

MADNESS BREWING

WEEKLY VIDEO GAME NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 20, 2010 — VOL. 4

So Much For PC Gaming Being Dead...Starcraft II Sells Millions

The death knell has been cast upon the PC as a major gaming platform for some time now. However, 2010 may be changing all that. It used to be that the PC market was home to all the games that were too powerful for the home consoles. Now that the home consoles are more powerful than most home computers, the feeling is that PC games don't really have much of a place anymore. However, a bunch of games that aren't easy to replicate on a home console have been making waves in the PC gaming waters and people are starting to think that PC gaming may be nearing a renaissance.

The first part of the PC gaming rebirth is mostly thanks to the amazing sales of *StarCraft II*. The game not only sold millions across the globe in its first week of release but, as of this writing, has sold several million units in North America. To put things in perspective, it outsold the top ten console games combined...for the last four weeks combined. While it has been a slow couple of weeks for console games (which is usually the case during the summer), there was one major high profile release in *NCAA Football 11*; so it's not like *StarCraft* was competing solely again *Just Dance*.

However, beyond *StarCraft*, the future looks quite bright for PC gaming. *Civilization V* is looking to be one of the best titles on any platform this year and possibly the best game yet in the amazing series. 2K Games is being very smart with the release of *Civilization V* in that it won't require a super-powerful computer to run the game. While the game is a turn-based

strategy and shouldn't require a huge rig to play, you never know when a PC game developer might begin to feel a little *Crysis*-envy and decide to make the graphics as detailed as possible.

So the PC now has two must-own games that practically anyone can who has a decent computer can actually play. Even if someone doesn't have a decent computer, you could go to any electronics store and buy a \$300 computer and be able to play either *StarCraft II* and *Civilization V*.

After *Civilization V*, the future continues to look good for the PC. *Torchlight 2* was announced for a 2011 release with plans for online co-op gameplay to be an integral part of gameplay, it could become one of the biggest franchises on the PC. Oddly enough, a game that *Torchlight* borrows quite a bit from, *Diablo*, is finally seeing its third instalment released in 2011.

Some may roll their eyes because it seems that the only games that are doing well on the PC are strategy games but every platform needs its staple. The Xbox 360 relies on sports and FPS games just as much as PC gamers rely on strategy games for their platform of choice.

The only major problem is that there aren't any new franchises emerging; the games selling well are all sequels. There seems to be a lack of support for new IPs. While digital distributors are doing ok with indie games, with the odd exception (e.g. *Torchlight*) nothing has caught the eyes of the masses. A few new franchises on the PC may make it a worthy competitor against the consoles

IN THIS ISSUE

Video Game Reviews

- Crazy Taxi (Dreamcast)
- Galaga (Arcade)
- Golden Axe (Genesis)
- Gadius (NES)
- Mario Kart 64 (Nintendo 64)
- Mario Tennis (Nintendo 64)

Other Features

- Top Games of February 2010
- Video Game Accessories
- Part I: Official NES Products

MADNESSBREWING.COM Coming Up This Week

Saturday

- Weekly Movie Newsletter
- Weekly Movie Podcast
- The A-Team (Film) Review
- Filiere 13 (Film) Review
- Get Him to the Greek (Film) Review
- Grown-Ups (Film) Review
- Robin Hood (Film) Review

Sunday

- Civilization IV (PC) Review
- In the Heat of the Night (Film) Review
- Orb 3D (NES) Review
- Zelda II: The Adventures of Link (NES) Review

Monday

- Bomberman '93 (TG-16) Review
- Tetris (PSP-Mini) Review

Slow Summer Has Cooled Console Sales Considerably

As much as PC game sales are doing well with *StarCraft* buoying that sector of the game industry, console game sales have been performing horribly. Only three major releases since the beginning of July have actually managed to sell more than 100k units in their first week of release. It's getting pretty pathetic. Luckily for the industry, help is on the way.

July opened strong with *Lego Harry Potter* selling over 100k units on both the Wii and the DS while those two SKUs plus the Xbox 360 and PS3 versions all finished in the top five of sales for the week of July 3rd according to sales tracking website VGChartz.com. The following week, *Crackdown 2* came out and sold 188k units for the Xbox 360. Then, the next week, *NCAA Football 11* came out for the PS3 and Xbox 360 and sold over 400k between the two versions.

The problem is that many of the new games are starting off strong but then quickly falling down towards the bottom of the sales charts or not even selling all that well to begin with. *Dragon Quest IX* sold 85k units in its first week of release (against *NCAA Football 11*) but quickly disappeared from the sales charts. In fact, the only DS game that has seen an appearance in the top ten since *Dragon Quest's* release was *Pokemon HeartGold/SoulSilver*.

On the other hand, quasi-high profile titles like Activision's *Singularity* and 505 Games's *Naughty Bear* have found quite an audience with the dust that their collecting from sitting on the shelves for so long. Too many titles that have been released during the last month and a half have become destined for the bargain bin.

Games aren't selling for three reasons: the economy hasn't improved as quickly as people had hoped for in the United States and people are starting to hold off on unnecessary purchases like video game, the summer is never a good time for

video game sales to do well, and there are not that many major games coming out that people want.

The first one is a scary reason. Scary because it's true and also scary because Sony and Microsoft are hedging their bets that potential new customers are going to be willing to spend \$400 to buy into their systems with new motion controls added. If people are apprehensive about buying software for their pre-existing systems, they are definitely not going to splurge and buy a brand new system.

Summer has also traditionally been a dead period for the video game industry. Generally, people hold off on buying games during the summer and pick up the titles that they've missed in the fall. The biggest reason is that most people go away on vacations during the summer and they tend not to take their consoles away with them. Kids still get sent away to summer camp for weeks at a time so there's no reason for the parents to shell out a bunch of cash on games during the summer period. However, people will pick up the games they've missed later on as long as they're worth playing. The original *Bioshock* game did very well despite being released in the middle of the summer in 2007. Sales were a little slow at first but picked up considerably in the fall as hype around the game grew and it eventually became a must-have game to pick up during the holiday season.

The third reason makes this whole problem a non-issue. Companies aren't even trying during the summer period. There are only three games coming out at retail for the Xbox 360 this month. One of them, EA's *Madden NFL 11* will most likely sell a million units in its first week of release (combined with PS3 sales of the game). The other two titles are significant titles to the Xbox 360 2010 line-up: *Kane & Lynch 2* and *Mafia II*. Nothing will sell if there's nothing to sell in the first place.

The sales charts have been quite boring as of late with titles that have been staples in the charts for the last few months moving around like a game of musical chairs. It's kind of

scary to see that the second best selling game for the latest chart available is *New Super Mario Bros. Wii*; a game that came out over half-a-year ago and isn't even the most recent Mario title. It's not alone as five other titles in the top ten have been out for over six months.

The gaming industry needs help. Thankfully there are some big guns in the nearing their release that will help boost sales. However, if people are still concerned about spending money in the near future will we see lower than expected sales on sure-fire hits too? The rest of 2010 could be a very bumpy ride from here on out.

Top Ten Games (and New Releases) Chart for July 3rd

(All data is from VGChartz.com)

Rank	Title	System	Weekly Sales	Weeks in Release
1	Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4	Wii	134k	new
2	Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4	DS	107k	new
3	Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4	Xbox 360	87k	new
4	Super Mario Galaxy 2	Wii	60k	6
5	Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4	PS3	58k	new
6	Red Dead Redemption	Xbox 360	56k	7
7	New Super Mario Bros. Wii	Wii	47k	33
8	2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa	Xbox 360	46k	10
9	Transformers: War for Cybertron	Xbox 360	45k	2
10	Wii Fit Plus	Wii	43k	39
16	DeathSmiles	Xbox 360	31k	new
18	Sniper: Ghost Warrior	Xbox 360	30k	new
19	Sin and Punishment: Star Successor	Wii	29k	new
21	Singularity	Xbox 360	29k	new
27	Naughty Bear	Xbox 360	21k	new
28	Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4	PSP	20k	new
31	Singularity	PS3	18k	new
38	Trinity Universe	PSP	14k	new
44	Naughty Bear	PS3	13k	new
69	The Last Airbender	Wii	8k	new
82	The Last Airbender	Wii	7k	new
151	Hot Shots Tennis: Get a Grip	PSP	5k	new

Top Ten Games (and New Releases) Chart for July 10th

(All data is from VGChartz.com)

Rank	Title	System	Weekly Sales	Weeks in Release
1	Crackdown 2	Xbox 360	189k	new
2	Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4	Wii	76k	2
3	Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4	DS	51k	2
4	Super Mario Galaxy 2	Wii	48k	7
5	Red Dead Redemption	Xbox 360	48k	8
6	New Super Mario Bros. Wii	Wii	40k	34
7	Wii Fit Plus	Wii	39k	40
8	Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4	Xbox 360	37k	2
9	Just Dance	Wii	37k	34
10	Pokemon HeartGold/SoulSilver	DS	32k	17
19	Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3 Portable	PSP	22k	new

Top Ten Games (and New Releases) Chart for July 17th

(All data is from VGChartz.com)

Rank	Title	System	Weekly Sales	Weeks in Release
1	NCAA Football 11	Xbox 360	227k	new
2	NCAA Football 11	PS3	185k	new
3	Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels of the Starry Skies	DS	85k	new
4	Crackdown 2	Xbox 360	69k	2
5	Red Dead Redemption	Xbox 360	50k	9
6	Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4	Wii	45k	3
7	Super Mario Galaxy 2	Wii	42k	8
8	New Super Mario Bros. Wii	Wii	36k	35
9	Just Dance	Wii	35k	35
10	Red Dead Redemption	PS3	35k	9
29	NCAA Football 11	PS2	12k	new



**NEW PODCAST
EVERY TUESDAY**

Top Ten Games (and New Releases) Chart for July 24th

(All data is from VGChartz.com)

Rank	Title	System	Weekly Sales	Weeks in Release
1	NCAA Football 11	Xbox 360	78k	2
2	NCAA Football 11	PS3	62k	2
3	Crackdown 2	Xbox 360	48k	3
4	Red Dead Redemption	Xbox 360	44k	10
5	Super Mario Galaxy 2	Wii	39k	9
6	Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels of the Starry Skies	DS	38k	2
7	New Super Mario Bros. Wii	Wii	33k	36
8	Red Dead Redemption	PS3	32k	10
9	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2	Xbox 360	32k	37
10	Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4	DS	32k	3
18	Arc Rise Fantasia	Wii	22k	new
26	Hidden Objects: Mystery Stories	DS	14k	new
30	Darkstar One: Broken Alliance	Xbox 360	12k	new
88	I Spy: Universe	DS	6k	new
142	Little League World Series Baseball 2010	Xbox 360	5k	new
187	Little League World Series Baseball 2010	PS3	4k	new

Next Week's Issue
Publication Date: August 25th, 2010

- **Feature Article:** Activision-Infinity Ward- Respawn Lovers' Quarrel
- Video Game Sales for Aug. 14th, 2010
- Nintendo Accessories: Part 2
- Top Games From March 2010
- Civilization IV (PC) Review
- Orb 3D (NES) Review
- Zelda II: The Adventures of Link (NES) Review
- Other assorted junk



**NEW PODCAST
EVERY MONDAY**

Top Ten Games (and New Releases) Chart for July 31st

(All data is from VGChartz.com)

Rank	Title	System	Weekly Sales	Weeks in Release
1	NCAA Football 11	Xbox 360	38k	new
2	Super Mario Galaxy 2	Wii	37k	10
3	Red Dead Redemption	Xbox 360	37k	11
4	New Super Mario Bros. Wii	Wii	33k	37
5	Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4	DS	33k	5
6	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2	Xbox 360	32k	38
7	Just Dance	Wii	30k	37
8	Wii Fit Plus	Wii	30k	43
9	Red Dead Redemption	PS3	30k	11
10	Crackdown 2	Xbox 360	28k	4
18	BlazBlue: Continuum Shift	Xbox 360	21k	new
23	BlazBlue: Continuum Shift	PS3	18k	new
75	Clash of the Titans: The Videogame	Xbox 360	7k	new
102	Disney Guilty Party	Wii	5k	new
132	Clash of the Titans: The Videogame	PS3	5k	new

Top Ten Games (and New Releases) Chart for August 7th

(All data is from VGChartz.com)

Rank	Title	System	Weekly Sales	Weeks in Release
1	Super Mario Galaxy 2	Wii	38k	11
2	New Super Mario Bros. Wii	Wii	31k	38
3	Wii Fit Plus	Wii	28k	44
4	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2	Xbox 360	28k	39
5	Just Dance	Wii	28k	38
6	Red Dead Redemption	Xbox 360	28k	12
7	Assassin's Creed II	Xbox 360	26k	38
8	NCAA Football 11	Xbox 360	25k	4
9	Pokemon HeartGold/SoulSilver	DS	23k	21
10	Assassin's Creed II	PS3	23k	38
70	Disney Sing It: Family Hits	Wii	6k	new
165	The Bachelor: The Videogame	Wii	4k	new

Game of the Year Candidates from February 2010

Normally at the end of the year on the site, I get together with a few friends and we come up with a top ten list of the games of the year. There are a few restrictions to be considered. Usually, there's a sales ceiling a title has to break to be considered. Even if a game is a darling of the critics, my belief is that if people don't play it, then it can't be considered one of the best of the year. It also helps remove any bias my friends and I have on titles that we may really enjoy but most people don't like. The only exception to this is downloadable titles because I can't track their sales. However, they need to get really good reviews throughout the Internet and in other forms of media before they're considered.

I've decided to start tracking the titles by month. This saves me a ton of work in November and December by spreading out the research for sales figures within the first month of a title's release. This means I won't be tracking lifetime sales anymore; only the first month. This prevents titles from the first couple of months having an advantage over titles released in late November or December (even though I would include titles in the nomination list that I felt had a strong chance at reaching the sales minimum).

Here are the titles for February 2010. I will be publishing the short list for the first months of 2010 in the newsletter every week until I've caught up. After that, it will be a monthly feature in the newsletter.

All retail titles need to have at least 150k sales in their first five weeks if they are platform exclusive (with the exception of the PSP which only needs 75k since I can't track PSN sales). Multiplatform titles require 250k sales in their first five weeks.

It's interesting to note that we're two months into 2010 (for this feature) and we've yet to see a Wii title make the list. While there have been some great titles on the retail

end, they really haven't been met with high regard from consumers. Although one of the greatest problems for games like *Red Steel 2* and *No More Heroes 2* has been the disgusting lack of marketing for these games. If Capcom or Ubisoft are unwilling to support their products, why would consumers want to take the risk?

Retail Releases

Alien vs. Predator

PS3, Xbox 360

Developed by: Platinum Games (360)

Nex Entertainment

(PS3)

Published by: Sega

Surprisingly, *Aliens vs. Predator* actually sold very well considering it has the Sega logo on the front of its box. Jokes about Sega's poor showings the last few years aside, *Aliens vs. Predator* was a solid shooter. It's not going to take any sales away from *Call of Duty* or *Halo* but it's a pretty good title with some compelling game play. It could have been worse as games based on movie franchises have always been less hit and more miss but *Aliens vs. Predator* was a fun FPS game to keep people satisfied for a while.

Bioshock 2

PS3, Xbox 360

Developed by: 2K China, 2K Marin,

Arkane Studios,

Digital Extremes

Published by: 2K Games

It's unfair to really make any major complaints about *Bioshock 2*. Much of the hype surrounding this title was based around a bunch of overhype from the previous title in the franchise. *Bioshock* had people craving more of the underwater FPS and while there was more in the second game, it felt like more of an expansion than a full fledged sequel.

However, as its own separate package, *Bioshock 2* is a great game. Even if it really doesn't revolutionize the gameplay of the first title all that much, it's still a fun game to play. The addition of multiplayer helps those

who consider single-player campaigns in FPS titles a speed-bump in the way of marathon online gaming sessions. *Bioshock 2* may have recycled a few ideas from the original but there's much more in this title than there was the first time around.

Dante's Inferno

PS3, Xbox 360

Developed by: Visceral Games

Published by: EA

It was very smart for EA to release *Dante's Inferno* shortly before the release of *God of War III*. Fans of the *God of War* were aching for the new instalment of the franchise and *Dante's Inferno* was an acceptable title for them to nibble on while waiting for the new Kratos adventure.

For those who would complain that *Dante's Inferno* should not be immediately pushed to the background and considered nothing more than a *God of War* clone are probably anti-Sony. This game is definitely a *God of War* clone and isn't as good either. Still, *Dante's Inferno* is a solid title but the only reason why this title sold as many copies as it did was because of Xbox 360 owners who couldn't buy *God of War III* when it released and PS3 owners who couldn't wait to satisfy their appetite for the major Sony franchise.

Heavy Rain

PS3

Developed by: Quantic Dream

Published by: SCEA

There is a slight majority of people who think that *Heavy Rain* is a fantastic game and are already calling it the game of the year. Then there is a large minority that believe that *Heavy Rain* is nothing more than a bunch of quick-time events with incredible graphics and a compelling story. The debate rages on between the two sides but, regardless, the title still sold a ton of copies.

It'll be interesting to see how this title fares throughout the rest of 2010; especially during the holiday season against the heavy hitters of *Halo* and *Call of Duty*. Will people still think this title is special by the end of

the year? What about five years from now? When it comes down to it, *Heavy Rain* is a really fancy interactive movie and, unless it's *Dragon's Lair*, people tend to grow less fond of titles in that genre as time goes by.

White Knight Chronicles

PS3

Developed by: Level 5, SCE Japan

Published by: SCEA

White Knight Chronicles is an example of how many analysts in the video game industry don't understand the video game industry. For the last couple of years, we've been hearing how new intellectual properties don't sell all that well their first time out unless they're marketed to death. So how do these people explain the popularity of *White Knight Chronicles*? The game sold very well in its opening month despite the fact that it's: a Japanese RPG, a new I.P., and also exclusive to the PS3 which has the smallest user base out of all the consoles.

Those picking up *White Knight Chronicles* who were expecting something along the lines of *Final Fantasy XIII* are sure to be disappointed. However, even though it's not greatest JRPG of the year, it does employ several interesting things like the avatar creator that make the game different in a genre that seems to only be about big hair and giant swords.

Downloadable Titles

Arsenal of Democracy

PC

Developed by: BL-Logic

Published by: Paradox Interactive

Unless it's called *Civilization*, PC strategy games generally don't get the respect that they deserve. *Arsenal of Democracy* is a title that flew under the radar for most and is not for everyone but those who enjoy the genre of real-time strategy war games will think that this might be one of the greatest games of all time. To put it simply, take *Axis and Allies* and make it way more complicated than it has

to be and you've got this game...although nothing is simple about *Arsenal of Democracy*.

Chime

Xbox Live Arcade

Developed by: Zoe Mode

Published by: Easy Tiger,

OneBigGame,

Valcon Games

Maybe it's just finally nice to see a puzzle game that doesn't have anything to do with matching three items of the same shape or colour. Either way, *Chime* is a lot of fun to play. Those who like jigsaw puzzles and *Tetris* will like *Chime*. It feels like something completely different in a genre that keeps recycling concepts. Another selling point for the game is its soundtrack. Even if you're not a fan of techno and the like, you're still going to enjoy the beats from *Chime*.

The Misadventures of P.B.

Winterbottom

Xbox Live Arcade

Developed by: The Odd Gentlemen

Published by: 2K Play

Xbox Live Arcade is home to many quirky platformers so it's no surprise that *The Misadventures of P.B. Winterbottom* arrived for the system in February. While it does borrow a page or two from *Braid*, the game does do some interesting things with the platforming genre and makes it feel fresh despite the fact that the game has the look of a turn-of-the-20th-century silent film. The concept of cloning oneself to get one's hands on an elusive slice of pie makes it sound like Homer Simpson created the game. Well, I guess Homer is really good at making video games because this title is fantastic.

Napoleon: Total War

PC

Developed by: The Creative

Assembly

Published by: Sega, Typhoon Games

Sega actually published two games worth buying in the same month? Just another sign that the video game industry is doomed.

Joking aside, *Napoleon: Total War* is a solid strategy title. It's almost like *Risk* with Napoleon's armies. Compared to *Arsenal of Democracy*, the game is much easier to control which may be good for some and not so good for others. Despite the fact that it looks much simpler than *Arsenal of Democracy*, *Napoleon: Total War* still stands out from many other games in the genre as providing both a decent challenge while still being fun and captivating to play

February Shortlisted Titles by Platform

Xbox 360	5
Playstation 3	5
PC	2

2010 Shortlisted Titles by Platform

Xbox 360	9
Playstation 3	9
DSi	2
PC	2

Shortlisted Titles by Publisher

2K Games	2
SCEA	2
Sega	2
EA	1
Easy Tiger	1
OneBigGame	1
Paradox Interactive	1
Typhoon Games	1
Valcon Games	1

Shortlisted Titles by Publisher

EA	3
SCEA	3
Sega	3
2K Games	2
Capcom	1
Easy Tiger	1
Nintendo	1
OneBigGame	1
Paradox Interactive	1
THQ	1
Typhoon Interactive	1
Valcon Games	1

Nintendo System Accessories Part I: Official NES Accessories

Looking back at the NES, it's easy to have fond memories of some of the many peripherals that graced the system. Everyone remembers the Zapper but most people generally have one other add-on that they really took a shine to during the 8-bit box's glory days. This article is the start of a multiple part series that will look at the various Nintendo accessories through the years. We'll start it off by looking at the ones created by Nintendo for the NES; which were generally the best ones produced for one of the most popular systems ever created.

The NES Advantage Released in 1987

The great thing about the NES was not having to waste money at the arcades anymore. Still, even though it was easier on the wallet in the long run, there were some things about the arcade that made losing stacks of quarters worth it. Generally, the feel of a cabinet's console with its large buttons and joystick was far superior to playing with a regular NES controller.

Therefore, Nintendo released the NES Advantage which basically converted the NES pad into a giant controller console. The d-pad was replaced with a joystick while the A and B buttons were made gigantic compared to the small little buttons on the standard controller. Also included on the Advantage were turbo buttons which provided a bit of a boost to gameplay for players that needed it.

While no games required the NES Advantage, it was still a popular peripheral nonetheless because it brought the full arcade experience closer to home. While it wouldn't give you an actual advantage in most games unless you employed the turbo buttons, it still made some games feel more exciting because it really gave

the feeling of playing a game on a giant console just like the arcade.

The NES Four Score/Satellite Released in 1990, 1989

Two players is fun but four players is better. Released in 1989, the NES Satellite allowed players to hook up an extra two controllers on top of the normal setup. This permitted four players to play on games that supported four-player multiplayer. The Satellite was a wireless product to a certain extent in that that the only thing that plugged into the NES was a small infrared receiver. The controller ports could be moved anywhere and would send the signal to the IR box connected to the NES. While wireless play is something that is common place today, it was a pipe dream in the late 80s. Six C-cell batteries would make sure the device had juice. However, due to the limitations of the IR technology at the time and that C-cell batteries weren't exactly cheap; the NES Satellite didn't fare so well.

The Four Score was released a year later to correct the problems that the Satellite had. It removed the wireless functionality (which wasn't a big deal anyways because people still had to have their controllers connected to the Satellite controller port box anyways). Both the Satellite and the Four Score worked well for what they were supposed to do: intense four-player action on one screen. Over 20 games supported the peripheral. That may not seem like a lot but considering that the device was released as the NES was giving up its place as Nintendo's flagship system to the Super Nintendo, it's actually a decent amount.

Notable Games:

- Bomberman II
- Gauntlet II
- NES Play Action Football
- Nintendo World Cup
- R.C. Pro Am II
- Smash TV

The NES Max Released in 1988

The NES Max almost seemed like it was from the future when it was released in 1988. It was a radical departure from the standard controllers of the day. It had features that the NES didn't even use and that players didn't know they even wanted. Yet it was still an amazing controller that was better than anything else on the market.

The Max incorporated an ergonomic design with handles on the left and the right of the controller. It made the controller much more comfortable to hold. While the SNES controller was nicer on the hands than the original NES controller, it still wasn't as easy to hold as the Max.

Another thing about the Max was that it also had a slide pad instead of a d-pad. While the NES didn't support analog control, some people swear that the slide pad on the Max makes them better at NES games. It works very much like the analog nub on the PSP although it doesn't auto center itself once the player releases it. It works great for games that require the player to navigate around a 360° field but generally there isn't much of an advantage to it as the NES didn't support analog input.

Much like the NES Advantage, there wasn't any software that was engineered solely for the Max. Also like the Advantage, the controller had turbo buttons. And just like the Advantage, it helped start fistfights during multiplayer matchups when there was only one of these special controllers to go around and the other person thought that lucky one using the controller was cheating.

The Power Pad Released in 1986/1988

Originally this was not a Nintendo-produced accessory. Bandai had released it alongside a sports video game called *Family Fun Fitness*. For one reason or another, Nintendo felt the need to buy the rights to the accessory (and the accompanying

game) and rerelease it as their own in 1988.

The forerunner to the *Dance Dance Revolution* pad, the Power Pad was the bane of many people's existence. If you were a parent, you hated it when the kids would leave it lying on the floor. If you lived in an apartment, you hated it when you were living underneath someone who felt the need to play *World Class Track Meet* for hours on end. It was the most hated peripheral by those who didn't play video games for those reasons and others.

With only half-a-dozen games in the American Power Pad library, it's wasn't exactly a common peripheral but chances are if you didn't have a Power Pad growing up, you knew someone who did. *Dance Aerobics* was *Wii Fit* way before the Wii was even a concept. Even though it wasn't as popular as some of the other accessories on the system, it still managed to become an important part of gaming history as two of the most popular gaming peripherals of all time can be traced back to the Power Pad.

Notable Games: - Dance Aerobics
- Stadium Events/
World Class Track
Meet

R.O.B. Released in 1985

The Robotic Operating Buddy (or R.O.B. for short) was released alongside the NES system as part of the deluxe package. The idea was that R.O.B. would play the game with you. It would respond to what it was seeing on screen and would take the appropriate action. The fact that it didn't trip up the NES as it was flying out of the starting gate is a miracle in itself.

The idea behind R.O.B. was to create something that would make the NES stand out from being just another video game system. The problem with R.O.B. was that it made gaming more complicated than it had to be. Assembly of the machine was up there with constructing Ikea furniture with a blindfold. Once

constructed, it wasn't all that fun to play with. It's a good thing *Super Mario Bros.* came along because if R.O.B. was the best Nintendo had to offer, we'd all be playing the Sega Dreamcast 3 by now.

The funniest thing about R.O.B. is that so many people are highly critical about the device yet most people who stand on their soapbox and complain about the machine have never played with one. The concept wasn't all that bad an idea but the execution was flawed.

R.O.B. only had two games. *Gyromite* and *Stack Up*. While *Gyromite* could be played without the need of R.O.B. (by using a second controller and convincing a friend to act like R.O.B.), *Stack-Up* pretty much requires the device (as well as additional accessories packed in with the game). It was an interesting concept but it's one Nintendo's few failures during the 8-bit era and no company has really tried to replicate the idea ever since.

The NES Zapper Released in 1985

The NES Zapper was released in 1985 and received very little software support up until the death of the NES. Yet the Zapper remains the most cherished peripheral released for the NES. *Duck Hunt* has a lot to do with it but it also has to do with the fact that it worked perfectly during the NES years and companies that have tried to replicate the light gun experience have failed miserably for many years after the NES was mothballed (and that includes Nintendo).

A neat story about the NES Zapper that many people don't know about is the censorship that Nintendo placed on the design of the peripheral for the North American audience. While the story about how Nintendo changed the North American casing of the Zapper from grey to orange several years after the Zapper's initial release is commonplace, it's not the real beginning of the story. When the peripheral was first released in Japan, it looked like a revolver. However, worried about scaring off parents and

receiving scorn from advocacy groups, when Nintendo released the peripheral stateside, they went with a design that made the gun look incredibly fake. The designs of the two guns look drastically different.

The Zapper was included with the deluxe set that also had R.O.B. Also in the set was *Duck Hunt* which was a brilliant move on Nintendo's part. Even though *Duck Hunt* was a very simple light gun game, it quickly became very popular and was highly sought after. Even though the system seller was *Super Mario Bros.*, there were a few people who wanted the system just so they could shoot at ducks. Even though *Super Mario Bros.* and later *Super Mario Bros. 3* are recognized as two of the best selling games of all time, *Duck Hunt* has also sold over ten million units worldwide and is still a game that is routinely referenced in pop culture.

Beyond *Duck Hunt* though, the library for Zapper games was scarce. There were some quality titles like *Hogan's Alley* and *To The Earth* but few games came out designed for the peripheral only after a few months of its release. In fact, there were only just over a dozen games produced for the Zapper.

Duck Hunt is partially to blame since so many people were enamoured with *Duck Hunt* that many people didn't care about the other shooting games on the market. The other problem is that the market for peripheral games has never been strong for any system in the history of video games. Even though a good percentage of people who owned the NES had a Zapper, it wasn't the main way to play games. Generally consumers will buy software for their consoles that use the standard controller method. People were more inclined to buy *Super Mario Bros. 2* than they were to buy *To the Earth* despite it being a good game.

Notable Games: - Duck Hunt
- Hogan's Alley
- To the Earth
- Wild Gunman

Video Game Review

Crazy Taxi
Sega Dreamcast
2000
Developer: Hitmaker (Sega AM3)
Publisher: Sega

Sega has a great pedigree when it comes to arcade racers. From *Monaco GP* to *Out-Run* to *Daytona USA*, it sometimes feels like the only thing that Sega can't screw up is making fun racing games. Not only does *Crazy Taxi* follow in the same heights of greatness as the other titles mentioned but is a must-own game. Even better is that the Dreamcast version (which is the version being reviewed) is better than the arcade version. The only downside--and it's a major one--is that even though there are a number of modes available in the game, they're rather short. There are also graphical and sound issues. Still, *Crazy Taxi* is a great ride for as long as it lasts.

The concept of the core game is as a taxi driver, you have to pick up and deliver as many passengers to their destinations as possible before time runs out. Fares can range from short distance hops to cross-town voyages. Players are given a time bank everytime they pick up a customer. If they bring the customer to their destination in a speedy amount of time, player's get to keep whatever time is remaining in their bank and also a small time bonus plus payment for the trip. If you bring someone to the place they want to go too slowly, you'll still get the money for the fare but the time bonus decreases. If you're too slow, the fare will leave the vehicle without paying. The timer continues to countdown whether one has a rider or not so it's in the player's best interest to keep an eye out for people looking for a ride (they'll have a dollar sign above their head colour coordinated for the length of the trip). The point of the game is score as much cash before time runs out. The player is also given a license ranking at the end with the goal being to procure the elusive Crazy license.

The graphics are on par for a Dreamcast game which is both a good and bad thing. Good in that the world is full of colour and everything is well detailed with limited blockiness. This game looks good enough to appear on more powerful consoles and looking like the game belongs on those systems. However, the game is plagued by many of the same problems that other Dreamcast games had. The worst is the blending of shapes caused by weird camera angles that result in visual distortions and views of emptiness. While the game does move at a quick framerate for the most part, when there is too much action on the screen the framerate drops to a crawl. This does present a problem for gameplay because even though when the framerate drops and the game's timer slows down to adjust, since the player needs to have quick reflexes to avoid traffic, it makes the game at times unplayable. It rarely happens but it's annoying enough that it warrants mentioning.

The soundtrack is great; if you like Bad Religion or The Offspring. If not, you'll keep the game on mute. It's neat that the different passengers have different phrases but each character does have a slow supply. However, the point of the game is not to be gabby cabbie but to be a fast one. Talk is cheap and the point of the game is to make as much money as fast as possible.

As far as arcade racers go, *Crazy Taxi* is one of the best. Thanks to the huge maps in each of the courses (and all the shortcuts to be found) the game does take a while to explore. The only problem with the exploration aspect is that once you've determined you found the shortest point (which is usually as the crow flies), there is little incentive to explore surround areas. The game does put landmarks close together to make sure that players visit most of the map but it still would have been neat to have had secret bundles scattered throughout the map for people to find like in the *Grand Theft Auto* games. It would have given this title way more replay value.

Speaking of replayability, the game does offer up a bunch of different thing to do. From modifying the conditions of the main game to completing a bunch of challenges, there's plenty to do with this title. The only problem is that there isn't much to each mode. While the arcade mode is the star of the show and can easily provide for many multiple hours of entertainment, there are only two courses. As much fun as the two maps are, they do being to lose their flavour after awhile. Although Sega Net support for high scores or multiplayer battles would have given this title more of a shelf life, it wouldn't have made much of a difference (Sega Net is no longer online so nothing is missed as of this writing). The challenges will keep players occupied for an hour or two but not much beyond that. It's simple fun until it begins to feel monotonous.

Sega's *Crazy Taxi* is a fun game. They took a great arcade and made it better. Even with its problems it is easily one of the best Dreamcast games available. Sure it could have been better and more refined but it is still a great game to kill some time with.

☆☆☆☆

Video Game Review

Galaga
Arcade
1981
Developed by: Namco
Published by: Midway

It would be unfair to point at Namco's *Galaga* and say that it's nothing more than a sequel (of *Galaxian*) of a rip-off (of *Space Invaders*). Truth be told, such a lame assessment holds quite a bit of truth. However, not only is *Galaga* much better than either *Galaxian* or *Space Invaders* but it is one of the best arcade games of its era. It's fun, exciting, and keeps you hungry for more. It's only drawback—and it's a big one—is that it will eventually be less fun and exciting after each playthrough and eventually you'll finally have had your fill. As a

diversion though, it is definitely worth playing...one quarter at a time.

The game is extremely simple. The player controls a ship at the bottom of the screen that can move left or right. Each level begins with a group of aliens flying in formation to attack the player. After their initial attack run, they settle into a larger formation at the top of the screen while another swarm attacks the player. Once all the swarms for that level have made their initial attacks and joined the upper screen formation (or been destroyed) a few enemies at a time break away from the greater formation to attack the player. Some of the ships have special gimmicks like a tractor beam or the ability to split into multiple ships. Once all the ships are destroyed, the player moves on to the next level. The goal of the game is to score as many points possible for bragging rights on the high score list.

The controls may seem simple but feel perfect. A joystick is used to move the ship while a sole button on the game's console fires the ship's weapons. It's incredible responsive and unless you're playing on a machine with sticky buttons, there's no blaming the controls for any mistakes that happen; it's all human error when something wrong happens.

The graphics look good for a game of its time. Because the game's visuals were so well done back in the day, the game has a retro look that stand out in today's age of 3D gaming. The sprites are detailed enough that every different enemy type is distinguishable from each other. The colours used for the various ships really made the game stand out back then. Today it gives the game a timeless quality.

Galaga is one of those games that is incredible easy to get hooked to. The difficulty curve is near perfect and frantically fun. While it may seem very bare-bones compared to shooters that were released afterwards with more powerful hardware, many of the game mechanics that are in those games are executed perfectly in *Galaga*. The action moves along at a quick speed

without needing to memorize patterns for survival (although it does help). The different ways the computer interacts and tries to combat the player is very well done and is something that keeps the gameplay fresh.

Namco's *Galaga* should be considered a staple of any respectable arcade. While the game graphically can't compare to today's games and is nowhere as sophisticated, it still holds up very well. With its retro look and feel, it's fun enough to still make gamers give up all the quarters in their pockets.

☆☆☆☆

Video Game Review

Golden Axe
Sega Genesis
1989

Developed by: Sega

Published by: Sega

Golden Axe is a bad game. Why Sega felt it necessary to release this along with the launch of the Sega Genesis makes no sense. While the game does show off what the system is capable of graphically (although this game isn't giving Sonic any run for its money in the speed department), the gameplay is dull and broken. There are much better beat-'em-ups on the Genesis and even if there wasn't, it's the type of game that parents should buy for their kids to get them to stop playing video games.

Death Adder has captured the King of Yuria and his daughter. It's up to three heroes to stop Death Adder and save Yuria from his grasp. A dwarf by the name of Gilius Thunderhead, a barbarian named Ax Battler, and an amazon named Tyris Flare are all up to the task as well as looking for revenge against Death Adder for what he has done to each of them personally.

Players take control of one of the three characters. Each character has their own fighting style, weapon, and magic spells. There are eight levels of moderate length. It takes only a couple of minutes to beat each level but the game is difficult enough

that those playing the game for the first time will not beat the game in twenty minutes. Each environment feels different from one another and gives the feeling like the heroes are circumventing the globe in their quest to defeat Death Adder.

There is also a secondary mode aside from the main game. The duel mode presents the player against an enemy with the player needing to finish off all twelve levels of enemies to beat the mode. It's an interesting option that gives players a bit of a reason to come back to the game once completing the main part but it is hardly worth buying the package just for it.

The controls are pretty simple for the game. The d-pad moves the player's character around while the C button makes the character jump. The B button makes the character attack although it can be used in combination with the C button to unleash a jumping attack. The A button can be pressed if the player's magic gauge is filled up enough to use magic. While the controls are simple enough to understand, they're a bit on the stiff side and sometimes unresponsive. Characters move at a sluggish pace and are sometimes slow to react to commands made from the controller. Adding to the problem is the game's poor collision detection which can lead to some cheap deaths. The poor controls are detrimental to any potential this game has at being fun.

The graphics are decent. At the time, they were better than anything on the home console market but very quickly, they looked rather simple compared to other Sega Genesis games. Still, the sprites look great and the level design offers some really interesting layouts which were unique to the genre at the time. However, any beauty shown off by a paused screen soon disappears once gameplay commences because the action on screen is slow. Considering this is the console of "blast processing", *Golden Axe* is a game that makes watching paint dry seem like an extreme sport. It never feels like the game is going too fast that one needs to take it easy and mind

their step controlling their character. The only time where it feels like things are going a little fast is when an enemy attacks and there's nothing the player can do about it with the unresponsive controls.

The soundtrack is dull and unimaginative. Ultimately, there is nothing good to note about the game's sounds. The score sounds like something that you'd hear on the Master System. The sound effects, while interesting, feel kind of out of place. Sound was never the Genesis's strong suit anyways but this game almost begs the player to push mute on their television and create their own soundtrack with their own music library. At least the sound isn't unbearable or straining to one's ears. It's not unpleasant; it's just forgettable and lacklustre.

This game has some interesting concepts but it seems like Sega rushed this title out. You can't blame this on it being a port of an arcade game because the arcade version isn't much better. The character selection, level layouts, and rideable were all excellently thought out ideas that had they been in a better game would have really made that game stand out. The biggest problem it seems for *Golden Axe* is that the developers were still not sure how to program for the Genesis. Considering that Sega released *Streets of Rage* just over a year later and played remarkably better than *Golden Axe* shows that perhaps *Golden Axe* could have been better served by a little bit more R&D.

However, beat-'em-up fans that have had their fill of other popular series like *Streets of Rage* and *Final Fight* may decide to give this game a try considering some of the elements in this game aren't in many other games of the same genre (like the animals that can be ridden). The game does provide enough unique gameplay that makes it intriguing to play and, perhaps with someone with enough patience, an enjoyable experience. Somewhere buried within *Golden Axe* is a great game. However, its visual overlay makes it something to avoid.

Perhaps if Sega had released a *Golden Axe: Hyper Edition Turbo*, it would be worth playing. However, if you've got a Sega Genesis and are looking for a great action game, there are many other franchises available on the system that makes this title one to pass. *Golden Axe* isn't even worth the nostalgia trip. There are several reasons why the Genesis had trouble gaining ground on the NES (and later the SNES) before Sonic became a mainstream game icon; *Golden Axe* is one of those reasons.

☆☆

Video Game Review

Gradius
Nintendo Entertainment System
1986
Developed by: Konami
Published by: Konami

If it weren't for one special thing about *Gradius* for the NES, the game would be an average shoot-'em-up for the system. The power-up selector made *Gradius* a worthwhile game. Not only does it make it better than most of the games in its genre on the NES but also makes it a stand out game compared to titles of the same genre on more powerful systems. Konami got lucky with *Gradius* because aside from this major part of gameplay, the game at its core feels very generic. Still, *Gradius* is still an enjoyable game.

There isn't much of a story to *Gradius*. The player controls the Vic Viper spaceship; navigating it through seven levels and destroying anything in its path. The Vic Viper is equipped with one main gun although the ship can be upgraded by collected power pods. It's up to the player to decide in the heat of battle what type of upgrade they want to perform on the ship. The upgrades are listed in a table at the bottom of the playing screen and the current one available is the one highlighted. Once a player hits the upgrade button, the power-up is activated and the player needs to begin collect power pods again to work their way up the upgrade list. Upgrades include improvements to

the weapons, a quicker ship, and shields. The upgrades can also be combined allowing skilled players to make their ships really powerful.

The game is presented as a horizontal side-scroller shooter. The controls are very simple because there's not much to do outside of moving the ship and shooting. The d-pad moves the ship across the screen while the A button fires the weapons. The B button selects the highlighted power-up and activates it. It's all very simple to use and essentially anyone can pick up the game and play it without worrying about the controls getting in the way.

The graphics look like what you'd expect a NES game to look like. That's not a bad thing, mind you, but this game didn't really tax the system's hardware all that much. It has that perfect 8-bit feel to it and everything moves along nicely at a silky pace. All the sprites have a bit of detail to them and are easy to differentiate between each other. It must be noted though that the few backgrounds—like the soil on the top and bottom of the screen in the first level—are very well detailed for a NES game.

The same thing goes for the soundtrack too. While the music is enjoyable and is something that you'd expect to come from a quality NES game, none of the tracks are all that catchy. Konami had some really great sounding soundtracks on the NES but this isn't one of them. It's not that there's anything wrong with the musical score but it seems more generic than anything else. Its sole purpose in this game is to function as a way to create a mood and environment and that's it. Which is fine, because it could have been worse as they could have made a soundtrack that tried to do too much and in turn became grating on the ears.

Despite the fact that the graphics and the sounds of the game feel sort of average or generic for the NES, the game still stands out for providing solid gameplay. The power-up system is lots of fun and adds an extra bit of challenge and strategy to the game as players experiment with

the various power-ups until they find the right comfort zone for them. The shooting aspects of the game are solid. The game has a decent difficulty level; while amateur players to the genre will most likely see quite a number of game over screens while playing, someone who is used to playing shoot-em-ups will find themselves facing a decent challenge before completing the game (although the game ultimately doesn't end as it keeps replaying the same levels over again with increased difficulty). With this perfect balance, the game is a blast to play for any type of gamer.

The downside is that other than the power-up system, there isn't much to the game to make it stand out. Its level design, graphics, and sound don't make it all that different from anything else in the genre and there are plenty of games out there that are available for the NES or on other consoles that are better. This is the not even close to being a must own shoot-em-up game on the NES. There are a slew of shooters on the NES that are either better than or at least comparable to *Gradius* that aren't supported by a major gimmick but have better graphics, sound, and gameplay. Some would argue that *1942*, *R-Type*, *Tiger-Heli*, and others are superior to *Gradius*.

In the end though, *Gradius* is still very fun to play. Even though it does feel like a generic shooter with a gimmick, it's a pretty great gimmick. Konami may have phoned in the core design aspects of *Gradius* but the power-up system makes the game so appealing. One could argue until they're blue in the face whether "Game X" is better than *Gradius* but it doesn't matter if one game is slightly better than the other; you won't go wrong by picking up *Gradius*. Sure, it's simple fun. However, gaming is supposed to be fun and chances are you will not be disappointed by this game.

☆☆☆☆

Video Game Review

Mario Kart 64
Nintendo 64
1997

Developed by: Nintendo
Published by: Nintendo

Mario Kart 64 by Nintendo might be the perfect video game. It's fun, easy to play, fun, beautiful in its perfect balance of simplicity and chaos, and most importantly, fun. If you play *Mario Kart 64* and don't have any fun, you may be dead inside. Sure, the graphics are slightly above what some would consider rudimentary 3-D and there are plenty of other games that offer a bunch of other options way beyond what *Mario Kart 64* offers but few can come close to touching *Mario Kart 64* in terms of overall quality. Many of the kart racers that were released after *Mario Kart 64* were akin to being a jack of all trades but master of none. *Mario Kart 64* takes the core gameplay of kart racing and perfected it. Legitimately, if *Mario Kart 64* is the only kart racer that you have ever played and then you play something else, chances are you'll be sadly disappointed by the new game and go right back to *Mario Kart 64*.

Players can select from eight different characters from the Mario universe (and Donkey Kong, Jr.). Each character has its own strengths and weaknesses although most players won't see much of a difference and will eventually pick the mascot they like the most.

There are twenty courses to drive on although several of them are locked until players have won several championships in the appropriate difficulty level (of which there are three: 50cc, 100cc, and 150cc). There are also four battle courses where each have completely different elements that make them feel like complete opposites from one another.

The game contains three modes. The Mario GP championship mode has players race over multiple courses to finish first in the various circuits. Winning championships will eventually open up an extra set of

courses and other options like faster karts (which also stands as a harder difficulty setting) and a reverse course option. Players race around the course throwing weapons at each other and using power-ups that are found in the question blocks littered throughout the courses. A well placed hit in a heated race can prevent someone from taking the checkered flag and finishing in a much lower position (which is tons of fun if you're doing this to someone and not so much if it's happening to you). This option is great both for people who are playing alone or with someone else.

The time trial mode is solely a single-player experience where one races on a course without any other racers in an attempt to see how fast they can go. It's a neat option that will keep players coming back for more as it has a real arcade feel to it in the sense that it encourages players to look at the course and see where they can cut precious seconds off their time. While it is very fun to play as a lone player, it does have enough to it that it is still tons of fun to play with others as the controller is passed around.

The final game mode is the battle mode. This is the main reason to play this game as there is nothing more satisfying than nailing your best friend with a red shell in the kisser to take the match. This mode isn't about racing; it's about taking out the other players with a myriad of weapons and other perils. Once a player is hit by a weapon three times, they're removed from the competition. This mode alone could have been released as a separate package and it would still be considered an excellent title. The fact that it's included with the two other modes makes this a phenomenal game.

The controls are very simple. The analog stick controls the steering while the A button acts as the acceleration and the B button works as the brakes. The down C button (or the Z button) will use the item that the player is hoarding (although holding the item button will make the character get some items ready behind them and can be used as a

shield; only when the item button is released will the item actually be fired or dropped). The shoulder buttons allow players to enter into a power slide. Tilting the control stick to the left and right while sliding will eventually build up a short turbo boost. Overall, the controls are really simple to use and mostly anyone can perform some strong power slides into turbo power boosts after only a few tries.

The graphics for the game look decent for a Nintendo 64 title. The fogging issues that plagued the system are well masked here even though it does exist on a few courses. However, the fog is built into the environment of the courses which essentially makes it not an issue. The courses are well crafted making the game look solid. Some courses, like Rainbow Road are full of colour contrasted against a black backdrop and are simply beautiful. Compared to other games on the Nintendo 64, *Mario Kart 64* is one of the best looking games on the system.

The sounds are great here too. Even though everything is just MIDI-tunes, many of the musical tracks are quite catchy. The compositions on some of those courses really bring out a strong racing atmosphere. The sound effects are also top notch here too. Even though the kart engines sound like something a four-year old would do with their mouth if you asked them to recreate the sound of a lawnmower, it still fits the game very well. The screams of agony from the various characters when their hit by a weapon are quite hilarious and each character is distinct from one another; it's easy to know who just met the wrong side of a red shell.

If there's one thing that *Mario Kart 64* needs to be criticized over, it's the scenery; or more appropriately, it's the lack of scenery. This is both a graphical issue and a technical issue. On some of the earlier difficulty levels, it's not unheard of for experienced racers to finish a race well ahead of the second place kart. This lack of other karts around and the emptiness of some of the courses make it feel like one is driving through

giant vacant areas. It's an issue that's corrected on the harder difficulties as there are way more frantic moments and very few seconds of peace and quiet during races on 150cc. Another thing though is that sometimes it's very relaxing to drive on some of those courses with the rest of the pack far behind and just take in the scenery. Even though some of those tracks can seem a bit bare, they're still very eye-catching in their simple beauty (for example, the Kalimari Desert course with its sunset colours).

Mario Kart 64 though is a game that is easily enjoyable whether you're playing by yourself or with someone else. It's a game that is easy to lose hours with whether you're trying to finish the main championship mode or playing a best-of-eighty-seven series with your friends in the battle mode. Taking the checkered flag or nailing your friend with a well-placed shell brings a level of satisfaction and fun that is rarely achieved in video games. To play any other kart racing game after this almost seems like a crime.

☆☆☆☆☆

Video Game Review

Mario Tennis
Nintendo 64
2000
Developed by: Camelot
Published by: Nintendo

The Nintendo 64 spawned a renaissance in Mario sports titles mostly due to the fact that the only games that were selling on the system were fun multiplayer experiences. *Mario Tennis* is fun and is a multiplayer experience. However, as a Nintendo 64 game, it could be better. It looks good and plays good but still feels lacking.

Mario Tennis is a tennis game that features a good portion of the characters from the Mushroom Kingdom (and Donkey Kong). Each character has their strengths and weaknesses. Not all the characters are available in the beginning and need to be unlocked by playing through the game. Nintendo also

made use of the Transfer Pak which allows players to transfer their character over from the Game Boy Color version of *Mario Tennis* (sold separately). The courses are just as unique as the characters in that they have their advantages and disadvantages (like ball bounce and speed). There are also special courses to unlock; each with their own unique flavour.

The core part of *Mario Tennis* is the championship mode which puts players in various tournaments. Winning tournaments earns trophies and unlocks players. The championship mode under singles or double conditions.

The extra modes are actually quite skimpy if you compare this title to *Mario Golf*. The ring mode offers a challenge and it's not easy to clear. The goal is to get as many rings before the preset condition ends (i.e., before someone wins the game). It's interesting because it forces the player to keep rallies going or make sure they're accurate with their shot. During a rally, if the opponent hits the ball through the rings, it will count towards the player's score if the player ends up winning the rally. However, if the player loses the rally, they also lose all the rings collected during that rally.

The Bowser Court is a mix between tennis and *Mario Kart*. The court wobbles all around. This can be problematic if one plays close to the lines as a wobble at the wrong time can cause a ball to go in to fall outside the line. The course also contains item blocks that act like they do in other Mario titles (i.e., bananas trip people up, red shells are like heat-seeking missiles). It's fun a few times but feels very gimmicky and loses all lustre only after a few games.

The game looks really good although there are two things that need to be considered: this is a game made near the end of the Nintendo 64's life-cycle so the developers knew all the tricks the system could pull off, and it's a tennis game so it doesn't require much graphical horsepower to look good.

There's much to say about the sound. It does the job but it's

nothing to climb the rooftops and pledge an undying love about. The music fits the bill although the sound bites from the characters can get annoying after a while. For the most part though, the sound is an aspect of the game that feel unnoticeable.

The game is good if you're looking for a tennis game on the Nintendo 64. There's not that many and, other than *Mario Tennis*, they're junk. However, *Mario Tennis* feels very underwhelming. Compared to *Virtua Tennis* on the Dreamcast (which came out at the same time), the game feels very bare bones. Even compared to *Mario Golf*, the other Nintendo-Camelot sports title on the 64, the game feels very lacking. The tournament mode is uninspiring, the Bowser court is annoying, and the overall gameplay does play better than anything else out there (in fact, it's marginally better than Tennis for either the NES or the Game Boy).

One feature that falls a little flat is the Game Boy link-up. It's not that there's anything wrong with the mode but considering that the GBC *Mario Tennis* is a better game, the only real benefit to the link package is taking the created Game Boy character and putting them into the third dimension. Definitely not worth buying the Nintendo 64 game and tracking down a Transfer Pak.

Despite these hang-ups, it's still easy to have fun with this game. Playing this game against another person is great (and another piece of evidence that playing with someone in the same room is way better than online multiplayer). The ring mode is extremely fun and is one of the best training-like modes in any sports game. It's very enjoyable and it makes you a better player.

To call *Mario Tennis* a cash-in title to satisfy the limited market for N64 tennis games would be selling this title a bit short. Even though at times it feels like Camelot phoned it in and Nintendo didn't care, *Mario Tennis* still manages to be a decent package. Sure, it's not that much a step above some of the better titles on the 16-bit titles but it still provides some pretty good tennis action with almost no hiccups. However, this

game is only a must-buy for those who only have a Nintendo 64, are huge fans of Mario, or a massive fan of the video game tennis genre. Otherwise, the game is only worthwhile if you can pick it up for cheap and you don't already have a favourite tennis game.

☆☆☆

Major News and Notes from the Last Seven Days

Microsoft is revisiting a few of their old franchises. The software giant has recently announced Age of Empires Online and Microsoft Flight. Flight Simulator used to be one of the most popular games on the computer so it's nice to see that Microsoft is returning to their roots and going to be reintroducing a new generation of gamers to these great series. Although, surprisingly enough, these games are only slated for a PC release right now although that may (and hopefully) change so they'll see Xbox 360 releases as well. Fingers crossed for a Links revival too...THQ is coming out with a tablet for the Wii. Nobody was really asking for this and it could be even more useless than the SNES mouse but it's coming to a retailer near you...Sony was busy announcing a bunch of new games for release this week. The biggest ones are Resistance 3 and Ratchet and Clank: All 4 One are on their way for the PS3. All I'm waiting for now is a new Ape Escape...More details have come to light about the Gran Turismo 5 which is launching later this year (although who really knows if it will actually ever be released at this point). The game will feature both a go-karting mode and a course creator. While unless they license out green, red, and blue shells and the Rainbow Road from Nintendo, I really couldn't care less about go-karting in Gran Turismo. However, the track creator option has tons of potential. I had written this game off because of all the delays and the lack of popularity of the PS3 but now that the PS3 has bounced back in a big way and all the potential

possibilities of course creation with this game, this game could be one of the best selling games of the year. Hopefully they allow for trading courses over the Internet and being able to create online racing leagues with them...Sony fanboys must be having a field day with the latest news to come out of the United Kingdom. It seems that there's a bit of an issue with a Xbox 360 advertisement for Final Fantasy XIII that actually uses PS3 footage. The ad has been pulled due to the images but not for the reason you'd think. The agency in charge of making sure ads being run on British television are on the up-and-up had the ads pulled not because they were showing PS3 footage for the Xbox 360 version of the game but because the ads were showing off too much full motion video instead of actual gameplay...On the topic of Final Fantasy, development of Final Fantasy XIV is being put on hold for the Xbox 360 due to issues and restrictions with Xbox Live. The project isn't dead but unless a deal can be worked out between Square Enix and Microsoft, the 360 version of the game is as good as gone...It hasn't been a good week for Microsoft. First the possibility of losing Final Fantasy XIV and now news coming out that there are copies of Halo Reach floating around a month before its launch. The highly anticipated game had been available on Microsoft servers for a few certified people to test and play. However, someone managed to crack the system and download a copy. There are several groups that are reporting that they have full access to the game. Although, considering that these copies are probably useless for online multiplayer, who really cares? Seriously, who plays Halo just for the single-player campaign.

**WEEKLY VIDEO GAME
PODCAST**

**NEW PODCAST
EVERY MONDAY**

July Retail Game Releases

Microsoft Xbox 360

- BlazBlue: Continuum Shift
- Clash of the Titans: The Videogame
- Crackdown 2
- DarkStar One: Broken Alliance
- Little League World Series Baseball 2010
- NCAA Football 11

Nintendo Wii

- 2-for-1 Power Pack: Winter Blast/Summer Sports 2
- Arc Rise Fantasia
- Big Beach Sports 2
- Chuck E. Cheese's Party Games
- Cruise Party
- Despicable Me: The Game
- Disney Guilty Party
- Little League World Series Baseball: Double Play
- Tournament of Legends
- TrackMania

Sony Playstation 3

- BlazBlue: Continuum Shift
- Clash of the Titans: The Videogame
- Little League World Series Baseball 2010
- NCAA Football 11

Sony Playstation 2

- Despicable Me: The Game
- NCAA Football 11

Nintendo DS

- 7 Wonders II
- Animal Planet: Vet Collection
- Cats & Dogs: The Revenge of Kitty Galore
- Chuck E. Cheese's Party Games
- Despicable Me: The Game
- Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels of the Starry Skies
- Farm Frenzy: Animal Country
- Galaxy Racers
- Hidden Objects: Mystery Stories
- Little League World Series Baseball: Double Play
- Mahjong: Journey Quest for Tikal
- Nursery Mania

Nintendo DS (Continued)

- Samantha Swift and the Hidden Roses of Athena
- TrackMania Turbo

Sony Playstation Portable

- Despicable Me: The Game
- Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3 Portable

July's Downloadable Game Releases

Microsoft Xbox 360 Arcade

- Blacklight: Tango Down
- Deadliest Warrior: The Game
- DeathSpank
- Hydro Thunder Hurricane
- Limbo
- Monkey Island 2 Special Edition: LeChuck's Revenge

Microsoft Xbox 360 Game Room

- Asteroids (Atari 2600)
- Auto Racing (Intellivision)
- Barnstorming (Atari 2600)
- Decathlon (Atari 2600)
- Enudro (Atari 2600)
- Fishing Derby (Atari 2600)
- Frostbite (Atari 2600)
- Gravitar (Atari 2600)
- Gyruss (Arcade)
- Hover Force (Intellivision)
- Ice Hockey (Atari 2600)
- Jail Break (Arcade)
- Major Havoc (Arcade)
- Quadrun (Atari 2600)
- Scooter Shooter (Arcade)
- SkyDiver (Atari 2600)
- Starmaster (Atari 2600)
- Utopia (Intellivision)
- Tower of Doom (Intellivision)
- Yie Ar Kung Fu (Arcade)

Nintendo WiiWare and Virtual Console

- Aero the Acrobat (Super Nintendo)
- AquaSpace
- Balloon Pop Festival
- Cruise Party
- Dive: The Medes Islands Secret
- Furry Legends
- Heavy Fire: Special Operations
- Hoopworld

Nintendo WiiWare and Virtual Console (Continued)

- Pearl Harbor Trilogy – 1941: Red Sun Rising
- Toribash

Sony Playstation 3

- A Bug's Life (PS1)
- DeathSpank
- The Emperor's New Groove (PS1)
- Family Feud
- Hercules (PS1)
- Landit Bandit
- Monkey Island SE 2: LeChuck's Revenge
- Motor Toon Gran Prix (PS1)
- Sam And Max Episode 4: Beyond The Alley Of The Dolls
- Toy Story Racer (PS1)

Nintendo DSiWare

- 4 Travellers – Play French
- 24/7 Solitaire
- 101 Shark Pets
- Aboslute Brickbuster
- Crazy Sudoku
- Crystal Monsters
- Flips: The Folk of the Faraway Tree
- Happy Birthday Mart
- Hello Flowerz
- Hospital Havoc
- Music On: Retro Keyboard
- Petz Hamsterz Family
- Petz Kittenz
- Pop Island: Paperfield
- Primrose
- Puffins: Let's Race!
- QuickPick Farmer
- Scrabble Tools
- Soul of Darkness
- SteamWorld: Tower Defense

Sony Playstation Portable (PSP)

- 4x4 Jam (Mini)
- 5-in-1 Arcade Hits (Mini)
- Archibald's Adventure (Mini)
- Chameleon Legacy
- Fly Fu (Mini)
- Gravity Crash Portable
- Groovin' Blocks PSP
- The Mystery of the Crystal Portal (Mini)
- Piyotama PSP
- Widget's Odyssey (Mini)
- Young Thor (Mini)

August Retail Game Releases (So Far)

(This Week's Releases in Bold)

Microsoft Xbox 360

- Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days
- Madden NFL 11

Nintendo Wii

- The Bachelor: The Videogame
- Disney Sing It: Family Hits
- **Gold's Gym: Dance Workout**
- Madden NFL 11

Sony Playstation 3

- Disney Sing It: Family Hits
- **Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days**
- Madden NFL 11

Nintendo DS

- The Bachelor: The Video Game
- **Dawn of Heroes**
- Galactic Taz Ball
- **Harvest Moon: Grand Bazaar**
- Monster Rancher DS

Sony Playstation Portable (PSP)

- Madden NFL 11
- Ys Seven

August's Downloadable Game Releases (So Far)

(This Week's Releases in Bold)

Microsoft Xbox 360 Arcade

- Castlevania: Harmony of Despair
- **Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light**
- Monday Night Combat

Microsoft Xbox 360 Game Room

- 3-D Tic-Tac-Toe (Atari 2600)
- Beamrider (Atari 2600)
- Centipede (Atari 2600)
- **Chip Shot Golf (Intellivision)**
- Cosmic Commuter (Atari 2600)
- Dodge 'Em (Atari 2600)
- Dolphin (Atari 2600)
- Dragster (Atari 2600)
- **Freeway (Atari 2600)**
- Hockey (Intellivision)
- **Maze Craze (Atari 2600)**

Microsoft Xbox 360 Game Room (Continued)

- Seaquest (Atari 2600)
- Snafu (Intellivision)
- Super Pro Decathlon (Intellivision)
- Thin Ice (Intellivision)

Nintendo WiiWare

- Deer Captor
- Enjoy Your Massage!
- Fantasy Slots: Adventure Slots and Games
- **A Monsteca Corral: Monsters vs. Robots**
- My Aquarium 2
- **Space Trek**

Sony Playstation 3

- Arctic Adventures: Polar's Puzzles (Mini)
- Crash Team Racing (PS1)
- Earthworm Jim HD
- Scott Pilgrim vs. The World
- **Top Gun**
- Widgets Odyssey 2 (Mini)

Nintendo DS

- **3D Mahjong**
- Absolute Chess
- BlazBloo: Super Melee Action Battle Royale
- Did It Myself ABC123
- **Divergent Shift**
- Hints Hunter
- **Just Sing! National Anthems**
- Match Up!
- **myNotebook: Carbon**
- Petz Dogz Family
- Rhythm Core Alpha
- Turn: The Lost Artifact

Sony Playstation Portable (PSP)

- Arctic Adventures: Polar's Puzzles (Mini)
- **Carnivores: Dinosaur Hunter (Mini)**
- Crash Team Racing (PS1)
- Widgets Odyssey 2 (Mini)



**NEW PODCAST
EVERY TUESDAY**

June, July, and August Critics Picks

Multiplatform

- BlazBlue: Continuum Shift (PS3, Xbox 360)
- Blur (PS3, Xbox 360)
- Lego Harry Potter (PS3, Wii, Xbox 360)
- Madden NFL 11 (PS3, Xbox 360)
- Monkey Island 2 SE: LeChuck's Revenge (PS3-PSN, Xbox Live Arcade)
- NCAA Football 11 (PS3, Xbox 360)
- UFC Undisputed (PS3, Xbox 360)

Microsoft Xbox 360

- Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light (Xbox Live Arcade)
- Limbo (Xbox Live Arcade)
- Monday Night Combat (Xbox Live Arcade)
- Puzzle Quest 2 (Xbox Live Arcade)
- Snoopy Flying Ace (Xbox Live Arcade)

Nintendo Wii

- Sin and Punishment: Star Successor
- Tiger Woods 11 (Wii Version)

Sony Playstation 3

- Joe Danger (PSN)
- Modnation Racers
- Sam & Max: The Devil's Playhouse Episode 3: They Stole Max's Brain! (PSN)
- Scott Pilgrim vs. the World (PSN)
- Soldner-X 2: Final Prototype (PSN)
- Tales of Monkey Island (PSN)

Nintendo DS

- Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels of the Starry Skies
- Maestro! Green Groove (DSiWare)

Sony Playstation Portable

- Hot Shots Tennis: Get a Grip
- Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3 Portable

The Final Madness

Someone had asked me to produce a chart of the releases from the first part of the year to see how well they were selling after their initial release. While it's hard to say whether the lifetime sales of a game are good or bad, first week sales are a good way to establish a baseline. For a game to more than triple its first week sales after half a year is pretty good while titles have less than

doubled their initial sales either mean that first week sales were incredible or the game is a dud.

So far, the best selling game of the year is *Pokemon HeartGold/SoulSilver*. It's amazing that it managed to do so well considering it was released the same week as the second best selling game of the year, *God of War III*. If there's any real shocker on the list, it's that

Bioshock 2 has yet to crack a million copies on one system. It's very surprising to see that *Battlefield: Bad Company 2* sold almost double amount of copies as *Bioshock 2* had considering the amount of hype surrounding both games and the previous instalments of each series.

All sales figures come from VGChartz.com

Title	Release Date	System	First Week Sales	Lifetime Sales*
Bayonetta	January 5, 2010	Playstation 3	62k	245k
Bayonetta	January 5, 2010	Xbox 360	108k	343k
Darksiders	January 5, 2010	Playstation 3	114k	401k
Darksiders	January 5, 2010	Xbox 360	175k	469k
Army of Two: The 40 th Day	January 12, 2010	Playstation 3	75k	234k
Army of Two: The 40 th Day	January 12, 2010	Xbox 360	125k	354k
Glory of Heracles	January 18, 2010	DS	8k	97k
Dark Void	January 19, 2010	Playstation 3	38k	105k
Dark Void	January 19, 2010	Xbox 360	61k	135k
Mass Effect 2	January 26, 2010	Xbox 360	727k	1.38m
MAG: Massive Action Game	January 26, 2010	Playstation 3	199k	550k
Tatsunoko vs. Capcom: Ultimate All-Stars	January 26, 2010	Wii	84k	217k
No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle	January 26, 2010	Wii	42k	125k
White Knight Chronicles: International Edition	February 2, 2010	Playstation 3	77k	197k
Bioshock 2	February 9, 2010	Playstation 3	155k	445k
Bioshock 2	February 9, 2010	Xbox 360	388k	938k
Dante's Inferno	February 9, 2010	Playstation 3	150k	409k
Dante's Inferno	February 9, 2010	Xbox 360	134k	369k
Aliens vs. Predator	February 16, 2010	Playstation 3	128k	301k
Aliens vs. Predator	February 16, 2010	Xbox 360	207k	471k
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo 3	February 16, 2010	PSP	29k [^]	91k [^]
Endless Ocean: Blue World	February 22, 2010	Wii	42k	244k
Heavy Rain	February 23, 2010	Playstation 3	229k	601k
Battlefield: Bad Company 2	March 2, 2010	Playstation 3	330k	852k
Battlefield: Bad Company 2	March 2, 2010	Xbox 360	619k	1.61m
MLB 10: The Show	March 2, 2010	Playstation 3	153k	502k
Major League Baseball 2K10	March 2, 2010	Playstation 3	22k	96k
Major League Baseball 2K10	March 2, 2010	Xbox 360	56k	327k
Final Fantasy XIII	March 9, 2010	Playstation 3	561k	1.12m
Final Fantasy XIII	March 9, 2010	Xbox 360	398k	811k
Yakuza 3	March 9, 2010	Playstation 3	48k	119k
God of War III	March 16, 2010	Playstation 3	814k	1.81m
Metro 2033	March 16, 2010	Xbox 360	53k	125k
Pokemon HeartGold/SoulSilver	March 16, 2010	DS	1.03m	2.61m
Just Cause 2	March 23, 2010	Playstation 3	69k	184k
Just Cause 2	March 23, 2010	Xbox 360	113k	260k
Red Steel 2	March 23, 2010	Wii	56k	165k
Zhu Zhu Pets	March 23, 2010	DS	120k	308k
WarioWare D.I.Y.	March 28, 2010	DS	11k	46k
America's Test Kitchen: Let's Get Cooking	March 28, 2010	DS	2k	67k

* Lifetime sales to date are up to the weekend of August 14, 2010

[^] Includes retail sales only and does not include copies sold via the Playstation Network. These numbers are not included because Sony does not make those numbers public.