time as well. Gamers demand realistic environments, sound, online multiplayer capability, realistic physics, etc. The development time is many times longer now and development teams are much larger than back in the SNES days. There's a lot more room for quirks to get into the

code and be missed through the testing and certification process.

Having a game playable online now almost demands monthly patches. There's an underground world of Glitch Cheaters out there who specifically try to find obscure glitches and use those to their advantage. These people have no skills, although they're mostly who you see at the top of the leader boards. How can you compete against a guy who's inside a wall and can shoot out and hit you, but nothing can touch him?

If developers cared, they could release anti-cheating patches every 4-6 weeks, which would be a great use for the XBOX LIVE network. Unfortunately so far, XBOX LIVE isn't really being used for this purpose.

Bungie is among the best for anti-cheating patches for Halo 2, but they're the only ones that really consistently try and combat glitch cheating in infrequent patches.

One other really good point was made refuting the release-it-now-patch-it-later process, at least for consoles. For the 360, only half of the owners are subscribed to XBOX LIVE, even though it's free (you can download patches with a Silver membership.) For whatever reason, some people just don't want to be online. They just want a stand-alone console. These people have no way of getting a patch for their game, short of it being on an XBOX DVD. Official Xbox Magazine is one resource that could be used to deliver patches to the "offline" owners, but so far the magazine is not serving that function.

Developers have it easy patching a PC game, since most games are somehow tied into the internet. Even if a gamer doesn't have internet access, a buddy could download the patch and put it on a CD for someone who's totally offline.

That isn't really an option on the 360, since patches are only available via the Xbox Live Marketplace and there's no way for an average Joe gamer to copy a patch onto an Xbox file-formatted DVD. Developers still need to try and get it right the first time. This must be why the certification process was put in place. Games aren't manufactured until Microsoft has passed the game through its certification program.

Overall, my tune has changed a bit over post-release patching. Given that half the 360 community is offline and can't download patches, developers can't release it now and fix it later. Plus, their game needs to pass Microsoft certification as well, which should catch the big blunders.

With glitch cheating becoming such a problem, post-release patching to combat that and other minor problems would be outstanding. In some cases, I don't think patches come out quickly enough.

Add to that Microsoft's patch process and how easy and automated it is....patching happens with very little user interaction or game play delay. I'm now of the mind that post-release patching can be used for good purposes and can improve our console gaming experience as long as the testing and certification process is thorough.



RockStar Table Tennis shipped on a Tuesday and there was a patch on Wednesday, but at least they were quick about it.

NINTENDO IS FOR KIDS,

AND HERE IS WHY...

By OilsFan

I remember where I first saw the Nintendo Logo. I watched in rapt fascination after the Logo disappeared, as a cartoon ape grabbed a pixilated Fay Wray and climbed to the top of the screen. I paid a quarter to view that scene and to play the game that followed. I did this not once, but many times. If you were under the legal driving age in the video arcade heyday, then you probably did too.

Six years after seeing Donkey Kong for the first time, the local video arcade was dead. I myself was busy with college, and video games were just a secondary function of my Commodore 64 (by then the Commodore was a bit outdated, but I was a poor college student). Imagine my surprise when one day I saw my nephews playing a home video game system with the NINTENDO logo emblazoned in red upon it. There on the home screen were different games, yet still reminiscent of their arcade cousins from my misspent youth. In some respects the games were superior to the arcade; my nephews didn't have to pay a quarter every single time a game started!

Over the next few years, whenever I visited my brother's house my nephews would introduce me to new Nintendo games. I enjoyed playing Nintendo with them, but it was not about the games, it was about spending time with my nephews, who were great kids; until, eventually, they got their hands on the SNES and *Zelda: A Link to the Past*. When I sat down with that game, three hours went out of my life and I have no idea where they went. It convinced my wife to buy me the SNES system, and many hours of enjoyment ensued.

Now it's time for you to wax nostalgic. What do you think of when you think of Nintendo? Do have any images in your mind? Good. I am willing to bet a lot of your images have something in common with mine. Beyond the icons of Mario and *Zelda*, beyond the memories of cartridges and 8 bit graphics, I am willing to bet most of you are picturing images of youth, childhood or children. Even if it's just a vague thought in the back of your mind, part of you is saying "Nintendo is for kids" - and guess what? You are absolutely right.

You're right! Nintendo is for kids! In the late 1970's and early 1980's video games were seen as a youth market. Games were simple and stylized out of necessity. Processing power could not be wasted on digital blood, or littering the screen with bodies. Arcades were full of comic book style characters and cartoon violence. In the late 1980's Nintendo concentrated on bringing this arcade experience into the living room. It brought its colorful cast of

characters to the home screen and gave us new ones as well. Then something happened once the 1990's started; computers advanced enough to provide more realistic graphics to assist in telling more involved stories. In short, video games grew up. Nintendo didn't.

In 1991, *Mortal Kombat* made headlines when it hit the arcades, sparking controversy over how to handle graphic violence in video games. Two years later, *Doom* gave us our first real taste of the first person shooter, and a whole new category of video games was born. As video game play-

ers aged, we started seeing more photographic looking characters and more graphic violence. In 1995, Sony gave us the Playstation, and console gaming was never the same. Full motion video, long complex stories, realistic graphics; these became our gauge for what makes a mature gaming experience. Third party developers recognized it as well, as *Final Fantasy*, a beloved series on Nintendo consoles, appeared on the Playstation. Solid Snake became the icon of the hour; racing was done in *Grand Turismo*, with a depth of realism we had never seen before. Video game players had aged, and sought out a more sophisticated experience.

Meanwhile, Nintendo offered us more of the same: More Mario, more Bowser, more Donkey Kong. To be fair, some lack of 3rd party software was due to the cartridge nature of the N64, but that does not explain Nintendo's own game development. If you look at the list of titles published by Nintendo for the N64, you'll see lots of cartoon characters like Kirby, Pikachu, Banjo-Kazooie. There were only 278 games made for the Nintendo 64, and twelve of them featured Mario, Yoshi, or Donkey Kong! With the Gamecube, 3rd party developers did come back to Nintendo, but some popular titles never made it to the system (*Burnout 3/Revenge*, *Mortal Kombat*, *Call of Duty*, to name a few). Overall, the Gamecube has the fewest titles amongst its competitors (1377 PS2 games, 776 Xbox games, 562 Gamecube games, according to each official site.) Sure there are exceptions to every rule (*Resident Evil 4*), but it seems that developers look at the Gamecube as a less serious system.

Nintendo does rule the handheld market, but if you look at game content, you will see the same story as on the console. Whether on the console or on the handheld, Nintendo is still publishing a lot of games aimed at children, with familiar cartoon-style characters. Nintendo seems to concentrate heavily on these characters, always putting out games containing Mario, Link, Donkey Kong, or various Pokemon. It also concentrates on "family friendly" gameplay; Mario runs around collecting coins and stars, Link fires his bow and the enemy disappears, Donkey Kong needs bananas. Nintendo sees itself and promotes itself as the game system for kids.

In the immortal words of Sir Paul McCartney, "what's wrong with that, I'd like to know."

I do not come to bury Nintendo, but to praise it. Yes, Nintendo is for kids, but there is nothing wrong with an adult enjoying something aimed at kids. In my adult life I've enjoyed many things that are aimed at younger people; things like the movie *Babe*, Harry Potter books, and yes, even Nintendo games. These games have a sense of wonder, whimsy and fun that we associate with childhood, but that everyone can enjoy. Add to this the fact that many of us have children of our own, and might not feel that the latest Tom Clancy game is appropriate fare for them. Yet, we don't want the latest piece of animated movie-based game crap. We want fun, well-crafted games for us and our children to enjoy. Yes, There is a whole host of reasons why Nintendo is for kids, and why we NEED Nintendo to remain that way.

I look forward to the next generation of Nintendo, but I sometimes fear where it is going. Like everyone else, I am amazed at the footage I have seen online of *Zelda: Twilight Princess*, but I wonder about a darker, more mature version of the game that holds such a special place in my memory. I don't ever want to see Link wading through an ocean of blood to rescue a scantily-clad Zelda, becoming another *Prince of Persia*. Don't get me wrong - I really enjoyed POP, but I want *Zelda* to be *Zelda*, to have that sense of wonder and fantasy, without the realism and the sense of tension always turned up to 11. Keep Nintendo for Kids, for those of us who have kids, or who just enjoy acting like a Kid. Now if you'll excuse me, I see some empty go-karts. Grab a shell, dude!



HOW GAMING IMPACTS LIFESTYLES

A LITTLE STUDY

By Derf

The only things I've read regarding the impact of gaming on lifestyle seem to be negative. When I read these things, I wish I could have responded to these bogus "conclusions." With this article, I'm going to use a fictional setting to put forth some true facts about gaming lifestyles. I hope you enjoy it!

"I've found him!" Bob shouted to his cat. "My ad on the MSN homepage had several replies, but this guy, the one they call ulTm8, he is the one that will get my grant on The Problems with Gamers' Lifestyles underwritten."

Bob studied ulTm8's application. "What a loser!" Bob exclaimed. "A 50 year old wasting his time playing childish games. I can see him now. Fat, bald, and gray with his glasses taped up the middle. I bet he is a loner with no one but chat-room friends. He'll show up for his interview tomorrow with at least two Gameboys to play while I talk to him. JACKPOT!! Tomorrow, we meet face to face."

The next day, Sara, my secretary buzzed me. "Bob, Dr. Williams is here to see you."

"Who in the heck is Dr. Williams," I asked. She laughed and said, "he is the loser you are interviewing".

The first interview was mainly background information. ulTm8 – a/k/a Dr. Williams – was impressive to look at. In fact, he looked much younger than 50. Tall and thin, he told me he was a 4th degree black belt, and he looked the part. ulTm8 has been married for 28 years, with 4 children and a successful dental practice on the side. All four of his children were honor students.

I instinctively sucked in my bulging gut and continued. "Dr. Williams, how long have you been gaming?"

Dr. Williams answered, "Please, call me Steve – I played the first computer game stamped out of a terminal at the university in 1974. It was a little Star Trek game with typed out Es and Ks. I remember they had to kick us out of the computing center. From there I have played just about every game genre, even led a few clans. Online gaming is my favorite."

"Well," I said, "your lifestyle seems to be the exception when it comes to gamers."

"No," Steve responded, "I'm not, and before we are done I aim to prove that to you". With that, Steve left, and I wondered, "does this guy put on a good act or is he really that well adjusted?" Our next meetings would focus on issues I planned to study in my grant. "I think I'll start with violence," I snickered. I've seen the reports about how violence in video games can make a person more aggressive. Surely, violence has a negative effect on a person's life and this martial arts guy has got to have a violent streak in him.

The day of the next meeting I was running a bit late and as I entered my office, Steve was there playing some kind of game machine. "Can't even stop playing for a few minutes?" I asked. Steve rubbed his chin and noted, "You were late, so I decided to train my brain a bit. You know, some video games are designed to keep your mind sharp, others require advanced problem solving. They aren't all hand-eye coordination. A recent study has shown that Doctors who play video games for just 10 minutes before performing surgery will finish their work faster and with fewer mistakes. Some initial studies indicate that certain types of games may help prevent dementia. I don't know about you Bob, but I want to be all there when I'm older."

"Dang," I said. "I forgot my phone in the car." Steve looked at me with a discerning eye, "Getting a bit forgetful," he said with a laugh.

"Let's talk about violence in video games," I said quickly to change the subject.

Steve chuckled, "You want to know if I beat my wife, kids, or students at the martial arts studio? Nope, I'm afraid I don't do those things. In fact, I don't even own a gun. I guess I have died thousands of times in games and I realize just how dang easy it is to get hurt messing with those things in real life.

I can tell you I wouldn't want to be a cop, foot soldier, or fighter pilot. Games have taught me to respect those professions and realize how truly talented and dedicated those people are. I knew this topic would come up, so I brought in this graph."

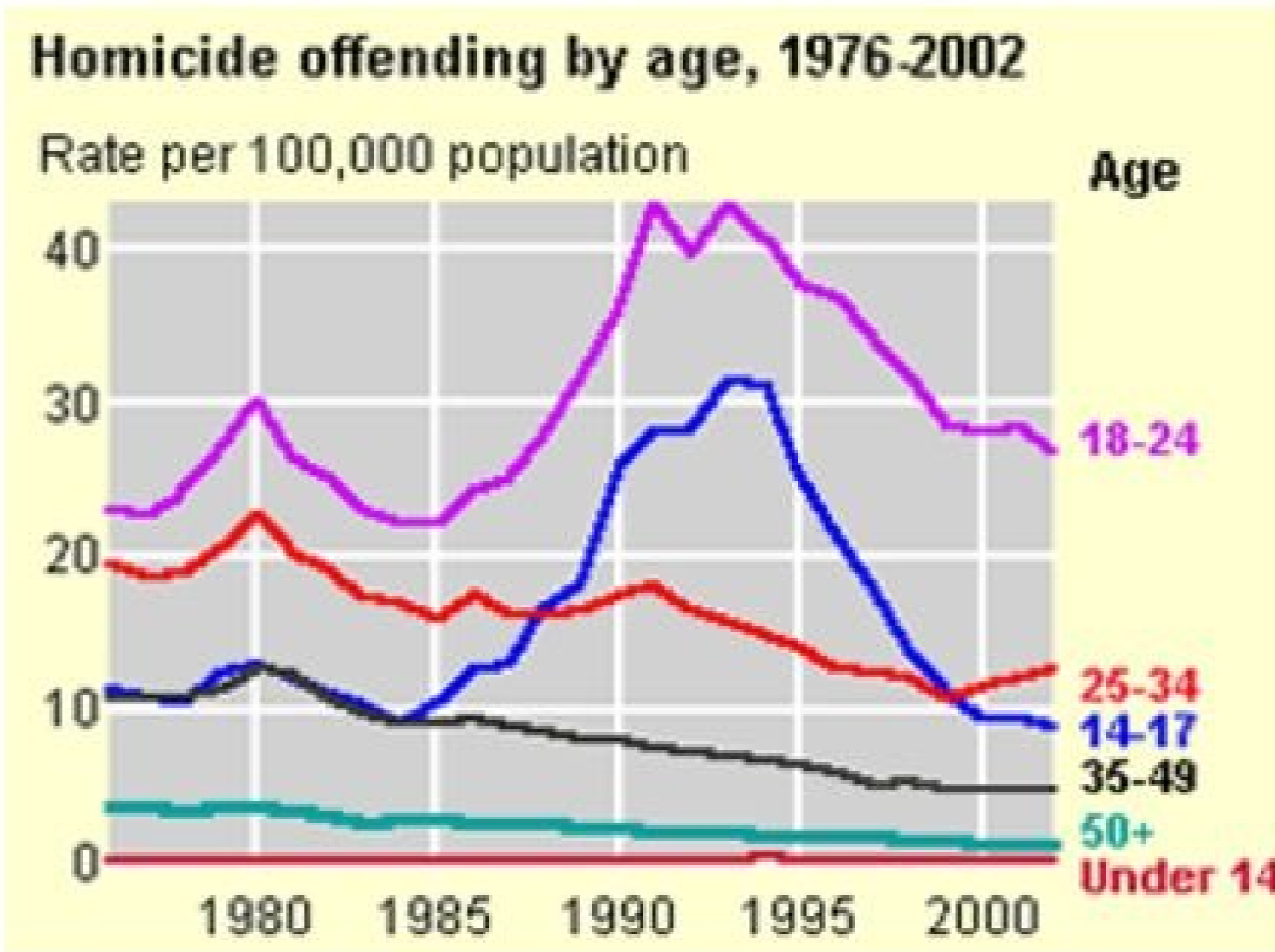
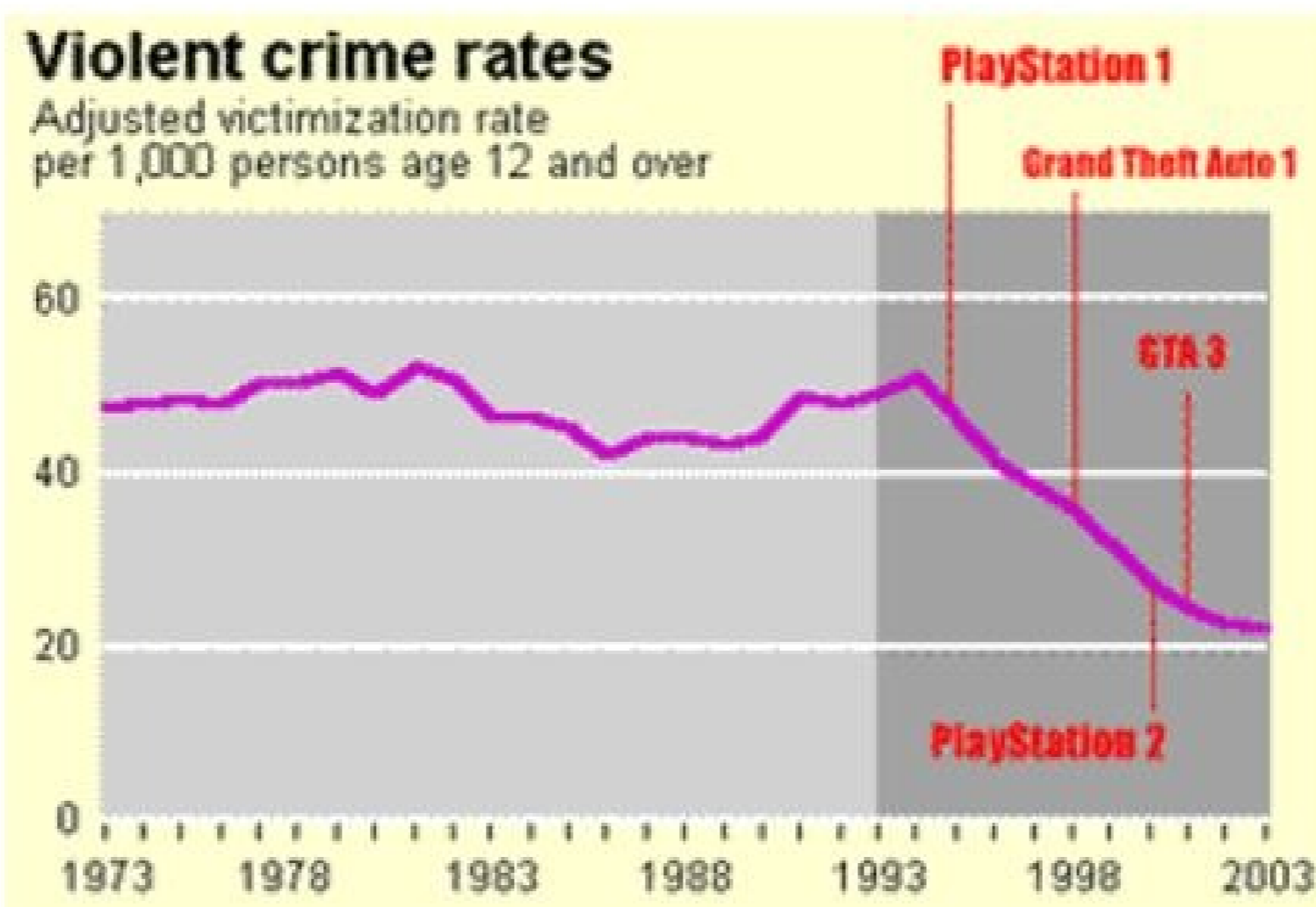
Steve continued with his diatribe completely unabated. "This is from an article I happened to find at <http://www.gamerevolution.com/oldsite/articles/violence/violence.htm>. As you can see, since video games came into existence the rates of violence are actually decreasing. With millions of gamers out there and if you assumed that violence in games translates into real life violence, then that rate would be rising sharply, not declining.

"What about children?" I asked.

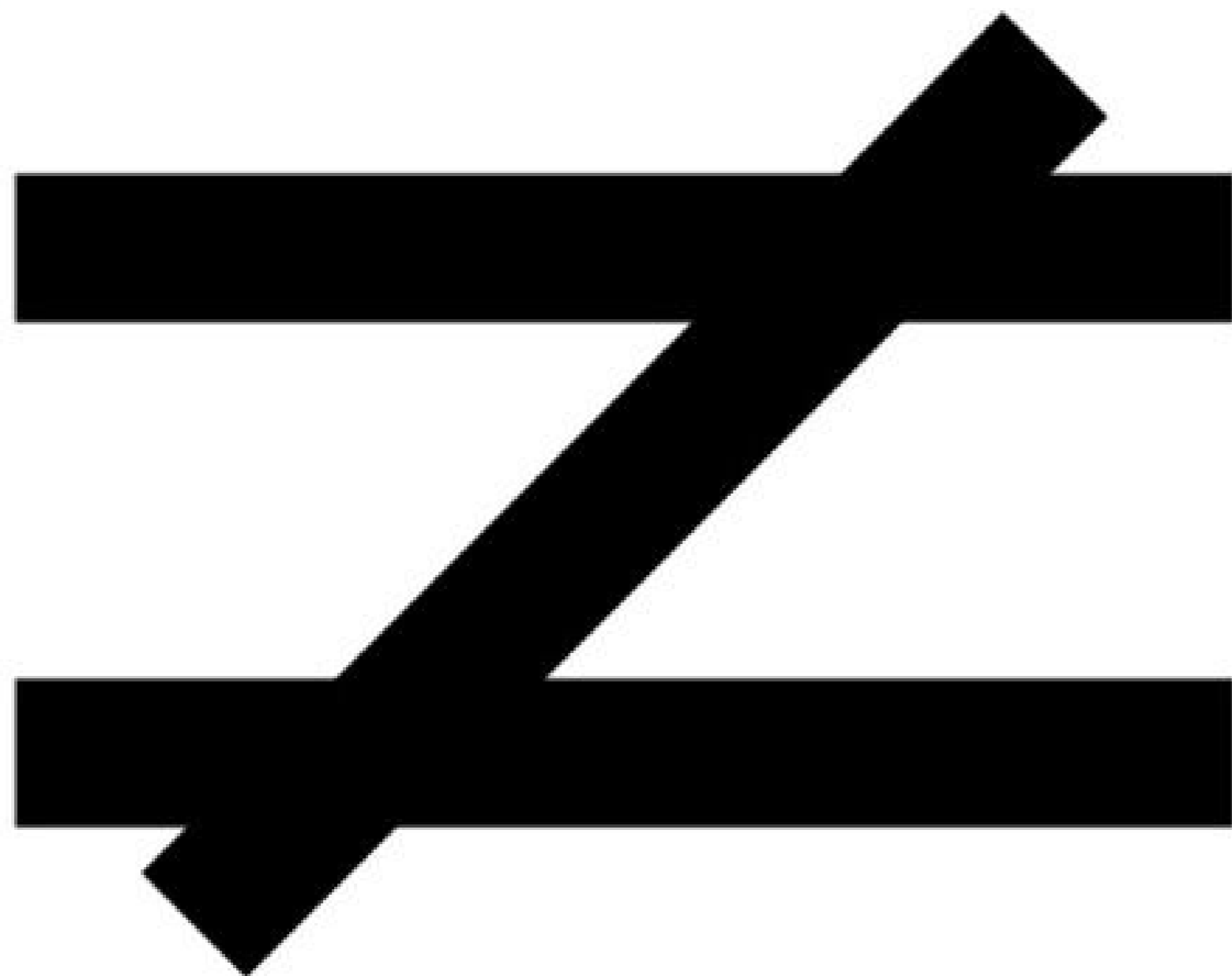
"As a father, I strictly limit what games and how much gaming my kids did when they were younger," Steve said without inhaling a breath. "Playing these games with my kids is a big advantage. I can teach them as

we play and I know exactly what they are playing. For instance, Grand Theft Auto games have never been allowed in our house. When kids are young and impressionable, any thing done a lot and unsupervised is dangerous. Parents need to parent. Kids, or parents for that matter, need to do their work first and save the fun for later. Here is another graph from that same article that shows the decline in crime in by age. I think it clearly shows that gaming is not responsible for violence. Unsupervised, unchecked gaming in kids may lead to isolated cases. Let's not blame the games, Bob, let's look at the parenting."

Holy crap! I'm in over my head. I may have to modify my study.



HOW GAMING IMPACTS LIFESTYLES (CONTINUED)



At the next session I decided to talk to Steve about game addiction. Here is what Steve told me. "Video games are designed to be addictive. If you don't want to get to the next stage, then the games are not fun. I have a brother-in-law that loves water skiing. When he first learned – he tried to get up on the skis. Then when he got up, he tried to stay up. From there, he did simple movements and went to one ski - all the time getting faster and faster. He spent thousands of dollars on his boat and gas and a place to store it in the winter. In the winter, he frequently plans and dreams about his boat. Is he addicted to skiing? Maybe, but why is this ok and playing video games not? Basically they are the same thing. If he really got into skiing to an extreme, his relationship with his wife and family would suffer. He could spend thousands of dollars upgrading his boat. Bob, these are same arguments against gaming. Basically, if you enjoy anything, be it games, cars, woodworking, or whatever, you have the propensity to let that hobby take over your life. Out of the millions of game hobbyists, you only hear of the extreme cases like the parents that let their kids starve while playing a game. Gamers are addicted to games in the same way people are addicted to running, books, TV, music. There is no chemical addiction like to a drug. Life is about balance, Bob".

I thought about what Steve had said. Looking at my life I spend a lot of time drinking coffee and reading at the book store. Am I addicted to that like he is to gaming? Am I being anti-social? Anti-social - hmmm, that will be our last topic to discuss!

At the last session, I asked Steve, "Aren't gamers anti-social? I mean spending hours looking at a computer or a TV screen instead of interacting with real people? It seems to me that kind of behavior would lead to a recluse lifestyle?" Steve looked at me intently and said, "Its funny how people who criticize gamers and video games are the ones that hardly play them. Bob, how can you study us when you have never played a game? How can you criticize a lifestyle you know nothing about?"

I blushed and said, "Steve, I am trying to understand." Steve continued, "Gaming has always been about playing with another person. Pong, the first video game required people to sit next to each other and interact. I remember buying my Atari 2600 in dental school and having six of my friends come over to my place to play Space Invaders. While playing, you chat, talk smack, and build lasting friendships. Today, you may put on a headset and meet up with your friends on a virtual playground, but you still do the same interaction. Alternatively, you could have several friends over to your home and play in a LAN party or play split-screen. I can honestly say that every LAN party I have been to was the ultimate in social interaction. Since you all have the game play in common, there are no uncomfortable 'sitting in the corner alone' moments that you get at a party with strangers. I have met my kid's friends by dropping in on their LAN party and filling in an extra slot. Many of those kids and I share a special relationship even now that they have moved on to college. I know couples that met in online gaming and are getting married. I have sent pizza across the country to hungry college students who were out of cash. Bob, once you get involved with an online community, gaming gets to be more about being social than playing the game". Wow, I thought. What if most gamers were like Steve? That would make this group an exceptional social microcosm to study.

Lately, Steve and I have become friends. I have been over to his place, played games online, and talked to many of his friends, both here in town and over the 'net. The first little LAN party I went to was incredibly fun. I admit that I can't really play well, but that doesn't seem important to Steve's group. This group of mature gamers are truly talented, not only in gaming but in several aspects of their lives. They know how to enjoy life and have fun but are still able to maintain balance in their lives. Now, I know the well publicized negative effects are generally linked to extreme cases. I think my new study will be about how well gamers fit into society. Surely, no one has done a study on that before.

RPG RETROSPECTIVE

HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF COMPUTER ROLE PLAYING GAMES

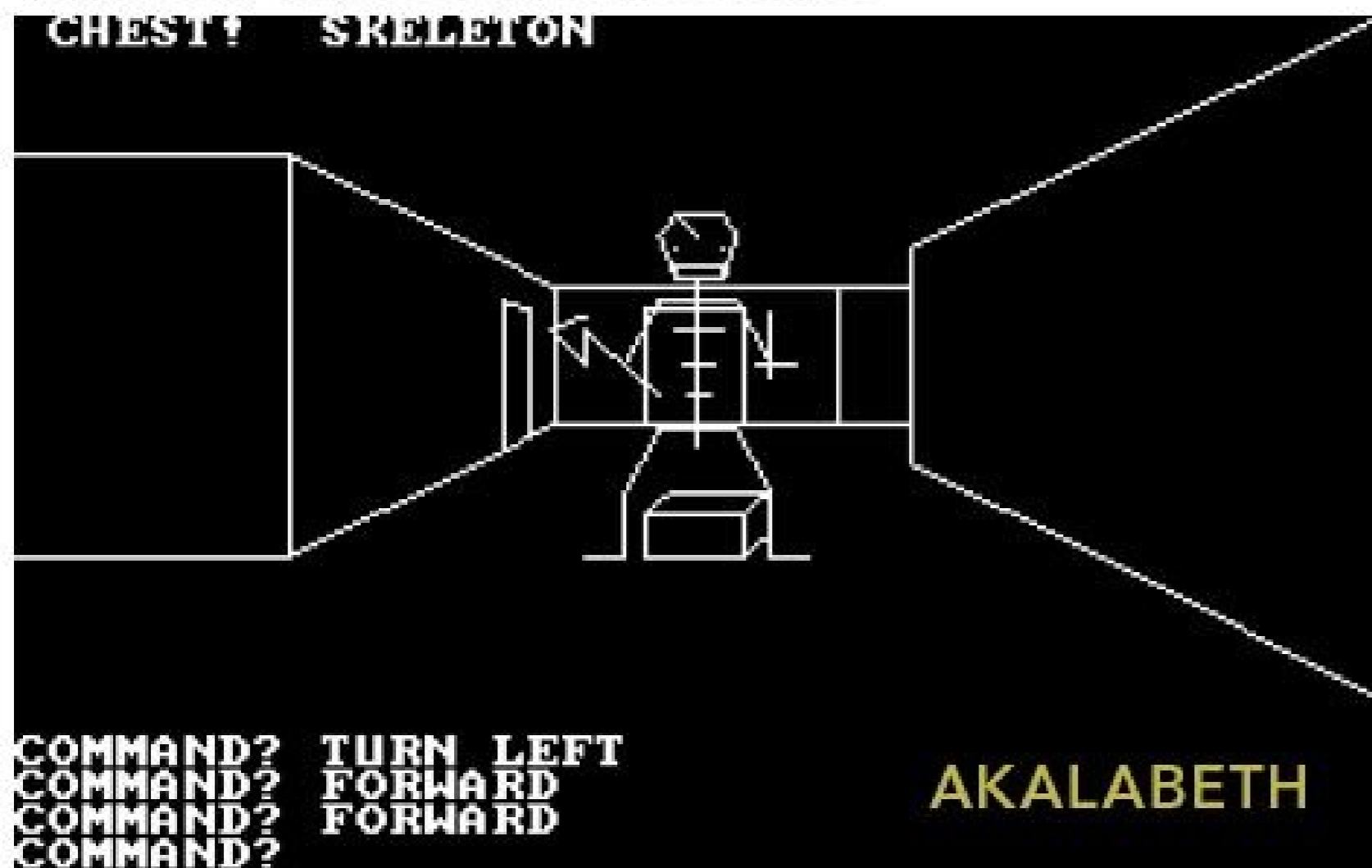
by Faleorn

D.i.g.i.t.a.l.
S.o.r.c.e.r.e.s.s.
Lulu from Final Fantasy 10

Role Playing Games; you either love them or hate them, and usually to extremes that border on obsession or the “it has cooties, get it off me” variety. Hellish demons, slimy aliens, and dark dungeons to abandoned space stations; for 35+ years we have traveled across hundreds of worlds and galaxies to accomplish the goal of being the most powerful entity in the game world.

The line of what is and what isn't an RPG has been harder to classify in recent years with new sub-genres continually created. New art styles, game play styles and very short games have made this even more difficult.

Distinguishing what game was an RPG and what game wasn't came easier when we didn't have full 3D graphics, fast computers and consoles. This multi-part retrospective will cover several major games and changes to the RPG genre that have happened over the last four decades, and what we may expect to happen in the future.



HISTORY – AKALABETH TO GOLD BOX AND THE FIRST CRPG'S

Most gamers have heard of the *Ultima* series of games and have possibly heard of their creator Lord British, but many may not know of *Akalabeth*, also known as *Ultima 0*. This was the first game created by Lord British himself, Richard Garriott. This game was his 28th attempt at creating an RPG and until it was officially published was sold in plastic baggies and provided a source of income while he was in school.

Akalabeth is widely considered the first graphical RPG for home computers and certainly was the main influence for many game makers in the years to come.

After *Akalabeth*, there were several very important Role Playing Games released, including *Wizardry* and the first *Ultima* game in 1981, the industry standard-setting *Ultima III* in 1983, and a well-received game *Bards Tale* in 1985. All of these games were popular and have become classics in their own right.

One game that came out in 1985 that continued the RPG industry standardization and is quite possibly the most influential RPG in the history of 2D Role Playing Games is *Ultima IV: Quest of the Avatar*.



Ultima IV was the game that standardized the hack and slash game play with true story elements. What made this important to RPG players is that the games became more of an adventure than an arcade game. This style was copied and cloned in several games for over a decade and is still one of the most frequently, legally downloaded games on the internet. Amazing for a twenty-year-old game with 2D tiled graphics and low quality sound effects.

Ultima to this day remains a series of games that has a huge worldwide following. In 1987, PC gamers saw the release of a new RPG that also has a strong long-standing following, *Might and Magic*. The *Might and Magic* games became very popular because of a strong story, a large world, and a combat-heavy game style that appealed to the less hardcore RPG fan. This also helped create a new style of RPG with faster game play. This style was better showcased by the first true real-time RPG, *Dungeon Master*.



RPG RETROSPECTIVE (CONTINUED)

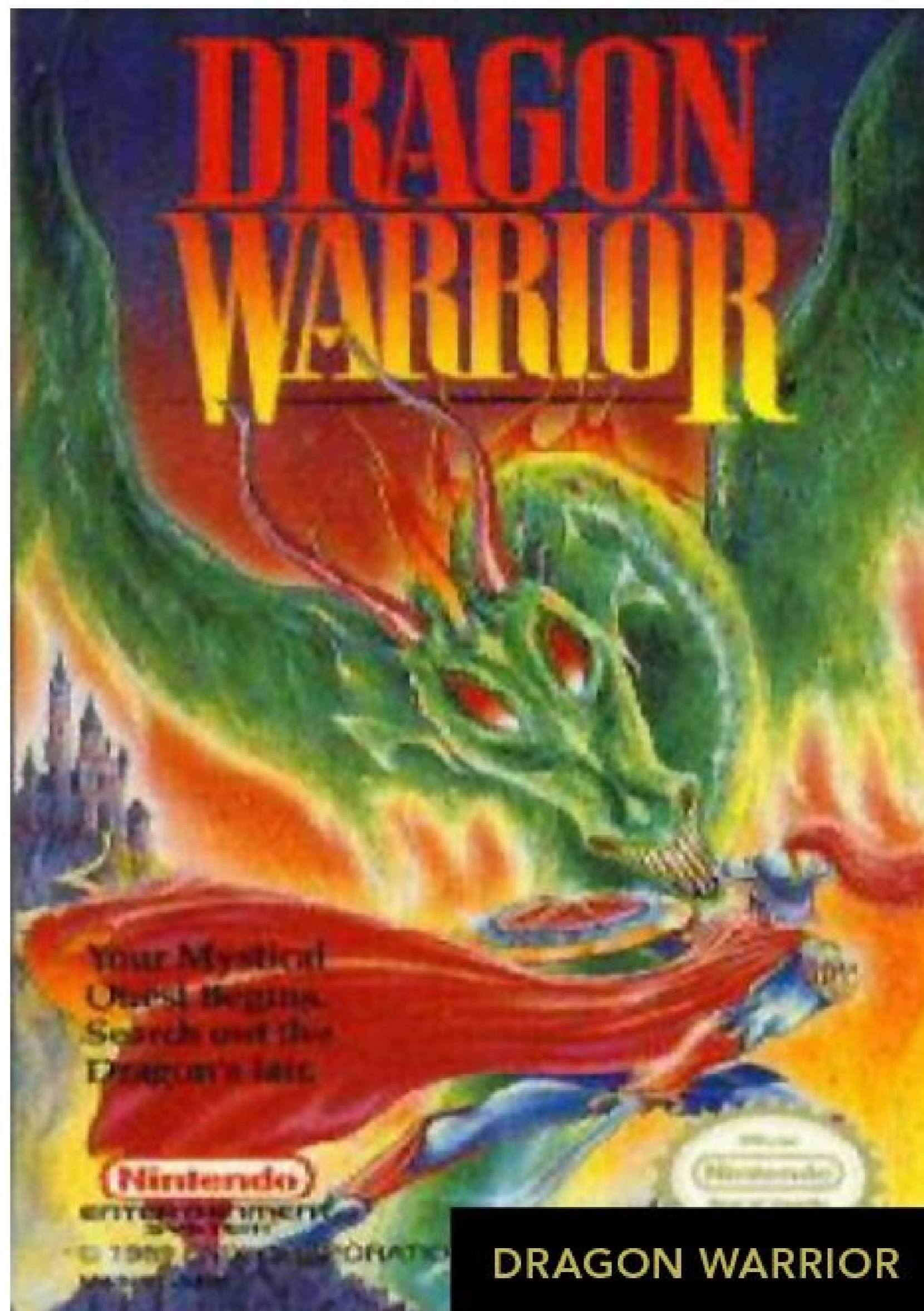
Dungeon Master was a breath of fresh air for many people; it offered faster game play instead of the slower turn-based combat common in almost every RPG to date. It also allowed for object and environment manipulation instead of using text-based commands, using runes to cast spells and requiring the player to remember rune combinations for casting. It is a game that was certainly ahead of its time and not easily copied. Many tried and none really came close to cloning the game until years later.

In 1988, one of the most popular RPGs and one of the first to legally use the *Dungeons and Dragons* game play rules and universe hit the market: **The Gold Box** game *Pool of Radiance*. This is widely considered the best *Dungeons and Dragons* (CRPG) release before *Baldur's Gate* a full decade later. An amazingly full storyline and a battle system that felt similar to the pencil and paper version of D&D helped propel this game in to superstar status.

The Gold Box games became very popular with a total of 14 titles released over four years, including *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Dragonlance*, *Buck Rogers* and *Savage Frontier* *Forgotten Realms*. This was certainly a list of too many games to be released in such a short time. Over-saturation of the market and the rise in popularity of other game genres almost stalled out the CRPG.

While PC gamers bathed in virtual worlds and sprites in their favorite RPGs for many years, personal computers were not the only place to play Role Playing Games; console gamers had a limited variety of choices, usually with a single game on each console for several years. From Atari's *Dragonstomper* to Intellivision's less than stellar *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* games, console gamers opened up the CRPG door and never let it close.

The first truly amazing console RPG was introduced for the Famicom, called *Dragon Warrior* (also called *Dragon Quest*). This stellar game was first introduced in Japan in 1986 and later on the Nintendo Entertainment System in North America, but with enhanced graphics and sound effects. This game was the first game in a long-lived series so popular in Japan that that during each initial game release, Japanese stores couldn't sell the game until the weekend due to people missing work and school. No other game, including the *Final Fantasy* games, has had such a wide impact.



DRAGON WARRIOR

Quickly following on the mass hype of the first game, Enix in 1987 brought out *Dragon Quest II* in Japan. *Dragon Quest II*, while not as widely popular as the original, cemented the fact that consoles could have games that were compelling to play and did not require a keyboard.

Also in 1987 a small, almost unsuccessful company put everything on the line with a single game, and the last game before closing its doors. This game would change the company's future and really change the course of role-playing games forever. Of course, this game was *Final Fantasy*, Square Co.'s greatest game series and a series that has spawned a feature film, a very popular MMORPG, two strategy games and a dozen sequels. This last-ditch effort helped change the way all games were created in Japan and across the world.

Final Fantasy has really changed the RPG genre with advancement in a movie-style cinematic system that has been copied more times than can be counted, possibly selling more consoles for Nintendo and subsequently Sony than any other video game, thus raising the bar for other developers to

follow. Square saw that with the Sony Playstation, it could do something never seen before and released one of the highest selling Role Playing Games in the history of consoles and personal computers, *Final Fantasy VII*.

If you see the screens for the games listed, they have not really changed much in the fifteen years or so covered thus far, but by the 1990's games began to push their platforms and their developers, moving the game development from smaller developer houses to larger teams.

EVOLUTION OF GRAPHICS IN ROLE PLAYING GAMES FROM AKALABETH TO OBLIVION

From the original graphical RPG, *Akalabeth*, to the great *Final Fantasy II*, computer graphics did not really change at all; simple line art and iconic tile maps with two to sixteen colors really forced players' imaginations to work overtime if they wanted to feel the deep dungeons, hear the scraping of skeletal feet and even hear the crossing of swords.

Interestingly, many of these games did not require color monitors at all. Monochrome screens worked as well as the temperamental CRT monitors that showed but three colors (when they warmed up they



RETRO REVIEW: ELDER SCROLLS ARENA REVIEW

In 1994, the PC gamer was introduced to one of the largest gaming worlds seen in a video game, Tamriel. With an expansive story and exciting game play, it would enthrall players for hundreds of hours of late-night play time. This game is *Elder Scrolls Arena*, the first game in the *Elder Scrolls* series, which had the player starting off in prison and eventually rescuing his imprisoned Emperor Uriel Septim.



While this first game is overshadowed by the second game in the series, *Daggerfall*, it is a fine game that still plays well today and is still a great way to begin exploring the world of Elder Scrolls.

Arena won several "Game of the Year" and "Editor's Choice" awards from gaming magazines, which any fan of the series knows is a trend that continues on to the latest game, *Oblivion*.

Review – *Arena* was and still is a good game. While lacking the graphical, game play and speaker-blasting glory of *Oblivion*, after playing the game for a few minutes it has a subtle way of pulling you in for the long term.

Graphics – For the time, the graphics were well done despite the sprites and low quality 3D realm not matching *Oblivion's* high-resolution textures and shader-filled glory that grace our PCs and Xbox 360s today. Only true graphics lovers will not give the game a chance based on what they see.

Sound – Sound quality is well done, and for the time was a game that had superior sound and music. It is still not bad, and actually the in-game sound effects and music add to the nostalgic game play.

Game Play – After 12 years, the game play still works, which is a testament to Bethesda. The game is very easy to pick up and play with mouse and keyboard controls.

Story – The story is good but not great; however, this has more to do with the actual creation of the game than anything. *Arena* was a game that started out as a gladiator combat game, then evolved more into the *Elder Scrolls* experience. This does not mean the story is lame or even horrible but well done enough that you follow the story and want to finish the game.

Overall – This game is a recommended free treat for Role Playing Gaming fans, as well as those who are really into retro gaming. While its age shows visually, it does not take away from the experience, and before long you will be living in the deep rich world of Tamriel.

If you wish to experience *Arena* you can download the full game from Bethesda at http://www.elderscrolls.com/downloads/downloads_games.htm as well as a link to DOSBox, a great free emulator to run DOS Games. Just a note, it takes approximately five minutes to download and install with a couple minutes to read the DOSBox readme file. While running *Arena*, you will need to speed up DOSBox (Control F12) to have the game run smoothly. After 10 minutes, you can be up and playing *The Elder Scrolls Arena* and smiting goblins and rats just like it was 1994.

RPG RETROSPECTIVE (CONTINUED)

were able to show four). It really wasn't until the creation of standards for PC gaming with EGA (Enhanced Graphics Adapter/Array) and VGA (Video Graphics Adapter/Array) that games required better monitors, better video cards, and, ultimately, the need for more money.

Consoles at the time would work on any old TV, and even the Playstation 2 and Xbox would be happy on a 25-year-old TV without any real issues. The quality wasn't there, but it worked.

PC Gaming has pushed the advancement of video cards to new heights, extreme prices, and regular updates. While RPGs have not pushed this need as fast as other game genres such as First Person Shooters, the evolution of animation and texturing has progressed more with RPGs in recent years than any other genre.

Advanced animation techniques, terrain rendering, texture creation, model rendering and lighting have really been pushed by the creation of creatures and living worlds upon which they roam. This progress has been particularly evident in *Eye of the Beholder*, *Ultima VII*, *Baldur's Gate*, *Never Winter Nights*, *Elder Scrolls* series and certainly the *Final Fantasy VII* game.

In the last decade, Role Playing Games have moved to the forefront with the creation of Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPG), which to run efficiently, require faster computers and more powerful video cards. This has aided in the ability to build more richly textured worlds, with more players and more varied landscapes.



Possibly the one game that has benefited from this advancement in graphic horsepower is *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*. *Oblivion* is certainly one of the nicest looking games to come out in the last couple of years in an almost seamless world that varies from night to day, from grasslands to forest to mountains, and has set a benchmark for game developers to follow.

Companies have also become standardized for graphics cards, with nVidia and ATI the most popular brands. Releasing more powerful cards almost on a monthly basis, most users can easily spend more on a single video card than the rest of the computer. New computer purchases are rarely made anymore without deciding which video card to install.

In the future, games will improve graphically. This is a guarantee. We are seeing renders and early alpha images from games that are becoming closer to real life in every way. But in the next ten years will we see a dramatic jump, such as the one we saw from line art to 2D to 3D? As gaming systems become more powerful, we will most definitely see better and more detailed real time shadowing, higher resolutions and procedural animation and rendering, which will create worlds of wonder and excitement we could not have before imagined.

STAY TUNED...

In the next issues of the magazine, I will cover more of the history of RPGs and MMORPGs, Sound and Music evolution, as well as physics and the most important role playing games and their impact on the RPG genre.

