

MADNESS BREWING

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Sales for 3DS Through the Roof; PS3 Sinking Like a Stone

It's the week before Christmas and the best selling title is a tired casual franchise on a system that is supposed to be treading water.

This makes no sense and every bit of sense all at the same time.

The reason for this paradox is because the Wii is supposed to be on life support. Even fanboys of the system cannot dispute this. According to Gam rankings, there were only five (somewhat) major titles to come out for the system this year. That's beyond pathetic. Additionally, many are already looking towards 2012 when Nintendo's new home console will launch. Most of the projects that Nintendo has previously announced or hinted at have already been moved to the Wii U. Nintendo is hardly trying to keep up appearances; they have pretty much written off the Wii and left it to fend for itself for the holiday season.

Yet despite the meagre software support from both Nintendo and the third parties, it has held its own during this holiday season. According to VGChartz, seven of the top twenty titles for last week were Wii titles and the system is still selling close to half-a-million units. There are plenty of reasons for that too. The system is incredibly cheap and has a solid back catalog. For those on tight budgets and wanting to get a video game system for the holidays (either for themselves or for loved ones), the Wii is almost the perfect system. Very few titles are priced more than \$50 and several of those are packed with bonuses (like *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword Special Edition* or *Wii Play Motion* both with extra

controllers packed in). Plus Nintendo has one of the most solid reputation for games; arguably better than every other developer. Even games that are masked as Nintendo titles but are not (like *Fortune Street* which was developed by Square Enix) may not necessarily be great but are still much better than similar fare on other consoles.

That being said, Nintendo isn't dominating this holiday season. They are barely outselling the Xbox 360 in terms of software and the Xbox 360 console is outselling the Wii by 60%. The real question for Nintendo and its fans will be what happens in January when the sales rush of the holidays are over and there's no real software on the horizon to bank on a jump in sales.

For what it's worth, the Xbox 360 sales figures are misleading. A good portion of Xbox 360 purchases in the last few months have been that from people who already own an Xbox 360 and are either replacing their old one because it no longer works, the small hard drive on the older models has become too cramped, or some other reason. While it's all the same when it comes to numbers, Microsoft and the retailers don't make much money on the systems (most retailers don't make anything on systems). This also means that the natural boost in peripherals that occurs when people buy new systems isn't happening with Microsoft products. Then again, all companies aren't doing well with controller sales at the moment. Sony can't seem to be able to give them away (they're offering some great controller bundles that several retailers I spoke to say are not

IN THIS ISSUE

Video Game Reviews

- **Adventure Island (NES)**
- **Centipede (Arcade)**
- **Decimation X (Xbox Live)**
- **Donkey Kong Country (Super Nintendo)**
- **Space Invaders (Arcade)**

Other Features

- **Video Game Sales for the Week of Dec. 17, 2011**
- **1st Quarter of Q1 in Review**
- **Publisher Report Card for 2011**

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Tuesday

- Weekly Movie Podcast

Wednesday

- Weekly Video Game Podcast

Friday

- Weekly Movie Newsletter

moving and usually people who need extra Wii remotes just ask their friends to bring one when they come over since everyone has a Wii.

While Kinect Adventures was the number two game for last week, Kinect titles aren't doing particularly well. Aside from *Just Dance 3*, *Kinect Sports: Season 2*, and *Dance Central 2* many titles in the Kinect library are sitting on the shelves collecting dust (and in the case of *Kinect Sports*, the spike in sales has to do with the fact that many retailers have been running bundle specials with *Kinect Sports* included in the package). Retailers have been trying to combat low sales by offering deals such as \$20 off Kinect titles (which has been actually more of the norm all year long than a special deal) and buy 2, get 1 free specials. The biggest problem with Kinect software is that few titles are actually compelling enough and provide a full enough experience to warrant a \$40-\$60 price tag. Many of the retail Kinect titles should have been made available through Xbox Live at a much lower rate. Microsoft probably doesn't care about this problem because they're making money hand over fist with Kinect systems (the profit margins are very high on each system sold) and the licensing they get from Kinect software sold at retail is easy cash in their product. As long as the Xbox 360 is selling over three-quarters of a million units during the holiday rush and Kinect sales are over half-a-million, then Microsoft isn't worried about the lack of movement on Kinect software. Much like the Wii, people are not getting into the system primarily for the software library; they're more than happy with what's inside the box. They might pick something up later on but that's a decision individual consumers will come to down the road. There is a very small hardcore Kinect market and if casual adopters continue to buy the accessory at a steady pace, it's great for Microsoft.

Speaking of treading water, Sony isn't doing too well. For home consoles, they're sitting third well behind Microsoft and falling behind the Wii on a week-to-week basis. Sony came into the holiday season with the Playstation 3 being the best-selling console of the year worldwide. By the end of 2011, not

only will they be surpassed by the Xbox 360 but they may be surpassed by the Wii as well (an unlikely scenario given that there are only two weeks left in the year but still possible considering Sony's slide). Maybe Sony is happy that they still managed to have a decent year despite the Playstation Network debacle and not having a great year with first-party titles. Still though, their performance the last couple of weeks has been pretty bad and there's little indication that things are going to get better. On the software side, things are very bad; only two of the top twenty-five titles from last week are for the Playstation 3. On top of that, both the Xbox 360 and Wii's software totals for the week are each almost double that of the Playstation 3.

By the way, that tired franchise mentioned at the beginning of the article is *Just Dance*. Not only was *Just Dance 3* the best-selling title for last week, it sold more than half-a-million copies. Several retailers I've spoken to were sold out days before Christmas (although at least one did receive a shipment prior to the 24th). It's amazing the legs of the series considering that the game isn't particularly good (the Wii version is the epitome of wobble). Yet casual fans love the game. Maybe it has to do with the fact that people generally like to dance, and while the Wii doesn't do a good job at measuring how good a dancer one is, it's still fun to dance around with friends listening to pop music. There are three *Just Dance* games in the top forty which is pretty amazing considering that this franchise was supposed to be grasping for air. By the end of the year, *Just Dance 3* will most likely have sold over four million copies across all the systems.

The Year in Review: Microsoft, Nintendo, and Sony

Depending on who you ask (and their allegiance) either *insert video game company here* did very poorly or did great. There really isn't any definite answer as to who won 2011. Perhaps an argument can be made that since Nintendo didn't domi-

Top Ten Games for the Week of December 17th, 2011 (Source: VGChartz.com)				
	Title	System	Publisher	Week Sales
1	Just Dance 3	Wii	Ubisoft	524k
2	Kinect Adventures	Xbox 360	Microsoft	507k
3	Super Mario 3D Land	3DS	Nintendo	444k
4	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3	Xbox 360	Activision	428k
5	Mario Kart 7	3DS	Nintendo	337k
6	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3	PS3	Activision	292k
7	Mario and Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games	Wii	Sega	283k
8	The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	Xbox 360	Bethesda	251k
9	The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D	3DS	Nintendo	249k
10	Mario Kart Wii	Wii	Nintendo	246k

dominated the last few years, that they lost big time. Perhaps the fact that Nintendo didn't get creamed this year despite a very rocky 3DS launch and next-to-no support for the Wii is the result of great success. An argument for and against each system can be made for their results in 2011.

Microsoft had a much easier year than its two competitors. There wasn't any major scandals and both software and hardware are doing very well. It's expected for the Xbox 360 to be the best-selling console in North America for the first time ever. Sales will be at least 50% higher than last year. The problem with this stat is that it doesn't reveal how many people are buying the Xbox 360 for the second time.

If there was a large amount of new adopters of the system, we would have seen a spike in software and accessory sales. We're seeing neither (with the exception of Kinect sales) and while that's not a bad thing for the finances of Microsoft (a sale is a sale), the Xbox's popularity hasn't exactly exploded as much as the sales of the system would indicate.

There are two major factors driving up Xbox sales with current Xbox owners. The Xbox's new design that was revealed last year is a much more reliable system. The original Xbox 360 had major overheating issues that resulted in many systems dying only after a couple of years (compared to many consoles from the 80s and 90s that are still working as if they were brand new). The redesigned Xbox 360 is a vastly improved system without there being a boost to horsepower. The new system hasn't had anywhere near the hardware failure rate as the previous one. Another great addition was adding Wi-Fi capability to the system without the need of an unnecessarily expensive attachment. The other major factor was that the hard drive on many of the older systems was becoming too small. Even 60GB was no longer big enough considering the amount of digital content available through Xbox Live. With the price of proprietary hard drives and Wi-Fi attachments for older Xbox consoles being so high, the desire to upgrade automatically leads to buying a new system.

The Kinect is doing very well although, as mentioned in the lead article of this newsletter, the software sales for other Kinect software is weak. This is another dagger in the great story of Microsoft this year in that, while the Kinect accessory is doing well on its own, the sale of one means also the sale of at least one piece of software (some Kinect bundles come with two or three games). This means that while it looks on paper that Microsoft is running neck and neck with Nintendo in terms of software in the lead-up to the holiday season, that number is inflated by games included with the Kinect accessory. Throw in the juggernaut that is *Modern Warfare 3* and it becomes clear that many Xbox 360 titles appear to be

underperforming. The Xbox 360 software pie is only so big and it's being dominated by Kinect and *Modern Warfare 3*. In the age of multi-million dollar budgets and HD gaming, that's a problem for some studios begging for table scraps.

The future appears to be relatively stable for Microsoft. The revenue they are making from Xbox Live is helping offset costs in other divisions of their gaming department. The online service helped make Microsoft profitable with their console sector for the first time ever a few years ago and it will continue to do so until at least the next console race. There isn't much in terms of new stuff on the horizon for the system as Microsoft and the third parties are relying mainly on tried-and-true IPs to keep their head above water during the current era of financial uncertainty. Halo, which was supposed to be a franchise that was to be retired, is coming back along with other major heavy-hitters like *Grand Theft Auto*. It could be a very good 2012 for Microsoft unless they're hedging their bets on Kinect software sales.

Nintendo had a very bizarre year. They lost money; the first time in a very long time. This was due to the horrible exchange rate for the Japanese Yen as well as R&D for the Wii U and the launch of the Nintendo 3DS. Until the currency exchange situation solves itself, Nintendo will have a rocky road again despite being a sales leader in terms of software and hardware.

Yet Nintendo is still pulling in more revenue than most video game companies. On paper, this shouldn't be the case. They have left both the Wii and the Nintendo DS for dead this year. Realistically, there was only one high profile release for each system; *Pokemon* for the DS and *Zelda: Skyward Sword* for the Wii. Yet the Wii is still up there with its two console counterparts in a three-way race down to the wire for top-selling console of the year (worldwide). Wii software is doing incredibly well considering that most of the software that is selling has been released for well over a year. Games like *Mario Kart Wii*, *Wii Sports*, and *New Super Mario Bros. Wii* are still selling over 100k a week during the holiday

rush. Sure, these titles are included in various bundles for Wii hardware but the fact that Wii hardware is still selling well is a miracle onto itself. Considering the lack of new games and the low prices on HD consoles, theoretically, Wiis should be collecting dust on store shelves. That's simply not the case.

The reason for this is because the Wii has a strong back catalog of quality titles. People can buy a Wii knowing that they're going to be able to find great games for the system. Many of these titles can be found at a budget price (although *New Super Mario Bros. Wii* and *Mario Kart Wii* still carry a brand new price premium despite being out for several years). The Wii is the economic choice this holiday season and because of that has led to the Wii having a strong year despite all its shortcomings.

However, the Wii did serve up a big cup of failure this year. Sales are much lower than last year and they're nowhere near the peak of the Wii hype from a couple of years ago. One problem might be is that too many people own a Wii and that the market is saturated. Another problem is that those who are considering buying a system and are knowledgeable about games might not buy a Wii with all the hubbub of the Wii U coming out in 2012.

The 3DS tripped over itself when it launched in March. The firmware still had to be upgraded and the launch line-up looked more like the Washington Generals than the Harlem Globetrotters. It only got worse from there as there was no compelling software from March until September with the exception of two Nintendo 64-era remakes: *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D* and *Star Fox 64 3D*. *Zelda* sold great but *Star Fox* barely made a dent on the sales chart. Additionally, Nintendo continued to purposely keep the digital download store (eShop) dry of titles choosing to release rarely more than one title a week. Even today, with the addition of NES and Game Boy Advance titles given free to early adopters (more on this next paragraph), Nintendo has only made one NES game available for everyone on the 3DS eShop and is refusing to release any GBA titles to the general public.

Nintendo panicked when it came to the 3DS and issued a \$70 price cut only 5 months after the release of the system. To placate early adopters, Nintendo offered 20 free games (10 NES and 10 GBA titles) to those who bought the system before the price drop. Nintendo announced this deal a few weeks prior to price drop which saw sales of the system spike. Sales of the system began to grow leading up the holiday season and software that people actually wanted began to become available. *Super Mario 3D Land* and *Mario Kart 7* became compelling reasons to own the system (*Super Mario 3D Land* has landed itself on many game of the year lists). At a sub-\$200 price and finally having a library of games worth owning, it's no surprise that the 3DS took off during the final months of the year. In fact, if sale trends continue, the 3DS will outsell any other system (portable or home console) this year. Additionally, the 3DS sales are now outpacing the original DS's sales for the first 12 months of each system's lifespan.

The future looks decent for Nintendo at least on the portable side. There are many highly anticipated titles coming out in 2012 for the 3DS; although most of them are Nintendo-published titles. *Paper Mario*, *Kid Icarus*, *Luigi's Mansion 2*, and *Metal Gear Solid: 3D* all have solid buzz surrounding them (although expect *Kid Icarus* to have lower than expected sales as one-off Nintendo franchises haven't been doing well for the last couple of years). The question remains as to what will happen with the Wii U. The third-parties appear to be on board but, then again, they were supposed to be on board with the original Wii and the Gamecube and look how well that turned out. CES 2012 will be the next look at the Wii U and hopefully we'll have more answers than questions about Nintendo's home console future.

Where Nintendo is lucky to have done so much with nothing, it's almost as if the same thing could be said about Sony but for entirely different reasons. For all intents and purposes, Sony should have been obliterated this year but they weren't. In fact, up until the last week before Christmas, they still had more sales for home consoles

than the other two companies (although trending sales data has shown that the Xbox 360 surpassed the Playstation 3 for sales in 2011 as of the December 24th). Sony had a lackluster launch of their Move peripheral that was supposed to blow the Wii and Microsoft's Kinect out of the water (it didn't). They also had a disastrous lead-up to E3 with the hacking of the Playstation Network which resulted in Sony shuttering the service for a several weeks. Yet the PS3 remains relatively unscathed and that, in it of itself, is a victory.

The Playstation 3 is sort of the middle child in the console family. The popular big brother is the Xbox 360 who is so cool that it has too many friends. The Playstation 3 sort of gets the excess friends. Then you have the little brother that is Wii. Everyone pays attention to the Wii despite the fact that it doesn't do anything special. The Playstation 3 can now do everything the Wii can do (if you buy the special Move peripherals) and the games look just as good on the Playstation 3 as they do on Xbox 360. Yet few actually choose the PS3 as their main console. Sales of multiplatform games indicate that gamers prefer buying games on the Xbox 360. This is because of Xbox Live and the achievement point system. It doesn't matter that the Playstation Network is free because there are more people overall on Xbox Live. Also, even though the Playstation 3 now has trophies to counteract Microsoft's achievement point system, it was late to the party and everyone has already taken up with Microsoft's system.

Yet people still buy the PS3. For smart shoppers, it makes sense as it is one of the best Blu-Ray players on the market and it up-converts DVDs to 1080p pretty well. For some who buy the PS3, the fact that it plays games is a bonus. A good portion of those who buy a PS3 buy it as a media centre as it does a solid job at streaming content from a home network and it also plays Netflix. As a media centre is great but playing the games is dessert.

The games part has been both a blessing and a curse for the Playstation 3 this year. The system has been blessed with some great exclusive titles

this year like *LittleBigPlanet 2* and *Uncharted 3* but unfortunately they don't compete well against either Microsoft's exclusives (*Gears of War 3*) or Nintendo's solid line-up of mascots (Mario and The Legend of Zelda). Because of progress the PS3 has made in terms of outperforming the Xbox 360 in sales, it's hard for Sony to get developers to make games exclusively for their platform and while they do have some decent first party stuff, it's just not as good as what Nintendo or Microsoft can offer.

The Playstation Network outage was a short-term disaster for Sony but in the end it didn't seem to affect them at all. Sales hardly slowed during the outage and EB Games wasn't stuck with an influx of used systems to sell. People still bought PS3 games at nearly the same rate they had previously been doing. In the end, the gift that Sony gave to gamers affected by the outage was more than generous (6 months of Playstation Plus resulting in around 2 dozen free games in the long run). However, the cynic would argue that if the PSN outage didn't affect Sony in sales, then it just goes to prove that their current online strategy is not working because the only thing Sony lost was a value-added service that few see the value in. While might seem a bit twisted, it does make a bit of sense. Microsoft has a stranglehold on HD gaming because of Xbox Live and the community that has grown around it. People buy and play games on a PS3 because they own a PS3 but there's really no incentive to do so. The Xbox Live experience has become an integral part of multiplayer games that people have started to get into the habit of buying games solely for the online community and not because the game offers great gameplay. *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* has sold incredibly well but if you ask many of the people who are currently playing it, it's more because of the social experience than great gaming.

Sony can't compete with Xbox Live at this point and they may never be able to catch up. They're only hope is that during the next wave of consoles that either people naturally migrate to the Playstation 4 (if that's what they call it) because of the services offer or if Microsoft royally screws up their next

console launch. While it's doubtful that the former would work if Microsoft keeps the momentum going with their next console by keeping Xbox Live stable, the most plausible scenario for Sony is Microsoft sinking its own ship. There is history to back up this theory as Sony was the dominate leader in video games with the PS2 and is now sitting third in the console race.

As for handhelds, it's not looking too good for Sony. If the PSVita had launched stateside this year, they may have been able to take advantage of Nintendo's disastrous start for the 3DS. However, with a February 2012 launch, it's allowed Nintendo to pick themselves up and dust themselves off. Unless it's revealed that the 3DS will make people go blind, the PSVita is going to have a hard time trying to stop the current momentum of the 3DS. While the 3DS isn't what the Wii was in its launch year, it is outpacing the original DS. Remember too that the PSP was launched after the DS and had more powerful hardware yet it still ended up a distance second to the DS when it was all said and done.

Further to add to the problems of the PSVita competing against the 3DS, the Japanese launch of the system earlier this month was the farthest thing from glitch-free. There were firmware problems reported that Sony tried to downplay unsuccessfully. There's also much confusion as to what can be saved and what can be transferred to the device. Some games purchased previously from the Playstation Store can be put on but a sizeable number of games cannot. The passport program that allows owners of UMDs to buy digital versions of their games at discounted prices was not as fabulous as advertised as the discounts announced aren't all that great and the selection of games eligible for this program are small. Hopefully Sony learns from their mistakes with the Japanese launch when they bring the system to North America and Europe next year or 2012 will be a miserable year for the company.



NEW PODCAST EVERY TUESDAY

The Games of 2011: January-March

January had a decent selection of games; two of which could arguably be considered part of one's top 10 list of the year. Despite the presence of some superstar titles, the field was relatively small for the month. Still, rarely do we see the first month of the year actually have more than one game worth buying, not to mention several.

The cream of the crop was *LittleBigPlanet 2*. It does everything the original did and way more. While the traditional game is a lot of fun, it's the user created content that really ties this title together. The only limits are one's imagination and it seems that many Playstation owners have limitless imagination. Some of the games crafted by users rival some of the digital titles produced for the Playstation Network by actual developers. Reviewers loved this

game as did the million-plus people who bought it.

While not as impactful as the original, *Dead Space 2* was still a great game. While it did have trouble finding its audience because of the January release date, it still managed to resonate with some. During game of the year discussions for this website, *Dead Space 2* has been bandied about like a dark horse. No one can deny that *Dead Space 2* was a great game; its problem is that it's not a game that everyone has played.

For every great game released, there are just as many, if not more flops. January had a share of them. *Two Worlds* was supposed to be a major franchise but the original didn't do so well and *Two Worlds II* didn't fare much better. Perhaps if there had been less hype surrounding the franchise, people would be more willing to deal with a less-than-perfect game. It's not a bad

Sales Figures for January 2011 Titles (Source: VGChartz.com)		
Title (System/Publisher)	1st Week Sales	YTD Sales
DC Online Universe (PS3/Sony Online)	104k	286k
Dead Space 2 (Xbox 360/EA)	212k	619k
Dead Space 2 (PS3/EA)	155k	466k
Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective (DS/Capcom)	10k	95k
Kingdom Hearts Re:coded (DS/Square Enix)	72k	297k
LittleBigPlanet 2 (PS3/SCEA)	226k	1.17m
Lord of Arcana (PSP/Square Enix)	4k	29k
Lost in Shadow (Wii/Hudson)	6k	39k
MindJack (PS3/Square Enix)	7k	26k
MindJack (Xbox 360/Square Enix)	6k	26k
Plants vs. Zombies (DS/PopCap)	27k	387k
Prinny 2 (PSP/NIS America)	2k	21k
Superstars V8 Next Challenge (PS3/Deep Silver)	n/a	n/a
Superstars V8 Next Challenge (Xbox 360/Deep Silver)	655	857
Two Worlds II (PS3/SouthPeak)	57k	168k
Two Worlds II (Xbox 360/SouthPeak)	83k	259k
Venetica (PS3/Atari)	6k	36k
Venetica (Xbox 360/Atari)	6k	37k

Reviews for Major Titles Released in January

Title (System/Publisher)	Metacritic	Edge	IGN	Game-Trailers	1UP	Game Informer
DC Universe Online (PS3/Sony Online)	70	n/a	7	n/a	6 (C-)	n/a
Dead Space (PS3, Xbox 360/EA)	PS3 90, Xbox 89	9	9	9	9 (A-)	9
Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective (DS/Capcom)	PS3 85, Xbox 83	8	8.5	8.5	9.5 (A)	6
Kingdom Hearts Re:coded (DS/Square Enix)	70	n/a	8	6.5	8.5 (B+)	6.75
LittleBigPlanet 2 (PS3/Sony Online)	92	9	9	9.3	9 (A-)	9.5
Lost in Shadow (Wii/Hudson)	69	6	7.5	5.5	n/a	7.5
Plants vs. Zombies (DS/PopCap)	80	n/a	8	n/a	n/a	8.25
Prinny 2 (PSP/NIS America)	70	n/a	7	6.3	6.5 (C)	n/a
Two Worlds II (PS3, Xbox 360/South Peak)	PS3 66, Xbox 68	5	6	7	n/a	7.75

Metacritic Scores for Other Titles Released in January

Title (System/Publisher)	Score
Lord of Arcana (PSP/Square Enix)	53
Mindjack (PS3, Xbox 360/Square Enix)	46 (Both)
Superstars V8 Next Challenge (PS3, Xbox 360/Deep Silver)	55 (PS3) 60 (Xbox)
Venetica (PS3, Xbox 360/Atari)	47 (PS3) 44 (Xbox)

Game but when you have *Dead Space 2* out around the same time, it's a hard argument to make to buy *Two Worlds II* over a potential game of the year candidate.

There were also some gems and some awful games on the portable side. The DS saw a pair of great games with *Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective* and the DS release of the great PC game, *Plants vs. Zombies*. It wasn't all roses for the DS as *Kingdom Hearts Re:coded* released to mixed reviews. That's saying something considering that the *Kingdom Hearts* games were a go-to series for the Playstation 2.

January wasn't a great month for the PSP. *Prinny 2* had some lukewarm reviews despite general praise for the first game in the series. The Square Enix game *Lord of Arcana* was a flop

leaving the system without a worthwhile game to buy for the month. The same goes for the Wii with the mediocre *Lost in Shadow* being released. This was a sign of things to come for both systems in 2011.

February was a surprising month for several reasons. The best reviewed game for any system was the PSP game *Tactics Ogre: Let Us Cling Together*. Sure, it's a remake but it came out at a time during the life cycle of the PSP where good games are few and far between. Another major surprise was the horrible reception for two major names in the video game industry. *Mario Sports Mix* received mixed reviews (which is unthinkable for a Mario title). Even though Mario has been spun-off into so many different types of games, the sports games are generally great. The other title, *Body and Brain Connection* for the Xbox 360 was a negatively reviewed game despite having the pedigree of being associated with Dr. Kawashima, the doctor behind the wildly successful *Brain Age* games for the Nintendo DS. While *Mario Sports Mix* ended up selling relatively well (no surprise), *Body and Brain Connection* did extremely poorly and sold in the tens of thousands.

It was a good month for gamers overall. The hybrid FPS/beat-em-up *Bulletstorm* hit store shelves with critical praise and was met with reasonable success. The *You Don't Know Jack* franchise was revived, and while it didn't sell as well as many would have liked,

it managed to sell better than most trivia based games as of late. It may have performed better had it been released as a digital downloadable title but, all things considering, it still was successful for what it was.

The most anticipated release for the month was *Marvel vs. Capcom 3*. The previous installment in the series is regarded by many as one of the greatest fighting games of all time. Whether or not this game (and the expanded version of the game released later this year) will hold a candle to *Marvel vs. Capcom 2* in the long run remains to be seen; the game was met with critical and commercial success. Perhaps it won't be another decade before we see another sequel to the series.

There were also a few solid titles that flew under the radar. *Radiant Historia* for the DS was largely ignored by the general public for a bunch of reasons, most importantly because people were already starting to look at what the 3DS's launch would look like the next month as well as having to compete against a *Dragon Quest* release on the same system (even though it was a remake of a game that never made it to North America the first time around). Those who got their hands on *Radiant Historia* were not disappointed and it is considered by a few to be one of the best DS games of the year.

The other inconspicuous title was *de Blob 2*. The original had only been released for the Wii but this time around it was multiplatform. While the

Sales Figures for February 2011 Titles (Source: VGChartz.com)

Title (System/Publisher)	1st Week Sales	YTD Sales
Body and Brain Connection (Xbox 360/Namco)	826	35k
Bulletstorm (PS3/Electronic Arts)	33k	114k
Bulletstorm (Xbox 360/Electronic Arts)	221k	459k
Dance Paradise (Xbox 360/THQ)	6k	57k
De Blob 2 (PS3/THQ)	2k	27k
De Blob 2 (Wii/THQ)	3k	44k
De Blob 2 (Xbox 360/THQ)	673	28k
De Blob 2 (DS/THQ)	771	28k
Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Revelation (DS/Square Enix)	38k	119k
Dreamcast Collection (Xbox 360/Sega)	474	23k
Hyperdimension Neptunia (PS3/NIS America)	13k	131k
Knights Contract (PS3/Namco Bandai)	3k	20k
Knights Contract (Xbox 360/Namco Bandai)	1k	16k
Mario Sports Mix (Wii/Square Enix)	48k	608k
Marvel vs. Capcom 3 (PS3/Capcom)	216k	476k
Marvel vs. Capcom 3 (Xbox 360/Capcom)	201k	460k
Naruto Shippuden: Shinobi Rumble!! (DS/Takara Tomy)	1k	7k
Radiant Historia (DS/Atlus)	14k	80k
Tactics Ogre: Let Us Cling Together (PSP/Square Enix)	23k	82k
Test Drive Unlimited 2 (PS3,/Atari)	35k	106k
Test Drive Unlimited 2 (Xbox 360/Atari)	91k	227k
TRINITY: Souls of Zill O'll (PS3/Tecmo Koei)	4k	30k
You Don't Know Jack (PS3/THQ)	11k	72k
You Don't know Jack (Wii/THQ)	11k	64k
You Don't Know Jack (Xbox 360/THQ)	18k	99k
You Don't Know Jack (DS/THQ)	319	15k
Ys I & II Chronicles (PSP/Xseed)	8k	25k

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VIDEO GAME NEWS AND REVIEWS MOVIE NEWS AND REVIEWS
General News and Discussion (Montreal, Quebec, Canada, International, Sports, Business)

Metacritic Scores for Other Titles Released in February

Title (System/Publisher)	Metacritic Score
Body and Brain Connection (Xbox 360/Namco)	60
Dance Paradise (Xbox 360)	62
Dreamcast Collection (Xbox 360/Sega)	56
Hyperdimension Neptunia (PS3)	51
Naruto Shippuden: Shinobi Rumble!! (DS)	60
Radiant Historia (DS/Atlus)	85
TRINITY: Souls of Zill O'll (PSP)	54
Ys I & II Chronicles	67

game looks better on the HD consoles, it still feels more natural to control it on the Wii. Unfortunately for THQ, even though it was on several consoles, it still didn't manage to sell all that well. While *de Blob 2* is not going to win any game of the year awards, it still is a fun game to pass the time. The sad thing is that it's still struggling to find a lifeline in the bargain bin and used game market.

Aside from *Mario Sports Mix* and *Body and Brain Connection*, there were a few other high profile clunkers. *Test Drive Unlimited 2* received lukewarm reviews but was largely ignored by the public. The *Dreamcast Collection* for the Xbox 360 sold and played horribly. Sega has always had a problem with emulating older software onto new hardware (there are few exceptions to this rule) and it didn't quite work out this time around. Additionally, while some were happy to see classics like *Crazy Taxi* on the collection, the compilation could have used more support with popular games like *Jet Grind Radio*, *Sega GT*, *Sega Rally Championship*, or *Shenmue*.

Reviews for Major Titles Released in February

Title (System/Publisher)	Metacritic	Edge	IGN	Game-Trailers	1UP	Game Informer
Bulletstorm (PS3, Xbox 360/Electronic Arts)	PS3 84, Xbox 85	9	8	8.6	7.5 (B-)	9.25
De Blob 2 (PS3, Wii, Xbox 360/THQ)	PS3 75, Xbox 79, Wii 80	n/a	8	8.4	7 (C+)	8
Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Revelation (DS/Square Enix)	80	n/a	7	8.5	8 (B)	8.5
Knights Contract (PS3, Xbox 360/Namco Bandai)	PS3 53, Xbox 55	3	3.5	4.9	n/a	7
Mario Sports Mix (Wii, Square Enix)	65	n/a	6.5	n/a	8 (B)	4.5
Marvel vs. Capcom 3 (PS3, Xbox 360/Capcom)	PS3 86, Xbox 87	7	8.5	9	9 (A-)	9.25
Tactics Ogre: Let Us Cling Together (PSP/NIS America)	88	n/a	8.5	9.1	10 (A+)	9
Test Drive Unlimited 2 (PS3, Xbox 360/Atari)	PS3 70, Xbox 68	7	5.5	6.4	n/a	8.5
You Don't Know Jack (PS3, Wii, Xbox 360/THQ)	PS3 84, Xbox 83, Wii 83	n/a	8.5	8.3	n/a	8

March was a huge month this year for several reasons. Usually, there's a bump in games this month as companies try to make one last push to raise revenue before the end of the financial year (March 31st). The other reason, at least for this year, was the launch of the Nintendo 3DS. While it wasn't the greatest launch ever, it still had some big names release software with Nintendo, Electronic Arts, and Ubisoft all releasing multiple titles for the system for its launch.

While there wasn't any must-own games for the 3DS at launch, it still had some solid software. *Super Street Fighter IV: 3D Edition*, *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Shadow Wars*, and *Ridge Racer 3D* were all good titles that kept early adopters happy in the short term. Surprisingly, none of these are Nintendo developed software. In fact, the Nintendo software was kind of flat. While *Nintendogs + cats* and *Pilotwings Resort* got decent reviews, neither received the kind of praise that we normally hear from Nintendo published software, especially at launch. The bomb that stunk up everything was *Steel Diver* which felt more like a tech demo for the software than anything else. While it would have been a great downloadable title from the eShop for a much cheaper price, asking consumers to shell out \$40 for this game was insulting.

The other major problem with

the launch of the 3DS was that beyond the three kind-of-great games that came out with the release of the system, there was a lot of junk released by third parties. Even somewhat unstoppable franchises like *Madden* and *The Sims* (both EA games) were rejected by consumers and critics due to the lack of quality. Other stable franchises like *Rayman* and *Super Monkey Ball* fell flat. Then there was the selection of games like *Asphalt 3D* and *Combat of Giants: Dinosaurs 3D* that made the situation far worse. No one could argue that the 3DS didn't have great horsepower but these games made it look like we took one step forward and two steps back.

That being said, one of the best games of the month was released on a Nintendo handheld. The Nintendo DS still had a major release with *Pokémon Black/White*. While it didn't provide the franchise with the major overhaul of the formula that some fans have been asking (begging) for since the Game Boy Advance games, the game still provides from some great RPG action that is accessible for young and old. Prior to the release of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*, *Pokémon Black/White* was the best-selling title of the year. For those that thought that Pokémon mania was dead, they were sadly mistaken.

For the consoles, there were many great games and not-so-great

games released. *Crysis 2* came out on the consoles (whereas the original was a PC-exclusive). While it wasn't as graphically groundbreaking as the first game, it still provided a solid FPS experience and showed that the franchise isn't all about style but has plenty of substance. The *Fight Night* franchise was resurrected by EA with the release of *Fight Night Champion*. It's been a long while since there has been a boxing game worth owning (with the exception of *Punch-Out!!* for the Wii). *Need for Speed: Shift 2 Unleashed* was released and kept the seat warm for those who were waiting for *Forza Motorsport 4* to come out later in the year. *Tiger Woods 12: The Masters* was loved by critics but consumers weren't buying. Perhaps Woods's personal troubles stunted sales for the game or maybe people are tired of buying a golf game on a yearly basis. Wii sales of the game took a huge tumble (although the series on the Wii had been in major decline since the first couple of years) and PS3 and Xbox 360 owners kept their distance as well.

There were a few surprises this month too. The anticipated *Dragon Age II* came out and received less than stellar reviews. Perhaps not everything BioWare touches turns to gold but considering the anticipation for this game, the reviews and the sales performance for this game may go down as one of the major disappointments of the year.

Reviews for Major Titles Released in March

Title (System/Publisher)	Metacritic	Edge	IGN	Game-Trailers	1UP	Game Informer
Asphalt 3D (3DS/Ubisoft)	46	4	3	4.5	n/a	3
Bust-A-Move Universe (3DS/Square Enix)	55	n/a	6	4.6	5.5 (D+)	6
Crysis (PS3, Xbox 360/Electronic Arts)	85	8	9	9.1	9 (A-)	9
Dissidia 012: Duodecim Final Fantasy (PSP/Square Enix)	79	n/a	9	8.1	9 (A-)	7
Dragon Age II (PS3, Xbox 360/Electronic Arts)	PS3 80, Xbox 77	6	8.5	9.2	8.5 (B+)	8.25
Fight Night Champion (PS3, Xbox 360/Electronic Arts)	PS3 84, Xbox 87	9	8	9.3	8.5 (B+)	9
Homefront (PS3, Xbox 360/THQ)	PS3 70, Xbox 71	5	7	7.3	7.5 (B-)	7
Lego Star Wars III: The Clone Wars (PS3, Wii, Xbox 360/LucasArts)	PS3 78, Xbox 77, Wii 74	n/a	6.5	n/a	8 (B)	4.5
Madden NFL Football (3DS/Electronic Arts)	50	n/a	5	5.1	n/a	6
MLB 11: The Show (PS3/SCEA)	90	n/a	8	9	9 (A-)	9.25
Monster Tale (DS/Majesco)	81	6	8.5	n/a	8.5 (B+)	8
Need for Speed: Shift 2 Unleashed (PS3, Xbox 360/Electronic Arts)	PS3 80, Xbox 82	8	8.5	8.9	8.5 (B+)	8.5
Nintendogs + cats (3DS/Nintendo)	75	7	7	7.1	n/a	6.5
Okamiden (DS/Capcom)	82	8	8.5	8.5	8.5 (B+)	8.75
Pilotwings Resort (3DS/Nintendo)	72	6	7	6.7	8 (B)	7.25
Playstation Move Heroes (PS3/Sony)	55	3	5	n/a	n/a	6.5
Pokémon Black/White (DS/Nintendo)	86	8	9	8.6	8.5 (B+)	8.75
Ridge Racer 3D (3DS/Namco)	75	8	n/a	6.8	7.5 (B-)	7.25
Steel Diver (3DS/Nintendo)	62	5	7	6.2	7 (C+)	4
Super Monkey Ball 3D (3DS/Sega)	60	5	7.5	6.6	7 (C+)	6
Super Street Fighter IV: 3D Edition (3DS/Capcom)	87	8	8.5	8.2	8.5 (B+)	9
The 3rd Birthday (PSP/Square Enix)	71	7	8.5	5.4	7.5 (B-)	6.75
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters (PS3, Xbox 360, Wii/Electronic Arts)	PS3 82, Xbox 81, Wii 84	n/a	8	8.4	8 (B)	9
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Shadow Wars (3DS/Ubisoft)	79	7	7	8.1	9 (A-)	8.25
WWE All Stars (PS3, Wii, Xbox 360/THQ)	77	n/a	7	8.4	8 (B)	7.5
Yakuza 4 (PS3/Sega)	80	7	6.5	8.3	8.5	n/a

Playstation Move Heroes, which was supposed to be a major accessory-seller for the Playstation Move had an even larger thud than *Dragon Age II*. Not only were the reviews horrible but it didn't help move all that many Move bundles. Motion control gaming isn't dead (although it's not as hot as it once was)

but Sony didn't put much thought into this software other than having the false believe that *Sly Cooper* and *Jak* are major franchises in the video game universe.

March was even a big month for the PSP. There were a number of major releases for the system which

keep the system alive for a few months more. Some anticipated titles like *The 3rd Birthday* flopped while others such as *Dissidia 012: Duodecim Final Fantasy* garnered good reviews and had decent sales. Even if the PSP doesn't have Sony's full support anymore, it's nice to see third parties still caring about it.

Metacritic Scores for Other Titles Released in March	
Title (System/Publisher)	Score
Ar tonelico Qoga: Knell of Ar Cell (PS3/NIS America)	66
Combat of Giants: Dinosaurs 3D (3DS/Ubisoft)	45
Dynasty Warriors 7 (PS3, Xbox 360/Tecmo Koei)	PS3 57 Xbox 60
Gods Eater Burst (PSP/D3)	74
Jikandia: The Timeless Land (PSP/Aksys)	65
Major League Baseball 2K11 (PS3, Xbox 360/2K Games)	PS3 70 Xbox 69
MLB 11: The Show (PSP/SCEA)	76
MotoGP 10/11 (PS3, Xbox 360/Capcom)	PS3 69 Xbox 67
Naruto Shippuden: Kizuna Drive (PSP/Takana Tomy)	55
NASCAR 2011: The Game (PS3, Xbox 360/Electronic Arts)	PS3 63 Xbox 62
Phantom Brave: The Hermuda Triangle (PSP/NIS America)	68
Pro Evolution Soccer 2011 3D (3DS/Konami)	74
Rango: The Video Game (PS3, Wii, Xbox 360/Paramount)	PS3 70 Xbox 70 Wii 53
Rayman 3D (3DS/Ubisoft)	65
Samurai Warriors Chronicles (3DS/Tecmo Koei)	63
The Legend of Heroes: Trails in the Sky (PSP/Xseed)	79
The Sims 3 (3DS/EA)	54
Top Spin 4 (PS3, Xbox 360/2K Sports)	PS3 80 Xbox 84
TrackMania: Build to Race (Wii/City Interactive)	76
Warriors: Legends of Troy (PS3, Xbox 360/Tecmo Koei)	PS3 46 Xbox 57

Sales Figures for March 2011 Titles (Except 3DS) (Source: VGChartz.com)		
Title (System/Publisher)	1st Week Sales	YTD Sales
Ar tonelico Qoga: Knell of Ar Ciel (PS3/NIS America)	11k	46k
Crysis (PS3/Electronic Arts)	103k	275k
Crysis (Xbox 360/Electronic Arts)	202k	506k
Dissidia 012: Duodecim Final Fantasy (PSP/Square Enix)	29k	127k
Dragon Age II (PS3/Electronic Arts)	94k	244k
Dragon Age II (Xbox 360/Electronic Arts)	249k	510k
Dynasty Warriors 7 (PS3/Tecmo Koei)	13k	112k
Dynasty Warriors 7 (Xbox 360/Tecmo Koei)	6k	89k
Fight Night Champion (PS3/Electronic Arts)	63k	199k
Fight Night Champion (Xbox 360/Electronic Arts)	84k	188k
Gods Eater Burst (PSP/D3)	4k	28k
Homefront (PS3/THQ)	116k	242k
Homefront (Xbox 360/THQ)	354k	677k
Jikandia: The Timeless Land (PSP/Aksys)	2k	11k
The Legend of Heroes: Trails in the Sky (PSP/Xseed)	8k	48k
Lego Star Wars III: The Clone Wars (PS3/LucasArts)	49k	197k
Lego Star Wars III: The Clone Wars (Wii/LucasArts)	130k	450k
Lego Star Wars III: The Clone Wars (Xbox 360/LucasArts)	83k	318k
Lego Star Wars III: The Clone Wars (DS/LucasArts)	95k	326k
Major League Baseball 2K11 (PS3/2K Sports)	28k	101k
Major League Baseball 2K11 (Wii/2K Sports)	6k	106k
Major League Baseball 2K11 (Xbox 360/2K Sports)	53k	286k
MLB 11: The Show (PS3/SCEA)	80k	378k
MLB 11: The Show (PSP/SCEA)	4k	81k
Monster Tale (DS/Majesco)	4k	29k
MotoGP 10/11 (PS3/Capcom)	145	18k
MotoGP 10/11 (Xbox 360/Capcom)	n/a	n/a
Naruto Shippuden: Kizuna Drive (PSP/Takana Tomy)	3k	20k
NASCAR 2011: The Game (PS3/Activision)	53k	186k
NASCAR 2011: The Game (Wii/Activision)	60k	145k
NASCAR 2011: The Game (Xbox 360/Activision)	65k	196k

**Sales Figures for March 2011 Titles (Except 3DS) - Continued
(Source: VGChartz.com)**

Title (System/Publisher)	1st Week Sales	YTD Sales
Need for Speed: Shift 2 Unleashed (PS3/Electronic Arts)	17k	75k
Need for Speed: Shift 2 Unleashed (Xbox 360/Electronic Arts)	22k	78k
Okamiden (DS/Capcom)	41k	75k
Phantom Brave: The Hermuda Triangle (PSP/NIS America)	759	20k
Playstation Move Heroes (PS3/SCEA)	7k	46k
Pokémon Black/White (DS/Nintendo)	1.64m	3.75m
Rango: The Video Game (PS3/Paramount)	833	24k
Rango: The Video Game (Wii/Paramount)	1k	32k
Rango: The Video Game (Xbox 360/Paramount)	797	22k
Rango: The Video Game (DS/Paramount)	286	38k
The 3rd Birthday (PSP/Square Enix)	12k	64k
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters (PS3/EA Sports)	67k	342k
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters (Wii/EA Sports)	14k	122k
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters (Xbox 360/EA Sports)	81k	296k
Top Spin 4 (PS3/2K Sports)	13k	91k
Top Spin 4 (Wii/2K Sports)	1k	21k
Top Spin 4 (Xbox 360/2K Sports)	12k	65k
TrackMania: Build to Race (Wii/City Interactive)	889	5k
Warriors: Legends of Troy (PS3/Tecmo Koei)	5k	31k
Warriors: Legends of Troy (Xbox 360/Tecmo Koei)	n/a	n/a
WWE All Stars (PS3/THQ)	17k	81k
WWE All Stars (Wii/THQ)	6k	65k
WWE All Stars (Xbox 360/THQ)	21k	109k
WWE All Stars (PSP/THQ)	4k	55k
Yakuza 4 (PS3/Sega)	14k	77k

**Sales Figures for March 2011 3DS Only
(Source: VGChartz.com)**

Title (Publisher)	1st Week Sales	YTD Sales
Asphalt 3D (Ubisoft)	14k	98k
Bust-A-Move Universe (Square Enix)	8k	45k
Combat of Giants: Dinosaurs 3D (Ubisoft)	11k	121k
Madden NFL Football (EA Sports)	20k	106k
Nintendogs + cats (Nintendo)	51k	566k
Pilotwings Resort (Nintendo)	57k	235k
Pro Evolution Soccer 2011 3D (Konami)	6k	52k
Rayman 3D (Ubisoft)	24k	125k
Ridge Racer 3D (Namco)	24k	123k
Samurai Warriors Chronicles (Tecmo Koei)	29k	72k
Steel Diver (Nintendo)	14k	57k
Super Monkey Ball 3D (Sega)	25k	134k
Super Street Fighter IV: 3D Edition (Capcom)	71k	257k
The Sims 3 (Electronic Arts)	30k	81k
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Shadow Wars (Ubisoft)	15k	109k

**WEEKLY VIDEO GAME
PODCAST**

**SPECIAL EDITION PODCAST
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 28TH**

Year in Review Discussion: Microsoft, Game Reviews, Recap of New Releases

Video Game Reviews

Video Game Review

Adventure Island

Nintendo Entertainment System

1988

Developed by: Escape/Hudson Soft

Published by: Hudson Soft

Despite *Super Mario Bros.* creating a renaissance for games after the Video Game Crash of 1983, it made it almost impossible for good platformers to get their moment in the sun. Why play anything else when there's *Super Mario Bros.* available. While Hudson's *Adventure Island* isn't anywhere as good as Mario's first platformer, it still provides as decent experience in the genre. It does have a few problems such as its difficulty level, the weird continue system, and it's uninspiring level design. Still, the quest of Master Higgins still provides from some decent platforming entertainment that is good for those who like this type of game to give a try.

Much like all the other games in the genre, Master Higgins goes out to seek his kidnapped girlfriend. Higgins has to traverse through dangerous landscapes that is littered with enemies and pitfalls all around. At the end of every world, he must battle a boss (although all the boss battles are identical). It's your standard fare for a platformer with a few twists. There are only a few power-ups in the game. The basic one is the tomahawk that Higgins can use to attack enemies. The skateboard allows Higgins to move much more quicker and jump farther but prevents him from stopping (he's always in a state of motion). There's also a bee power-up which makes him invincible for a short period of time and another bee power-up that drains his energy. Higgins needs to constantly collect fruit which replenishes his health bar. The health bar doesn't go down when he's hit but diminishes as time passes in the game. If Master Higgins goes hungry, he dies. The only thing that's affected by enemy hits are the power-ups. Once hit, Higgins loses his power-ups. Once all the power-ups are gone, he also dies.

Graphically, the game looks good. The game is one of the best looking platformers on the NES with

colourful landscapes and well-drawn sprites. Few games look better on the system and those that do usually have additional chipsets to provide for better graphics. There are some framerate issues when the action gets too fierce and there are some scrolling issues that don't affect gameplay too much but are still visually annoying. Still, the game looks great despite its age since it's plenty colourful, the sprites are well designed, and the backgrounds are not entirely bare.

The sound is a mixed bag. While the themes sound good for the first while, they do start to get a bit annoying after so many loops. That's not to say that the game is played better with the sound turned off but it does little to compliment the game. The sound effects are nothing special; they're not bad but they could have been better. They sound nothing more than stylized blips and bloops.

The controls can be a bit frustrating. While they're very responsive, as the game gets more difficult towards the end, it seems like the response time slows. This is extremely problematic towards the end of the game which can be especially frustrating. Playing the game is just like any other platformer for the system (d-pad to move, one button to jump, the other button to run/fire). It's not complicated to control (not many games on the NES are) but the starchiness of the controls makes for controller-throwing fits by the impatient towards the games end.

That's fine though since many gamers will never see the end of the game. This game can be quite difficult and requires plenty of skill to beat. That would normally be acceptable except for the fact the game seems to be made intentionally difficult for a reason because there is the ability to continue at the beginning of each world (there are eight of them with four levels each) if the player finds the Hudson Bee at the end of the first level. The problem is that new players wouldn't know to look for the bee unless someone tells them to and it's not exactly sticking out like a sore thumb for people to find. Even if you find the bee and you make use of the continue system, the game's difficulty in the harder stages become a

major drag. Power-ups in the later stages are a necessity but are hard to come by. If a player gets game over in the final world and continues from there, they will have an extremely difficult time finishing the game because it requires perfect timing and reflexes to complete without any active power-ups. It's a vicious cycle that becomes increasingly frustrating.

Even with that though, the game makes for a different experience for those groomed on the *Super Mario Bros.* series. It's not entirely different from that style of game that would confuse players yet it offers enough differences in gameplay that makes the game feel unique. The fruit/health system is particularly interesting and makes for an interesting challenge as trying to get fruits in the harder levels becomes a risk/reward system. On one hand you can try and get through the world as fast as possible to prevent dying from not getting fruit but run the risk of making mistakes or taking one's time to get fruit so that they have more time in the level although that means having to spend more time exposed to enemies and other dangers of the environment. It's provides for an interesting and satisfying experience.

Hudson's *Adventure Island* is a good title that could have used more refinement before it was released to fix the control and difficulty issues. That's not to say that this is a bad game but it doesn't compare well against other top-quality platformers on the NES. It's better than many of the same games of its genre but it's merely an average game. If you're hard-pressed to play something other than Mario on the NES, this is a good choice; just be warned that Mario may have spoiled you.

☆☆☆

MADNESS BREWING WEEKLY MOVIE NEWSLETTER

Next Issue: December 30.2012

- Year in Review: Q1 2011
- The Financial Woes of the Industry and What It Means for 2012
- Movie Reviews
- Box Office Data for the Holiday Wknd.

Video Game Review

Centipede

Arcade

1980

Developer: Atari

Publisher: Atari

During the golden age of the arcades, you couldn't throw a stone in an arcade and not hit at least a dozen shoot-em-up games. *Centipede* was one of the top games of its generation and still holds up reasonably well despite not being all that flashy. For those who like classic arcade action, *Centipede* is a solid bet. However, for those who have grown up with games that have things like a background and a decent soundtrack, it might be a bit problematic.

The game is all about stopping the infestation of giant centipedes and other creatures. The player moves their ship across the playing field trying to shoot a giant centipede and other dangerous creatures like spiders and scorpions. Killing a centipede cannot be done in one shot; all the segments of the centipede must be destroyed. The centipede does not actively go after the player, they move from left-to-right and then right-to left while moving down the screen until they hit an obstruction (either the side wall or a mushroom). Players can shoot the mushrooms to slow down the progression the centipede makes to give themselves more time to shoot and destroy the angry critter down. Once a centipede is vanquished, a new one appears and is slightly faster than the previous one. There also runs the possibility of a centipede being split into two by chaotic fire and two centipedes moving around the landscape independently of one another. If a player is zapped by an enemy, they lose a life. Once all the player's lives are exhausted, the game is over.

Visually, the game isn't much to talk about. The sprites barely look like what they're supposed to look like. The centipede sort of looks like a centipede if you use your imagination and everything else kind of looks worse. While the game does provide colour, there isn't much to it. The game has a black background and the sprites have a few colours to them. After the defeat of each centipede, the colour scheme

changes. Some colour schemes work better than others since the wrong combination can be bad on the eyes. It's hard to say which ones work well and which ones don't because it depends on the person. Some may not even find a problem with any of the colour schemes.

The game doesn't have any background music. There are sound effects of the shooting and the enemies moving but they're not that great. Some sounds, like the sound of falling enemies, can be the equivalent of nails on a chalkboard. Sound is not a selling point at all and is a topic best avoided. Thankfully, sound is rarely a reason to play a game or avoid it entirely.

While the game isn't great in the visuals or sound department (whether it be 1980 or today), the gameplay is quite well done. The action is frantic and makes for a very challenging experience. Compared to other shooters of the day, it's quite complex. This type of activity within the game has given *Centipede* the ability to hold its own in terms of gameplay despite running on primitive hardware. Like many of the games of its day, the game's only goal is to get the highest score possible. Maybe setting world records is out of the reach of many but the game never makes it seem impossible for one to set a new personal high score. Trying to break one's top score becomes a mission that needs to be completed.

Atari's *Centipede* is a very good arcade game that holds up well despite its age. The game becomes an obsession that's hard to stop. Yeah, the game looks ugly by today's standards (and by yesteryear's too) and probably sounds better if you're wearing ear plugs but it's gameplay is incredibly well designed and can lead to hours of one's life disappearing in the pursuit of just one more game.

☆☆☆



**NEW PODCAST
EVERY SUNDAY**

Video Game Review

Decimation X

Xbox 360 (Xbox Live Indie Games)

2010

Developed by: Xona Games

Published by: Xona Games

Space Invader clones are a dime-a-dozen in the gaming sphere although they're less prevalent in today's age than during the golden age of the arcades. To simply dismiss Xona Games's *Decimation X* as a clone of one of the originators of the shoot-em-up genre is selling the game short. That being said, it's not much different from *Space Invaders*. The graphics are not much better and the action is very similar (think of the original game but as if it were on steroids). *Decimation X* is a pretty good game at a great price that will easily suck away much of your spare time.

The concept of *Decimation X* is almost a direct copy of *Space Invaders*. The player controls a ship and needs to defeat all the enemies that are floating overhead before they land on the ground. The player has a few barriers to protect themselves from enemy fire although these slowly disintegrate as they're being fired upon. The similarities end there as *Decimation X* turns up the volume exponentially. Enemies are aggressive and quick, firing a non-stop barrage of bullets. While the first couple of waves are easy to deal with, it only takes a minute or two before the screen is blanked out by all the firepower raining down from the top. Power-ups can be obtained by defeating enemies; sometimes one at a time although once a certain amount of enemies are defeated, a layer of power-ups fall from the sky for the player to try to collect before they disappear forever. The game ends once the enemies overcome the player (you can only prolong the inevitable for so long).

Graphically, there's not much to talk about when it comes to this game. This game is designed to have a retro feel to it and it works very well. However, there are flashes of modern design interlaced with the retro look. Despite mostly being white sprites on a black background, the game has flashy pixelated explosions and special

rainbow coloured sprites. The game runs at a very quick framerate which makes the action incredibly intense. Even though it's not the game's big selling point (as some could argue that the graphics are quite rudimentary), it has a certain charm that matches the aesthetic of the game.

The soundtrack is interesting but it does get tiring after a while. The game features only one musical score that plays on a loop. Although the music does help to build the franticness of the game, the modern electronic music seems out of place for a game that graphically looks like it would be something to come out of the 80s. More tracks would have been nice and with it the ability to select different styles. The sound effects are great and really add to the feel of the game. Even though they're not realistic, the sounds match the style of the game and compliment it well.

Xona Games did a very good job with *Decimation X*. Sure, you can't help but think that you're playing a *Space Invaders* clone while playing it but considering that Taito seems to be out of the *Space Invaders* business, these game feels like what would be the natural evolution of the game. As an Indie game, it's a good value as this game has a low price and will easily waste plenty of your time. It's solid fun that feels like a step back in time.

☆☆☆

Video Game Review
Donkey Kong Country
Super Nintendo
1994
Developed by: Rare
Published by: Nintendo

Donkey Kong isn't exactly the crown prince of Nintendo's large cast of mascots. In fact, it's almost as if he's the black sheep; the first nemesis of the beloved Mario that was relegated in the 80s to teaching kids about math. When Nintendo enlisted Rare to create a new type of platformer during the mature age of the Super Nintendo's life cycle, it was curious to see what would be the result. *Donkey Kong Country* ended up being a renaissance for the primate

character that helped revitalize the IP and became, for a while, a solid number two behind Mario in Nintendo's roster of franchises. *Donkey Kong Country* is the game that started it all again and despite its age is still one of the best platformers ever.

Foregoing the Mario route where a princess gets kidnapped by a reptile, *Donkey Kong Country* borrows its backstory slightly from Kirby: an evil villain named King K. Rool steals the protagonist's hoard of bananas (although this time the evil villain is a reptile...just like in Mario). To make matters worse, Donkey Kong's chimpanzee buddy, Diddy Kong was tossed aside by the King's minions and sealed in a barrel (oh, the irony). Now it's up to Donkey Kong to free his friend from his wooden prison and find his stash of bananas.

The goal of *Donkey Kong Country* is to get from one end of the level to another and traverse the map to finally reach King K. Rool. Six worlds await with a number of levels to be played. The game sticks to a jungle theme throughout although some worlds do have a particular theme of their own (for example, one world is filled with snow while another has most of its levels taking place inside of a factory).

The game doesn't deviate much from the traditional jumping and killing/avoiding enemies and collecting 100 of something to get an extra life (in this case bananas) although there are some gameplay elements that make the game different from other platformers. There are some levels where the Kongs' ride in mine carts that rely more on quick reflexes and memorization than anything else. There's also plenty of minigames to be found throughout levels that can be found by either collecting enough animal tokens or discovering secret passages or barrels. These diversions break the monotony of having to do the same thing over and over again for the entire game which can be a curse for platformers that have long playthrough times. Some of the platforming is broken up by having to shoot the Kongs through barrels which sometimes takes precise timing to get just right.. It's a neat gimmick that isn't overused and doesn't become tired.

Another interesting aspect of the game is the collection of the letters of K-O-N-G to score an extra life within a level. Trying to find every last letter adds something to the game but it's not necessarily an original concept (think of the dragon coins from *Super Mario World*).

The game handles very well; probably the best of any 2D platformer. Running and jumping is easy to do and very fluid. You will never be cursing your controller saying that you pressed the button and the game didn't respond. The game is very responsive and it feels like you have total control. Both Donkey Kong and Diddy Kong have similar movesets although there are a few differences. Both the Kongs have rolling attacks; Donkey has a somersault while Diddy has a cartwheel. One of the interesting aspects of the game is that if either Donkey or Diddy Kong perform their signature rolls over a pit, they can still jump as if they're on a platform. It gives new meaning to "leap of faith" jumps.

Donkey Kong also has a pound move that enables him to find things (like bananas and extra lives) buried in the ground. Using the pound move to kill enemies will also score Donkey Kong bananas most of the time. While Diddy Kong doesn't have a move of his own to even up his arsenal with Donkey Kong's, he's much faster and agile than Donkey Kong. He can reach areas of the game that Donkey Kong can't because he's slower and can't jump as high or far. Also, Donkey Kong can kill heavier enemies in the game due to his larger size while those same enemies laugh at Diddy Kong as his attacks bounce right off them. It's a very interesting dynamic as there are some areas where it's easier to play the game as Donkey Kong and some areas are easier (or sometimes only accessible) using Diddy Kong. However, playing as one or the other throughout the entire game doesn't make the game impossible. For those who don't like being forced to play as specific characters during particular portions of games that allow for multiple characters, this is not an issue whatsoever.

In 1994, what brought people to the table was the graphics. At the time, this game was the best looking

title on the Super Nintendo. Perhaps on an HDTV this game is a little rough looking but, when played on a CRT, the game still looks great. Even when looking at it on an HDTV, the game still looks decent. The game is very colourful and the sprites are highly detailed considering what system the game is on. All the characters have multiple animations that relate to what's going on in the game. One of the funniest animations is that of when a large enemy just laughs off Diddy Kong's attacks. Things like that give the game personality. While graphics are normally about style, it actually has substance too.

The soundtrack is outstanding too. Some of the themes are earworms that will permeate your brain and refuse to leave. Each musical selection balances out the gameplay well. The map theme, the standard jungle music theme (heard in the first level and several others), the final boss level theme are all particularly fantastic. The sound effects are incredibly well done. While the standard sound effects that we would expect sound great (like the sound of an enemy getting hit or items being collected), what really makes the atmosphere spectacular is the amazing job done with the ambient sound effects. It's not enough that you hear the sound of enemies walking but you also hear snakes slithering and recoiling and the sounds of the jungle in the distance. The game is not only a treat on the eyes but also on the ears.

While Donkey Kong and Diddy Kong are the stars of the show, the game features a strong lineup of secondary characters; some of which are playable. There are several non-playable characters along the way to offer Donkey Kong some help; Candy Kong allows players to save their game, Funky Kong let's players revisit worlds they have already beaten, and Cranky Kong gives the adventuring Kongs some advice. Aside from Cranky's humourous sarcasm, these NPCs are not only worthless, they create unnecessary problems in the game. Once a player selects a world, they are stuck in that world until they find Funky Kong who will transport the Kongs to another world. The greater problem is that once a player is stuck in the world, they need to beat enough

levels to find Candy's area on the map so they can save their game. This can be a problem as it may take a few levels before Candy's save area is revealed. There is no option to save at any time which can be problematic. Additionally, while Cranky is fun to deal with from time to time, most of advice goes without saying or doesn't add up to much. An interesting diversion at best; unnecessary padding for the cynics on the audience.

The game gets interesting with the playable secondary characters. Like Diddy Kong, many of Donkey Kong's animal friends are locked away in crates due to the dastardly tactics of King K. Rool and his followers. During their adventure, the Kongs can get the help of Rambi the Rhino, Enguarde the Swordfish, Espresso the Ostrich, and Winky the Frog. Each character has their own moveset. Donkey and Diddy can ride these characters throughout the level. The only problem is that they're level specific so even if you finish a level riding a particular character, they don't follow you into the next level. Collecting three symbols throughout the game of a particular animal opens up their own minigame which allows players to get tons of extra lives. There's also one other animal friend that helps out: Squawks the Parrot. However, Squawks doesn't do much except shine a light during dark levels and he's only available in one level.

A slight hit against the game is the inability to save acquired items collected throughout the game. Bananas, animal medallions, and extra lives disappear when the game is turned off. While it's not a big deal that the extra lives disappear since the game provides plenty of opportunity to score easy lives, losing the animal medallions feel like a kick to the gut. These medallions are not littered all over the place making playing the animal minigames more of a special occasion than it needs to be.

When *Donkey Kong Country* was released in 1994, it was hardly considered revolutionary. Basically it was a traditional platformer with a flashy coat of paint. Even Nintendo's golden goose Shigeru Miyamoto considered the game nothing more than a bunch of hype.

Even though it didn't reinvent the wheel, Donkey Kong Country offers excellent platforming action that still is quite solid despite its age. It's different enough from the usual Mario fare yet still feels like a Nintendo-produced game. There are few platforming titles that are better than *Donkey Kong Country*.

☆☆☆☆☆

Video Game Review

Space Invaders

Arcade

1978

Developed by: Taito

Published by: Midway (North America)

It's hard to evaluate a game that was published in 1978 by today's standards (and it will probably be even more so for people in the future). When *Space Invaders* came out, it was seen as a revolutionary game that dominated the video game industry. It was so popular yet so simple a game that when the sequel came out a year later, the only thing Taito/Midway did was include colour; and that was more a trick than actual software/hardware engineering as they simply put colour filters over certain parts of the screen. Still, playing *Space Invaders* today is still quite a bit of fun. Graphically and technically it has been surpassed by modern games but, due to a strong foundation, it is still provides for a good time.

The concept of *Space Invaders* is simple; enemy invaders are coming from outer space and it's the players job to shoot them down with a ship of their own. Enemies come in from the top of the screen and slowly move their way downward. The player has a few barriers to protect themselves from incoming enemy fire. The game speeds up from one of two things happening: the fewer enemies on screen, the faster they move, and once an entire wave of enemies are defeated, new ones appear and are faster than the previous set (they're also more vicious with their firepower). There is no ending to the game (until the player is finally defeated); the goal of the game is to get the highest score on the machine.

The game doesn't have much in terms of graphics or sound. The game

game has a black background with white sprites. The sprites themselves don't have much detail; they just look like dancing icons. Still, they have a certain charm to them that makes the game have its own identity (if Taito had chosen to use generic geometric shapes, this game would not be as iconic as it is). There is very little sound to talk about. There isn't any background music and there is a limited amount of sound effects. The sound effects help break the silence and at least aid the immersion of the game slightly but no one is going to scream from the rooftops how much they like the sound effects from this game.

While it can't be confused for the best shoot-em-up available, it's a game that still manages to be fun despite its age. It's simple twitch action that provides for an intense experience as the difficulty level increases. What makes the game addictive is trying to get a higher score. It never feels as if getting a new personal high score is unobtainable and the pursuit of such a goal can waste plenty of time (and quarters depending on where the game is being played). The game looks deceptively simple which becomes very inviting for unsuspecting players (victims, perhaps?). Getting into the game is very simple but getting out of it is harder. With that said though, those who constantly need to achieve different types of goals or need varying gameplay will have trouble sticking around. Those who can sit still for more than five minutes without needing to experience something from a Michael Bay movie will be hooked.

There's a reason why Taito's *Space Invaders* was one of the biggest arcade titles of all time and that we still talk about it today. It's a great game although there's no way they could box it and sell it as a retail game as is. The game is lots of fun in small doses and can be played on multiple devices. Still, there's nothing like playing the game in an arcade cabinet with a joystick and a fire button. If you do find yourself nearby a *Space Invaders* cabinet, you'll have a lot of fun with it. Just be warned, if you put one quarter in, you'll be putting many more in the machine.

☆☆☆

Top Games From the Last Three Months

Multiplatform

- Assassin's Creed: Revelations (PS3, Xbox 360)
- Batman: Arkham City (PS3, Xbox 360, PC)
- Battlefield 3 (PS3, Xbox 360, PC)
- Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 (PS3, Xbox 360, PC)
- Dark Souls (PS3, Xbox 360)
- Dungeon Defenders (PS3-PSN, Xbox Live, PC)
- The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (PS3, Xbox 360, PC)
- The King of Fighters XIII (PS3, Xbox 360)
- LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7 (PS3, Wii, Xbox 360, 3DS, DS, PC)
- NBA 2K12 (PS3, Xbox 360)
- NBA Jam: On Fire Edition (PS3-PSN, Xbox Live)
- Orcs Must Die (Xbox Live, PC)
- Rage (PS3, Xbox 360)
- Rayman Origins (PS3, Wii, Xbox 360)
- Rocksmith (PS3, Xbox 360)
- Saints Row: The Third (PS3, Xbox 360, PC)
- Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure (PS3, Wii, Xbox 360, 3DS)
- Trine 2 (PS3, Xbox 360, PC)
- Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3 (PS3, Xbox 360)

Microsoft Xbox 360

- Dance Central 2
- Forza Motorsport 4
- Guardian Heroes (Xbox Live)
- Joe Danger: Special Edition (Xbox Live)
- Sonic CD (Xbox Live)

Nintendo Wii

- escapeVektor: Chapter 1 (WiiWare)
- Kirby's Return to Dreamland
- The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword

Sony Playstation 3

- Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception

Nintendo 3DS

- Cave Story 3D
- Mario Kart 7
- Pushmo (eShop)
- Super Mario 3D Land

Nintendo DS

- Professor Layton and the Last Specter

Sony Playstation Portable

- Where is My Heart? (PSP Mini)

PC

- Anno 2070
- Blackwell Deception
- The Book of Unwritten Tales
- Dungeon Defenders
- Football Manager 2012
- To The Moon

This Week's Game Releases

Wii

- Aladdin Magic Racer
- The Ultimate Battle of the Sexes

Last Week's Downloadable Game Releases

Xbox Live

- Trine 2

Playstation Network (PS3)

- Apples to Apples
- Orbit (Minis)
- P.O.W.—Prisoners of War (Minis)
- Prehistoric Isle (Minis)
- Sonic CD
- Trine 2

Nintendo WiiWare

- Soccer Up!

Nintendo 3DS eShop

- Mighty Switch Force
- Tetris (GB—Virtual Console)

Nintendo WiiWare

- Christmas Wonderland
- Chronicles of Vampires: Origins
- Doodle Fit
- Rythim Retrobits

In Next Week's Issue

- The Top Games of 2011
- The Year in Review April to June
- Video Game Reviews:
 - Alien Crush (TG-16)
 - Duck Hunt (NES)
 - Final Fight (Arcade)
 - Rad Racer (NES)
 - Sonic 2 (Genesis)
 - Super Mario Land 2 (GB)