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HARDCOREGAMER



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v5i2. denny quaid, hamburger

TO SLAY THE DRAGON... YOU MUST BECOME ONE!

DIVINITY II EGO DRACONIS

PLUS THIS COOL STUFF:

\$6.99 USA WINTER 2009 \$6.99 Canada



THE FUTURE OF ARCADE GAMING! THE FUTURE OF MOTION CONTROL! THE FUTURE OF GAMING GUIDES!

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Biographical Data



Dack Steve Hannley

Marty Funkhouser may be the best TV show character of all time. Seriously, go watch this season of Curb Your Enthusiasm and see for yourself.

Now Playing: *Don't Stop - Annie, Kings & Queens - Jamie T, Crown on the Ground - Sleigh Bells, Man on the Moon - Kid Cudi*



StormyDawn Rhi Hale

I still can't believe I managed to throw all this together. I didn't know I was capable of this kind of work, and I am super, super proud of myself. And now, I must fulfill a promise I made when I was 8: HI MOM! <3

Now Playing: *Dragon Age: Origins, Warhammer: Age of Reckoning*, more *Dragon Age: Origins*



James James Cunningham

Rest in Peace, Pi. I can't even begin to express how much I'll miss you.

1994ish - 11/16/2009



UberLord Tony Mitera

I'm beginning see zombies and darkspawn carrying M16s in my sleep. That probably means I should play less games, but I'm not about to let my sanity get in the way of a few more hours in all of the games I'm buried in.

Now Playing: *Dragon Age: Origins, Left 4 Dead 2, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*



Jeremy Jeremy Peeples

After a turbulent 2009 on a personal level, it's felt wonderful to at least get back on track with gaming. I've been playing a lot of stuff from a variety of genres, and rekindled my love of MVC 2 by playing with my buddy Darian for hours on end.

Now Playing: *Excitebike: World Rally, Forza Motorsport 3, Street Fighter IV, Crazy Taxi, Marvel vs. Capcom 2, WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010, Wario Land: Shake It!*



Leon the Hart Eric Pomroy

With the swine flu scare now in full force, I figured it'd be best to completely cease my social life and spend my nights playing video games alone at home. In other words, nothing has changed.

Now Playing: *Lostwinds: Winter of the Melodias, Rune Factory Frontier, Excitebike: World Rally, Metroid Prime Trilogy*



Beck Adam Beck

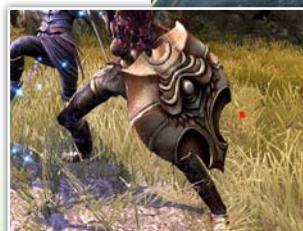
2009 has been a strange year for me. For one, the earth below me is still snow free, and it scares me. Thankfully, we are treated to a wave of games that doesn't seem to letup until summer of next year.

Now Playing: *Dragon Age: Origins, Demon's Souls, Borderlands*

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On the Cover: Divinity 2

One of 2010's best games could be coming out sooner than you think. Divinity II, from Larian Studios, is an Action-Adventure RPG with an enormous scope. We take an exclusive look at the game and interview some top players at Larian Studios. Did we mention you can turn into a dragon? Yeah, you don't want to miss this.



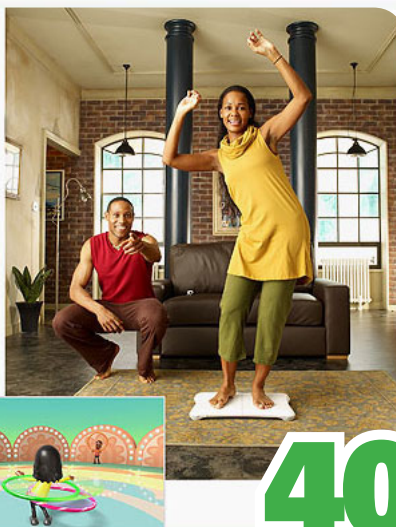
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Feature: Motion Controllers: Then and Now

Did you know that your beloved Wiimote wasn't the first motion controller? It's true! Throughout the history of gaming, there have been a plethora of other devices. Tony takes a look at the most prominent examples. Some were impressive. Some... well, you might want to just read the article.



EVERYTHING ELSE IS CHILD'S PLAY.



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Feature: 2010's Wonderful World of Arcades



Gamers might be glued to their Xboxes and PlayStations, but the arcade scene is still alive and kicking. There are some truly impressive cabinets coming to the arcade next year and Adam Pratt takes an in-depth look at 'em.



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HARDCORE

COVER STORY



Cover Story by Tony Mitera



DIVINITY II

EGO DRACONIS

Your life has suddenly taken more than its fair share of twists and turns in a very short amount of time. Barely any time has passed from when you were little more than a Dragon Slayer initiate and completed the ritual to put you on the path to become a Slayer. In a twist of the strands of fate, your first dragon hunt thereafter was supposed to be the last you and your compatriots would ever know, as you and your fellow Dragon Slayers were in pursuit of the last known Dragon Knight in existence. Rather than the day end with the betrayers finally eliminated, your destiny changed course when the last Dragon Knight approached you and fused her essence into your own.

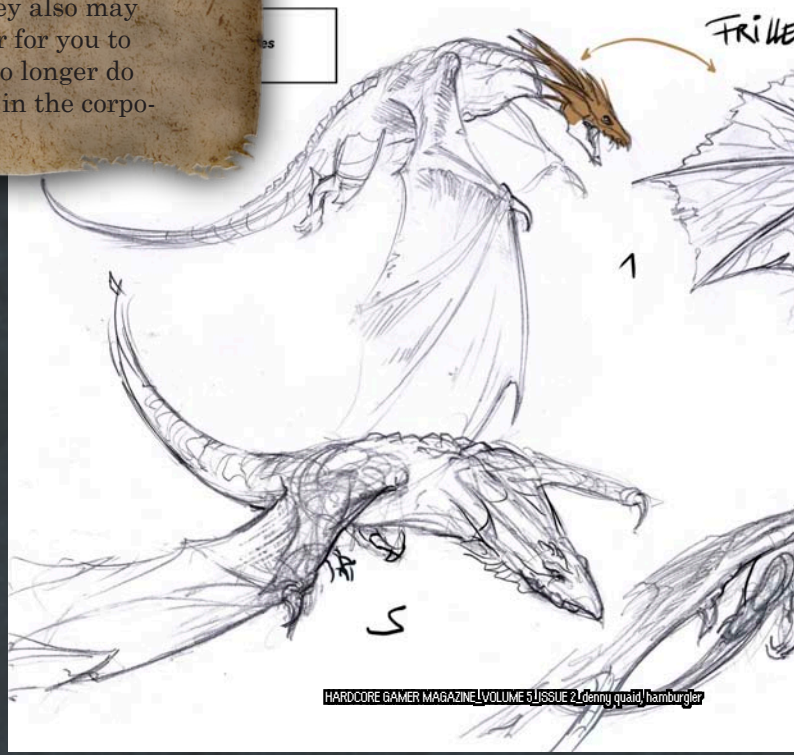
Now you are the very being that you were trained to hunt and kill, which not only makes you a favored target for the Dragon Slayers to sink their blade into, but also puts you in a unique position of terrible knowledge. While humanity has been working on eliminating the Dragon Knights a new threat has been brewing in the form of a demon army led by Damian, a being so furious over the loss of his love that he would see the world burn with all the flames his wrath can muster. Not only must you survive being stuck between these two opposing forces, but you must also gain enough power and friends to stop Damian's army before he uses it to turn the world asunder.

COVER STORY

If you hadn't already guessed, *Divinity II* is the latest high fantasy epic from Larian Studios, the architects behind the previous games in the *Divinity* series including 2002's *Divine Divinity* and 2004's *Beyond Divinity*. The gameplay is essentially an action RPG as you control your character through real-time combat using your abilities to topple your foes and perform evasive rolls and leaps so as to avoid the swing of an axe or the sting of a bolt of magical energy. You only control your own character rather than a party, which means that the only micromanagement you will be performing is simply that of keeping tabs on your skills and their cooldown as you rain hell down on your enemies.

As a Dragon Slayer initiate one of your first trials in becoming a full-fledged Dragon Slayer is to visit the village of Farglow. This sacred village is a place that all Dragon Slayers visit once and never again, and a key reason for the visit is the mind wipe that occurs at the height of the initiation ritual. This mind wipe has the unfortunate side effect of wiping out much of the training and experience that initiates have amassed over their training, but that training was only meant to see if the initiates mind is tempered enough to accept the gift that follows the mind wipe. You see, the wipe leaves the initiates mind open and clear to receive the new knowledge that the ritual imparts, not the least of which is the ability to see and communicate with undead spirits as well as the ability to read minds. This wipe also leaves the initiates eyes with a perpetual silvered shine, a trademark visage of a Dragon Slayer.

The ability to interact with the undead is important, as with the lands of Rivellon having endured a long and bloodied history of conflict there are many spirits left haunting the dungeons and towers that scatter the landscape. Your quests will take you through many areas that these ghosts call home, and talking with them may not only shed some light on previous unknown history as it pertains to your objective but they also may have side quests for you to complete in order for you to complete that which they can no longer do now that they are no longer in the corporeal realm.

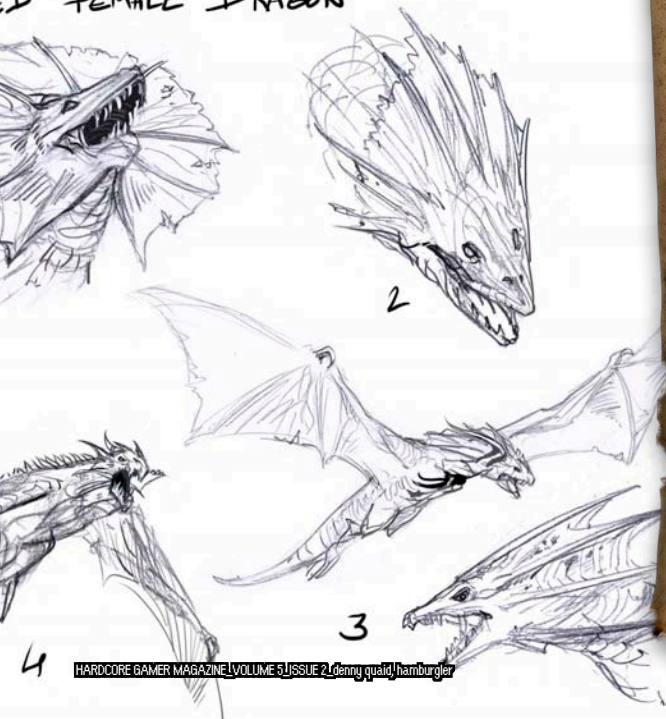




The ability to read minds however is a true game changer, and is one of *Divinity II*'s most interesting features. As you make your way across the lands of Rivellon, you will encounter many characters during your journey, both human and non-human. You can use your newly acquired mind reading powers to probe the minds of nearly any character that you can talk with normally, letting you in on insight or hidden knowledge that would otherwise be unavailable to you. Mind reading, however, does not come without a price, as each time you do so it puts you into an experience debt that can be high or low depending on the strength of the mind you are reading (or as to how juicy the information is). Once this debt has been accumulated all future experience gains go towards paying it off before your character continues to gain experience towards leveling, but the rewards are often worth it.

Mind reading has a variety of uses, the most basic of which is to get a cheap bit of gossip or to learn a juicy or possibly embarrassing aspect of a shopkeeper's life so that it can be used as leverage to help him adjust his prices accordingly. However, the use of this ability in quest lines can often change the direction a course takes dramatically. Early on in the game you are simply asked by a female villager to deliver a sealed letter to the village blacksmith and are explicitly told to not tell her husband. Seeing it for what it obviously is, one outcome of the quest would be to simply deliver the letter and leave it at that.

ED FEMALE DRAGON





Hardcore Gamer had the chance to sit down with Swen Vincke, the CEO and Studio Head of Larian, and David Walgrave, the Producer of *Divinity II*, to ask them questions about their biggest game yet.

1) How big can the airborne battles as a dragon get? Will the player be primarily fighting single or small groups of enemies, or can battles become more complex?

The player will take on single enemies if he's smart. There will be squadrons of flying creatures taking you on, but if you don't single them out, and you're going to fly right in the middle, you're as good as dead.

You will also have to take care of enemy air defenses, so there's air-to-ground combat in it as well.

2) What challenges did you face in adding the ability to become a dragon into the game and take flight?

There were numerous challenges. We already started taking them into account during preproduction where we experimented with different technical solutions to all our problems.

We needed to have big levels where you could fly around freely, and they couldn't be less detailed than the rest of the world. And when flying at 40 meters per second, streaming had better keep up (opposed to running at 4 meters per second). You can also transform back into a human in most of these levels, so the ground experience needs to be up to par with the rest of the world. There were constant "what if" moments during art creation of these levels, and during quest design, et cetera.

Of course, we also iterated through different control schemes and animations for the dragon. You're basically flying a huge beast around, but you want it to feel reactive and fast enough. Took quite some different setups before we found the right feel.

3) How much of the game can the player spend in their dragon form once they gain the ability to do so?

You'll probably spend something like 20% of the time as a dragon.



With such matrimonial woes going on, it's hard not to mind read into the matter further, and when the woman's mind was read you find that she often wonders why her husband hides a key up in the rafters that she cannot reach. This leads to grabbing the key and checking out the locked cellar, which is a plan cellar barring the fact that it contains her husband diary in which he details the fact that her murdered the last man that tried to court his wife on the side. When confronted with this new knowledge the husband enrages at the thought of his secret getting out and attempts to cover his tracks by killing you. There are entire quest chains that are unlocked simply by letting your curiosity getting the better of you and mind reading people you talk with. It might be hit or miss as to if they will have worthwhile thoughts rattling around, but the results are often worth it.

The ability to read minds also comes in quite handy when you can use it to glean what the motivations are of someone who is sending you on a quest. You may get sent on an errand, only to mind read the quest giver to find that they are only doing so to keep you away from something or at least hope that you do not find it. On some quests that have multiple outcomes, this may influence what outcome you ultimately want to choose now that you have insider knowledge of the quest givers. Of course some powerful characters may notice you peering into their minds and begin to have a mental conversation with you, which can both positively and negatively affect their views of you.

As stated earlier, however, the game doesn't exactly revolve around playing with the unspoken gossips of the townsfolk, as there are far more grave matters afoot. When the Dragon Knight infused her abilities and mind into your own you gained the ability to become a Dragon Knight but those abilities lay dormant. Thus, one of your first primary goals is to unlock those skills and not the least of which is the ability to turn into a dragon at will. While in dragon form, you have the full ability to take to the skies and engage in aerial combat as you breathe fire on your enemies and emit tracking bursts of flame to take out distant foes. It is fully possible to leap off of a cliff where you have slain a few mountaintop baddies, transform into a dragon as you freefall off the side, roast some airborne enemies, and then change back into human form again to kill some additional foes down in the valley below.

Combat is something that you will quickly get used to in *Divinity II*, but how it plays out is ultimately up to your personal tactics and how you build your character. Killing your enemy gains you experience proportional to the level of the fallen foe, which not only pays off any experience debt that you accumulated from mind reading, but also goes towards leveling up your character. Every time you level, you gain four attribute points to apply towards your base stats. Vitality increases your hit points, while Spirit helps dictate your maximum mana points available to you. Strength is the primary attribute for melee fighters due to how it affects how much melee damage you deal, how much of it you resist, how fast you regenerate hit points, and how well your body and resist affects such as burn and bleed. Dexterity deals with how much ranged damage you deal, how effectively you can dodge return fire from archers, and how much damage your critical hits do with any weapon. Finally, Intelligence can be pumped up to increase your magic damage and resistance, boost your ability resist such spells as curses and polymorph, and increase how quickly your mana regenerates.

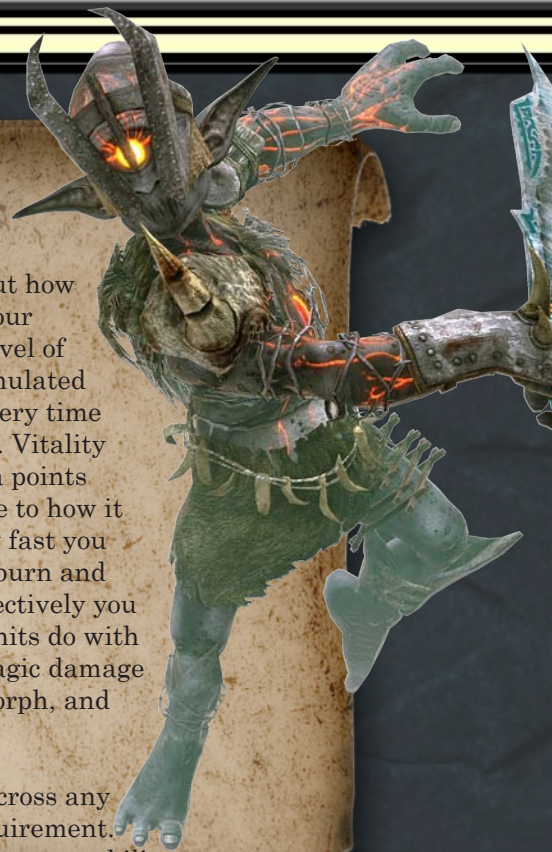
Every time you level, you also gain one skill point, which can be spent across any of the skill categories assuming you meet the skill's minimum level requirement.

Putting points into these skills either boosts your character, grants you a new ability to use, or further bolsters and ability you already know. There are five of these categories; Priest, Mage, Warrior, Ranger, and Dragon Slayer. Priests have less healing abilities than what you would expect, instead being geared towards summoning undead minions to help you fight or cast detrimental curses against your enemies. Mages are based more on straightforward magic damage, with skills that deal direct damage or give you some crowd control. Warrior skills are based almost entirely around either dealing damage in melee or other skills that help you stay alive while doing so.

Rangers are as stun, poison,

your stereotypical archers with a bevy of arrow skills such and explosive arrows, as well as some degree of stealth. Finally, Dragon Slayer skills are ones that increase your encumbrance, decrease how much experience it takes to read someone's mind, or increase your weapon proficiencies.

While you can create a character that is primarily based around one of the skill categories such as a full-on Ranger, the most powerful characters come with mixing and matching skills in order to suit the variety of situations you will find yourself in. Since you can switch weapon sets on the fly you may wish to pepper your foes with arrows before rushing in with a sword and shield, or prefer to swing a massive hammer around and just fling some painful magic at any target out of your mighty reach. Building a character that follows just one of the skill categories means that while your character will be incredibly powerful while in their element, you will often find yourself in situations where it is very difficult to survive such as a ranger in close quarters, or a warrior caught out in the open.





4) Other than not being able to enter dungeons, what downsides does being a dragon have that might make the player at times want to stay on foot?

As a dragon, it's pretty hard to talk to people. People run away at the very sight of a dragon, and think they'll be barbecued when you'd try to talk to them. Not being able to talk to other people in an RPG is kind of a downside :)

Some areas are really dangerous or impossible to enter as a dragon because people have put up anti-dragon defenses.

5) Do you still gain the same amount of experience and loot regardless if you kill an enemy in human form or in dragon form?

The targets that you can kill as a dragon cannot be killed when you're human. So that's the downside of being human in the game :)

Airborne targets don't drop loot. They do give experience though. Experience is shared between your dragon and your human form.

6) What sources influenced you in the creation and refinement of the game's lore and story?

Well, the basic lore was already there, thanks to the previous *Divinity* games (*Divine Divinity* and *Beyond Divinity*). We just worked further on that history. Of course, we did add a lot of new stuff, because *Divinity II* takes place hundreds of years after *Divine Divinity*.

Our writers were influenced by different cultures and sources, not just lots of fantasy books. If you do want some fantasy names, there's the usual Tolkien of course, but also the excellent fantasy work of Robin Hobb and Stephen Erikson. But we read much more than just fantasy, and we also know this world's history and history being made today. You will find many references in the game to the most varying topics.





7) What similarities and differences does *Divinity II* have with your previous titles in the series?

Similarities:

- the density of things to do
- it's in the same universe
- classless skill system
- there's always the stress on strong char development
- quest depth
- we worked out the summoning dolls a bit more (in *Divinity II*, you build your own creature)

Differences:

- obviously, we've gone full 3D now, with an engine that supports current gen technology
- we feel *Divinity II* is more dynamic
- and on the gameplay front, we've started mixing different genres: there's aerial combat as the dragon, you can mindread people, we have a couple of platforming challenges, and the combat has been adjusted to the over-the-shoulder cam to feel more action based

8) What feature or aspect of *Divinity II* are you the most proud of?

The mindreading skill is a very unique game mechanic. Players have a hard time deciding whether or not to mindread the character, and giving players freedom of choice is what we're for. It also makes NPC's more interesting, it gives them more depth, and of course, it allows for even more branching quest solutions. Mindreading gives you insight in a character, leads to treasure, or can change the way you can react to people or how you solve quests.

The fact that you can shapeshift and fly around feels very gratifying every time you press that button. The feature had been in our minds for years, and a lot of people kept saying that it could never be done. But it's not about proving them wrong anymore, it's just turned out to be great fun, every time you do it, even if you start taking it for granted after a while.

9) How long do you expect the average play through of the game to take?

Depending on how good you are, you can finish the game in about 60 hours. If you're going to read everything (all the books, diaries, sonnets...) and do all the sidequests, you're looking at about 80 hours.



10) Are there any plans towards expansion packs or downloadable content?

We are talking about this with different parties and cannot say anything at this time.

11) Do enemies respawn in the game, after a period of time, such as a goblin hamlet getting repopulated, or are there a finite number of enemies in the game?

The number of enemies are finite, they do not respawn. This is a design decision we made early on because the game could become unbalanced. It also makes clear to the player where he has already been, and where he still has to go. It will also indicate what his next move should be: enemies do not adapt their level to the player level, so if you are level 1 and you're wandering off too far, you'll quickly notice. Try taking on an enemy that's a couple of levels higher than you are, and you probably will die. However, you can try to take him on, which may work out for you if he's all alone. If you succeed, you will be rewarded with more experience.

12) What is the highest level attainable in the game?

Depending on whether you do all the side-quests and experience gained by killing enemies, you will end the game with a character that's between level 32 and 40. The level cap is level 60 but with the quest XP and enemy XP that is currently in the game, you won't reach that :)

13) How many skill and attribute points can be found via a means other than simply leveling up?

There are about two dozen skillbooks in the game, half a dozen statbooks, and a dozen of dragonskillbooks.

14) Without spoiling anything, what other unique or interesting gains can the player get using mind reading?

Apart from lore, alternative quest branching, other rewards, secret objects and locations, there are characters that teach you a new skill when you mindread them.

You'll have to be careful using mindreads, 'cause some people will just be thinking about day-to-day stuff, or trying to complete a funny limerick in their head.



15) If the player uses mind read a lot they will go into a lot of experience debt, does that mean that players who use it often won't get to as high a level as those who mind read sparingly?

Well, that depends on whose mind you read, really. Mindreading certain characters will unlock an entirely new location, reward, or quest branch, so you'll gain back more than the mindread cost you.

Of course, you may also gain back loot (items, money) and no experience, so you'll have to make a choice between what's more important to your character. For instance, if you know that a mindread of 50 XP will earn you the location of a gold bag that has 100 gold coins in it, do you think that's fair or would you rather not have bothered?

I think it's often obvious who will think of something interesting, so you have to learn to judge by talking to people first, and see how they fit in the story.

16) With no morality system to keep the player in check, are there repercussions to playing a "good" or "bad" character?

The people that you have interacted with will remember how you have treated them before. Some will stop trading with you, or their prices will be higher if you were rude to them or failed a quest. Good or evil has an impact on prices (but that doesn't mean being a goodie two-shoes will always give you a discount of course) and on quest branching.

17) How many different body parts are available for players to craft their personal minion with?

You combine the creature with a head, a torso, arms and legs. So you need four body parts. All four body parts come in four different flavours: dragon elf, goblin, undead and the standard creature parts.

Using a body part from one of the former three gives the standard creature a boost in stats and changes the skills of your creature.

The body parts also come with different stats. So you could find two different goblin heads :) (And probably even more!)



In either case you will be dealing a lot of death towards a large variety of humans, goblins, skeletons, demons, and their ilk. Though the game is fully 3D in both graphics and in movement, the use of your attacks and abilities is based around a lock-on system to help manage those battles that could otherwise easily be overwhelming. Your current lock is picked by simply pointing your camera towards the enemy. You can either let this free-moving lock run its course and simply point at who you want to hurt at the moment, or you can choose to put a hard-lock on a target, ensuring that you will only try to hit them until either they perish, or you change your lock.

It is important to get a firm grasp of this system quickly, as simply standing around and picking your abilities to use against your target can often only get you killed. Melee fighters have an easier time going toe to toe with enemy hits assuming you pump their strength and vitality points up and deck them with armor, but if you have been forgoing strength in favor of the more delicate or intellectual pursuits, you will find that often your best defense against a foe is to make him unable to hit you at all. By pressing the jump button and moving to either side you can perform an evasive roll, and by jumping forward or backward you will leap into the air in a flip. These moves are great tools to help keep melee fighters at bay while you pepper their healers, or simply roll out of the way of an enemy mage's spell before it lands. Higher level enemies are harder to evade in this manner and certain spells either move far more quickly than others or have homing abilities of various quality, but dodging and rolling can often mean the difference between using a potion or two in a fight or using none at all.

Gear plays a big role in your survivability and tactics, as not only can gear items add to your melee, ranged, and magical defense but many gear items come with a variety of additional enhancements, which may be better suited either for your character or for the task at hand. Gear items themselves provide basic defense and have a chance of having modifiers of some caliber, such as the ability to deal automatic damage to any foe that hits you with a weapon with any attack, or simply have a chance of dealing some damage to any nearby enemies regardless if they attack you or not. Other boosts, such as the ability to increase one or more of your skills by a number of points can be invaluable, not to mention those pieces of gear that increase your base stats.

Such gear can be purchased through one of the many shopkeepers and blacksmiths that dot the game world, but generally speaking these pieces of armor and weapons only have the most basic of stats and rarely have anything more than maybe one stat bonus to them. The best gear comes from either random loot from enemies or from quest rewards. Purchasing gear is great for filling holes in your equipment or trying out the different styles of combat, but soon enough those blacksmiths and shopkeepers will simply be those who you sell unwanted gear that you've accumulated in exchange for some gold coins or possibly a few potions and charms for your travels.



In addition to their inherent bonuses many pieces of gear have either enchantment or charm slots. Charm slots work similar to the socketing systems found in other RPGs where you simply fit an object into the charm slot that adds such things as melee damage, magic resistance, vitality points, mana regeneration and a multitude of others. You can put a charm into a charm slot at any time and it doesn't require anything, other than a weapon or gear item with such a slot and something to put in it. Once you put a charm in a slot, however, that charm is permanently bound to that item. It can be replaced, but you cannot retrieve that charm and use it in other items.

Enchantments are far more powerful than charms, but in a similar manner, they require an enchantment slot be present on the gear item. Enchantments also are selective in what items they can be applied on, such as weapons, jewelry, or armor. Their effects however are often with the hassle of getting them on your gear, though. Some enchantments can add the ability to automatically restore your hit points or mana as a fraction of the damage you have dealt, or simply add a nice bonus to your base damage. Enchantments do require the help of someone to help you put the enchantment on, however, so you can't just slap one on while in the middle of your latest dungeon crawl.

While you don't have a party in *Divinity II* and only ever control your own character, that's not to say that you can't get some dedicated help of your own. As you comb through dungeons and kill enemies you will acquire the body parts of creatures in the form of their heads, torsos, arms and legs. These ghastly bits of loot are more than just trophies of your latest kills, serving a far more important purpose when taken to a necromancer who can help you assemble them into a new being. Similar to your skills, however, how you build this little pet monster of yours often depends on how you want him to compliment your own character.

Every body part has a set of attributes, such as how much it increases health, resistances, damage and whether or not it adds any abilities for the creature use. You can just as easily build your creation as a tank that has high health, as you can build it as a melee force of nature, which gets in close and mauls your foes. With certain body parts, you can give the creature ranged abilities, so if you would rather it stay back and let you get messy in melee, you certainly can. Summoning your creature is done by using a Crystal Skull and takes half of your total mana, but once summoned, the creature will faithfully follow you and generally get in the face of anyone foolish enough to brandish a blade or an unkind stance against you.

You will fight your way through a multitude of dungeons and other environments filled with all manners of things that wish to do unpleasant things with your mortal coil, but unlike a traditional dungeon crawler, *Divinity II* often makes use of gameplay elements other than just simply blazing through the area, cutting enemies down and gathering loot. There is much of that action to be had of course, but in addition you must watch out for pressure plates or other hidden traps that can have both good and bad consequences such as the difference between spawning a chest full of goodies or polymorphing you into a ladybug for a period of time. As you leap over and roll out of the way of danger, it is important to keep an eye on your surroundings, not only to watch for flanking enemies, but also to make sure you don't accidentally activate some devious trap that takes off half of your hit points in the blink of an eye.





18) What skills or abilities do you feel that a beginner adventurer should work into their builds?

That really depends on what type of player you are, and what character you want to build. However, there are some skills that all types of players can use. For instance, the evade skill is handy for warriors that tank their way through the enemies, but it's also a great skill for the rangers when melee enemies come too close.

If you're planning on mindreading a lot and you don't want to spend too much XP, invest in mindread early in the game, because most of the mindreads will be in the first part of the game. (It's kind of hard to mindread people in dragon form. Not to say impossible.)

Again, even though it's personal choice in my opinion, I would advise people to put at least one point in summon ghost or summon demon very early in the game. You don't have your creature at the start of the game, and having an ally will take the heat off of your character for at least a little while. They'll also heal you or attack the enemies for you.

19) How many total quests are there in the game, and of that number how many of them are optional side quests?

There are more than one hundred quests, of which more than half are optional. But you will notice that without questing, you will have trouble getting on in the game. Solving quests is not only fun, it also yields a lot more XP than killing enemies. So if you find yourself hitting a wall, make sure to talk to people and explore the area.

20) What area of the game are you the most proud of, either from a visual or from a design standpoint?

I personally still love the very first level we ever made which is called Broken Valley. A lot of effort went into that level from all teams, and we actually re-created it about three times.

I am still amazed at the size of the valley. The first part of the valley (the village) is really packed with interesting houses and dark dungeons and colourful characters. They give you lots of quests, and once you continue down the stream, you realize that you've only seen one fifth of that entire valley.

There's really so much to do in that first level, that the external testers initially thought that that was the entire game. I can't blame them, cause Broken Valley does have a lot of quests and offers a lot of variety. But it's just the beginning, even though you can easily spend more than ten hours in this valley alone if you want to see and do everything.

**strategy
then.**

- DEPOSIT QUARTER
- BALL WILL SERVE AUTOMATICALLY
- AVOID MISSING BALL FOR HIGH SCORE



**strategy
now.**

doublejump.com



Other elements in the game play a prominent role in spicing up your dungeon crawling as well. There is a small amount of platforming elements found in some of the more complicated dungeons in which you must accurately leap from platform after precarious platform in order to reach a switch to open a gate or simply leap over an obstacle from higher ground. There is no fall damage in the game, so missing a leap rarely results in death, unless you happen to fall amongst a bunch of enemies who will then be quite happy to poke you full of new wounds. It won't be long before you will think to leap onto a platform that a lesser, non-Dragon Knight couldn't get to, so that you can avoid the reach of the swords and axes found in the hands of melee enemies, but to negate being cheap, the enemies in the game will either use a ranged attack against you if they can't reach you, or will simply begin to regenerate hit points at a vastly accelerated rate.

Another aspect of working your way through a dungeon or through the countryside itself in the pursuit of finishing quests, is how often in many quests you will need to either use your mind read ability to learn a key element about the quest, or read something that you had picked up for clues. Again, experience debt does hamper your characters progression somewhat, but there will be many times where you can get free attribute points or skill points to spend, just because you decided to read the mind of a librarian and accidentally learned a new alphabet, that you then used to read an ancient book filled with knowledge.

One thing to keep in mind as you play *Divinity II*, however, is that the game certainly does not hold your hand if you decide to wander off the beaten path and into a pack of higher level enemies. The game's enemies do not automatically scale to your level, so it is entirely possible to wander into a goblin's lair filled with enemies two or three levels higher than your own. This level difference doesn't seem like much, but even a couple level difference between you and your enemies matters a great deal. Enemies of a higher level than your own will deal massive damage, whereas if you are against an enemy a few levels lower than you, it will hardly be able to scuff the polish on your armor.





Regardless of how tough it was to do so, once you have completed a quest, you will be presented with a rewards menu. In the rewards menu, you can not only view the base rewards that come with completing that particular quest, but you will often get one or more reward selections, which lets you pick additional rewards to add on to your earnings. Such additional rewards can come in the form of even more experience gains, or another stack of gold coins to pad your coin purse with, and can also contain powerful new gear or charms. It can often boil down to what you need at the time, as sometimes getting more experience can be worth it, whereas in other times, you may simply decide that you would rather have that nice new axe over another stack of coin.

To effectively take on the full mantle of what it means to be a Dragon Knight and put yourself in a position where you can effectively combat Damian's demon army, you must first gain access to your Battle Tower, which happens approximately 40% of the way through the game. It is at this time that you unlock your ability to take to the skies as a dragon, not to mention you now have your own base of operations. The Battle Tower can effectively serve as your adventuring hub, containing its own small band of citizens loyal to your cause such as a blacksmith capable of folding enchantments into your weapons and armor, an herbalist with whom you can concoct new and additional potions, a necromancer so that you can get under the hood of your creature and swap out body parts, and a scout who can collect the raw goods and materials used in many useful applications.

The Battle Tower also has its own storage capacity, which by the time you get it will be a godsend considering the amount of raw goods, spare gear, and various recipes and enchantments you will have been carrying around by that point in the game. By default, your character can only carry 100 slots of items, and even though multiple Fanny Blossoms will only take up one slot of their own, your inventory space will fill up quite quickly. Skill points can be spent into your encumbrance to let you carry around a larger amount of items, but even then you certainly need to keep tabs on your inventory space. The nice thing about gaining access to the Battle Tower, however, is the stone that you can use to teleport to it at any time. Once your loot bags are full, simply teleport back home, offload / sell some goods, and then use the stone to teleport back right where you were.





Of course the pinnacle reason of being a Dragon Knight is to gain the ability to take flight and become a dragon. While in the air, you can fairly easily control your dragon by simply flying around using the mouse to steer and the keyboard buttons to control movement (or using a simple 360 pad control scheme). You will be subject to the attacks of airborne enemies, but immune to those on the ground, just as how while in the ground you cannot be harassed by airborne enemies as you deal with ground forces. Flying enemies have an additional targeting symbol around them to help you pick them out more easily, but otherwise the combat system and the ability to lock on to enemies in the air is handled the same as it is while on the ground.

Air battles are usually much faster in their pacing than ground battles are, thanks to both enemies and your own dragon form, moving around much more quickly. Since the air combat takes place in the skies, you must worry about enemies above and below your altitude as well as in your immediate airspace. In addition, you will often fight larger battles in the air than you do on the ground, making aerial combat an overall intense method to engage your foes. Occasionally, you must deal with ground-based defenses, such as the equivalent of anti-air towers, but such pitiful structures usually can't hold up for more than a second against your dragon breath.





HARDCORE

COVER STORY



Divinity II
EGO DRACONIS



Divinity II
EGO



Whether you are taking it in from the ground or from the air, the environments of the game all seem to maintain a vibrant and unique look from one to the other. At the start of the game, as you make your way through the village of Farglow, you get to appreciate some of the attention to detail that has been put into the design of its architecture, which is a level of detail that is shared throughout the game's towns and villages. As you strike out onto your own, you will be battling through goblin hamlets set on the ridges of a tall cliff overlooking a valley with a swiftly flowing creek at its bed. Upon leaping down to that level, you will look up and see god rays from the sun getting cast down through the overhead foliage.

The game also features a large amount of fully voiced characters, though the voice of your own character remains silent as you engage in conversations with them. Conversing with other characters boils down to listening to what the other person has to say, and then picking a response from the one or more listed that you can choose from. These responses can be good natured, charming, evil, or neutral in nature, running the gamut in between, though once a response has been picked the charm (or damage) has been done and you rarely get the chance for a take back, to change the outcome. This means that you really need to pay attention and take careful consideration into what you say in a conversation, or at least keep a handy quick save readily available before you engage in one. One thing that the game does not have however is a morality system, so such conversations can take whatever direction you wish without fear of messing up your standing on some moral ground.

Regardless of what moral path you take, the gameplay of *Divinity II* will have a lot to offer RPG enthusiasts when it comes out on January 5th. The game combines a rich and storied lore with its traditional action RPG oriented gameplay, but further expands upon it with the ability for you to read the minds of nearly anyone you meet, not to mention you are granted the ability to transform into a dragon at will and take flight. In either case, keep a sharp eye towards HardcoreGamer.com as the game nears its release date for the exclusive first review of *Divinity 2* just in time for the dawn of the new year.

SCORE <1>
112009

HI-SCORE
200506

SCORE <2>
012010

2010'S
WONDERFUL WORLD OF
ARCADES

BY ADAM PRATT
ARCADEHEROES.COM

PRESS START

WHILE THIS PAST DECADE HASN'T BEEN PARTICULARLY KIND TO THE ARCADE INDUSTRY, THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT THINGS ARE LOOKING UP, WITH MORE RELEASES COMING OUT THAT ARE TURNING MORE HEADS THAN WE'VE SEEN IN A WHILE. BELIEVE IT OR NOT, SEVERAL MANUFACTURERS STILL EXIST WHO ARE HARD AT WORK ON A VARIETY OF NEW COIN-OP ARCADE TITLES AND HERE IS A PREVIEW OF WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE BEGINNING PART OF 2010 OR IF YOU'RE LUCKY, SOME OF THESE GAMES MAY ALREADY BE AT A LOCATION NEAR YOU, JUST WAITING FOR YOUR QUARTERS.

GLOBALVR

AMERICAN MANUFACTURER GLOBALVR HAS TAKEN A MORE RELAXED APPROACH TO GAME RELEASES IN 2009 AND WE EXPECT THAT TREND TO CONTINUE IN 2010. THEY HAD TWO MAJOR GAMES IN 2009,

JUSTICE LEAGUE: HEROES UNITED WHICH SAW A RE-ENTRY BY AN ARCADE DEVELOPER INTO THE BRAWLER MARKET WITH AN ARCADE EXCLUSIVE PROPERTY; AND

TWISTED: NITRO STUNT RACING, WHICH BROUGHT THE UNIQUE PC RACING GAME INTO THE ARCADE ARENA WHERE IT COULD BE APPRECIATED BETTER THANKS TO CABINET SETUP.



A REQUEST FOR INFORMATION WAS MADE TO GLOBALVR ABOUT WHAT WE MIGHT EXPECT TO SEE FROM THEM IN 2010 BUT THEY REMAINED SILENT ON THE PROSPECTS. THE COMPANY HAS GAINED A LITTLE BIT OF A REPUTATION FOR PORTING HOME CONSOLE GAMES TO ARCADES AND ADDING AN ARCADE TWIST TO THEM SO PERHAPS WE WILL SEE THE TREND CONTINUE. **JUSTICE LEAGUE** WAS A NOTABLE SURPRISE HOWEVER AS THAT WAS NOT A PORT OF A PRE-EXISTING GAME SO TIME WILL TELL AS TO WHAT THE COMPANY PLANS ON DOING NEXT YEAR.

INCREDIBLE TECHNOLOGIES

INCREDIBLE TECHNOLOGIES HAS ALWAYS BEEN A STRONG PLAYER IN THE OUT-OF-HOME ENTERTAINMENT SECTOR, THANKS IN PART TO THEIR EVER POPULAR **GOLDEN TEE** SERIES. IN 2009, **GOLDEN TEE** SAW IT'S 21ST BIRTHDAY, WHICH WAS CELEBRATED WITH THE RELEASE OF **GOLDEN TEE LIVE 2010**. THE GAME RE-INTRODUCED SKINS PLAY TO THE GAME AND IT ALSO INTRO-

DUCED A FACE-BOOK FEATURE WHERE PLAYERS COULD UPDATE THEIR FACE-BOOK STATUS FROM THE GAME STATING THAT THEY WERE IN THE PROCESS OF PLAYING **GOLDEN TEE**. IN 2009, THE COMPANY ALSO SAW A KIT



RELEASE OF AN UPDATE TO ONE OF THEIR BAR GAMES **TOSS PRO BAGS** WITH LAWN DARTS. INCREDIBLE TECHNOLOGIES HAS BEEN A STRONG SUPPORTER OF ONLINE FUNCTIONALITY AS WELL AS ONLINE TOURNAMENTS WITH SUBSTANTIAL PRIZES, MAKING WAVES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR WITH THEIR **BOWLAPALOOZA** CONTENT. WHILE NO NATIONAL TOURNAMENTS HAVE YET BEEN ANNOUNCED FOR 2010, MANY EXPECT TO SEE THEM SOON.





AS FOR WHAT TO EXPECT FROM IT IN THE FIRST PART OF 2010, THEY JUST ANNOUNCED THAT SILVER STRIKE LIVE WILL BE MAKING IT'S WAY OUT IN Q1 2010. THIS NEW TITLE WILL MAKE EVERY GAME AN ONLINE GAME AND YOU CAN CHOOSE TO EITHER PLAY FOR FUN OR PLAY FOR CASH ON EVERY TURN. THE GAME WILL ALSO OFFER A LARGE NUMBER OF CUSTOMIZATION OPTIONS FROM THE BALL DESIGN, TO CHARACTER CLOTHING, WHAT HAND THEY USE AND MORE. JUST THE FACT THAT YOU HAVE A CHANCE TO WIN CASH WITH EVERY GAME IF YOU SO

CHOOSE (FOR \$1 EXTRA) COULD MEAN THAT THE ATTENTION ON THIS VERSION OF SILVER STRIKE BOWLING WILL BE A BIG PLUS, ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING THE FACT THAT THERE ARE ALREADY THOUSANDS OF SSB GAMES PLAYED ONLINE CURRENTLY. SILVER STRIKE LIVE WILL BE OFFERED IN INCREDIBLE TECHNOLOGIES PEDESTAL CABINET WHICH HAS BECOME THE STANDARD FOR ALL IT GAMES ACROSS THE BOARD.

AS FAR AS OTHER PROJECTS GO, RECENTLY A PRODUCER ON ONE OF THEIR DEVELOPMENT TEAMS WENT PUBLIC ABOUT A TITLE HE WAS WORKING ON AT THE COMPANY AND WAS BLOGGING ABOUT THE PROGRESS OF THE GAME THROUGH IT'S DEVELOPMENT PHASE, BUT FOR UNKNOWN REASONS THE GAME WAS CANCELED AND THE TEAM WAS REASSIGNED TO ANOTHER PROJECT.

KONAMI

FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS, KONAMI HAS MAINTAINED A STRONG ARCADE PRESENCE IN BOTH JAPAN AND EUROPE BUT THE US WAS SADLY PUT TO THE SIDE UNTIL 2009. WHILE WE STILL DIDN'T GET THE CHANCE TO HAS **CASTLEVANIA: THE ARCADE GAME** OR **GTI CLUB SUPERMINI FESTA** BROUGHT TO OUR SHORES, KONAMI DID DECIDE TO BRING A COUPLE OF HIGH-PROFILE RELEASES TO THE SCENE. FIRST, THEY SURPRISED EVERYONE BY COLLABORATING WITH RAW THRILLS' AND ACTIVISION ON THE ARCADE RELEASE OF **GUITAR HERO** IN MARCH. AT THE SAME TIME THEY ALSO BROUGHT THE LATEST VERSION OF **DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION** TO THE US, **DDR_X**. THIS TITLE WAS MARRIED AT FIRST BY SOME NAGGING ISSUES THAT DEDICATED **DDR** PLAYERS BROUGHT TO EVERYONE'S ATTENTION, BUT FORTUNATELY, KONAMI LISTENED AND ADDRESSED THE PROBLEMS.

SINCE THEN, KONAMI HAS CONTINUED TO ANNOUNCE TITLES FOR FOREIGN MARKETS INCLUDING **MOCAP SPORTS**, WHICH WILL SEE A RETURN TO THE MOCAP LABEL WITH NEW MOTION CONTROLS THAT BY FIRST APPEARANCES LOOK MUCH LIKE WHAT SONY HAS DEMONSTRATED RECENTLY ON THE PLAYSTATION 3, BUT IN PRACTICE REPORTEDLY ARE MORE SIMILAR TO WHAT NINTENDO PROVIDES WITH THE WII. THE GAME WILL INCLUDE THREE SPORTS TO CHOOSE FROM INCLUDING BOXING, TENNIS AND BASEBALL AND THE LARGE CABINET ALLOWS FOR TWO PLAYERS TO COMPETE AGAINST EACH OTHER. IT IS ASSUMED, ALBEIT NOT CONFIRMED AT THIS TIME, THAT KONAMI WILL BRING **MOCAP SPORTS** OVER TO THE US, SINCE PREVIOUS MOCAP TITLES HAD SEEN A RELEASE IN THE STATES EARLIER IN THE DECADE.



THEY ALSO MADE A MAJOR ANNOUNCEMENT AT THIS YEAR'S E3 SHOW, WITH METAL GEAR ARCADE. CONTRARY TO SOME NEWS REPORTS, MGA WILL SEE A US RELEASE SOMETIME IN 2010 AND IN ADDITION TO INCLUDING CONNECTED PLAY WITH PS3 METAL GEAR ONLINE USERS, THE TITLE WILL ALSO UTILIZE A SPECIAL 3D GOGGLES SYSTEM, THE LIKES OF WHICH WE HAVEN'T SEEN IN THE ARCADE INDUSTRY IN QUITE A FEW YEARS (THINK OF TAITO'S CONTINENTAL CIRCUIT 3D, THEY WILL BE SIMILAR TO THAT BUT MODERNIZED). BETWEEN THE ONLINE FEATURES, EXCELLENT GRAPHICS AND A UNIQUE CABINET SETUP, MGA COULD BE A BIG PLAYER IN 2010 AS IT CARRIES WITH IT ONE OF THE BIGGEST NAMES IN GAMING AND THE ADDED ONLINE CONNECTIVITY COULD EQUAL REPLAY VALUE FOR ARCADE FANS.



NAMCO GAVE US SOME INTERESTING OFFERINGS AT THE BEGINNING OF 2009 WITH THE SPIRITUAL FOLLOW-UP TO **CRISIS ZONE** CALLED **RAZING STORM** AND A SLICK MOTORCYCLE-RACING GAME CALLED **NIRIN**. WHILE THE REST OF THE YEAR HAS BEEN FAIRLY QUIET REGARDING NEW ARCADE RELEASES FROM THE COMPANY, THEY ARE STARTING OUT 2010 WITH A BANG THANKS TO THE NEW **TANK! TANK! TANK!** AS STRANGE AS THE TITLE SOUNDS, THE GAME HAS ALREADY WOWED PLAYERS ARE DIFFERENT INDUSTRY TRADE SHOWS AND IT TAKES US BACK TO A TIME WHEN THERE WAS MORE DOMINATING THE ARCADE THAN JUST RACING GAMES.

TANK! TANK! TANK! COMBINES ELEMENTS FROM NAMCO'S OWN **TO-KYO WARS** (1996, ARCADES) AND **EARTH DEFENSE FORCE 2017**, WHERE PLAYERS CAN WORK TOGETHER TO DECIMATE LARGE CITIES ALONG WITH THE CREATURES INFESTING THEM. THE CABINET PROVIDES A UNIQUE STYLE TO THIS GAME, WHERE IT FEATURES A HIGH-DEF SCREEN SET VERTICALLY IN FRONT OF THE PLAYER AND IT ALSO UTILIZES TECHNOLOGY THAT THE COMPANY HAS USED PREVIOUSLY IN ARCADE TITLES LIKE **MARIO KART GP**, WITH A CAMERA AVATAR SYSTEM THAT ALLOWS YOU TO CREATE YOUR OWN AVATAR USING SEVERAL PRE-DEFINED OVERLAYS. **TANK! TANK! TANK!** COMES IN TWIN CONFIGURATIONS ONLY SO THAT ALL PLAYERS WILL HAVE THE CHANCE TO SIT DOWN WITH A FRIEND AND WREAK HAVOC. TWO UNITS CAN BE LINKED TOGETHER FOR A TOTAL OF FOUR PLAYERS. IN ADDITION TO CO-OP MODES, THE GAME DOES FEATURE A DEATHMATCH MODE WHERE PLAYERS CAN DUKE IT OUT HEAD-TO-HEAD.

NOT ONES TO SHY AWAY FROM A LIGHT-GUN OFFERING, NAMCO ALSO HAS DEMONSTRATED A NEW CONCEPT IN THE GUN ARENA IN JAPAN WITH **DEAD STORM PIRATES**. NOT A LOT OF INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE ON THIS TITLE YET, ALTHOUGH IT IS SIMILAR TO SEGA'S **LET'S GO JUNGLE**, WHERE PLAYERS SIT INSIDE OF A LARGE COCKPIT-STYLE CABINET AND THEY CONTROL MOUNTED GUNS FOR THE ON-SCREEN BLASTING ACTION. A COUPLE OF THINGS THAT SET THIS APART ARE A MOTION-BASE FOR THE WHOLE CABINET AND A NEW RUDDER CONTROLLER THAT ALLOWS PLAYERS TO STEER THE SHIP DURING CERTAIN SCENES IN THE GAME. WE CAN ONLY GUESS AS TO WHETHER OR NOT WE'LL SEE **DEAD STORM PIRATES** IN VENUES OUTSIDE OF JAPAN BUT THE VERY NATURE OF THIS GAME SUGGESTS THAT IT WILL APPEAL TO WESTERN AUDIENCES.

NAMCO IS ALSO PLANNING TO RELEASE A NEW RACER IN THE US AT THE BEGINNING OF 2010 BUT AT THE TIME OF WRITING, NO DETAILS WERE AVAILABLE ON THIS TITLE.

2010



RAW THRILLS'

THIS COMPANY LED BY LEGENDARY GAME DESIGNER EUGENE JARVIS MADE SOME FANTASTIC STRIDES FOR ARCADES IN 2009, AND WITH THAT, THEY HAVE BEEN GAINING SOME WELL-DESERVED RESPECT AND ATTENTION FROM THOSE WHO NORMALLY DO NOT COVER ARCADE GAMING. THEY STARTED THE YEAR WITH A PORT OF **GUITAR HERO 3** FOR ARCADES (APTLY CALLED **GUITAR HERO ARCADE**) WHICH SAW STRONG SALES AS MANY LOCATIONS THAT WEREN'T PART OF THE TRADITIONAL ARCADE SCENE PICKED UP ON THE TITLE. THEY FOLLOWED THAT UP WITH A SURPRISE, A REMAKE OF MIDWAY'S **HYDRO THUNDER** CALLED **H2OVERDRIVE**. THIS ORIGINAL TITLE WAS PUT TOGETHER BY THE SAME TEAM WHO WORKED ON **HYDRO THUNDER**, BUT IT SAW A NUMBER OF MODERN IMPROVEMENTS, FROM STUNNING GRAPHICS TO SOLID AND ADDICTING GAMEPLAY. THEY ALSO RELEASED A MAJOR UPDATE TO THEIR BEST-SELLING **BIG BUCK HUNTER PRO** WITH **BIG BUCK HUNTER: OPEN SEASON**, WHICH ADDED A NUMBER OF IMPROVEMENTS TO THE ORIGINAL GAMEPLAY.

AS FOR WHAT IS NEXT ON RAW THRILLS' PLATE, BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS, THEIR LATEST TITLE, **TERMINATOR: SALVATION** WILL HAVE HIT ARCADE-VENUES ACROSS THE COUNTRY. THIS IS A LIGHT-GUN TITLE THAT WAS PUT TOGETHER BY THE SAME TEAMS WHO MADE THE RECENT **ALIENS: EXTERMINATION** AND IT EVEN HAS SOME VETERAN ARCADE DEVELOPERS ON BOARD WHO WORKED ON TITLES LIKE MIDWAY'S **CARNEVIL**. **TERMINATOR SALVATION** LETS PLAYERS MOW DOWN HORDES OF ROBOTS USING LARGE GUNS SIMILAR TO SOME OF SEGA'S DELUXE LIGHT-GUN GAMES.

RUMOR HAS IT THAT IN 2010, THE COMPANY IS WORKING ON A GAME NAMED **DAYTONA**, BUT AT THE TIME OF WRITING, THAT REMAINS A RUMOR. INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, YOU CAN FIND A PAGE SET ASIDE FOR A GAME ON THEIR WEBSITE BY THE NAME OF THAT VERY GAME (SEGA LOST THE RIGHTS TO **DAYTONA** A COUPLE OF

YEARS AGO AND IT SEEMS THAT RAW THRILLS' WERE THE ONES TO PICK IT UP) AND NOW THAT SEGA IS GOING TO RELEASE AN UPDATE TO **DAYTONA** UNDER A DIFFERENT NAME, WE WILL HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE HOW RAW THRILLS' WILL REACT. THERE ALSO HAS BEEN TALK OF A NEW FIGHTER AS WELL AS A SPORTS GAME COMING OUT OF THE COMPANY SOMETIME BUT UNTIL THE COMPANY GETS AROUND TO MAKING SOME OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS, WE WILL JUST HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE.

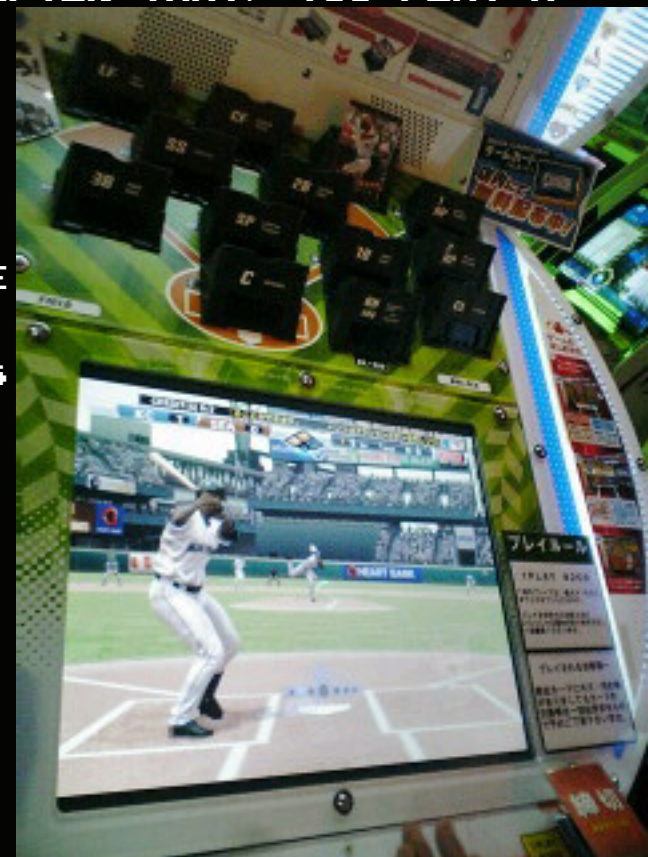


PRESS START
TO CHALLENGE

IF I COULD USE ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE WHAT SEGA'S ARCADE DIVISION WAS UP TO IN 2009, IT WOULD BE "BUSY." THEY STARTED THE YEAR OFF WITH SEVERAL NEW ENTRIES INTO THE RACING GENRE, INCLUDING THE AM2 DEVELOPED **R-TUNED STREET RACING**, **HARLEY DAVIDSON: KING OF THE ROAD** AND **HUMMER EXTREME**. THEY ALSO REVEALED A COUPLE OF SPORTS RELATED TITLES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR: **SEGA BASS FISHING CHALLENGE** AND **SEGA CLAY CHALLENGE**. LATER IN THE YEAR, SEGA RE-DEVELOPED **HUMMER EXTREME** AND RELEASED IT IN A MUCH MORE AFFORDABLE AND COMPACT SIZE USING THE SAME CABINET DESIGN THAT THEY HAD DEVELOPED FOR **SEGA RALLY 3**. ON TOP OF THAT, THEY REVEALED TWO NEW HARDWARE PLATFORMS WHICH WILL POWER THEIR GAMES IN 2010 (AND FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE) CALLED RINGEDGE AND RINGWIDE, RESPECTIVELY. RINGEDGE FEATURES MORE POWERFUL HARDWARE AND THUS WILL END UP COSTING MORE; RINGWIDE IS FOR MORE ECONOMIC MINDED GAMES.

ONE OF THE BIG SURPRISES TO COME OUT OF SEGA THIS YEAR WOULD HAVE TO BE **SEGA CARD GEN**. THIS IS A CARD-BASED GAME WHERE A SPECIALIZED BASEBALL CARD IS DISPENSED EVERY TIME YOU PLAY, WHICH ARE USED TO PLAY A GAME OF BASEBALL USING A TOUCH SCREEN PANEL. AS THE PLAYER, YOU TAKE THE CARDS AND BUILD A TEAM BY PLACING THE CARDS INTO STAND UP READERS THAT ARE LOCATED ABOVE THE SCREEN. THE READERS LOOK AT THE DATA ON THE CARDS AND USE THE PLAYER STATS TO CREATE YOUR TEAM. AFTER THAT, YOU PLAY A STANDARD GAME OF BASEBALL, SELECTING PITCHES AND AIMING WITH THE BAT BY USING YOUR FINGER. WITH OVER 300 CARDS TO COLLECT, THIS GAME APPEALS TO VIDEO GAME FANS, SPORTS FANS AND CARD COLLECTORS ALIKE. **SEGA CARD GEN** IS SLATED TO BE RELEASED SOMETIME IN EARLY 2010 AND FROM THE LOOKS OF IT, I BELIEVE THAT THE CABINET COULD BE UPGRADED IN THE FUTURE TO MAKE USE OF DIFFERENT SPORTS ALTHOUGH SUCH FEATURES HAVE NOT BEEN CONFIRMED AT THIS TIME.

SEGA

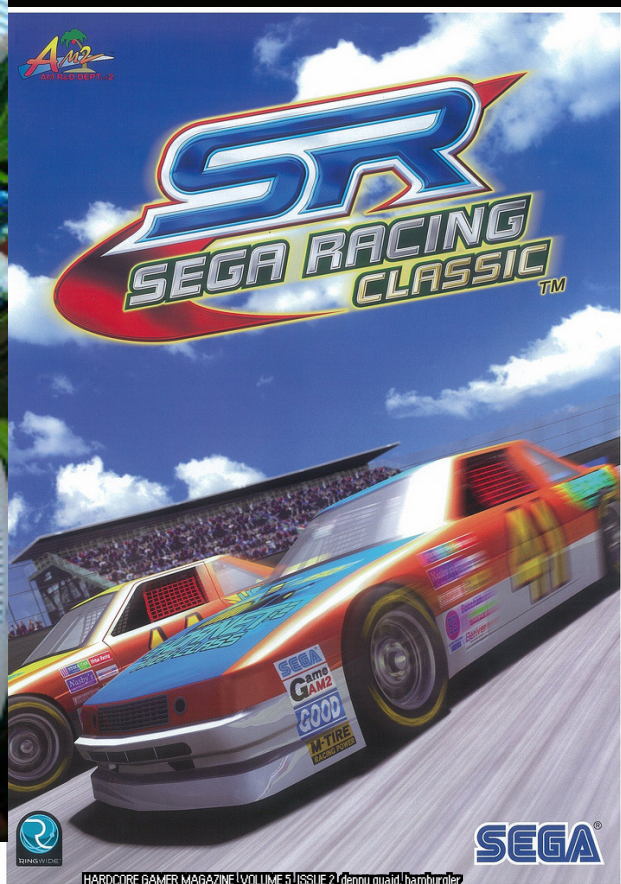


ANOTHER SURPRISE THAT SEGA HAS OFFERED US IS A REMAKE OF ONE OF THEIR BEST-SELLING ARCADE GAMES OF ALL TIME, **DAYTONA**. THE NEW GAME CALLED **SEGA RACING CLASSIC** (AS PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED, THE RIGHTS TO THE **DAYTONA** NAME COULD NOT BE OBTAINED BY SEGA) IS THE FIRST GAME TO MAKE USE OF SEGA'S RINGWIDE HARDWARE. THE NEW GAME WILL FEATURE A 32" LCD SCREEN @ 1280X720P RESOLUTION, NEW TRACKS, NEW MUSIC, A NEW BILLBOARD LEADER DISPLAY AND GAMEPLAY SIMILAR TO WHAT **DAYTONA** FANS HAVE COME TO KNOW AND LOVE OVER ALL OF THESE YEARS. HOW **SEGA RACING CLASSIC** WILL BE RECEIVED BY **DAYTONA** FANS ACROSS THE GLOBE REMAINS TO BE SEEN. IT HAS SOME LARGE SHOES TO FILL, CONSIDERING THE LASTING POPULARITY THAT IT'S PREDECESSORS HAVE ENJOYED IN ARCADES, BUT WITHOUT A DOUBT, THIS IS ONE TITLE TO WATCH IN 2010.

SEGA HAS DEMONSTRATED A NUMBER OF INTERESTING NEW TITLES IN JAPAN, BUT FOR THE MOMENT, IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THE COMPANY WILL BRING ANY OF THESE PRODUCTS TO THE US FOR AN OFFICIAL DISTRIBUTOR. THIS INCLUDES AN INNOVATIVE NEW CONCEPT IN THE FIELD OF AIR HOCKEY CALLED **HEAT UP HOCKEY**. **HUH** DEPLOYS A VIDEO PROJECTION SYSTEM ONTO THE AIR HOCKEY PLAY FIELD, SO INSTEAD OF DEALING WITH A SIMPLE FIELD THAT PLAYERS KNOCK A PUCK BACK AND FORTH ON, THE PLAY FIELD BECOMES A DYNAMIC PART OF THE GAME. PLAYERS WILL NEED TO DEAL WITH BOTH VIRTUAL TARGETS AS WELL AS VIRTUAL PUCKS. AS INNOVATIVE AS **HEAT UP HOCKEY** HAPPENS TO BE, THE TECHNOLOGY USED ALSO MEANS THAT IT WILL BE EXPENSIVE. IN FACT, ONE SOURCE SAID IT WILL "PROBABLY BE COST PROHIBITIVE FOR MOST OPERATORS" SO IN THE EVENT THAT **HUH** MAKES IT TO US SHORES, YOU'LL PROBABLY FIND IT AT LARGER VENUES THAT HAVE THE PURCHAS-

ING POWER TO PICK THE GAME UP.

SEGA ALSO HAS FALLEN BACK IN LOVE WITH **TETRIS** AND IN JAPAN. THEY RECENTLY DEMONSTRATED TWO VERY DIFFERENT ARCADE VARIATIONS ON THE IDEA; FIRST WITH **TETRIS THE GRANDMASTER 4** AND THEN WITH **GIANT TETRIS**. **TGM4** WILL CONTINUE THE TRADITION OF OFFERING **TETRIS** PUZZLES AT AN ADVANCED DIFFICULTY FOR MOST PLAYERS, BUT THIS TIME IT WILL FEATURE BRIGHT BACKGROUNDS. **GIANT TETRIS** HAPPENS TO BE EXACTLY WHAT YOU THINK IT IS - A GIANT VERSION OF **TETRIS**. EVERYTHING ABOUT GAME IS HUGE, FROM THE SCREEN, TO THE GRAPHICS, TO THE JOYSTICKS THAT ARE ABOUT THE SIZE OF BASKETBALLS. **GIANT TETRIS** IS MEANT FOR QUICK BURSTS OF FUN AND I BELIEVE THAT IT WILL BE A PERFECT CANDIDATE FOR A US RELEASE, AS LONG AS OPERATORS CAN AFFORD TO BUY ONE.



VIDEO GAMES AND PINBALL PRESENT TWO COMPLETELY DIFFERENT STYLES OF GAMING, BUT ONE THING THAT BRINGS THEM TOGETHER ARE ARCADES. THE WORLD'S LAST PINBALL MAKER IS POISED TO KEEP THE FINE ART OF PINBALL GAMING ALIVE IN 2010. IF ANYTHING, PINBALL CAN MARKET ITSELF AS THE ONE GAME WITH THE MOST REALISTIC GRAPHICS AND PHYSICS AVAILABLE.

STERN HAD A DECENT YEAR THROUGH 2009 WITH FOUR RELEASSES - **CSI: 24**, **NBA PINBALL** AND **LORD OF THE RINGS SPECIAL EDITION**. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN HOW PLAYERS FEEL ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE AND QUALITY OF THESE TITLES, BUT NO MATTER WHAT YOUR FEELINGS ARE, THEY HAVE KEPT THE IDEA GOING.

IN JANUARY, STERN WILL BEGIN SHIPPING **BIG BUCK HUNTER PINBALL** WHICH IS AN INTERESTING DEPARTURE FROM THE OTHER LICENSES THE COMPANY HAS SOUGHT OUT IN THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS. WITH **BIG BUCK HUNTER** MAINTAINING IT'S POPULARITY AS A TOP EARNER IN THE COIN-OP BUSINESS (THANKS IN THE MOST PART TO THE BAR SCENE), IT SHOULD BE INTERESTING TO SEE IF THE SAME CROWD WILL APPRECIATE THE PINBALL VARIATION OF THIS GAME TOO.

RUMOR HAS IT THAT AFTER **BIG BUCK HUNTER PINBALL**, THE COMPANY WILL CREATE A PIN BASED UPON THE **IRON MAN** MOVIES JUST IN TIME FOR THE RELEASE OF **IRON MAN 2**. BEYOND THAT, IT'S ANYONE'S GUESS AS TO WHAT THEY WILL TRY NEXT, ALTHOUGH I PERSONALLY WOULD LOVE TO SEE THEM GIVE SOME LOVE TO **TRON**, WHICH JUST SO HAPPENS TO HAVE A NEW MOVIE COMING OUT NEXT YEAR. ON TOP OF THAT I WOULD ALSO LOVE TO SEE THEM DUMP THE MONOCHROME DOT MATRIX DISPLAYS IN FAVOR OF EITHER FULL COLOR DMDs OR SMALL LCD SCREENS.



OTHER

I HAVE COVERED WHAT THE BIG NAMES IN THE ARCADE INDUSTRY WILL BE BRINGING TO THE US IN THE NEXT LITTLE WHILE, BUT WHAT ABOUT THE LITTLE GUYS? ARE THERE ANY LITTLE GUYS IN THE INDUSTRY ANYMORE? THE ANSWER IS YES AND THEY ARE ALL HARD AT WORK ON SOME FASCINATING PROJECTS, WHICH I AM GOING TO TAKE A LOOK AT HERE.

DARK PRESENCE

THROUGH MOST OF THIS PAST DECADE, ONE-ON-ONE FIGHTERS DIDN'T RECEIVE NEAR AS MUCH LOVE AS THEY HAD SEEN IN THE 90'S, UNTIL **STREET FIGHTER IV** CAME ALONG AND EVERYONE HAS SEEMINGLY FELL IN LOVE WITH THE IDEA ONCE AGAIN. THAT ISN'T THE CASE WITH INDEPENDENT DEVELOPER GALLOPING GHOST, HOWEVER. THEY HAVE ALWAYS LOVED THEIR FIGHTING GAMES AND WITH THEIR NEW TITLE **DARK PRESENCE**, THEY ARE OUT TO PROVE JUST THAT.

THE FIRST THING THAT EVERYONE NOTICES ABOUT **DARK PRESENCE** IS THE FACT THAT IS USES DIGITIZED ACTORS - JUST LIKE WITH **MORTAL KOMBAT**, BUT THIS TIME IN HD WITH THOUSANDS OF MORE FRAMES PER CHARACTER. THE DEVS SPENT TWO YEARS FILMING EACH ACTOR PULLING OFF EACH OF THEIR MOVES WITH EVERY OTHER CHARACTER AND FROM BOTH SIDES. A FEW OF THE ACTORS HAVE MARTIAL ARTS TRAINING AND SOME OF THE ACTORS USED IN THE ORIGINAL **MORTAL KOMBAT** DROPPED BY TO HELP OUT. EVEN THE WEAPONS USED BY EACH CHARACTER WERE REAL AND ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASION, AN ACTOR WAS SENT TO THE HOSPITAL FOR RELATED INJURIES. THE FINAL RESULT IS A FLUID EXPERIENCE THAT TRANSLATES INTO AN EERILY REALISTIC FIGHTER EXPERIENCE THAT WILL FEATURE NOT ONLY UNIQUE GRAPHICS BUT INNOVATIVE AND STRATEGIC COMBAT AS WELL. **DARK PRESENCE** ALSO FEATURES ONLINE CONNECTIVITY WHICH WILL BE USED TO ADJUST THE GAME ENVIRONMENTS TO MIMIC THE SAME WEATHER PATTERNS AS THE AREA WHERE THE PLAYER FINDS THEMSELVES; A USB THUMB DRIVE SAVE FEATURE WHERE YOU CAN DOWNLOAD A CHARACTER'S STORYLINE AND MORE TO TAKE IT WITH YOU; AN OPTIONAL PRIZE VENDING FEATURE AND EVEN AN OPTIONAL (OPERATOR'S CHOICE) SHOCK BAND DEVICE THAT PLAYERS CAN WEAR FOR A SMALL "REGULATED" SHOCK IN CASE YOU GET HIT.

THE AMOUNT OF DETAIL THAT GALLOPING GHOST HAS PUT INTO THE GAME IS NOTHING SHORT OF ASTOUNDING AND IT IS EXPECTED THAT THIS GAME WILL SEE A RELEASE SOMETIME IN 2010. YOU CAN FIND OUT MORE BY VISITING [HTTP://GALLOPINGGHOST.COM](http://gallopingghost.com).



FRICTION IS A NEW LIGHT-GUN TITLE THAT IS THE FIRST GAME TO COME TO US FROM FRICTION GAME STUDIOS. THE TEAM BEHIND THIS ONE ALREADY HAS EXPERIENCE WITH DEVELOPING ARCADE TITLES AND ONE GUY ON THE TEAM HAS EVEN DONE SPECIAL EFFECTS WORK FOR BIG HOLLYWOOD MOVIES, INCLUDING **TRANSFORMERS**, **SPEED RACER**, **PIRATES 3** AND MORE.

THE STORY BEHIND **FRICTION** IS SHORT AND SIMPLE. YOU ARE AN AGENT HIRED BY THE GOVERNMENT TO INFILTRATE AN ORGANIZATION WHO IS DEVELOPING TRANSFORMING ROBOTS WHO WILL BE USED TO WAGE A WAR WITH HUMANS. PLAYERS ENGAGE THESE ENEMIES WITH A STANDARD SET OF GUNS BUT THE GAME WILL REWARD YOU WITH POWER-UPS THAT RANGE FROM MACHINE GUNS TO ROCKET LAUNCHERS AS YOU PROGRESS THROUGH THE LEVELS. I WAS ABLE TO SEE AN EARLY BUILD OF THE GAME RUNNING ON A LAPTOP AND IT LOOKED VERY SLICK AT THE TIME, WHICH WAS OVER A YEAR AGO. SINCE THEN THEY HAVE IMPROVED THE GRAPHICS, ADDED MORE ENEMIES AND BOSSES AND TWEAKED THE ENVIRONMENTS TO PROVIDE A SHOOTER EXPERIENCE THAT SHOULD STAND OUT ON ITS OWN IN ARCADES. EVERYTHING IN THE GAME IS IN 3D AND EVEN HAS A FEW DESTRUCTIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR PLAYERS TO TEAR UP. AT TIMES, THE PATH YOU FOLLOW CHANGES DEPENDING UPON WHAT YOU SHOT.

AT THE TIME OF WRITING, THE GAME WAS GOING THROUGH THE TESTING PHASE AND BARRING ANY ISSUES, THE GAME SHOULD SEE A RE-RELEASE IN 2010. THANKS TO A COMPETITIVE PRICE TAG, IT WON'T SET OPERATORS BACK AN ARM AND A LEG JUST TO PURCHASE ONE. MORE INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND ON THEIR WEBSITE,

[HTTP://WWW.FRITIONGAMESSTUDIOS.COM](http://www.frictiongamesstudios.com)



BACK IN THE "GOLDEN AGE" OF ARCADE GAMING, IT WASN'T UNCOMMON TO HEAR OF GAME DEVELOPMENT BEING HANDLED BY ONE PERSON, BUT THAT WAS MOSTLY DUE TO THE FACT THAT THE GAMES FOR A TIME WERE FAR MORE SIMPLE TO DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT THAN THEY HAVE BECOME. THESE DAYS HEARING OF ONE MAN DEVELOPING A COIN-OP GAME IS PRACTICALLY UNHEARD OF, BUT IT CAN HAPPEN, AS IS THE CASE WITH **GET OUTTA MY FACE!**, BY WILL BRIERLY.

THE CONCEPT BEHIND **GET OUTTA MY FACE!** FEELS LIKE A CLASSIC GAME IN IT'S IMPLEMENTATION, AS THE PREMISE IS VERY SIMPLE. YOU ARE A BLUE CUBE AND YOU ARE TRYING TO FIND OUT WHY AND WHAT YOU ARE. YOU DO THIS BY SURVIVING EACH STAGE - AVOIDING THE GRASP OF MALICIOUS CUBES WHO CHASE YOU AROUND THE SCREEN FOR AN ALLOTTED AMOUNT OF TIME. THE PLAYER NEEDS TO STRATEGICALLY USE THEIR SURROUNDINGS AS A SHIELD FROM THESE BAD CUBES, SOME OF WHICH CAN BE MANIPULATED DIRECTLY BY THE PLAYER. THANKS TO UNIQUE GRAPHICS AND SIMPLISTIC CONTROLS, **GET OUTTA MY FACE!** IS AN EASY GAME TO APPROACH DESPITE ITS DEPARTURE FROM THE TYPICAL STYLE OF GAME THAT MOST ARCADES FEATURE IN TODAY'S WORLD.

GET OUTTA MY FACE! HAS BEEN SEEN A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT GAME SHOWS BUT AT THE TIME OF WRITING, A RELEASE DATE WAS NOT SET IN STONE, ALTHOUGH THE DEVELOPER IS LOOKING INTO GETTING THE GAME MANUFACTURED FOR SALE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC IN 2010. MORE INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND AT

[HTTP://GETOUTARCADE.COM](http://getoutarcade.com)



GET
OUTTA
MY
FACE!



ROBO-BASHO

THE GREAT
IS THAT
SOLELY TO

EXPERIENCES THAT DEVELOPERS CAN PROVIDE THAT GO ABOVE AND BEYOND WHAT IS FEASIBLE IN A HOME SETTING. THAT IS THE IDEA BEHIND THE NEW **ROBO-BASHO**, WHICH IS A NEW TITLE IN-DEVELOPMENT BY ROBOTIC AMUSEMENTS. IN **ROBO-BASHO**, PLAYERS TAKE CONTROL OF SUMO WRESTLING ROBOTS AND ATTEMPT TO PUSH THE OPPOSING PLAYER OVER. THE ROBOTS ARE HOUSED INSIDE OF AN ENCLOSED CABINET THAT KEEPS THE ROBOTS BOTH MAINTAINED AND PROTECTED, WHILE PROVIDING THE SCORE. IF THE GAME PROVES TO BE A SUCCESS WHEN IT IS RELEASED IN 2010, THE COMPANY RESPONSIBLE FOR IT PLANS ON CREATING OTHER ROBOTIC COIN-OP GAMES AS WELL. MORE INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND ON THEIR WEBSITE, [HTTP://WWW.ROBOTICAMUSEMENTS.COM](http://www.roboticamusements.com).



TITAN 4 GAMES

IT WAS REVEALED IN LATE OCTOBER THAT A NEW COMPANY WAS JOINING THE FRAY OF AMUSEMENT GAME DEVELOPMENT CALLED TITAN 4 GAMES. THE COMPANY IS BEING HEADED BY A FORMER CEO OF GLOBALVR AND THEY HAVE JOINED UP WITH A COMPANY CALLED SOFTKINETIC TO USE THEIR PROPRIETARY IISU GESTURE-MOTION TRACKING TECHNOLOGY FOR USE IN A NUMBER OF ARCADE TITLES. THE WAY IISU WORKS IS MUCH LIKE WHAT MICROSOFT HAS BEEN DEVELOPING WITH THEIR NEW PROJECT NATAL TECHNOLOGY AND A NUMBER OF VIDEOS SHOWCASING IISU CAN BE FOUND ON THE INTERNET.

AT THE TIME OF WRITING, THERE WAS NO WORD ON WHAT THE GAMES WOULD BE, BUT THE TITAN 4 GAMES WEBSITE CLAIMS THAT THEY WILL BE RELEASING THE FIRST GAMES TO MAKE USE OF IISU IN "FALL 2009". PRESUMABLY THAT MEANS THAT THEY WILL BE REVEALING THEIR NEW CONTENT AT IAAPA IN NOVEMBER, WHICH ALSO MEANS THAT PLAYERS WILL HAVE THE CHANCE TO TRY OUT NATAL-LIKE GAMING ON A PUBLIC SCALE BEFORE MICROSOFT IS ABLE TO ROLL OUT THEIR PLANS ON THE XBOX 360.

THE FINAL WORD

THIS HAS BEEN A PREVIEW OF WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE COMING MONTHS FROM THE ARCADE INDUSTRY, BUT NEW TITLES ARE REVEALED ON A REGULAR BASIS - ALBEIT WITHOUT MUCH HYPE BEHIND THEM. HOPEFULLY, AS THE INDUSTRY ENTERS INTO A NEW DECADE, THEY WILL LEARN HOW TO JUMP ONTO THE MARKETING BANDWAGON WITH A LITTLE MORE AGGRESSION THAN THEY HAVE HAD OVER THE PAST TEN YEARS. THE ONLY OTHER CHALLENGE FOR PLAYERS IS FINDING A VENUE WHERE TO PLAY THESE GAMES, BUT THEY ARE OUT THERE IF YOU KNOW WHERE TO FIND THEM. BESIDES THE YELLOW PAGES, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF WEBSITES POPPING UP THAT WILL HELP YOU DISCOVER NEW ARCADES LOCATED NEAR YOU, SO GET OUT THERE AND PLAY!

GAME OVER
TRY AGAIN?

Motion controllers: Then and Now

Feature by Tony Mitera



Getting to interact with your games using your own body has been a long running dream for many gamers. Sure, swinging a sword around using a controller can certainly be fun, but when it's your arms doing the swinging, it brings a level of physicality to a game that adds to the immersion and fun. With Microsoft and Sony joining Nintendo on the motion controller front, it would seem that the technology is certainly gaining popularity, but motion controllers are far from a new revelation in gaming. Controllers that measure the player's physical movements have been around since the original Nintendo platform back in 1989, though the technology has certainly come a long way since its humble beginnings.



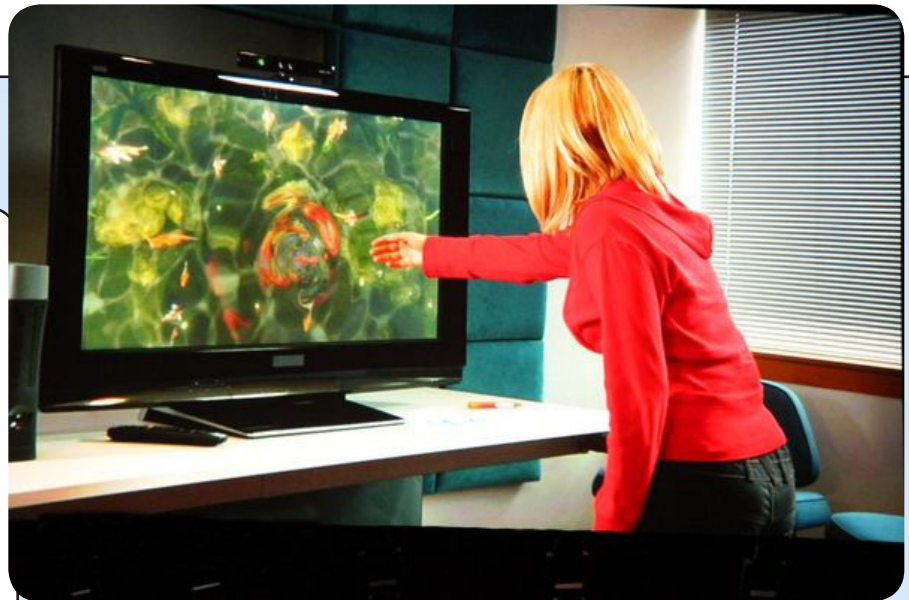
Motion Technology: A Primer



Motion controllers can be defined as any device that lets a player use physical motions to interact with a game, though there are many degrees of complexity (and the lack thereof) found in motion controllers over the years. The accuracy and reliability has seen great strides over the years, thanks in no small part due to the advancements in the technology used to help the player take their actions into the virtual world. When you understand how older motion controllers worked and what technology they used, it's hard not to find yourself without a new appreciation for the relative accuracy and ease of use found in modern motion controllers.

Early motion technology was mainly based on rotational sensors fitted into the controllers themselves. Such sensors detect how far something is bent or rotated, such as being able to tell exactly how far you rotate a doorknob in real life. Unfortunately, such sensors can only measure that one metric and in only one dimension, and must either be fitted into some wearable device or into a stationary peripheral. If the ultimate goal of motion controls is to make it so the players every action is represented in the game world, getting there by these sensors alone wasn't going to cut it.

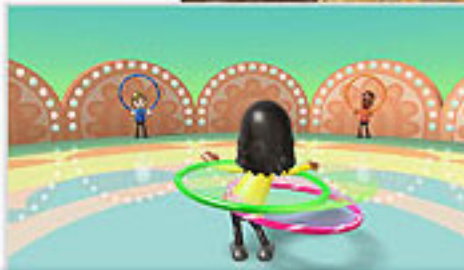
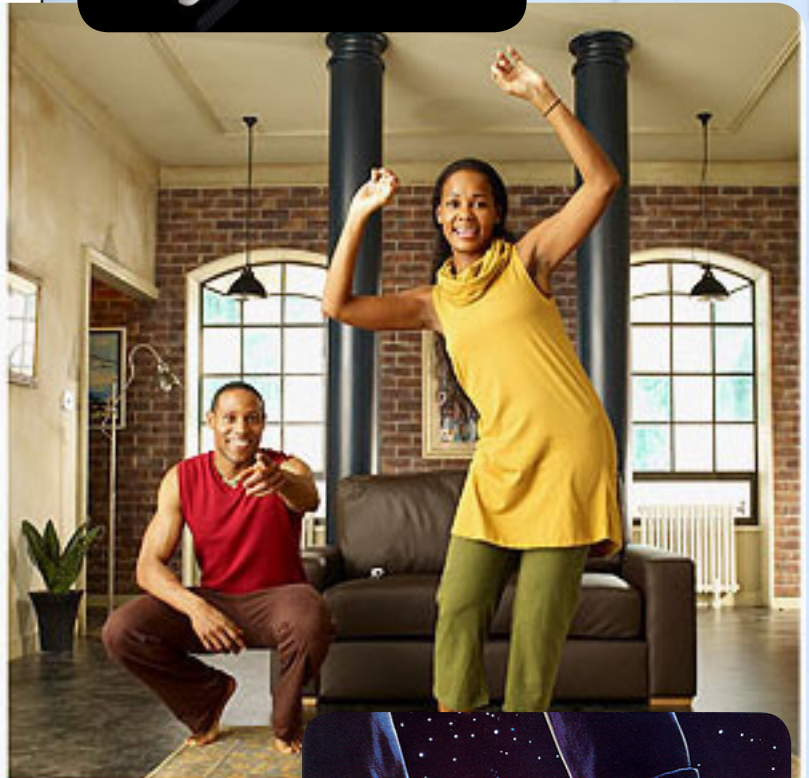
Infrared technology has been used in gaming for quite some time, starting with such peripherals as the Nintendo Zapper, and is still used in many modern motion controllers. Infrared tech is essentially broken down into two parts; an emitter and a receiver. The infrared emitter sends out a beam of infrared light, which is invisible to the human eye. The receiver is what picks up the beam of light, and between the two you have some of the core components of many of the motion controllers out there today.



Gyroscopes are somewhat like the evolution of the rotation sensor, except that they do not need to measure the rotation of two objects in relation to each other. Instead, gyroscopes can be used to measure their own orientation (or the enclosure that they are built into) in all three dimensions. Such gyroscopes are commonly used in aircraft so that pilots can detect which direction the aircraft's nose is pointed, but until recently were not used very often in motion controllers.

Other technology, such as pressure sensors, have been used in motion controllers both old and new. Pressure sensors simply measure how much force is getting pushed against an object. Another technology that is beginning to be used more and more in motion controllers is the ability to talk wirelessly with the platform your game is running on. While not strictly necessary for bringing your motions to life, it certainly makes doing so easier when you are not tripping over a cord that tethers you to your device.

These technologies certainly existed long before they were used with gaming, but exactly how they have been implemented in motion controllers over the years has certainly changed. To see those changes, let's take a walk down memory lane and look at the history of motion controllers, starting with one of the most obscure peripherals of all time; the Amiga Joyboard.



Stumbling Forth

Going Through the Motions



Early motion controllers were often little more than a proof of concept. The devices found in this section were commercial failures more often than not for a variety of reasons. They helped pioneer the technology used in motion controllers, however, and without using them as stepping stones to modern motion controllers, it's hard to imagine the technology getting to where it is today.

Subject: Amiga Joyboard
 Release Date: 1982
 System: Atari 2600
 Manufacturer: Amiga



If you've had the opportunity to actually use this peripheral, congratulations on being a gamer long enough to see almost the entire evolution of motion controllers used in gaming to date. The Joyboard was released for the Atari 2600 and was only compatible with a single game called *Mogul Maniac*. Games such as *Off Your Rocker* and *Surf's Up* were intended for the Joyboard as well, but were never officially released -- though the former did eventually make it to the public as an unofficial release.

The Joyboard itself was a platform that you stood on, which itself was simply attached to a standard Atari joystick. Leaning in one of the four directions corresponded to moving the joystick on that direction. Unfortunately, this meant that is was all or nothing, and the Joyboard was incapable of measuring small changes in how you leaned on the board. Still, it technically was one of the first peripherals to let how you move influence your gaming, and everything has to start somewhere.

Subject: **Nintendo Power Glove** System: **Nintendo Entertainment System**
Manufacturer: **Mattel (USA) / PAX (Japan)** Release Date: **1989**



The Nintendo Power Glove's status as one of the first motion controllers is certainly debatable, but it certainly is one of the more infamous peripherals on the list. The Power Glove was worn on your right hand, and had a surprising array of features bundled into it. The roll of your wrist could be measured, as could up to four positions for your thumb, pointer, middle, and ring fingers. The faceplate of the device contained a bevy of buttons that allowed for the player to reprogram the functions of the device, as well as a standard set of controls.

The problem with the Power Glove was that not only was it cumbersome to use and quite far ahead of its time, but also had a ridiculously small stable of compatible games. The only games that supported the Power Glove were *Super Glove Ball* and *Bad Street Brawler*, and the latter of which could still be played with a normal controller, albeit without some special moves that could only be pulled off with the Power Glove. Three more games were at one point in development for the Power Glove but they never saw the light of day. With such low compatibility the device proved to be a flop, destined to far more often be used as a punch line for a joke than for anything befitting one of the grandfathers of motion controllers.

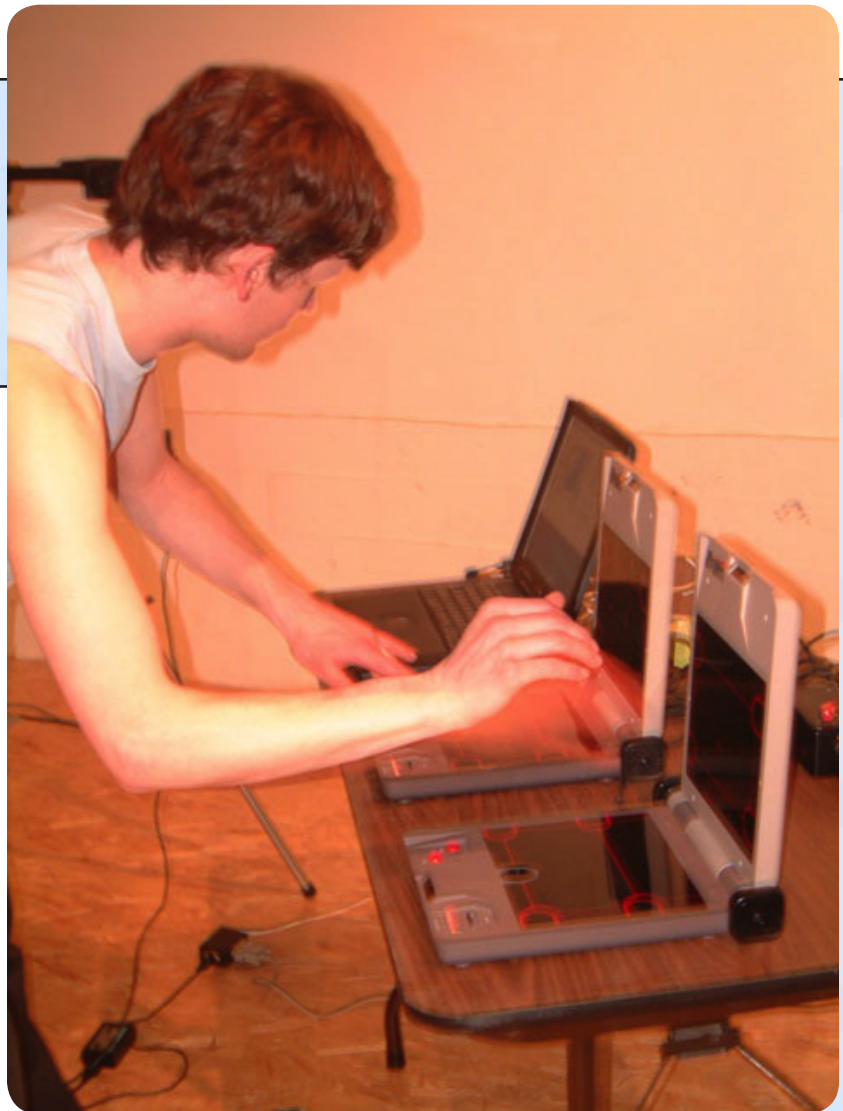




Subject: [U-Force](#)
 System: [Nintendo Entertainment System](#)
 Manufacturer: [Broderbund](#)
 Release Date: [1989](#)

If you haven't heard of the U-Force controller for the NES, you are certainly not alone. Released the same year as the Power Glove for the same system, the U-Force controller employed nothing more than a pair of infrared beams mounted perpendicular to each other on the flat and raised portion of the device. The device was touted to work with virtually all NES games, and came bundled with some attachments that fit into a mounting hole on the bottom panel of the device.

Though technically players could either use their hands alone or with the fancy grip attachments that mounted inside of the beam-readable area of the device, it appears that hardly anyone adopted the device. History shows that of the few people who used the device, the consensus was that it was almost impossible to decipher how exactly the device was supposed to be meaningfully used. The advertising campaign came equipped with the slogan of "Hands Off!" that apparently most people took literally. The device quickly slipped into obscurity.



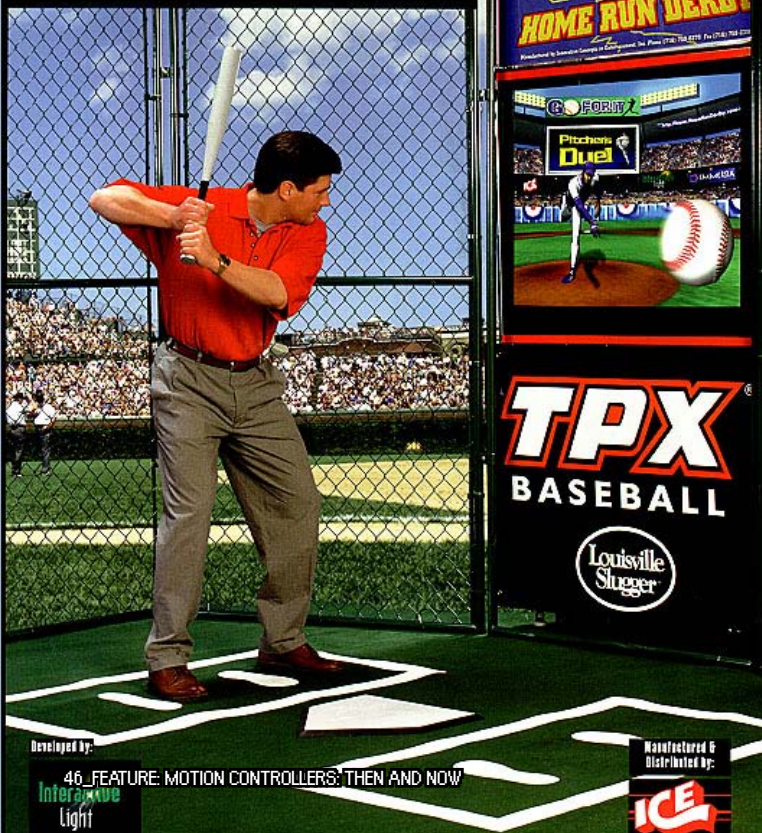
In the next era of consoles, motion controllers didn't really fare much better. The Sega Activator was an unsuccessful product released for the Sega Genesis that came in the form of a good sized octagonal ring you would place on the floor. Each section of the octagon contained an infrared transmitter/receiver and each one was set up to correspond to a different action such as having the primary directions serve as the d-pad while the diagonal ones corresponded to the face buttons on the controller.

However, in practice the Activator didn't work particularly well. It could only be used in rooms with flat, standard height ceilings that didn't have a light source directly above it. It technically worked with any game, but its biggest problem was that you weren't getting your motions mapped into the game as much as you were simply flailing in a direction that corresponded to something you could usually do much more quickly and accurately on a controller. However, the Sega Activator does get recognition as the first motion controller that didn't require you to be directly interacting with a device.



Subject: [Sega Activator](#)
System: [Sega Genesis](#)
Manufacturer: [Sega](#)
Release Date: [1994](#)

HOME RUN DERBY THE #1 SPORTS SIMULATOR...



Subject: [Home Run Derby](#)
System: [Arcade](#)
Manufacturer: [Interactive Light, Inc.](#)
Release Date: [1996](#)

There isn't much to say about Home Run Derby, other than that it was the first baseball simulator that let players step up and swing a real bat against a virtual ball. The game used little more than an infrared sensor to detect when the bat had passed over the home plate that they player stood over, making it fairly simplistic. Unfortunately, the game didn't seem to ever catch on, but between either having to tether the bat down with a rope and let that get in the player's way or risk an errant bat flying across the arcade it's hard not to see why.

When Police 911 hit the arcades back in 2001, it marked a significant step forward in motion controls. The game was essentially a light gun shooter in which the player took the role of a police officer sent to put down some bad guys. A series of infrared sensors were arranged around the player to detect changes in their posture. This allowed for you to literally duck down behind cover to reload, or lean out just enough from behind cover to take shots at an enemy while not fully exposing yourself to return fire.

The ability that the game had to detect even subtle changes in how the player was standing was revolutionary, not only towards how sensitive the sensor technology had become but also towards how immersive it made the game become. You were no longer haphazardly shooting enemies on the screen, but were now actively ducking behind tables and around corners to take cover. For the first time, your movements were getting directly mapped to your characters actions, a tenant of the gameplay that makes it still one of the best reasons to check out your local arcade and see if it's still around (the game, or even the arcade for that matter).



Subject: Police 911
System: Arcade
Manufacturer: Konami
Release Date: 2001



Motion for the Masses



In the early part of the decade, motion controller technology began to pick up steam, and arcade games like Police 911 only helped pave the way for newer and more immersive developments in the technology. Motion controls were really limited to the PC platform for the better part of the decade, but things were able to change as Nintendo got ready to unleash a motion controller bundled as the primary means of controlling their new console; a stature that motion controllers had never been granted prior to and have not yet been granted since.

The PC crowd had limited access to motion control technology up until 2001 when NaturalPoint Inc. released the first version of its TrackIR product. The original product was meant as a means of assisting the disabled with moving the mouse cursor, which changed when a customer noted that it also worked as a means of controlling flight simulators. NaturalPoint then pursued branding the device as a motion controller for gaming, and over the years the TrackIR line has seen five hardware revisions and to date supports 101 games.

The device itself simply attaches to the top of your monitor and consists of an infrared camera and some infrared LEDs. The player must wear either a ball cap with reflective markers mounted on the bill of the cap, or attach a rigid piece of plastic to their headphones which sports a trio of the reflective markers. The camera picks up the position of the reflective markers since they reflect the infrared light cast from the LEDs and computes their orientation to one another. In its original form, the TrackIR only accounted for two degrees of freedom, but the latest models allow for six degrees of freedom and picks up every motion of the your head.



The TrackIR lets you move your head to change your viewpoint instead of the controller. Such an option is mainly supported in flight simulators to look around the cockpit and keep tabs on your surrounding airspace, but is also used in tactical shooter games such as *Arma 2*, letting you effectively separate your ability to look around from where your gun is pointed. Since games have to be specifically coded to allow for devices like the TrackIR to be used with them, it doesn't have an exceptionally high support rate, but it certainly allows for a level of immersion and functionality in the PC games that it does support that wouldn't otherwise be found.



Subject: [TrackIR](#)
System: [PC](#)
Manufacturer: [NaturalPoint, Inc.](#)
Release Date: [2001 - Present](#)

The Wiimote is no stranger to anyone these days, thanks in no small part to the device coming bundled with the highest selling console of the current generation. The Wiimote in a sense is almost the spiritual successor to the Power Glove and allows for the player to use their hands and arms in intuitive ways to control their games. That being said, the Wiimote is certainly better for its decades of technological advancements.

The Wiimote itself contains a three-axis accelerometer which allows it to effectively keep track of what direction it is getting moved in and with what force. At the front of the device is an infrared sensor which picks up the infrared light emitted from a number of LEDs found in the Wii Sensor Bar. When the Sensor Bar is in the Wiimote's field of view the device can use triangulation to calculate its relative distance from the screen as well as allow for it to be used as a pointing device for menu navigation or view control in first-person games. In addition to its motion control functions, the device also has many buttons along its top face and a single trigger at the bottom.

The impact of the Wiimote and its accessories such as the Nunchuk is hard to argue, as it is certainly the single most prevalent motion controller on this list. Its inclusion with every console sold meant that developers could count on motion control getting used by every gamer rather than only those who had purchased a third party peripheral. Though its potential is not always fully utilized in every Wii game, the Wiimote easily stands its ground as one of the most important consumer motion controllers released in the 21st century.



Subject: Wiimote
System: Nintendo Wii
Manufacturer: Nintendo
Release Date: 2006



Of course, that doesn't mean that a particularly bright individual can't find room to improve on such a peripheral. Carnegie Mellon graduate Johnny Chung Lee did just that when in 2007 he released a series of projects that allowed for the Wiimote to be used in interesting ways on your PC. In its traditional configuration the Wiimote is meant to be held by the player, and picks up infrared light from the Sensor Bar mounted above the television. What Mr. Lee did in many of his projects was reverse these roles, mounting the Wiimote on top of the television pointing back at the player and making the player become the source of the infrared light.

One such project involves the use of setting up an infrared emitter on top of the television and applying reflective tape to one finger on each hand. The light from the emitted makes the fingers easily show up for the Wiimote's infrared sensor, allowing the player to use their two fingers in a method similar how they are used on multi-touch devices such as an iPhone. Another project keeps the Wiimote on top of the TV, and has the player simply don a pair of glasses with infrared LEDs built into the sides of the frame. This allows for accurate head tracking in a three dimensional space, which in shadows of *Police 911* could allow for you to duck and dodge in a shooter and simply use a second Wiimote as your "gun" like you would in any other shooter.

Of course these projects were more proof of concept than anything. To date, the techniques used have not shown up in a Wii game and remain as little more than a display of what potential the Wiimote has when used creatively. That's not to say that the projects didn't catch any attention at all from the gaming industry; Mr. Lee's projects with the Wiimote are likely what set him square in the sights of Microsoft when they hired him as part of their Applied Sciences group to presumably work on the upcoming motion controller of their own.



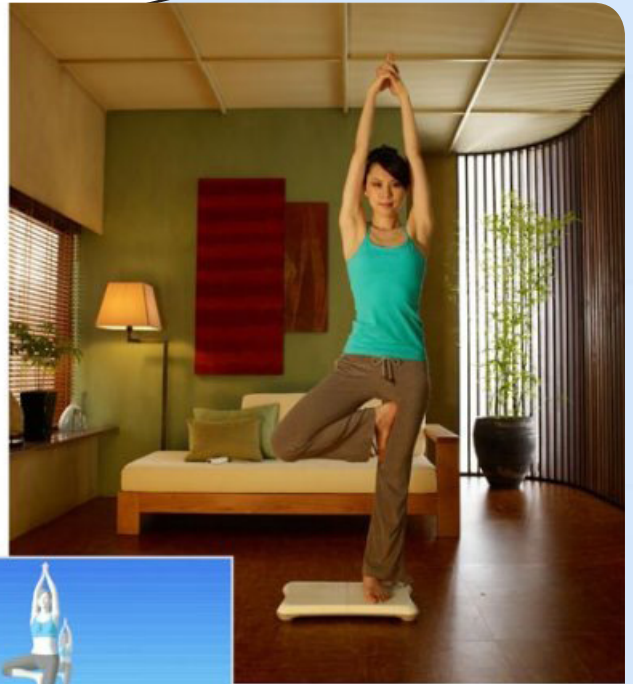
Subject: [Wiimote Hacks](#)
System: [PC](#)
Manufacturer: [Johnny Chung Lee](#)
Release Date: [2007](#)



Subject: [Wii Balance Board](#)
 System: [Nintendo Wii](#)
 Manufacturer: [Nintendo](#)
 Release Date: [2008](#)

In another display of an idea coming back with a whole new set of technology, the Wii Balance Board is easily along the same vein as the Amiga Joyboard mentioned earlier in the list. The Wii Balance Board is an unassuming device that shares design elements with bathroom scales, not to mention its functionality. The Wii Balance Board contains four pressure sensors mounted internally which not only can measure the weight of the player standing on it but also how much and in which direction they are leaning.

Unlike the Joyboard, this allows for precise measurement of exactly where your center of mass is located, and many games incorporate this into balancing acts or in navigation. This allows for you to simply lean in a direction and the game will react accordingly. Granted, it doesn't require much motion, not to mention how you are supposed to keep both feet on the board at all times, yet it is not designed to be jumped on, but the Wii Balance Board certainly fits the bill of letting you perform an action in the twenty and counting games supported by it by doing little more than shifting your weight around.



Each Movement Refined



With motion controllers finally reaching the masses, it is only natural that the rest of the big console manufacturers took notice and began to develop their own peripherals. While the TrackIR is still holding down the PC court and Nintendo further enhances the accuracy of their venerable Wiimote, Microsoft and Sony are set to step up to the plate with motion control technology of their own.

Though the Wiimote is certainly a powerful little device, its sensitivity in accurately responding to your motions leaves some to be desired. Nintendo addressed this issue just this year with the release of the MotionPlus add-on. The MotionPlus simply snaps onto the bottom of the Wiimote and contains an angular rate sensor, which in layman's terms means that it makes the Wiimote have a much higher sensitivity towards and detection of your arms every movement.

Wii games have to be specifically coded to make use of this new sensitivity, of which seventeen games have been announced and six have been released. However, one can only assume that if it gets enough market penetration the devices popularity among developers will increase accordingly. With the MotionPlus add-on, the Wiimote finally gets close to achieving true one-to-one motion for the player; which is one of the primary tenants of goals of any motion control peripheral.

Subject: [Playstation Motion Controller](#)
System: [Playstation 3](#)
Manufacturer: [Sony Computer Entertainment](#)
Release Date: [2010 \(Projected\)](#)

Sony announced their first foray into dedicated motion controllers at E3 2009 with their tentatively-titled PlayStation Motion Controller. Unofficially nicknamed "the wand", the device is essentially shaped like a small handle with an orb on its top end. The orb can glow in any color of the RGB color model, and its position and distance can be tracked via the PlayStation Eye video camera peripheral. The wand itself is also host to the same accelerometer and angular rate sensor technology found in the Wiimote and its MotionPlus add-on, and it is safe to speculate that the device can/will be used in a similar manner.

There have been ten games announced so far to have built-in support for the wand when they are released, and a handful of games already released have announced that they will patch support for the device in. The device similarities with the Wiimote are obvious, but with the PlayStation Eye's ability to track the orb's position regardless of what orientation the wand itself is in it is possible that the device could have even greater functionality and precision, which relies on the Wiimote pointed forward in order to calculate its position and distance.

Subject: [Nintendo MotionPlus](#)
System: [Nintendo Wii](#)
Manufacturer: [Nintendo](#)
Release Date: [2009](#)



Possibly the most unique approach to motion controls in this list, the so-called Project Natal device eschews the player utilizing a controller of any form at all. The device hosts an array of sensors and functionalities including a full-color camera, multi-array microphone, and a depth sensor to measure the distance of objects. Using the Natal, your own body becomes the controller, and device itself simply serves as the means that a game can measure how and where you move.

This allows for you to simply mimic holding a steering wheel to control your race car such as a demo build of *Burnout Paradise* showed, or interact with a virtual young boy in a realistic world. There hasn't been much announced in the way of actual title support for the device, but that hasn't stopped massive speculation on the devices potential. With its ability to perform real time motion capture and skeletal mapping of up to 48 joints on the body, people have been imagining everything from animating their own victory poses, to being able to play air guitar.



Subject: [Project Natal](#)
 System: [Xbox 360](#)
 Manufacturer: [Microsoft](#)
 Release Date: [2010 \(Projected\)](#)



Moving Forward



Between Microsoft announcing their motion control technology and Sony and Nintendo advancing theirs, motion control is slowly creeping away from its previous home in the enthusiast and PC camps and inching its way towards the mainstream. Though motion controllers have certainly come from humble beginnings, it is amazing to see how far it has come. Nearly every gamer has at some point wished that they could be a part of their game and have their motions represented exactly as they are in real life, whether it be to swing a sword in battle, or cast a lure out to do some fishing. With these advances in motion controllers and the exciting products coming out in the near future, that dream has moved closer to becoming a reality than ever before.

A Strategy Guide Like No Other



Alongside the release of Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 will be a strategy guide like no other. For decades, magazine-style guides have been the norm, but that's about to change with CoD: MW2's tactical map guide that gives players a whole new way to play. Designed for multi-player gaming, this fold-out guide features overhead maps on every campaign, Spec Op, and multi-player level in the game. Players short on space will be happy to know that it can be hung up on a wall like a poster, while those with tabletop room can fold it up and use it as a desktop reference tool.

This versatile map reveals the location of all spawn points and objection locations, but also allows you to write any additional information on the map itself. If you want to plan out the shortest route from one area to another, you can. Gone are the days of having to hand-draw maps on sheets of paper that vaguely resemble the real thing because this guide's dry erase functionality allows you to mark it up as much as you need and

when you're done, you can just erase it and start anew the next time you play. It's tactical and practical.

When did the concept for this guide begin and how long did it take to turn it from a concept into a reality?

[ERIC] We call the format for the Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 guide the Big FOLD, FOLD being an acronym for Fold-Out Laminated Display. We started working on the Big FOLD concept in March of 2006. Like any business, our initial focus was on intellectual property, product development, and fund raising. We were ready to hit the market towards the end of 2007 and almost instantaneously struck a deal with Alfred Publishing for SHREDHED (www.shredhed.com), our line of guitar instruction products. Since then we've had success in launching products into the classroom education space and working on marketing projects.

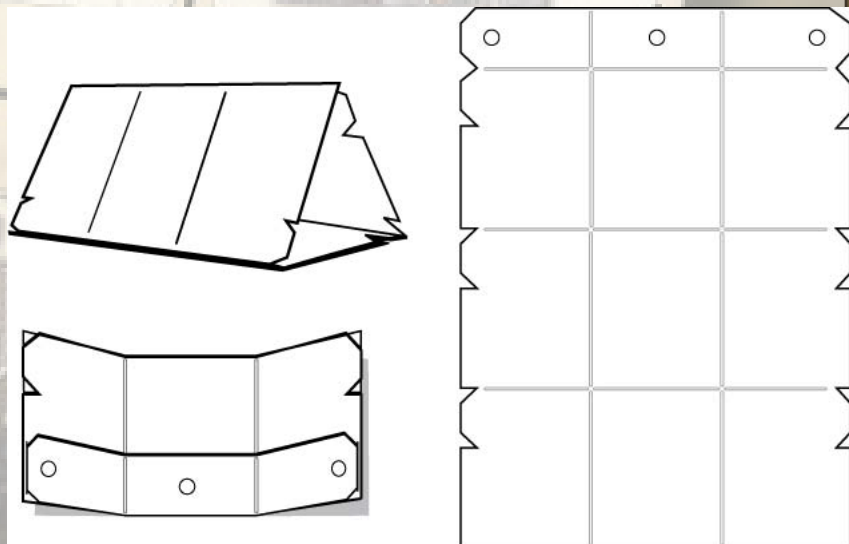
From the beginning, we've always seen the Big FOLD and its poster and free-standing triangle set-ups as being perfect for any activity that requires the use of both hands - like playing video games. BradyGames recognized how cool the Big FOLD would be as a map for Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 gamers not only because of the hands-free set-ups, but also because gamers could use and re-use the dry-erase feature of the map to plan, execute, and refine their strategies. Once BradyGames told us the concept, everything took shape pretty quickly. That's part of the beauty of what we do with publishers; we take content that they already have and deliver it to their consumers in a new, fun, and highly engaging way.

Was it a costly concept to bring to life?

[ERIC] Developing good products and protecting ideas is expensive. We have lived out the romantic story that you hear so often of 2 guys with a good idea willing to put everything they have on the line to make it happen. We've also been fortunate to have amazingly generous and patient investors and advisors on board from the beginning. The rough economy has certainly made things more interesting than we would have preferred, but it hasn't stopped us. In a big way, tougher times simply forced us to work harder and be more creative.

What brought about the need for a guide of this type?

[ERIC] The Big FOLD concept spawned from 3 brothers trying to learn guitar together by sharing a traditional songbook that they propped up against their couch. Needless to say, they spent far more time beating the crap out of each other than learning. It didn't take us long to recognize that there are seemingly limitless educational, instructional, and informational areas that could benefit from a bigger display that could stand up on its own. All of the other bells and whistles (being a 3-pocket folder, having a dry-erase surface, long-term durability, portability, etc.) were added on along the way.



Are there any expectations for the guide to revolutionize how people play the game or are expectations lowered a bit with it being a first-time effort?

[ERIC] Our expectations are pretty lofty. Kicking it off with *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* is a huge compliment to what we're doing and the potential for what can be done. We want to remove all of the interruptions in gaming that occur when you eat up screen real-estate or take a pause to: look at a map, check out your arsenal, figure out what does what on your controller, need a little help, etc. All of that and more can be displayed on the Big FOLD and set along side the gamer for quick glances while letting the game play on. We envision gamers having an extensive library of these guides - one for every game - right alongside their BradyGames' in-depth strategy guides. The type of use translates to computer software as well.

How long do you think it will take players to get used to playing games with guides like this?

[ERIC] The beauty of these guides is their simplicity. There's really nothing to get used to. Set it up; mark it up; fold it up. We're trying to make things easier for everyone.

What other genres do you think would benefit from foldout guides?

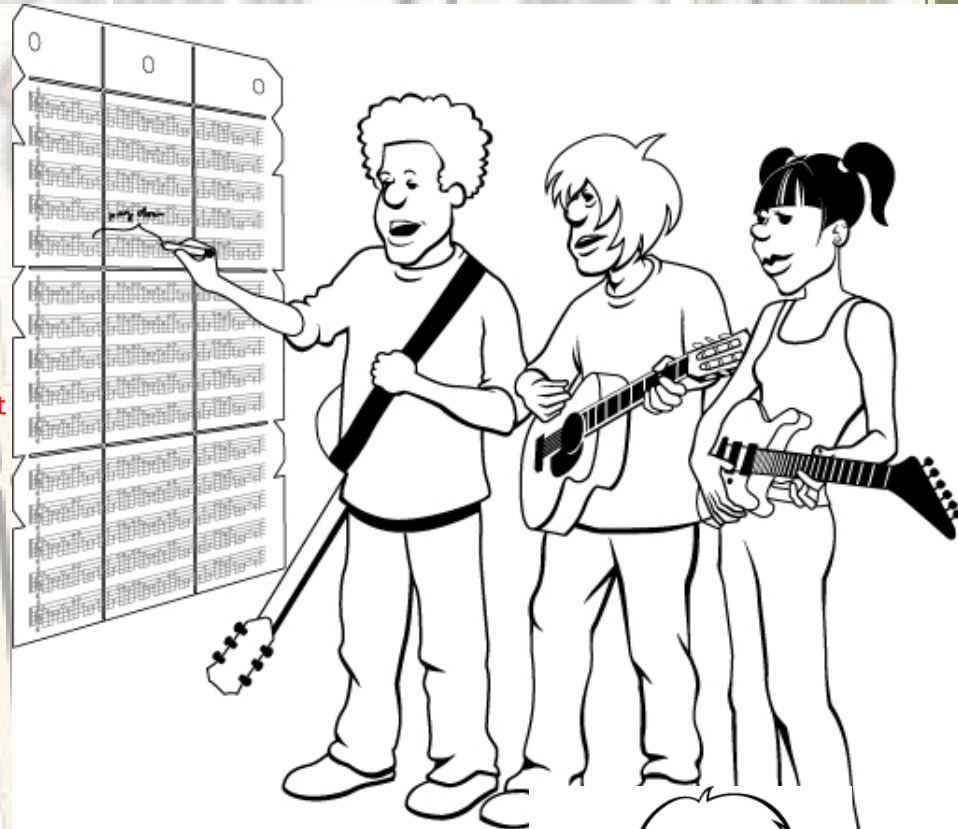
[ERIC] This answer may sound ridiculous, but all of them. Using the Big FOLD as an interactive map is easy to envision because we're looking at it with *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*. As I mentioned though, there are many, many things that need to be referenced when learning and simply playing a game. We've always turned to the little booklets that come with the games or the onscreen help. We're providing an alternative or supplement to those.

Would you like to see this become a new standard in guides?

[ERIC] Um; yes!

Was this designed with veteran players in mind, or is it something that players of all experience levels will be able to make use of?

[ERIC] We see the need and appeal for all levels of gamers. There is a learning curve with every new game, and beyond that period there is a need to reference certain things - always. We want to help the learning curve happen quickly while allowing the gamer to game along the way. We want to be the quick reference guide that eliminates the interruptions.



INCOMPARABLE MULTIPLAYER COVERAGE

We provide all the tools to maximize your multiplayer experience. Optimize your combat effectiveness with our analysis of every perk, weapon, attachment, camouflage, and more! Our Create a Class recommendations ensure you pick the perfect loadout. Expert tactics for team-based and solo play, Killstreak and Deathstreak bonuses, ranks, and much more!

EXCLUSIVE TACTICAL MAP PACK!

Bundled with this Limited Edition strategy guide is a unique, folding, dry erase poster that displays all of the multiplayer maps for *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*. You can use these maps to plan out your team's attack strategies and wipe them clean when you are finished!



Feature by James

Publisher: **Capcom**
 Developer: **Airtight Games**
 Genre: **Third-person Shooter**
 Category: **Rocketeer**
 Release Date: **January 2010**
 Rating: **T**
 Players: **1**

DARK VOID™



Planes are nice, but real men use jetpacks. Nothing says “manly” like strapping a giant rocket just above your butt and taking to the skies, wearing protective gear that provides about as much defense against heavy impacts as a cotton ball. But the sky is huge and inviting, even with enemy swarms filling it with blue-hot plasma, and there’s no way to resist getting up there and blowing up some pinheads while soaring with acrobatic grace.

Dark Void is what you get when the primary team members behind *Crimson Skies* don’t get to make a sequel. It’s got the 1930s pulp serial feel down pat, starring a two-fisted cargo delivery pilot named Will. Will and his assistant, Ava, get shot down in the Bermuda Triangle, ending up on an island where bizarre alien-ish humanoids (the Watchers) are trying to kill them for no apparent reason. Fortunately, Nikola Tesla is there, causing instant pity for any aliens stupid enough to pit themselves against history’s ultimate bad-ass mad scientist. Tesla gives Will a prototype jetpack, things quickly get out of hand, and eventually Will finds himself teamed up with Survivors in a land that’s obviously not the tropical island it initially appeared to be. He’s in The Void, and The Watchers aren’t happy about sharing their world.

Peaceful resolution is right out, and even a sternly-worded UN missive (had the UN been around in 1938) seems like it would have little effect, so the only answer is bullets delivered at high speed and in great quantities. *Dark Void*’s gunplay is divided up into two primary styles- on foot and in air. It starts out as a fairly standard cover-based shooter, with Will running, gunning, and jumping behind convenient barricades, with new elements added along the way. It’s several hours, in fact, before the jet pack finally comes into play. Will initially is grounded, with no hint of the aerial escapades to come, but new vertical elements are added one by one until the skies are your playground.

Starting on foot, the opening area has Will ducking and shooting in a fashion familiar to anyone who's played *Uncharted*, *Gears of War*, or any other game where hiding is a simple matter of touching a button near anything that looks like it might be bulletproof. Cover is the usual defensive affair, with blind fire being more protected but less accurate while aiming gives the enemy a convenient target. Twists on the gameplay show up shortly, however, as Will proves that hitting things is as fun as shooting them. The initial enemies go down in a single punch, while later ones need softening up first, but it's always cool to see a mechanized enemy get its block knocked off with a solid haymaker.

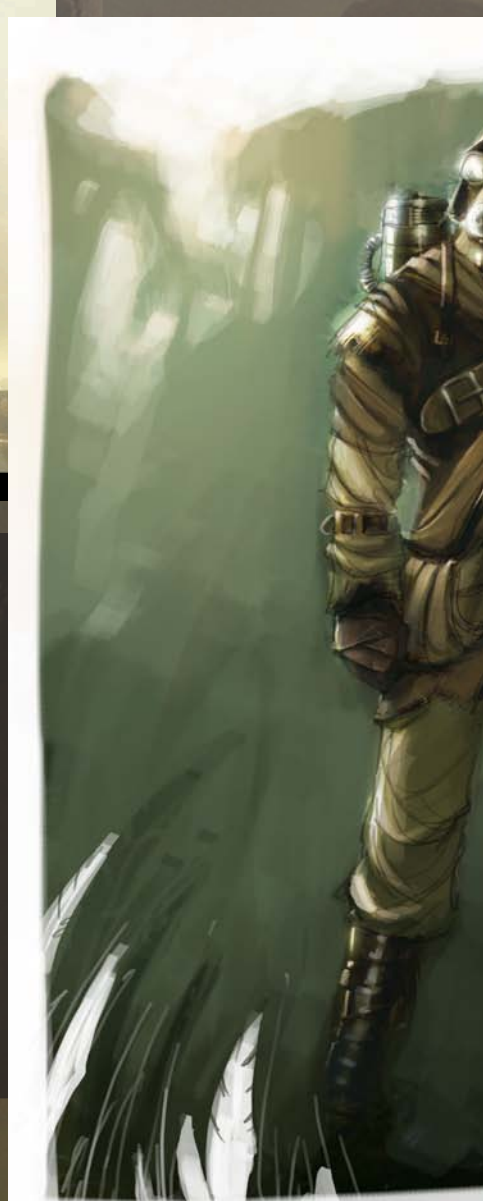
The other wrinkle in the combat comes as Will does his best Spider-Man impression, hanging off the underside of ledges while firing back at the Watchers as he leaps from handhold to handhold up sheer cliff faces. During these vertical cover sections the camera helpfully changes angle, giving a clear view up or down the wall, while bringing on a mild shot of dizziness when it smoothly flattens out again once Will is on solid ground. These sections rely more on firing from a set position before jumping to another spot of cover, because it's hard to run and gun while hanging on for dear life.

Eventually Will gets his first jetpack, good for hovering and boosted jumps but not flying. With this addition, however, the levels start opening up into vertical playgrounds, providing more strategic gunplay as the high ground becomes a tactical option. This is all in preparation for the final mobility upgrade, the full-flight enabled jetpack, and all the joys of dogfighting and clever level design it brings with it. At this point, *Dark Void* truly kicks into gear.





Aerial combat is different from on foot in more than the obvious ways. The jetpack comes equipped with a powerful gun, fed with unlimited ammo, but it only works while in flight. Once Will is either on the ground or hovering he's back to using the guns chosen at the start of the level or scavenged along the way, which is good for having the right tool for the job but also uses up the limited (but generously supplied) ammo. The other advantage of flight is that Will can hijack enemy saucers, using their armor to protect his own skin from a nasty case of alien laser burn. Hijacking takes a bit of work, though, unlike the normal gaming method of basically snatching a vehicle as it passes by, and unlike Will the saucers don't regenerate health after a few seconds of not taking damage, so their usefulness is limited. On the other hand, there's no denying how cool it is to have a rocketman hijack a flying saucer in mid-air.

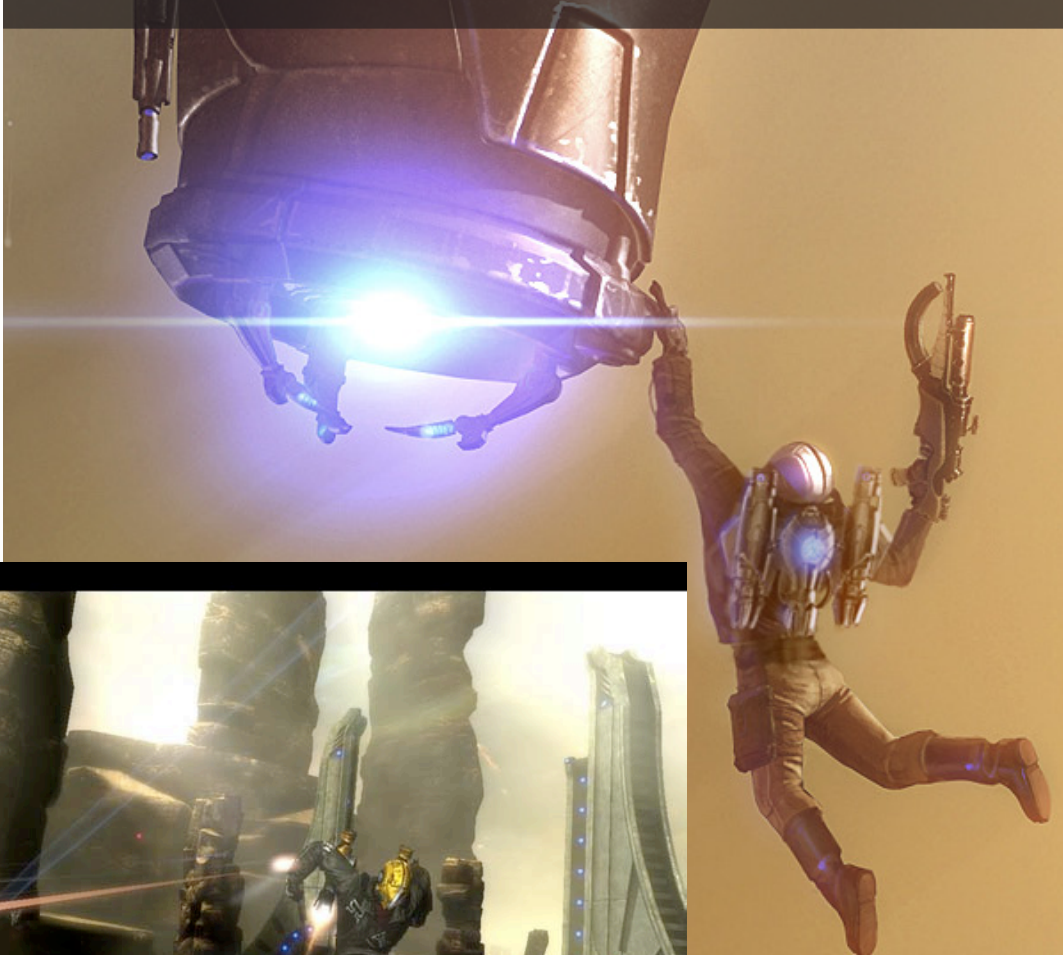


The thing about the jetpack is that it's a tool in exactly the same way the guns are- its use depends on the situation. There aren't special flying levels any more than there are sniper levels. There are areas where it's necessary, of course, because it's hard to dogfight from the ground, but an average mission will be a mix of air and ground based fighting. A mid-game level, for example, has Will clear out some gun turrets so the Survivors can land their airship, fighting off waves of nimble saucers while flying among the craggy spires of an otherworldly mountainous wasteland. When the ship lands, he fights on foot alongside a group of Survivors to open up an underground installation, which turns out to be a mixture of small corridors and large, open areas. The huge central shaft is large enough for limited flight, or Will can make use of the vertical cover system to avoid enemy fire. So long as you don't get his face shot off neither approach is wrong.

Supplementing the shooty gameplay are the usual collectibles no self-respecting world would be without. *Dark Void* has two kinds of items to track down- orbs and journals. The journals are filled with information on the world of *Dark Void*, filling in details that wouldn't fit anywhere else. There are dozens to find scattered throughout the game, some hidden very well indeed, but once found they remain available even in subsequent playthroughs, making it just a little easier to fill in the gaps.

Orbs are a more common, seeing as defeated enemies drop them, but there are some large bonuses hidden in out-of-the-way spots as well. The orbs act as currency, allowing you to upgrade your six primary guns and jetpack. Upgrades are expensive, but it only requires two to fully elevate even the generic machine gun from its original configuration as a reliable but bland workhorse into a stylish high-powered death dealer with glowing blue trim. While there are only seven items to power up, with two levels to buy apiece, every gun is useful and every upgrade makes it significantly moreso.

Dark Void is shaping up to be an epic action title, filled with solid gunplay, aerial derring-do, and a sci-fi backstory loaded with detail. Its stylish enemies are as fun to fight as look at, and the huge world is filled with detail. Once past the introductory levels the constant switching between flight and on-foot combat keeps things fresh, as every situation can be handled in a variety of ways. Admitted, the end result always turns out to be pumping a whole lot of firepower into a whole lot of bad guys, but if that's what it takes to rescue the rag-tag band of Survivors from the clutches of the Watchers then it's a price that's easily paid. *Dark Void* has hot lead, electric death, and rocket-powered mayhem. What more could an adventure need?



Two years ago, the original *Bioshock* amazed all who played it with its stunning graphics, dark storyline, and engrossing world that made use of both of those elements to provide one of the creepiest gaming experiences ever. It was the first FPS I ever felt like exploring simply because the world was so captivating. The environments all had the right mix of beautiful and rundown at the same time, and made the world of Rapture an eerie one. Now, the modern-day classic is back with an adventure set 10 years in the future that keeps the first-person adventure setup alive, but brings with it some big changes.

One of the biggest changes is the addition of multiplayer gameplay. It's something that players clamored for with the original and now it's a reality with the sequel. The amount of simultaneous players isn't yet known, but it is known that a separate team will develop the multiplayer stuff, so those fearing that the single player game would suffer as a result of it can save themselves some sleepless nights.

Another huge change is the reversal of player roles. In the original, you were seemingly a regular guy who fled from the monstrous diving suit-clad Big Daddies who protected young girls called Little Sisters (who harvested corpses for energy). Now, you're a rogue Big Daddy out to take the Little Sisters away from the other Big Daddies. The rogue BD plays differently than Jack. He's far more powerful and can dual wield plasmid attacks and weapons. Plus, with his diving suit, he can explore the underwater world more completely than Jack. However, like Jack in the original, you've got a conflict of conscience on your hands with the Sisters because you can either kill them for great gains, or adopt them and have help throughout the adventure.

While very little has been shown, it's clear that the incredible ambiance of the original game has been retained, and it seems like the change in roles is going to be a great way to freshen things up so it doesn't just feel like more of the same gameplay. *Bioshock 2* is in great hands, and seems to be on track to deliver another memorable experience for all who play it.

Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: 2K Marin
Genre: First-person shooter/exploration
Category: ...with an art deco design
Release Date: 2/9/10
Rating: M
Players: 1-unknown



BIO SHOCK 2



Preview by Jeremy Peeples

SUPER MONKEY BALL™ *Step & Roll*

After almost a decade since the original entry in the series, the rolling monkeys are back once again, and this time they want you to monkey see and monkey do!

For a series that focuses so heavily on balance, it's fitting that the franchise has turned to the Nintendo's Balance Board. Now more than ever, players will have seamless control over the rolling balls as they navigate the tricky courses and compete in crazy party games. You will feel just like a monkey confined in a translucent sphere!



The *Super Monkey Ball* series has always delivered both a strong single-player experience and an enjoyable multiplayer component, and *Step & Roll* is no different. Not only are there numerous mini-games like usual, but the entire single-player adventure can be traversed cooperatively.

So far, only a handful of mini-games have been showed off to public, but there will be several more in the final product. Amongst them is a kart-esque circuit race (complete with projectile pickups); the return of Monkey Bowling; Red Light/Green Light, the monkeys' take on the classic elementary school game; and an tower of seesaws you must guide your monkey through without falling to the ground.

Although *Step & Roll* is being touted as a family game, don't forget that practically every prior game has had challenging courses to an almost ruthless degree. While it is true that Sega wants *Step & Roll* to be accessible to all, they have far from forgotten the fanbase who just loves to punish themselves into mastering each stage and collecting as many bananas as possible. As the single-player quest progresses, expect the game to turn down-right devious. For the purists out there (or people who are too lazy to stand up), the traditional analog controls and the motion controls of 2006's *Banana Blitz* are also incorporated via the Wiimote and Nunchuck.

Now, be honest: do you even use your Balance Board anymore? Sega is giving us a game that promises to take full advantage of the neglected accessory, in perhaps the most logical way. Like seriously, the Balance Board was just made for acrobatic monkeys in balls! Catch *Super Monkey Ball: Step & Roll* rolling into stores this coming February.

Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Sega** Genre: **Action / Party** Category: **Great Balls of Monkey** Release Date: **February 2010** Rating: **Everyone** Players: **1-4**

Preview by **Leon the Hart**



SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV

Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **Dimps/ Capcom** Genre: **2d Fighter** Category: **Street Fighter** Release Date: **TBA** Players: **1-2** Rating: **TBA**



2009, as far as video games are concerned, has undoubtedly meant the resurgence of the fighter. *Street Fighter IV* and *BlazBlue* have already made their marks drawing record crowds at events like Evo. *Tekken 6* was a huge hit. That being said, though, it comes as somewhat of a surprise that *Capcom* has announced, so soon at least, their plans for a *Street Fighter* sequel.

Aptly titled *Super Street Fighter IV*, the new entry is supposed to mark a return to the roots of the series. Fan favorites Dee Jay and Thunder Hawk are slated to make their glorious returns to the franchise. Producer Yoshinori Ono has also confirmed the return of the classic car smashing bonus round. With so much nostalgia packed into the title, it's hard to believe that the team has also planned a total revamp of the online mode, as well as the inclusion of six additional characters not including Dee Jay and T Hawk.

While information about the additional characters has been scarce, the team has revealed a Korean Tae Kwon Do practitioner named Juri. Given that she is the first Tae Kwon Do practitioner in the *Street Fighter* series, her moves will be strikingly different from the other characters in the game. Juri also has a strong affiliation to the SIN organization, which is headed by Seth, the nefarious last boss from *Street Fighter IV*. As a result, there's no doubt that she'll figure heavily into the story (which coincidentally will be getting a lot more love and attention from the developers). Ono has publicly expressed his disappointment with opening and closing cut scenes for each character, so I think it's fair to expect something more robust for the next installment.

Taking a cue from *BlazBlue*, *Super Street Fighter IV* will feature eight player lobbies. Lobbies will feature party chat and the ability to watch replays of top players together. Online matches will also be streamlined, including 2v2 and 4v4 modes. It's obvious that the team is taking large steps to augment the overall community aspect of the game.

Thanks to *Street Fighter IV* and other stellar games, the fighting game scene has been totally reinvigorated. Let's hope that *Super Street Fighter IV* can improve on a great formula and deliver the kind of game fans have been calling for when it hits shelves in Spring 2010.



The *Monster Hunter* series is an absolute phenomenon in Japan. They even have actual summer training camps and festivals dedicated solely to the game. When *Monster Hunter Tri* released there this past August it broke all sorts of records, including selling over half a million copies in less than a week.

In America, however, the series has not quite taken off to the same degree despite several offerings on the PSP. Not one to back down from a challenge, Capcom is trying once again to bring the social phenomenon to American audiences with the Wii-exclusive localization of *Monster Hunter Tri*.

In a world where man shares the land with fantastical creatures, the preferred profession is that of a hunter-gatherer. Despite the fact that many of the creatures tower several feet over the humans, the hunters are trained to fearlessly stalk and slaughter the fauna and use any useful materials from the corpses to assemble more effective weapons and gear. Unlike past games in the series, though, the motivation to hunt is not for equipment alone; by completing NPC-given quests, the character's earthquake-devastated hometown is slowly restored to prosperity once again.

Not all is easy for the hunter, however. Some monsters are so immense and powerful that a single human challenger is child's play to them. The only means to defeat such a foe is to team up with other hunters, and while players can employ an AI teammate in single-player, the primary focus of *Tri* is multiplayer. As a game that relies heavily on tactics, the greatest chance for survival comes from hunting with up to three other humans online or a friend in split screen co-op.

Japanese players currently have to pay a monthly fee to access the online portion of *Tri*, but as of press-time Capcom has stated an interest in making the experience free for the Western audience. In addition, Capcom is currently looking into incorporating WiiSpeak into online play, another feature that the Japan release lacks and one that will certainly aide in strategizing attacks.

To make the experience all the more immersive, Capcom has developed what it touts to be a living, breathing ecosystem. There are several environments, ranging from mountainous landscapes to frozen tundra, and each region's creatures realistically interact with each other. So if a player is stalking a monster, he can be sure that he's not the only one on the hunt. Top this with a top-notch graphics engine that puts most other third-party Wii developers' work to shame and we've got an offering sure to visually captivate.

To say that the *Monster Hunter* series has been a success is an understatement. It's simply one of the best selling franchises of all time... except in America. Luckily Capcom went all out with *Monster Hunter Tri*, so there is no better time for Americans to see what they've long been ignoring. And maybe start some summer training camps.

Publisher: Capcom
 Developer: Capcom
 Genre: Action RPG
 Category: Not Your Dad's Deer Hunter
 Release Date: Q1 2010
 Rating: TBA
 Players: 1-2 (2-4 Online)

モンスターハンター MONSTER HUNTER tri

Preview by Leon the Hart

ModNation Racers



Preview by Jeremy Peoples

Publisher: Sony
Developer: United Front Games
Genre: Kart Racing...
Category: ...with customizable everything!
Release Date: 2/2/10
Rating: Rating Pending
Players: 1-12

The latest entry in the Play...Create...Share series looks to do for kart racers what *LittleBigPlanet* did for platformers - deliver a top-notch entry in the genre that raises the bar for what was expected from in-game customization in both quality, quantity, and ease of use.

Those who play without their creative juices flowing shouldn't feel bad - *ModNation Racers* ships with a wide variety of pre-made characters and tracks. User-created tracks are possible in under ten minutes and easy to use controls. The track creation tool operates in real-time and when you're done, you can immediately test it out and see how well it works. You can choose from a variety of surface types within a single track, so if you want a half asphalt/half-dirt track for a mix of traditional and off-road racing, you can have it.



Objects, obstacles, and weapons can be placed anywhere on the track, and can even customize the track-side scenery. So if you want to surround your creation with large mountain ranges, forests, lakes, or even rows of home, you can. The tool is versatile enough to allow for methodical creation, or you can quickly drag the tool around and it'll cause a slew of whatever item you've chosen to sprout up from the ground. It seems like the developers have found a way to give players a user-friendly tool without sacrificing creation options for the player.

From what's been shown so far, *ModNation Racers* has the makings of a killer app for the PS3. It looks to have the right combination of out-of-the-box content, a seemingly endless amount of user-generated tracks and racers, a unique art style, and the most important part of all - the gameplay, looks like it will satisfy kart racing veterans and newcomers.



RESONANCE OF FATE™

Preview by Beck

Publisher: SEGA

Genre: RPG

Developer: tri-Ace

Rating: Rating Pending

Release Date: Spring 2010

Players: 1



tri-Ace, creators of the *Valkyrie Profile* and *Star Ocean* franchises, brings us a brand new IP for the Xbox 360 and Playstation 3 this spring. This will mark tri-Ace's first simultaneous multi-platform release, not to mention their first game to be published outside Square-Enix (in North America and Japan, at least). *Resonance of Fate* – alternatively renamed in North America from *End of Eternity* – is a very different game from what we've seen from the developers, offering a grittier and more "western" appeal.

The story takes place in a distant future where the Earth has fallen ill to a poisonous gas, reducing the human race substantially. Humans have been pushed back and forced to build a colossal mechanical device named Bazel, which has given them harbor from the toxic world that has been created. This is where the game begins; as much as humanity relies on Bazel for its support, all machines one day malfunction and inevitably break. It's up to a skilled and experienced man named Vashyron, Zephyr (a boy who has been through many hardships) and Reanbell, a spry young girl, to protect the world and uncover the truths behind this mysterious event.

Checking out the gameplay mechanics, *Resonance of Fate* is like nothing we've ever seen before. It's a hybrid between a turn-based RPG and a third person shooter. Players take control of three characters, each of which are armed to the teeth with projectile weapons (whether they be handguns or Uzis), allowing them to make quick work of their foes. The appearance of the battle system may look fairly complex, but it is relatively easy to understand, offering very similar mechanics to that of a strategy RPG. To make it simple, each character is given a turn to move and charge up their shots in hopes of hitting their locked-on target before getting struck themselves. The battle system feels as if things are running in real time, considering all of the characters in a battle move regardless of what you're doing, but the overall strategic placement and actions that are required is a clear focus on the turn-based aspect. One gameplay feature that removes itself from the slower paced combat is the Invincible Actions. As if they were pulled straight from an action movie, players are able to accomplish magnificent feats, offering flashy and interactive spectacles by planning a character's path of action. These generally range from running, sliding and jumping assaults on the enemy, offering a little more style to the game.



A big part of *Resonance of Fate* is the customization, and there certainly is a lot. Because the game is heavily focused on projectile weaponry, each gun possessed is customizable to your liking. You want a scope on your handgun? By all means. You want a silenced sub-machine gun? Go ahead. Customization seems to be deep and is a crucial part to the game, increasing and balancing out how each character performs. While weapons are fully customizable, another feature is the ability to customize playable characters themselves. No longer will a story be filled with characters dressed completely ridiculous – or maybe they will be, if you wish it. There is the ability to change the hair color of the main characters, their clothing they are fashioning, and even add some accessories while you're at it. While this definitely doesn't change how the game will play, it will certainly give the player some creativity and ensures they won't be disappointed by how the characters look. Not to mention it opens up the possibility to downloadable content.

Resonance of Fate is looking to be a gem among RPGs, offering a deep battle system and vast customization among the characters and their arsenal. While the game seems to be gunning towards more of a depressing setting, the charm that tri-Ace has displayed in their previous titles is still active, offering a rather intriguing storyline with an interesting cast of characters. Scheduled for release in Japan later this year, and North America and Europe sometime in spring of 2010, *Resonance of Fate* is already shaping up to be a unique experience.



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REVIEW **REVIEW** **REVIEW**

Excitebike: World Rally
Nitendon't fix what isn't broken. I'm so excited, and I just can't hide it! I'm about to lose control and I think I like it.

DJ Hero
Spin through some beats. Finally, a rhythm game that feels different and brings a fresh approach to interacting with music.

Lips: Number One Hits
Ideal practice for bar karaoke. The second in the Lips series is almost worth it for the cute avatar animations alone!

NEWS

Pop'n Music Pops Into The US

Here's a game release that might have slipped under your radar. (It sure slipped under mine.) Konami has released Pop'n Music in the US for the first time... without the series' signature controller.

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Section: Gaming News | Keywords: Game Releases, Music Games, Nintendo Wii | **LEAVE A COMMENT**

Gamestop To Publish Its Own Games

Not content to just introduce the sale of DLC in its brick-and-mortar stores, Gamestop this month purchased online game company Jolt, with the intent of creating original games to sell to customers. Be afraid. Be very afraid.

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Section: Gaming News | Keywords: Game Industry, Money, Online Gaming, Retail, United Kingdom | **LEAVE A COMMENT**

NASA To Map Mars Through Online Gaming

Yes, that title is correct. Faced with a massive collection of data collected on Mars, NASA is turning to gamers for help. Are you ready to Be A Martian?

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Section: Gaming News | Keywords: Space Invaders, Browser-based Games, Online Gaming | **LEAVE A COMMENT**

Atlas Saves The Day W/ 3D Dot Game Heroes

In late October, Sony teased that 3D Dot Game Heroes was to be localized by a then-unknown company. In a move that was perhaps not unexpected, Atlas has now officially announced that it will be bringing the game to the US. From Software's retro romp will be arriving on American PS3s May 11th.

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Section: Gaming News | Keywords: Atlas, From Software, Game Announcements, Playstation 3, Sony | **LEAVE A COMMENT**

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GO LOOK HURRY

New SUPER MARIO BROS.™ Wii

Preview by **DJPubba**

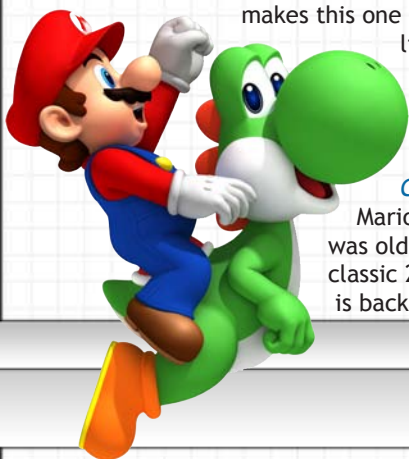
Publisher: **Nintendo**
 Developer: **Nintendo**
 Release Date: **11/15/2009**
 Rating: **Everyone**

Genre: **Action/Platform**
 Category: **Old School, New Look**
 # of Players: **1-4**



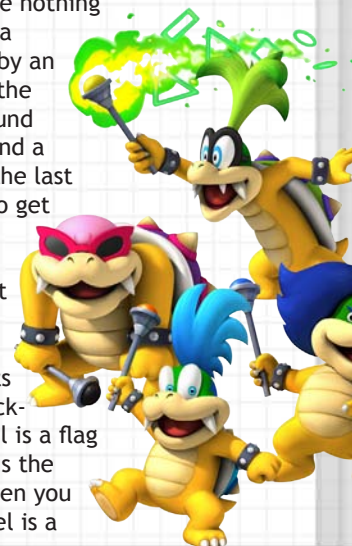
If you're new to *Super Mario Bros.*, you're probably young. The original *Super Mario Bros.* launched a new era in home gaming in the US as the pack-in with the Nintendo Entertainment System, debuting October 18, 1985. Prior to that, the home console video game industry had been languishing in failure when the second generation of game systems (Atari 5200-7800, etc.) failed to entertain. The action-platforming gameplay which the overall-wearing, fat mustache-sporting plumber delivered was an instant classic and kick-started the home console market back into the mainstream, causing literally millions of kids to become addicted overnight. The Guinness book of World Records lists it as one of the best selling video games ever, with 40,230,000 copies sold from its launch in 1983 until whoever counts *Super Mario* sales stopped counting in 1999. Since that time, *Mario* has become an American icon, as wholesome as apple pie. If you type the name "Mario" into Google or Wikipedia, Mario is the first thing you'll be served up. Wikipedia doesn't even bother to show any choices, it just takes you straight to his bio.

Obviously, countless games starring Mario have been released since 1985. *New Super Mario Bros. Wii* is the newest. What makes this one different is that it is very much like the original. After an extended foray into the third dimension with games such as *Super Mario 64*, *Super Mario Sunshine* and *Super Mario Galaxy*, Nintendo has returned Mario to his gameplay roots. What was old is new again, but prettier. The classic 2D action/platforming gameplay is back but updated to take advantage



of the Wii's graphical abilities and improvements have been made to the original formula without straying too far. This has been accomplished by adding creative new twists to the tried and true gameplay mechanics, the details of which I will touch upon shortly. The idea of revamping an old classic isn't entirely new, of course. Nintendo did the very same thing in 2006 with *New Super Mario Bros.* for the Nintendo DS. In fact, this new Wii title is basically the same thing as the 2006 DS game. Thankfully, it's not identical to the DS version nor any of the prior games.

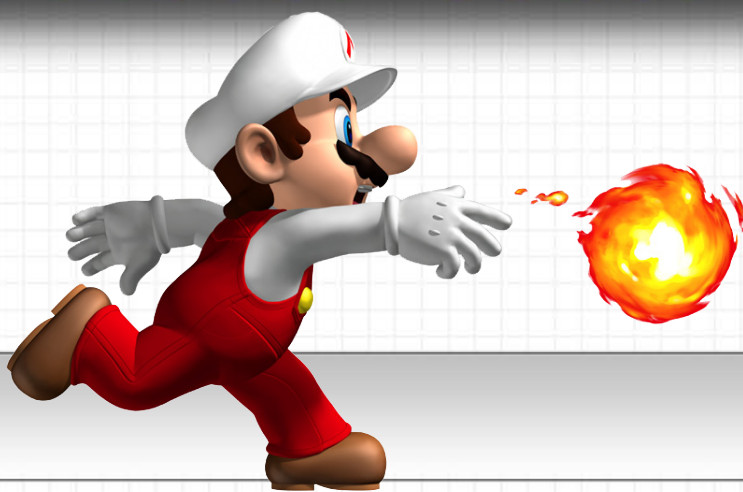
What *is* the same is the basic mechanic of jumping onto platforms (often requiring expert dexterity to execute), bonking special blocks from below, and landing upon the heads of enemies to "kill" them. (I put kill in quotes because nothing ever really dies in a Mario game -- it is a "kids" game, after all.) Being touched by an enemy in any place except the feet or the buttocks (only during a special butt-pound maneuver) results in the loss of a life and a reset to the beginning of the level (or the last checkpoint). Ostensibly, the object is to get to the end of the level where Princess Peach may be waiting to be rescued (she is invariably in another castle), but anyone who has played a Mario game before knows that the real fun is in finding all of the secrets and hidden bits -- which every level in the game is chock-full of. At the end of every regular level is a flag pole which you'll receive a higher bonus the higher up on it you manage to jump when you reach it. At the end of every castle level is a



Second opinion by **Dr. Brew** • Alternate Rating : 4 of 5

As a younger gamer, I didn't grow up playing Mario games, so I'm not as enthralled as you old fogies. I can see the appeal of the genre but the personal rewards for overcoming the insane difficulty of





boss of some sort, all of which require three well-timed head jumping-ons to dispatch. The exception to this rule is the last boss, the details of which I will not disclose here in the interest of letting you find out for your self.

Some of the things that are new to this new incarnation are the kinds of power-ups you'll encounter. Power-ups are special abilities you will gain by finding and grabbing the corresponding icon for. These are hidden throughout each level, although usually not very difficult to find. There are six power-ups, three of which are new. The three returning from previous games are: the basic red mushroom, which makes Mario bigger and able to get hit by an enemy more than once before losing a life; the fire plant, which lets Mario spit bouncy fireballs at his foes (and get hit an additional time); and the mini-mushroom, which makes Mario really tiny and light. The new power-ups include a helicopter helmet (and accompanying fancy jumpsuit, which my wife pointed out makes Mario even more sexier than he

already is) which gives Mario the ability to whizz far into the air when the Wiimote is shaken, and lets him glide gently back down after reaching the apex of this air-whizz. There is also an ice plant, which is nearly the same as the fire plant, except it turns enemies into ice-cubes which Mario can pick up and throw or use as blocks to stand on in order to reach higher platforms. Lastly is the cute penguin suit, which is nearly identical to the ice plant except Mario can swim much better with it on as well as slide along on his belly at a high rate of speed until some sort of obstacle puts

a stop to the fun times. Yoshi also makes a return. If you find Yoshi hiding in a block and pop him out, you can ride him. Riding him gives you the ability to jump further, as well as eat enemies and fruit for nutrition, power-ups, and general happiness.

All of these new elements combine together with the old to form an extremely enjoyable experience for the seasoned Mario veteran. My wife, a relative Mario newbie, testifies that it's also plenty of fun for new players as well, however only for the first world's-worth of levels. After that, the difficulty ramps up so high, it becomes frustrating for new, inexperienced players. It takes much repetition to master the moves and complex controls that are required to navigate the precise, merciless challenges. This is why I put kids in quotes earlier because, even though the graphics, story, and characters are obviously geared towards kids, the difficulty level is aimed squarely at masters. If you or your kids are masters, then it'll be perfect. But if you have no desire to put in the time and effort required to become an action/platform master, this game may not be for you. However, even after giving up in frustration, my wife stayed right by my side while I played, affixed to the screen and gasping and squeeling at every failure and epic success. She says that watching me play is incredibly exciting. So, either I am the luckiest husband in the world, or your family members might just also enjoy watching you play even if they can't. I'll leave that to you to decide and I'll score the game for me. For me, the difficulty level of the game makes it incredibly rewarding to master and, if you are the obsessive type like me, and love finding every secret there is -- there are many, many hours of enjoyable gameplay to be had here.

Rating: 4.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE:

4.25 of 5

some of these levels just aren't worth my trouble. I'm rating it "good" instead of "best game *ever*" as I'm sure you old farts are going to give it.



LittleBigPlanet™

Review by Mr. Rawr



Publisher: SCEA

Developer: SCE Studio Cambridge

Release Date: 09/17/2009

Rating: Everyone

Genre: Platformer

Category: Sackboy

of Players: 1



The PlayStation 3's *LittleBigPlanet* shocked everyone with cutesy aesthetics coupled with an impressive physics based take on the platforming genre. Critics unanimously praised the game, with some even heralding Sackboy as the PlayStation's new mascot, so a port to Sony's handheld must have seemed like a no brainer, but does this game have enough strength to live up to its older brother's shoes?

In *LittleBigPlanet*, players control Sackboy, a cute little stitch puppet that has no origin story, no amnesia, or stat points. He simply *is*. His goal is very simple: aide the odd inhabitants of *LittleBigPlanet* with whatever problems they may have. Sackboy will jump, pull, and swing his way past all obstacles to complete his assigned task across seven worlds. However, any sort of narrative takes a backseat and is only there to provide an excuse for each of the level's unique puzzles. This would be fine if the puzzles had any noteworthy aspects. While they are entertaining, compared to the PlayStation 3 version, the puzzles are quite tame. On their own merits the majority of the puzzles can best be described as "average."

The gameplay in *LittleBigPlanet* is very easy to understand, and casual platformer enthusiasts will easily enjoy. Sackboy can run, jump, and grab onto objects to either pull across the room or swing himself across gaps. Players can also move between the foreground and background, allowing you to move past some obstacles, even sometimes simulating a proper three dimensional environment. Where all of it becomes interesting is in the physics based environment. All objects react in the world with each other, and as such sometimes need to be considered if the puzzle relates to it. Putting a round object on an incline will cause it to roll away, and a crane might not operate if too much weight is on it. The physics in the game can cause some pretty intriguing interactions between the player and the game world. Objects bounce how they should, fall how they should, and dangle from a rope how they should. The

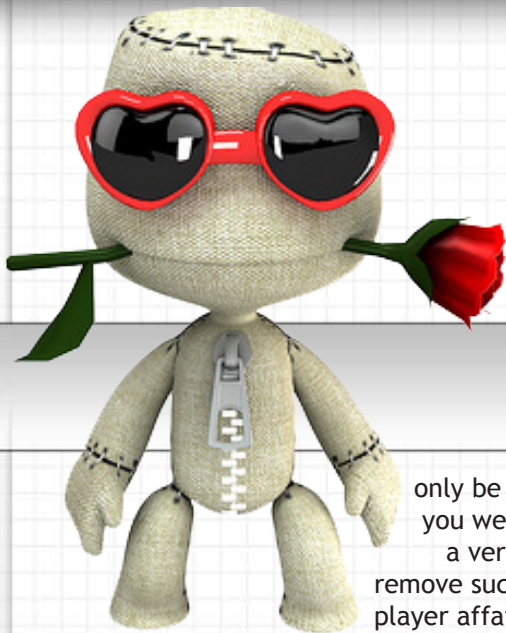
game never goes too far with this however, which helps keep everything simple, yet at times, quite dull. This sacrifices complexity in exchange for a pick up and play appeal, which sometimes helps but also hurts it.

The problems with the game stem from a very glaring omission: the lack of multiplayer. The original title's main appeal seems to vanish quite fast when it can

Second opinion by Beck • Alternate Rating : 4.5 of 5

An absolute rewarding and satisfying experience from start to finish. Even without multiplayer, the well crafted level designs and thought-provoking puzzles make this a must have.





only be played alone; with none of your friends causing shenanigans that kill you while you were genuinely trying to complete a level takes the fun out of things. This seems like a very odd decision to port a game that had a large multiplayer following and focus and remove such a key feature that made it so loveable. Also hurt because of the solely single player affair is the customization of your Sackboy; while the entirety of the dress up options are still available, it was never about what funny costume you were wearing, but what funny costumes your friends would come up with. Why dress up if only you can see it? Multiplayer would have been a solid addition and would have helped players make their own fun during some of the less interesting levels.

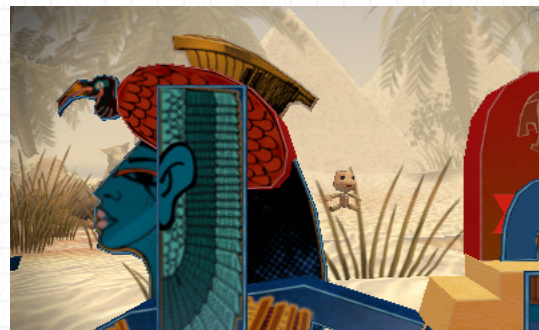
A feature that still remains noteworthy, even after a year of tinkering on the PS3, is the game's level creator. Given access to an absurd number of tools, players are given vast options how to create their levels, monsters, traps, and puzzles. Any sort of creation you can think of can be created in this level creator, as evidenced from some incredible creations seen from the PS3 version. Create platforms, cannons, fire breathing dragons, a spaceship, or even a faithful rendition *Megaman* level. The options are creator. Everything from a parachuting minigame to a fight with King Kong, all seen in the single player experience, can be recreated here in full. A feature like this however is much too complex for the everyday consumer, and requires the more dedicated players from the gaming community will get the most out of it. At this time it is unknown if the incredible talent seen up until this point will make the transition to the handheld and make content to experience for when we are on the go.

LittleBigPlanet is a very simple yet fun game. It's easy to enjoy, and some of the things presented in the game will make you smile, laugh, or just plain ole' say "Wow" at. However, there is a lot of monotony in the game and at the end of the day it just seems to mellow out into an acceptable experience. It's a pretty tame version of the rock and roll experience two and a half million Playstation 3 users experienced this time last year. It is still enjoyable, and a very decent platformer in its own rights, but that is exactly it: "decent." Don't go into this product expecting to be blown away, or to experience something incredibly new. It takes the safe route, and aimed to deliver a bus ride, friendly platforming experience, and they delivered. It just seems that all the charm that made the Playstation 3 version such a fun, unique experience seem to be missing, leaving an average, yet enjoyable experience.

Rating: 3.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE:

4 of 5



Publisher: SCEA
Developer: SCEA
Release Date: 11/17/2009
Rating: Mature

Genre: Action/Platform
Category: HD Compilation
of Players: 1

Over the past five years, the *God of War* series has redefined hack and slash gaming with its diverse and well-executed gameplay, sharp controls, and ability to deliver some of the most epic battles in gaming history. Unfortunately, it did this towards the end of the PS2's life, resulting in a lot of people missing them - although they did become Greatest Hits. The *God of War Collection* brings together the two PS2 entries on a single Blu-Ray disc and optimizes them for HD playback with a new widescreen setup and higher-quality textures.

While the visual enhancements are the most immediately noticeable, particularly during the boss fights - which now feel more epic than ever before, the framerate is also locked in at 60 FPS, and results in the games playing smoother than they ever have before. Sadly, the revamped graphics don't carry over to the cinematics that use the in-game engine. Those wind up being quite jarring because you'll go from the crisp redone visuals to the unmodified original graphics, which look darker and murkier by comparison, in a moment's notice. Despite that issue, the gameplay being smoother than ever before due to the constant framerate makes this the definitive version of each game.

Even the bonus video content from each game is included, although strangely, it's played in two separate ways for each, with *GoW I* accessible from the game and *GoW II*'s using the XMB Video tab and suffering from skipping issues that I haven't seen before in other XMB video content. As great as this compilation is in spite of some minor issues, it feels incomplete given its "collection" title by lacking the PSP entry in the series - it was a major benchmark for its platform just like the PS2 games were, and would have been a welcome addition here.

Still, the collection is an amazing value for those who have never played the series but have always wanted to, since it delivers both games in HD for about the same cost as getting them on the PS2. If you've got both games, you're probably better off waiting for it a price drop, as the revamped graphics and widescreen view are nice, but not worth \$40 for most people. However, if you have both games and also have a PS2 that doesn't play them easily, like mine, then this is an easy purchase to recommend as the games are fantastic and have aged remarkably well.

Rating: 4.5 of 5

Second opinion by **Zippy** • Alternate Rating : 5 of 5

These games were awesome enough already, but now in one convenient HD package, they simply rule. Pick it up, PS3 owners!

FINAL SCORE:
4.75 of 5

GOD OF WAR
COLLECTION



Review by **Jeremy Peoples**

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Ambrella
Release Date: 11/16/2009
Rating: Everyone 10+

Genre: Dungeon Crawler
Category: PokeGauntlet
of Players: 1-4

Review by **Leon the Hart**

POKÉMON RUMBLE

It's no secret that these lovable pocket monsters are bred mainly to fight in tournaments for humans, but so far there hasn't been a game where the monsters alone are let loose into competitive battle without the leadership of their captors. *Pokemon Rumble* is here to do just that.

Going in, one might see this as an opportunity to find the answers to several of life's mysteries: what happens when wild Pokemon must defend their territory, or become hungry for meat, or must combat over a potential mate? All fine questions, but *Pokemon Rumble* addresses an even bigger mystery:

What if all the wild Pokemon were actually origami-esque dolls that come alive when a magical key is inserted into their backs and, upon dialing, inflates them into a larger, more combat-prepared size to fend off hordes of adversaries and become the champion of the Battle Royale tournament which only the wild Pokemon know about? Now that's a profound question.

In the beginning, only the first generation of Pokemon are available. Players start out with a friendly, albeit pathetically low-leveled, Rattata who just wants to be accepted into the Battle Royale. He sneaks into the tournament grounds but is obliterated, so he sets off to find other higher-level Pokemon to be on his team. Playing out like a dungeon-crawling beat-em-up action slasher, players take direct control over the monsters and guide them through levels full of other wild monsters that must be defeated. Occasionally a defeated foe will join your team, and if you are lucky, it will be stronger than your other Pokemon.

The Pokemon can have up to two attacks at a time (although they usually only have one by nature) and other attacks can be purchased with coins that defeated Pokemon drop. The sad thing is that there are far too few attacks, so many Pokemon will share the same moves making the monsters feel frustratingly similar to each other. Sure, the more powerful Pokemon such as the Legendaries deal some truly powerful attacks, but by the time they come around, it's just not much fun anymore.

Eventually the team is strong enough to enter the Battle Royale competition and become kings of the wild orgami. If it manages to succeed, then the Sinnoh Pokemon are introduced into the world. Unfortunately, the Sinnoh stages are exactly the same as the Kanto stages which only expounds on the already repetitive gameplay of *Pokemon Rumble*.



It's not that *Pokemon Rumble* is a bad game; in fact it achieves exactly what it intends to do. It's just that it appeals to a niche audience: the very young, or the diehard. If you are someone who has completed every Pokedex, loves scouring for rarities such as Shiny's, and finds the aspect of taking direct control over hostile Pokemon intriguing, then *Rumble* will most likely satisfy your Poke-desires. Other gamers should be weary of the quickly trying repetition, especially considering it's 1500 points.

Rating: 3 of 5

Second opinion by **Zippy** • Alternate Rating : 3.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE:

3.25 of 5

Pokemon fans will find some stuff to enjoy, but anyone else need not apply.



Elder Koza Robert Schmuck

At a recent retro gaming convention I attended I bought a pair of Sega Master System 3D glasses and 5 3D games. I was impressed with the 3D effect and instantly sought the rest of the 8 total 3D games for the Master System; one of the best finds I've had this past year.

Elder Goban Mike Norman

Recently discovered a hidden gem on the Genesis: Charles Barkley's Shut Up and Jam 2! Might be a contender with Shaq-Fu for my favorite game!

Afrika Soundtrack

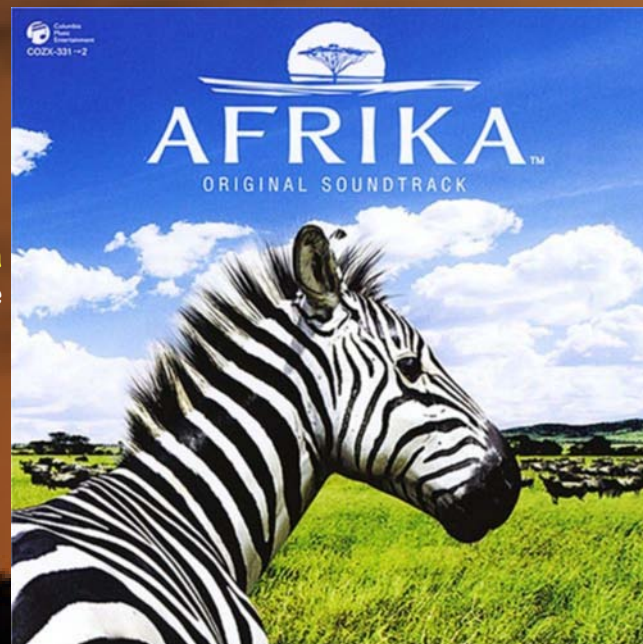
Article by Koza

With grand climaxes and delicate melodies, the **Afrika Original Soundtrack** is a superb choice for fans of the game and even for those who've never heard of it. After the game's release in Japan in August 2008, the soundtrack got immediate attention, winning the "Best Original Score (Video Game)" award at the Hollywood Music Awards. The game was recently released in North America on October 2009 exclusively for the Playstation 3.

Back in late 2007, Japanese born composer Wataru Hokoyama conducted the largest orchestra ever assembled in Los Angeles for Rhino Studios' Playstation 3 exclusive, **Afrika**. The 104 player orchestra cost an estimated \$200,000 to record the game's 35 minutes of music, ranging from extravagant swelling strings to more rhythmic drum based tracks. The music of **Afrika** fills the room with a gigantic, sweeping and dazzling full-orchestra sound that captivates any fan of classical music. With huge crescendos building to soft climaxes, the soundtracks' first track, "Savanna" sets the tone for the game's score; soft melodies and a full deep sound that flows tremendously throughout.

The CD features all of the original music created for **Afrika**, 14 tracks that span an all too short 35 minutes. Included with the soundtrack is a DVD that includes **Afrika**'s score in 5.1 channel Surround Sound as well as a few supplements. The DVD features the trailer for **Afrika**, a "Making of the Score" mini documentary, a photo gallery plus credits for the soundtracks' production.

The score for **Afrika** garnered composer Wataru Hokoyama industry recognition and as a result he worked on Capcom's **Resident Evil 5**, providing additional music, orchestration and conducting for the games soundtrack. After working on two major video game soundtracks in addition to other projects, Hokoyama will no doubt continue to score many great soundtracks in the years to come.



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かたまりたましいトリビュート

Article by Kozo

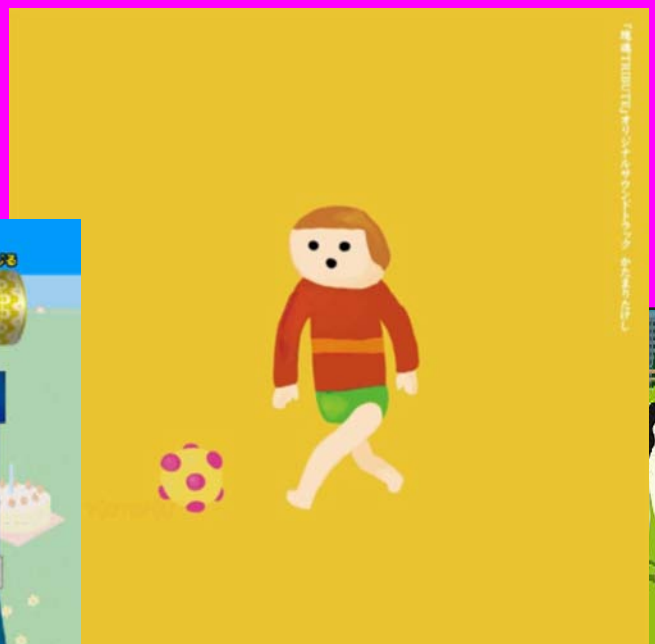
Katamari Damacy Tribute

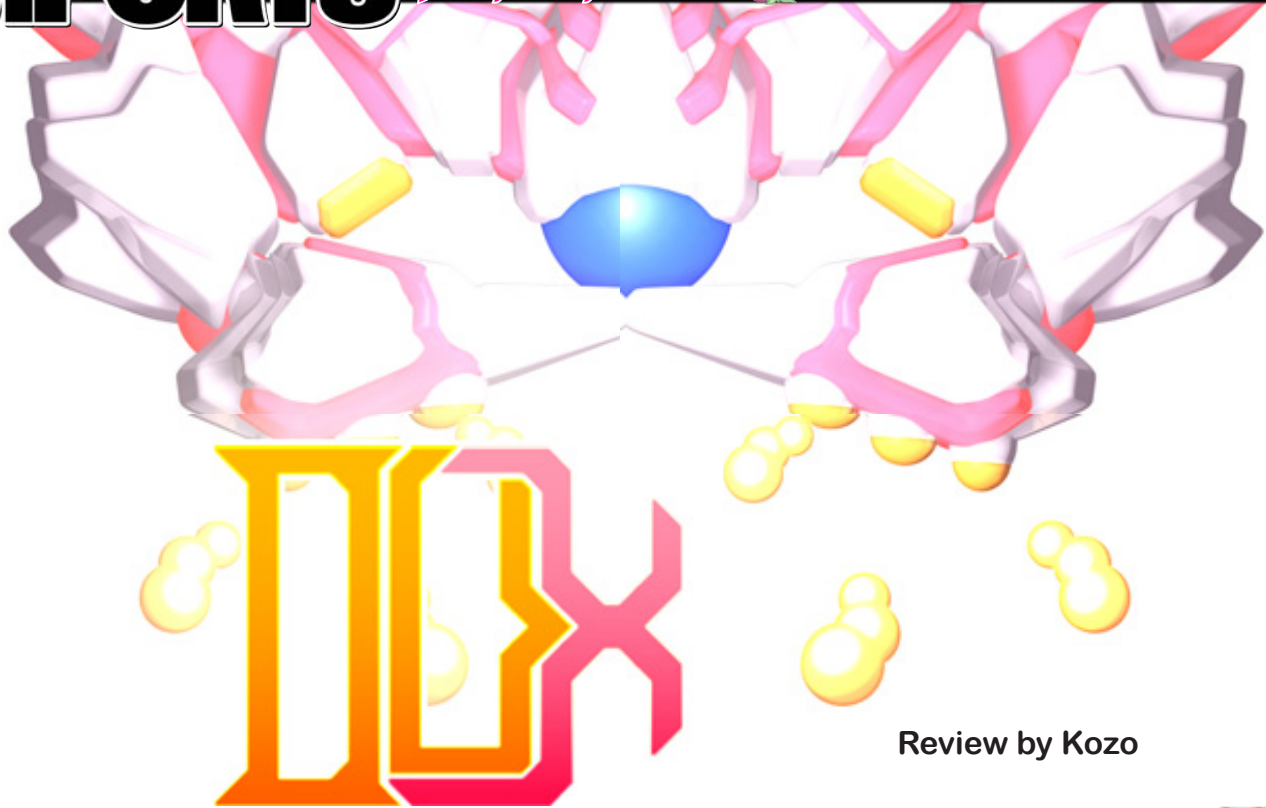
Video game music has come a long way in the past 25 years, from the simple midi sounds of the 8 bit era to the full fledged orchestrated music of modern games. Video game music spans the breath of musical genres; from original classical scores to electronic music and almost any variation in between, video game music has come full circle. As the game industry has grown so has the budget for game music, creating some of the most recognizable tunes today. From the eclectic music of *Loco Roco*, to the sweeping classical scores of *Shadow of the Colossus* and *Bioshock*, game music has something for everyone. While video game soundtracks are becoming commonly released in the US, Japan still sees a lot of great game soundtrack releases almost monthly. One of the best known games for creating music that is totally different is the *Katamari Damacy* franchise.

The *Katamari Damacy* series is known for two things, quirky gameplay and outrageously good music. The latest release in the *Katamari* series, *Katamari Tribute* (*Katamari Forever* in the US) is a compilation of past levels reworked for the Playstation 3. The gameplay and music of *Katamari Tribute* are remixed and reworked versions of levels from past *Katamari* games now in HD!

The *Katamari Damacy Tribute Soundtrack* features 36 tracks on 2 CD's and is a great compilation for fans of the series. For gamers who own any of the past soundtracks, or fans that love *Katamari* series fantastic music, the soundtrack is a must buy. With great remixes of songs from the past games, the music ranges from slow organic melodies to upbeat electronic rhythms, the music has something for everyone.

For the game's soundtrack, producer Kazuhito Udetzu and sound director Yuu Miyake selected songs from past games that were fan favorites or were special to the games production staff for well known artists to remix. Among the artists selected was Japanese chip-tune trio, YMCK (the same group that did the wonderful soundtrack for the DSiware game, *Art Style: PICTOBITS*) who remixed *A Crimson Rose* and *a Gin & Tonic* from the series' first game, adding a new genre to the *Katamari* franchise; chiptunes. The soundtrack also brought back past artists to remix their own original tracks, adding a new layer to the songs that is simply dazzling to hear.

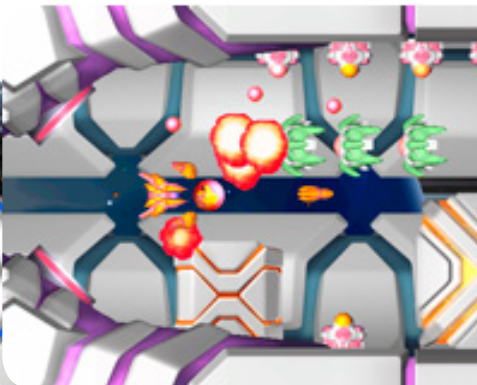




Review by Kozo

For a console that just celebrated its 10 year anniversary, the Sega Dreamcast is anything but dead! With a diehard handful of devoted developers still slowly releasing homebrew games for the decade old console, the Doujin games scene is still alive and well on the Dreamcast. Partly due to the Dreamcast's easy to break copy protection software and the supportive fanbase willing to encourage new games at a decent price, the latest Dreamcast game to see a disc based release is **DUX**, a 2D shooter from the team at HUCAST.net. **DUX** is the second 2D shooter from the NG:DEV.TEAM and HUCAST.net, following their multiplatform release of **LAST HOPE** in 2006 for the NeoGeo AES, NeoGeo CD and the Dreamcast. While **LAST HOPE** was criticized for its hard to distinguish bullets, **DUX** seems to have fixed this issue and is a great straight forward shooter.

DUX is a challenging shooter that boasts six stages that take a fair amount of time to work through. With an emphasis on dodging to navigate through the level while shooting only the enemies that block your path, it's a nice change of pace from your average shooter. **DUX** has multiple stage checkpoints within each stage, making the challenging portions of each stage easier to manage in small chunks of difficult gameplay. **DUX** is a very straight forward game; there are no unlockables, no bonus features and no mini games, just good old 2D side scrolling shooting. The player starts with six lives and has 3 continues to pass the games tough six levels. While some gamers might protest that the game only has an 'arcade' type mode, **DUX** does have some interesting options for the inquiring gamer to play around with.

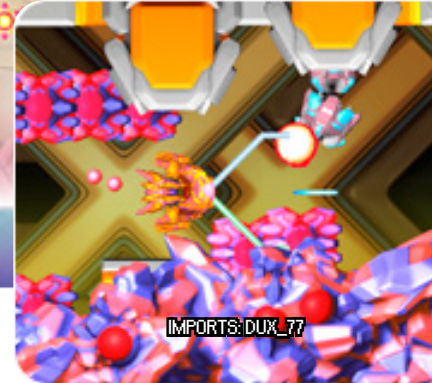


In the 'Options' menu accessible from the game's main menu after loading, the player has the option to change the 'Visibility' to 3 different settings. These settings change the appearance of the objects parallax scrolling behind the action in the actual game. Select the "Moderate" setting and there is a ton of action going on that definitely increases the games difficulty by having lots of objects can distract the player and cause them to lose a life. Select the "High" option and the game is very balanced for most shoot'em up fans to enjoy. For those looking to just have a good time and clear the game, the "Perfect" option is the one they want. The "Perfect" option removes all of the objects from the background and replaces it with a simple white background, making navigating the play field a lot easier. The inclusion of these different settings is a neat feature to play around with and add a little bit of replayability to the game.

The player can also change the games orientation from 'horizontal' to 'vertical' in the 'Controls' section of the 'Options' menu. This actually changes the game significantly and while the levels are the same length, the game does play a lot differently as a vertical shooter, further adding to the game's replayability. While this sounds like a tacky change in gameplay, it is definitely a big change to the game and is worth trying out a few times. While **DUX** may seem to be a standalone release on a 10 year old console, there is a lot of fun hidden for those willing to give it a try.

The art style and graphics of **DUX** are truly shocking to look at on the Dreamcast. The sprites are bright and vivid, the colors are rich and deep, and the art style really blends with the games color palette. **DUX** is visually impressive with a lot of action going on (as long as the "Visibility" is set to "Moderate") and this will make any gamer walking by stop and take a look at what's happening onscreen. The enemies and bosses are interesting to look at making the game really stand out with a unique and attention grabbing visual presence. While the games graphics are really impressive, the games soundtrack seems to have not reached the same level as the graphics. While it's an enjoyable enough to listen to, it seems way too uneventful for a shooter. With relatively smooth electronic music as its soundtrack, the onscreen action doesn't seem to match the smooth easy beats. The tempo seems a little slow at times and the almost ambient sounds don't match with the games high tempo action. It's a soundtrack that services the game well, but doesn't stand out enough to really add a great deal to the gameplay experience. The remix soundtrack that is available for **DUX** really should have been included in the game; it's a bit more upbeat and would have added a bit more to the game than the original soundtrack.

Overall, **DUX** is a very enjoyable game to play; with impressive visuals, a fair amount of stylish options to change, and the fact that it's a new game on a 10 year old Sega console, make it a great game for shooter fans and Dreamcast enthusiasts alike. While it essentially features an 'arcade' mode that is fun enough to play, **DUX** still has some inventive options for those willing to dig around a bit. Add in the fact that the game is region free making importing a snap and you've got an enjoyable experience for the inquiring gamer. While the game will give a lot of fun gameplay at first, overtime the game is a bit of a standalone release, but really it isn't all that different from the numerous arcade shooter ports on the Dreamcast already. For anyone looking to have fun reliving the heyday Dreamcast shooters, **DUX** is a very good start that in the end won't disappoint.





JAPAN'S DOUJIN SOFT KEEP 2D GAMES ALIVE

by Kozo and Taragan

Independent video games offer gamers a chance to try genres' that are all but forgotten by the modern games' industry or genres that aren't something most mainstream gamers would take an interest in. In Japan, the independent games scene is all about Doujin games (Doujin Soft) or 'fan games' that cater to gamers with specific tastes. Doujin games are a true outlet for gamers looking to find something different from what appears on the 3 major video game consoles of the current generation.

While the independent games market is growing in the US with events like Penny Arcade's PAX10 competition bringing independent games to the public, Japan's fan games (Doujin soft) scene is a lot different. In Japan there are two types of Doujin soft; totally free games that can be downloaded and played at no cost, and commercially sold versions which usually include demos for gamers to try before purchasing. Doujin soft games are commonly genres with dedicated fanbases willing to support titles that cater to a particular group's preference for games not commonly made regularly by the modern games industry.



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Doujin soft games include dating games, "Eroge" (or Hentai in the West) games that cater to adults, to the substantial emphasis on 2D games like fighters, shooters and traditional RPG's that have all but disappeared from the modern market. These games are also a lot more feasible for one person or a small team to develop without much difficulty. Doujin soft games also run the breadth of the development process, from one person responsible for programming, graphics and music development, to large teams that make a game in short periods of time by having specialized areas of expertise.

Doujin soft designer Kenta Cho is a great example of a one man team that creates games fairly regularly and offers them all for free on his website (http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~cs8k-cyu/index_e.html) with no cost to the gamer. Cho not only programs the games, but also does all the graphics, music, and testing himself. Kenta Cho has taken his love for playing Shmups and turned it in to a hobby of creating free shooters for fellow gamers to enjoy. With downloadable games available for a lot of different platforms including Windows, the XBOX 360 (XNA) BANDAI's Wonderswan handheld on top of a lot of different programming languages like Flash and Java, Cho provides gamers with a lot of video games for free.

Doujin soft designers that give away their games can also make the jump to the retail market if given the chance and the desire. Bandai's Wonderswan handheld had its own official hobbyist development kit, the WonderWitch, which gave gamers the chance to become designers themselves, programming games for the handheld. One such WonderWitch game, **Judgement**

Silversword made the jump to an official retail release in Japan. **Judgement Silversword** is definitely the best homebrew Wonderswan game ever. The bullet hell shooter was inspired by Treasure's **Radiant Silvergun**, one of the most sought after titles for the Sega Saturn in Japan.

Winner of the WWGP 2001 WonderWitch programming contest, **Judgement Silversword** saw a limited production run of a few thousand copies and was sold in retail stores in Japan. The retail edition of the game is called **Judgement Silversword - Rebirth Edition**. The first print run quickly sold out and soon after used copies of the game quickly jumped to prices over \$200 in Akihabara, the gaming capital of Tokyo. A second print run by publisher HFP caused the price to temporarily dip, but as the legend of **Judgement Silversword** has grown so has the price!

Collector's Alert: There is an easy way to distinguish between the first and second print runs of **Judgement Silversword - Rebirth Edition**. The second edition bears the HFP logo on the front of the box.

Judgement Silversword is a technical marvel. Spanning a whopping 30 levels, **Judgement Silversword** pushes the diminutive Wonderswan's processing power to the max as it often handles more than 100 particles on the screen. Although said to be inspired by **Radiant Silvergun**, **Judgement Silversword** strikes a strong resemblance to **Recca Summer Carnival '92** on the Famicom, in game mechanics, presentation and audio.

While many Doujin soft games don't see a console release, a few do. Dedicated development teams spend countless hours making great games. Long dead consoles still get a few new games each year published independently of the modern game market. Games like **DUX**, a 2D shooter from Germany for the Sega Dreamcast, was published in July 2009, almost 10 years after the consoles launch. Even the Atari Lynx handheld got its own homebrew game this year, **Zaku**, a fast paced horizontal shooter. While the Doujin soft market is a Japanese phenomenon, the impact is felt around the world by small groups of dedicated fan developers that make these games happen. With large companies like Microsoft opening the doors for independent game development with XNA Game Studio, the US market might start to catch up with the Japanese tradition. XNA games can be played on Windows, the Xbox 360 and Microsoft's new digital media player, the Zune HD. Hopefully more companies see the potential in having fan made games on home consoles that cater to gamers who like something a little different next to the big budget titles of the current generation. The Xbox Live Community Games program is also a step on the right direction for small developers to showcase great games that would otherwise get little notice by the mainstream gaming crowd.






by Goban

Irozuki Tingle no Koi no Balloon Trip

Finally, after two long years of waiting, Hyrule's famous green-clad hero is back! No, we're not talking about that scrawny mute elf kid. We are of course referring to the **Zelda** universe's famous resident map maker and creepy rupee hoarder, Tingle! After his successful debut as a title character in **Freshly-Picked Tingle's Rosy Rupeeland**, Tingle is back to haunt our nightmares in a new DS game: **Irozuki Tingle no Koi no Balloon Trip**.

In **Irozuki Tingle**, or "Ripening Tingle's Balloon Trip of Love", you take control of the green machine as he trades his rupee addiction for something more heartwarming, true love. The game's premise is pretty straightforward: Tingle must escape from the inside of a self-help dating book that he bought off of a late night infomercial by finding a princess to dance with. Rather standard stuff really, we were hoping that Nintendo would come up with a more zany storyline properly befitting Tingle's personality.

Along the way, Tingle meets up with three companions seemingly plucked straight from the land of Oz, each with unique abilities that will help Tingle find the Wiz.....er, the princess. Tingle's new friends are Kakashi, a tiny scarecrow who can squeeze into tight spaces; Buriki, a robotic woman from space who uses her cold logic to solve tough puzzles; and Lion, a cleverly named lion who uses his brute strength to clear obstacles. Dogging their footsteps is the mysterious Segare, who wants the princess for himself.



Irozuki Tingle's gameplay is very simplistic, a point and click (or in this case, tap) adventure. You will spend most of your time collecting and using various objects in order to solve puzzles and choosing the correct dialogue options with NPCs to progress through the pages of the book. Romance is also an important aspect of the game as Tingle will need to build the "love meter" of a handful of women either by sweet talking them or buying them various gifts from an aging Cupid called Loveya. (Think of **Irozuki Tingle** as **Adventure** meets **Myst** meets a Japanese dating sim.)

Despite its simple gameplay **Irozuki Tingle** is a blast to play. Tingle finds himself in a series of increasingly bizarre situations and the game continues **Rose Rupeeland's** tradition of absurd humor. The visuals are bright and cartoony, exactly what you would expect from a Tingle game (although a few times you will run into a buff Cho Aniki style version of Tingle that you will wish you could forget forever).

Unfortunately for non-Japanese speakers, **Irozuki Tingle** is very text-heavy. And although the game is very forgiving (it's nearly impossible to actually lose or die), not being able to understand what is going on will sap almost all of the humor and fun out of Tingle's adventure.

Sadly, most American gamers have never had the chance to experience the joy of being Tingle as his first DS adventure was never localized in the States. Nintendo believed that our gentle American spirits were just not ready to step into Tingle's green fairy shoes. To add insult to injury, European gamers soon recieved an English language port of the game, smugly lording their good fortune over their non-PAL compatriots.

It looks like it will be no different with **Balloon Trip of Love**. No plans have been made for a US release, so we can only hope that Nintendo of Europe bails us out once again with an English language version.





On the Download

Not Diablo.



Torchlight

<http://www.torchlightgame.com> • \$20



Developer: Runic Games • Genre: Action RPG
Release Date: 10/27/2009 • # Players: 1

There's a mining town on the edge of a mountain and it's got problems, in the form of an ancient godstirring up the monsters that dwell in the endless caverns. That's a problem for the town of Torchlight but just the ticket for a wandering hero (and AI pet sidekick) looking to make a name for him or herself. There are three characters to choose from, specializing in magic, melee, or distance attacks, each with its own skill tree. Dungeons go down, experience goes up, and the sun rises while you wonder how an entire night passed in what seemed like five minutes.

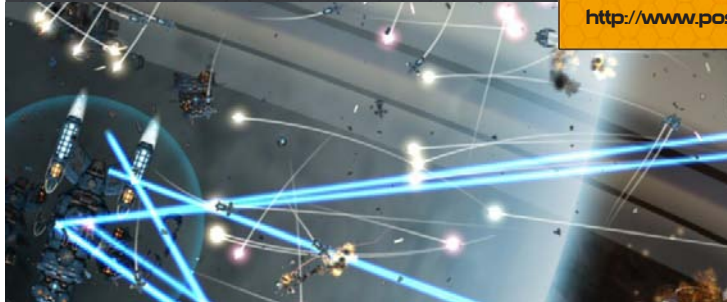
What makes *Torchlight* work is how one action leads to another. It's basically *Diablo*, designed by members of the *Diablo* and *Diablo II* staff, and the simple, addictive formula has only seen a few streamlining tweaks. Killing monsters leads to loot, good loot leads back to town to have some enchantments added and maybe put a stat-enhancing gem in an empty socket, and new equipment needs to be tested, so it's back to the dungeon where the endless cycle of kill/reward effortlessly drags you along.

The most notable addition to the gameplay is the pet, a cat or dog that can carry extra items and even be sent back to town to sell them for you. The pet levels as you do, can be customized with two rings and a necklace, and even be assigned two spells. It's a very helpful feature, and adds a necessary touch of personality as well. The game is filled with little touches that enhance the already polished gameplay, leading to endless hours cheerfully spent exploring the furthest reaches of *Torchlight*.

By: James • Score: 4.5 of 5

Gratuitous Space Battles

<http://www.positech.co.uk/> • \$20



Developer: Positech Games • Genre: Space Battles
Release Date: 11/04/2009 • # Players: 1

Gratuitous Space Battles, aside from having one of the best names for a game ever, is a cool little strategy title with a unique hook. You're put in the role of a fleet commander, but it's your job to set up the conditions for victory rather than fight. Ship design, weapon and gadget loadout, fleet configuration, ship strategies, and much more are all at your fingertips, but once the battle begins it's hands-off time. The fleet acts as ordered to the best

of its equipment's abilities, desperately trying to eradicate the enemy in an orgy of lasers, missiles, and plasma set against the interplanetary vistas of outer space. The 2D battles are epic confrontations of ships ranging from small fighters to huge dreadnaughts, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Winning battles earns Honor, which can be spent on new goodies, and the less power used in a battle the more Honor earned. This makes winning battles

with style pay off, leading to some very deep strategizing as you try to wring the most effect from the least output. Then the battle begins, and all you can do is sit and watch as the fleets tear each other to ribbons in an awesome, possibly even gratuitous, display of space combat. *Gratuitous Space Battles* has strategy and destruction in equal measure. What more could you want?

By: James • Score: 4 of 5

Echoes+

Xbox 360 Indie Games • 240 points (\$3)



Developer: Binary Zoo • Genre: Twin-Stick Shooter
Release Date: 10/18/2009 • # Players: 1

How many twin-stick shooters does one planet need? When they're of the quality of *Echoes+*, the answer can only be "lots". *Echoes+* puts the player in a small circular ship amidst what start out as a load of floating vector asteroids, adding more and more enemies and enemy types to the mix as the levels seamlessly progress. Firepower slowly evolves from pea-shooter into "mega-death for all" as the screen gets more and more hectic, in standard twin-stick tradition, but *Echoes+* isn't about redefining the genre so much as it is doing it well. The pressure builds at a steady pace as the screen rumbles to life while huge suns and



black holes get pummeled into oblivion, and there's always the hope for a health pickup to replenish your single life's shield as you hang on for dear life. If more is needed, there are multiple game modes and non-Achievements for each to chase after. *Echoes+* is packed with content, all of it fun, and exactly the kind of thing Indie Games needs more of to be taken seriously.

By: James • Score: 4 of 5

Bookworm Adventures Volume 2

http://www.popcap.com • \$20



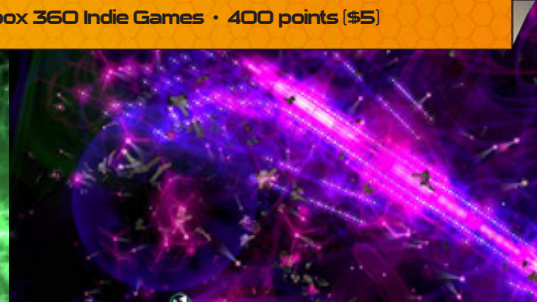
Developer: Popcap • Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: 7/30/2009 • # Players: 1

When making a sequel it's important to remember that any change needs to be an improvement. *Bookworm Adventures Volume 2* is a good sequel in most ways, but has one tiny tweak that instantly makes it less than its prequel. It follows the same basic formula, with the bookworm Lex fighting enemies by spelling words made from a four by four grid of random letters. The longer a word is the more damage it does, and big words also earn a gem tile that causes a status effect when used. Lex can now equip two items and a companion, with the items having a constant effect and the companion helping out every four turns. The problem is that enemy skills run in themes, and every few levels you'll go up against creatures that turn some of your tiles into difficult letters like J, V, and X, making it impossible to hold back letters for a major attack. While not all enemies can do this, every time one can it becomes just a little easier to play something else. Which is a shame, because the rest of *Bookworm Adventures 2* is as fun and addictive as its incredibly enjoyable prequel.

By: James • Score: 3.5 of 5

Beat Hazard

Xbox 360 Indie Games • 400 points (\$5)



Developer: Cold Beam Games • Genre: Twin-Stick Shooter
Release Date: 10/30/2009 • # Players: 1-2

Music game? Check! Twin-stick shooter? Check! Hyper-spastic light show caused by pulsing arcs of fire and the twinkly glowing remains of an unending stream of cannon fodder? Check, check, and oh dear god yes check! *Beat Hazard* is a straightforward twin-stick shooter that grabs music off any device tied into the

network to create levels. Enemy patterns, shot strength, boss appearances, and a light show to make your eyeballs pulse happily in their sockets are all dictated by the music, taking what's actually a pretty simple shooter and elevating it to endless playability. There are two bars at the bottom of the screen, Volume and Power,

and both work together to define your ship's shooting effectiveness. Destroyed enemies drop powerups, and once the bars are full the ship enters Beat Hazard mode, laying down pulsing arcs of light that throb in tune to the music. The soundtrack is completely up to you, and it's great fun to see which tunes yield

the best levels. The only real gripe is a shortage of enemy types, but most of them are there simply to add to the visual overload when they get destroyed. *Beat Hazard* is a brilliant idea with a decent execution, worth playing now while praying that the sequel goes for broke.

By: James • Score: 4 of 5

Exhumed by James



NON-LINEAR GAMING: THE EARLY YEARS

Tanks are awesome. They're big, tough, destructive, and fitted with giant guns. What's not to love? Sure, in real life they're clunky, sitting ducks for air assault, and always need a mechanic handy, but when a tank dreams it dreams of being in *Granada*.

Granada is one of the earliest games from the prolific developer Wolfteam, best known in the US for their work on Genesis and Sega CD. It originally hit Japan on the Sharp X68000 and quickly got a Genesis port, but with the cutscenes removed. *Granada's* story (make up your own if you like) is of a small tank with huge firepower driving through open levels shooting like mad, with the primary goal being to clear all enemy installations to trigger the boss fight. The required targets are indicated on a radar in the lower-right screen indicating their position, although not the path there. The levels tend to be labyrinthine, but a little exploration will show that you can go wherever you like and tackle the main targets in whatever order makes the most sense to you. Figuring out how to get there will take a bit of exploration, but the (mostly) nonlinear levels are filled with enemy tanks and gun turrets so there's plenty to do on the way, such as shoot the living hell out of everything that moves.



And that's what makes *Granada* such a great game. It takes the basics of the versatile, but they need that area's open spaces to be effective. Even more helpful is the shield, which attaches to the tank's front to block bullets and can be sent out to shoot radial streams of firepower. The level it's found on has cliffs with enemies perched on top, so it's important to learn how to use it properly.



A LITTLE EXPLORATION NEVER HURT ANYONE.



EACH LEVEL IS COMPLETELY UNIQUE FROM THE OTHERS.

and the powerups are tuned to match the challenge. Each area requires its own tactics, especially seeing as while the enemies are found in the same section of the level, they don't have preset movement patterns. Memorization, reflex, and proper usage of the tank's abilities (including strafing) are necessary in equal amounts if you want to not end up a sad little pile of scrap. *Granada* has fantastic level design, creative challenges, great boss fights, and is the kind of classic action epic that made the Genesis great.

The tank comes with two guns and a powerup specific to the level it's found in. The primary gun is a fast shot that makes up for its weakness by sheer volume of bullets, and the secondary gun shoots a single, powerful shot that also pushes the tank back a bit. The bonus weapons, however, are where technique come into play. The reflector is a spinning square that bounces bullets, useful in the cramped alleyways of the city levels it's found in. The homing missiles found on level two are much more



TANKS ARE AWESOME.



CREATIVE CHALLENGES MAKE GRANADA STAND OUT IN ITS GENRE.



Platform: Genesis
 Publisher: Renovation
 Developer: Wolfteam
 Release Date: 1990
 Genre: Free-roaming shooter
 Category: My Tank Is Fight!
 # of Players: 1

Games America forgot



Sony had something to prove in the early days of the PS1, and while this is understandable for a new console developer, it still resulted in collateral damage.

In the U.S., this meant that it was all 3D, all the time, and if a game wasn't packed with polygons it wasn't seeing a release. (Yes, *Beyond the Beyond*, but that was more coma simulator than video game.) *Gunner's Heaven* was polygon-free, so unwelcome on these shores. In Europe, however, it was released as *Rapid Reload*.

Rapid Reload is a side-scrolling 2D run and gun shooter. Alex and Ruka are chasing after the mystical stone Valkyri, fighting the Pumpkin Head gang every step of the way, and it's going to take huge amounts of firepower to get it. You choose either Alex or Ruka at game's start and blast endless waves of goons, bosses, creatures, and robots over five levels plus a final epic boss battle. Each level is divided into three sections, divided by two mid-boss battles, before facing off against a Pumpkin Head Gang leader piloting a big-ass mech. Most importantly, it can't be overstated how badly *Rapid Reload* wants to be *Gunstar Heroes*.

It's not a bad ambition, honestly. No other game has done run & gun as well as the original Genesis *Gunstar Heroes*, so if someone wants to send it through a copier that's fine. *Rapid Reload* isn't as good as its inspiration, of course, but that simply means it's quite fun rather than one of the greatest games of its era. Still, the similarities can be a little overwhelming at times. The graphic style, heavy use of boss fights, weapon types, the ability to grab and throw the smaller enemies, and even an auto-scrolling mine level and side-scrolling shooter section aren't exactly subtle homages.

On the plus side, it's a formula that works. There's usually a fair number of things on screen to shoot and it all blows up real good. Each weapon has its place, and the power-up method works particularly well. Certain enemies drop jewels, with the smallest being worth one second and the largest worth 25 seconds of power-up time. The jewels stack, always adding time to the power-up clock and even carrying from one level to the next, but because later sections are stingy with the drops it's never a good idea to slow down. Having an electric homing gun that can send out three tendrils of zappy death instead of just one, or a Fire gun that gives a large blast radius when its shots land, makes all the difference when the tough enemies show up in large numbers. Death, of course, resets the timer to zero.

Death becomes less likely with practice, however, because like most games of this genre *Rapid Reload* is heavily pattern-based. Bosses follow the same routine every time, so even a bad run to the end of a section can be salvaged by a good memory, at least in the beginning. Five levels doesn't seem like a lot, but the difficulty curve takes a sharp spike in the middle of level four and never stops climbing. Still, if pattern-memorization is your thing and you blow through *Rapid Reload* without taking a hit, you can always play as Ruka. Alex basically overwhelms his enemies with sheer power, but Ruka, in addition to having four completely different guns to cycle through, has noticeably less punch behind her shots. Not only do enemies take more hits to go down, but the extra time it takes comes right off the power-up clock. Alex is Normal difficulty, Ruka is Hard.

Rapid Reload isn't a genre-defining classic by any stretch of the imagination, but it is a good fun bit of shooting that deserved better than to be left behind. There's always a place for bright, colorful, side-scrolling mayhem, and *Rapid Reload* provides that as capably today as it did when it came out... (double-checks Wiki... 14 years ago!? Seriously!?) ...in 1995.

Nope, I totally don't see the resemblance to Gunstar Heroes.



If I can't beat a kid like this, us Pumpkin Heads will be in disgrace!



Yeah... wouldn't want that... With names like that, I'd think twice about messing with them.



Lasers pewpewpew

Forget Japan, this is European and fan-translated gaming. The English stuff you've never heard about. The Games America forgot.

Publisher: SCEI * Developer: MediaVision Entertainment * Genre: Run & Gun * Category: Not Gunstar Heroes * # Players: 1 * Release Date: 9/16/1995

Rapid Reload by James



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