

NintendoWorldReport

Issue 2

POWERED OFF



10/10 GAMES

NWR's top-scoring games reviewed!

EXCLUSIVE EDITORIAL

How to Destroy a Soul

LITTLE INFERNO

Interview with Tomorrow Corporation

FIRE EMBLEM AWAKENING

Check out our new preview!

BUST A GROOVE

How to PokéRap like Rapmaster J

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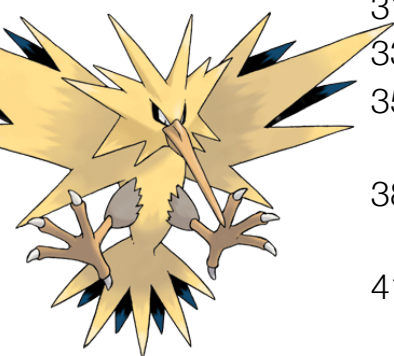
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This Month

By Nicholas Bray

Welcome to issue #2 of Nintendo World Report: Powered Off. This month, we have a great selection of new, old, and even some exclusive content for you to enjoy.

James Jones kicks things off with an article about the soul-crushing games he endured as a child. We take a look at the NWR staff's top 10 games of 2012, and in the review section we feature four games that received 10/10 scores. On top of that, we have a cool comic from Andrew Brown, along with everyone's favorite performer, Rapmaster J, dropping in to school us all on how he approaches the infamous Pokérap.

The design and content is still evolving for Powered Off, but I feel that this issue is a step up from the first. Over the coming months, we are hoping to make this digital magazine even better, but for now, please enjoy issue #2. We still need letters and fan art submissions, so please consider sending your mail to: poweredoff@nintendoworldreport.com

The letters section will be run and answered by Eurocast favorite Karlie Yeung!



How to Destroy a Soul

By James Jones

For reasons I'd rather not explain, I've spent much of the last month researching the procurement of a very specific categorization of video game. In the process, I have used "less than legal" methods to try over 20 titles from bygone systems, and have spent countless hours reviewing video of more recent titles, downloading demos whenever XBLA would accommodate me.

My quest is to find the soul destroyer.

Each game has its own unique attributes. Some instill infinite wonder. Some provide a sense of adventure. Some create the same kind of exhilaration that only comes when beating the unbeatable. Some are just means to pass the time.

But some, a small number, destroy souls.

This is not some mythological construct. These are not games cursed by some pagan god—this is not some mid-aughts movie. Nobody dies for real when they die in the game.

This is real life.

I've played these games before.

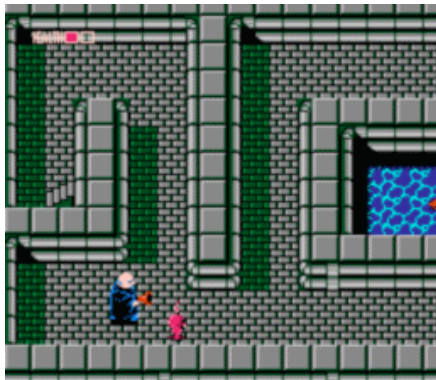
I've owned these games before.

I am an expert. I spent my life hunted by these games, and now, for reasons I will not discuss at this juncture, I hunt them.

Growing up, my parents would, from time to time, procure NES games. These games were not Mario 3, or The Legend of

Zelda. These games were Fester's Quest and Muppet Adventure. I don't think this was deliberate; they were not educated enough in the field to be so

consistent in buying games hobbled by such staggering inconsistency. They were savants. You might even call them artists. As a child, my NES collection once ended a sleeper prematurely, simply because it was so hellacious.



At some point I'll detail my search criteria, but first I'd like to discuss titles from my past. Keep in mind, this is just from my NES collection.

Muppet Adventure: Chaos at the Carnival:



As a child, this game didn't make any sense. Fozzie Bear wanders around a maze made of poorly rendered ice cream cones. Kermit the Frog... who, for reference,

is a frog, has to ride a raft downstream. Gonzo soars through space in the only playable segment of the game, and Animal flails about in a bumper car. There was apparently a "last" level, but since the Fozzie Bear segment never seems to end, I never saw it. I liked the Muppets. They seemed subversive. True to a fault, they were just that.

Fester's Quest:

A 2D collect-a-thon, this game's flaws are well documented. Guns that simply don't deal enough damage to kill enemies, endless mazes, strange indoor 3D segments, and staggering difficulty all dog this game. Most irritatingly, Fester moves as if he actually is dead, while his foes move at a relative blistering pace. There is no escape. There is no victory. Fester's Quest offers only defeat. Even frogs are catalysts of decimation. Fun Fact: IGN named Fester's Quest the 45th-best NES game, which leads me to believe the fine folks at IGN only played 45 NES games.

The Addams Family:

The legend continues with horrendously floaty 2D platforming. Rote memorization of the family mansion's various trapdoors is a must. While I was able to rescue every member of the Addams family, I was never able to get them all in a single session. Of course, there were no saves or passwords in this cash-in. It's embarrassing that I even tried. A GameGenie couldn't even resolve the fundamental problems that plague this game. It is a miracle I cleared any level, let alone all of them.



The Bugs Bunny Birthday Blowout:

Oh... I hadn't forgotten about you. I still see you when I close my eyes. Every night I play Birthday Blowout in a restless sleep, and it is for that reason I never feel alive. The cover art shows Bugs on a giant cake. The entire game was supposed to be a sort of 50th birthday gift to Bugs. This is undoubtedly the worst gift anyone has ever received. Ironically, I got this game as a gift as well, which makes it both the first- and the second-worst gift ever. Bugs and I could probably start a support group.

Where's Waldo?:

No.

Last Action Hero:

A bad '90s action movie starring a future governor, playing an action hero who BECOMES REAL. Really, mother? Why?



The Simpsons: Bart vs. The Space Mutants:

Skate around and spray-paint purple things red. It's a bad brawler with worse controls. It's one of multiple Simpsons games I owned. Bart vs. the World has a slightly racist segment in China that's just to die for. With that in mind, they're all terrible. Eat my shorts.

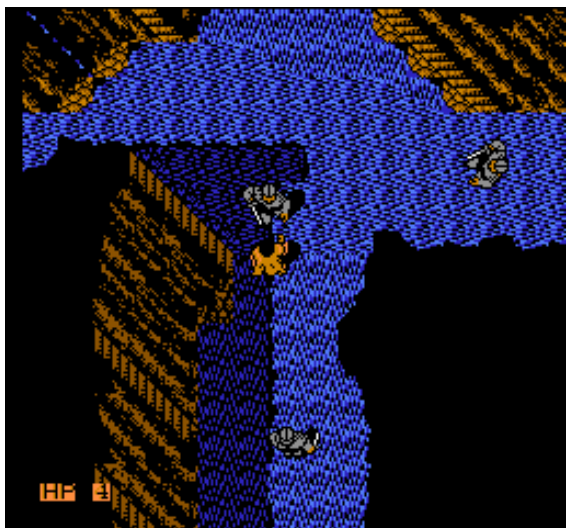


Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves:

This game is a strange creation, not unlike a movie about Robin Hood in which Kevin Costner and Christian Slater pretend to be legendary English heroes without exerting the slightest effort to perform English accents while Morgan Freeman plays an Arab. The game mixes strategy segments with cave exploration, overland travel, and fencing. Hell, I've probably forgotten more gameplay modes than I remember. It's absurdly lengthy and features no way to continue. Oddly enough, I beat it once. It's still better than the movie.

A quick summary indicates that licensed games are probably where I have the best chance of finding the Soul Killer. However, the truly obtuse games aren't licensed—they're almost never creative enough for the task. To kill a soul, you can't just be mind-alteringly subpar. You need to make someone challenge their perceptions of what gaming is, and perhaps question if gaming should continue. But that will have to wait for some other time.

There's plenty more to discuss.



Of Nerds and Men: Inhalation

By Zachary Miller

Zach waxes nostalgic about Kirby.

It's something of a Kirby week here at Nintendo World Report. You should do yourself a favor and relive a few of the pink puffball's excellent games.



While the "canon" Kirby games do tend to be simplistic, they are nonetheless engaging and provide a sort of "gaming comfort food." I always enjoy playing Kirby games to varying degrees, but my favorites remain highly ranked. Aside from offering standard platforming shenanigans, Kirby is also arguably Nintendo's most experimental franchise—probably because our boy can so easily transform into a ball. But even apart from that, even the platforming games try new things with zealous enthusiasm. Let's review.

Being the old-timer I am, I remember when the original Kirby's Dream Land came out on the Game Boy Brick. I owned a copy and I played it a lot—unlocking the game's impressive Hard Mode was a joy.



Did I mention Kirby can fly? Like, forever? *head explodes*

Unfortunately, today Kirby's Dream Land can be conquered in about a half-hour. Still, the game and its characters were new and charming. Kirby's ability to fly and suck up enemies (only to spit them out at other baddies) was a novel idea at the time. Of course, Nintendo must have realized it had something special on its hands when Kirby's Adventure came out for the NES. I played the balls out of this game, and have repurchased it at every available opportunity.

Kirby's Adventure is a huge game with varied environments, lots of secret areas, and a brand-new

ability that would become integral to the series: the power to inhale enemies and copy their powers. This ability proved critical for finding the game's many secret doors and switches. Kirby's Adventure also introduced a bevy of mini-games, the antihero Meta Knight, and a difficult final boss, the Nightmare. Kirby's Adventure is packed with content, and I love going back to it. The 3D Classics remake for 3DS eShop is especially fantastic.

And then we get to Kirby's first spin-off game: Kirby's Pinball Land. It was an easy transition, since Kirby is already a ball-shaped character. The game set a high standard for handheld pinball games, but it hasn't aged particularly well. For one thing, Kirby can't absorb powers (an oversight that would be remedied in Kirby's Block Ball). For another, he seems magnetically attracted to each board's side gutters. While the methods of progressing through each pinball board were imaginative, Pinball Land's underlying physics makes it more frustrating than fun today. However, I daresay that without this important game, we wouldn't have such excellent handheld pinball games as Pokémon Pinball: Ruby & Sapphire, and Metroid Prime Pinball.

"Being the old-timer I am, I remember when the original Kirby's Dream Land came out on the Game Boy Brick."

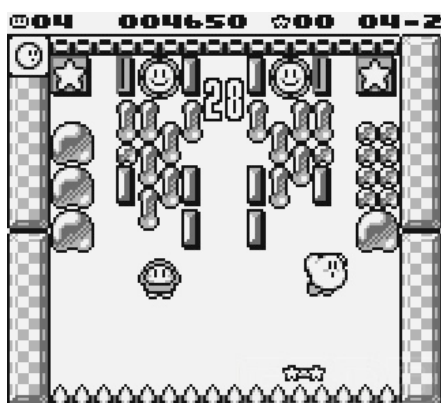
Kirby's Dream Land 2 expanded upon the standard set by Kirby's Adventure. Suddenly, Kirby had three animal friends who, in addition to having their own unique abilities, modified the way Kirby used his inhaled powers. Finding the Rainbow Drop collectibles often required a specific animal/power combination. Kirby's Dream Land 2 was also one of the first Game Boy games to boast Super Game Boy support—custom colorizations and a unique border. This is probably my second-favorite Kirby game, as it boasts variety and interesting puzzles.



"Color in a Game Boy game? That's impossible!"

The Super Nintendo saw three Kirby games: two traditional platformers and one spin-off title. Kirby's Dream Course took another swing at the "Kirby as a ball" gameplay by turning him into a golf ball. The game takes place on an isometric, pseudo-3D green. Your goal is to knock Kirby into all the enemies on the field and then into the hole. As in any golf game, you set power, direction, and spin to move Kirby around the green. He can absorb enemy powers by smacking into enemies with them, and these powers are often critical to finishing the course. Based on the player's performance, you can earn medals, which unlock new features in the game. Kirby's Dream Course is a little strange, but it's fun, and has a two-player mode. I have it on VC but haven't touched it in years.

Another of my favorite Kirby games, Block Ball, came out the next year, and I snatched it up right away. It's basically the Kirby version of Arkanoid, but gives Kirby the ability to absorb enemy powers and use them to up the score in each stage. Unlike Pinball Land, Block Ball has aged very well and remains one of my go-to games on 3DS Virtual Console.



I remember the next two SNES Kirby games very fondly: Kirby Super Star is perhaps the best-known Kirby game. It features seven platforming games of varying length and complexity and three mini-games. In most of the games, a second player can take control of a "Helper" character. The games range from Spring Breeze, a prettied-up version of Kirby's Dream Land, to The Great Cave Offensive, which is a Metroidvania-like scavenger hunt. I loved Super Star and played it with my brother all the time. There was always one treasure in the Great Cave Offensive I could never get, and I've never tried since. I should go back to that game. It's available on plenty of platforms now—DS, Virtual Console, and the Dream Collection.

The next year, we got a more traditional game: Kirby's Dream Land 3. The game is essentially similar to its predecessor, but adds three more animal friends and borrows Super Star's optional second player (a blob named Gooey). Instead of finding Rainbow Drops, Kirby 'n' Friends must complete a vaguely defined quest in each stage. The most amazing thing about Dream Land 3 is its visual style: hand-drawn in the vein of Yoshi's Island, with beautiful pastel colors and wonderful animations.



I used Nintendo Power to complete all the quests back in the day, as doing so unlocks an excellent final boss fight that, given the rest of the game's happy tone, is a little disturbing. I have this on Virtual Console and I keep meaning to replay it.

Three years later, on the N64, I marveled at Kirby 64. It was a beautiful blending of 2D platforming and 3D environments, but was by no means "2.5D." Aside from the polygonal visuals, Kirby 64 made an interesting change to Kirby's move set: while there were but seven unique powers, Kirby could combine any two of them, which means there were really 49 powers. Specific combinations were used to find the game's Crystal Shards (similar to Rainbow Drops). Sometimes, the challenge was to find the right combination and then hold onto it during the length of a stage. Once in a blue moon, players took control of King Dedede through sections of certain areas, which was a lot of fun but incredibly rare. Kirby 64 also includes the series' most epic final boss fight. While I wouldn't call this one of my favorite Kirby games, Kirby 64 is certainly inventive, and the graphics hold up fairly well for an N64 game.





After Kirby 64, the series started splitting into lots of different directions—I didn't play too many of them. I missed out on Tilt 'n' Tumble, Kirby Air Ride, and the Amazing Mirror, but I played Nightmare in Dream Land and loved every second of it. Why wouldn't I? It was a remake of Kirby's Adventure that included the ability to play as Meta Knight, who controlled differently and only had three health bars instead of Kirby's six. When I picked up my original DS, I also grabbed Kirby's Canvas Curse, which I loved. It remains one of the most inventive uses for that second screen. Once again reduced to a ball, players used the stylus to draw platforms and ramps for Kirby to move through each stage, defeating enemies and collecting medals. Collecting enough medals unlocked new balls (which tended to have different physics): Waddle Dee, Meta Knight, and even Dedede! I love Canvas Curse, and I wish somebody would make a sequel. I unlocked every unlockable in that game and played through most of the stages with all of the characters. I'm not sure what I did with that game—I wish I still had my copy.

"When I picked up my original DS, I also grabbed Kirby's Canvas Curse, which I loved."

After that, I missed out on Squeak Squad and Super Star Ultra (I've got the original!), but I did play Kirby's Epic Yarn after becoming entranced by the visuals and hearing nothing but good things from Neal Ronaghan, who famously gave the game a 10—based largely on the fact that he was smiling from ear to ear while playing it. I liked the game, but it really overstayed its welcome, and being the completionist I am, I just had to play 100 percent of the multitude of mini-games, which was exhausting. I picked the game back up this year but found it hard to get back into. Epic Yarn is slow moving, and the visuals, while charming, can't carry the entire game. The two-player mode is fun, though. But again, Epic Yarn is extremely experimental, messing with the visuals and even the core combat mechanics: Kirby whips things instead of inhaling them, and he doesn't copy powers. Instead, he goes through Yoshi's Island-like transformations into other forms for brief intervals.



After that, I sadly missed out on Mass Attack and Return to Dream Land, although neither piqued my interests all that much. I do want to grab the Dream Collection someday, because it includes a lot of my favorite Kirby games in one package. Of course, I've picked up every Kirby game that's been released on the 3DS eShop. Like I said before, the Kirby games are something like comfort food to me—never all that challenging, but fun nonetheless, and usually inventive. I can't wait to see where Kirby goes from here!



Fire Emblem Awakening

By Alex Culafi

It's finally coming to America, and we're gonna give you all of the juicy details.

After months of waiting, pining, and speculation, North American 3DS owners will have the chance to play the thirteenth game in the Fire Emblem series, FE: Awakening.

Though an original game in the turn-based strategy series, Awakening reportedly borrows elements from previous entries, while offering improvement in other areas. Perhaps the most notable inclusion in Awakening is its new "dual" system, which acts as a refinement to the rescue commands of the past. Initially, rescuing was used to effectively move units around the map, but at the cost of lower stats and greater susceptibility to attack. In Awakening, units can join forces, and receive stat boosts for doing so. Additionally, attacks can be conducted with both joined party members at once, as can dual blocks, which have the ability to occasionally negate enemy attacks. Even if two units aren't doubled, they can perform dual attacks and blocks if they simply stand adjacent to each other.



Plenty of versatility exists within the dual system. Units receive different stat boosts depending on who's doubling up on who: using a general can offer a defense boost to another player, while a sword master can buff fellow units with a speed increase. Units can also trade items, and the player can drop, swap, and change the position of characters at will.

Apart from its deep new feature, though, the game is still Fire Emblem, and, supposedly, still hard as nails. With three difficulties (and an unlockable fourth for those especially skilled few), Normal, Hard, and Lunatic, the game is said to

challenge even the most weathered of series veterans to some extent over a 40-chapter campaign. The ultimate difficulty tier, Lunatic, reportedly requires near-perfect mastery of the mechanics, and the risk of immediate and utter defeat.



In past iterations of the series, grinding acted as something of a difficulty softener, making the challenge more manageable to the uninitiated. Such grinding is almost entirely absent in Awakening, which features a far more limited number of skirmishes available between chapters. Another alteration comes in the return of the generation system, a feature prevalent in the Japan-only Fire Emblem: Seisen no Keifu. The premise: when female units build a strong enough bond with a partner, their children later become recruitable as soldiers. The mechanic is especially deep since which two parents originally partnered up influences the skills of the children.

Perhaps the coolest thing in Awakening is its position as the first 3DS game in Japan with paid downloadable content. Among that content (offering new characters priced between 250 and 400 yen) is Marth (who was originally free for a month), Roy, Leaf, Alm, Micaiah, Erika, Celice, Ephraim, and Elincia.

Returning from the seventh Fire Emblem game (released on the Game Boy Advance in 2003, and the first Fire Emblem to come to both Europe and North America) is the "My Unit" class, which allows the player to use an avatar of him or her self within the game, and offers the ability to marry and have a (recruitable) child. Of course, players can also expect plenty of new classes to choose from in Awakening.

PREVIEW

Like its predecessors, Awakening is built around a narrative of war and relationships. Fire Emblem-focused site Serenes Forest summarizes the plot of the game:

"The story focuses on the trials of Krom, the prince of the Holy Kingdom of Iris, and his companions during a turbulent era. When the neighboring nation of Perezia starts acting suspiciously, Krom commands the vigilante force to keep his country at peace. Soon, he encounters an unholy force plaguing the lands and a masked swordsman claiming to be the Hero King of legends."

Of course, from the presence of downloadable content, Awakening looks to include many crossovers from throughout the series.

The title features a dynamic music system, which shifts in correspondence to the player's position on a map, as well as in battles. For instance, as a battle starts, the relatively calm, piano-focused track for a given map would quickly shift to a more intense percussion and bass version of the same arrangement.

Following the divisive graphical style of Shadow Dragon and its Japan-only follow-up, Awakening combines smoother 3D sprites in battle with simple yet traditionally charming units on the map. In the case of character designs, the game somewhat adheres to those of past entries, but carries a slightly more anime look.

Although a release date hasn't been pinpointed, the game could come out this year. With three major Nintendo releases coming out and the game not being featured at the recent software showcase, though, I would place my chips on Awakening hitting stores early 2013.



Bit.Trip Presents Runner 2: Future Legend of Rhythm Alien

By Tom Malina

PREVIEW

The bits don't stop tripping 'til Commander Video runs home.

Looking back on the ups and downs of Nintendo's WiiWare service, it is abundantly clear that the retro-styled Bit.Trip series is one of the major high points. Across six very different titles, indie developer Gaijin Games introduced a unique flavour of arcade gaming, fusing deceptively simple gameplay mechanics with a psychedelic flair for visuals and sound. And between them all, most would agree that the fourth entry in the series, Bit.Trip Runner, stands above the rest. The gameplay truly applied the often-touted philosophy of 'easy to learn, hard to master' and aural design was so well synced with it, you almost felt like you were creating it as you played. For this reason, it is hardly surprising, in the aftermath of the Bit.Trip saga, that Gaijin has returned to the runnin', jumpin', slidin' action that was so acclaimed, in the amusingly-titled Bit.Trip Presents Runner 2: Future Legend of Rhythm Alien.



Commander Video is back, with his trademark rainbow in tow.

From the looks of things, the core fundamentals of the original are still in place for Runner 2. The mysterious protagonist of Bit.Trip, Commander Video, still runs automatically from left to right as the player inputs his moves in order to avoid or destroy everything that blocks his path. He can still collect presentation-altering power-ups as well as gold bars for bonuses, and if the levels shown so far are any indication, the game will be just as fiendishly difficult and timing intensive as the first Runner.

Where Runner 2 obviously differentiates itself, at least at first blush, is in the huge graphical upgrade. The Commander and all of his surroundings are rendered in full polygonal 3D this time around, whilst the jump to HD provides an extra level of detail to the backgrounds. It's a significant shift from the distinctly old-school look of the Bit.Trip games, but early screenshots and videos seem to suggest that it will retain the same quirky charm, with abstract geometry and whimsical details dotted all over the place.

The game design appears to have been expanded as well. Commander Video keeps all of his abilities from Runner, but there are now additional obstacles to surmount, from loop-de-loops and speed boosts to giant fans and rails, which the Commander can move up and down while grinding on them.

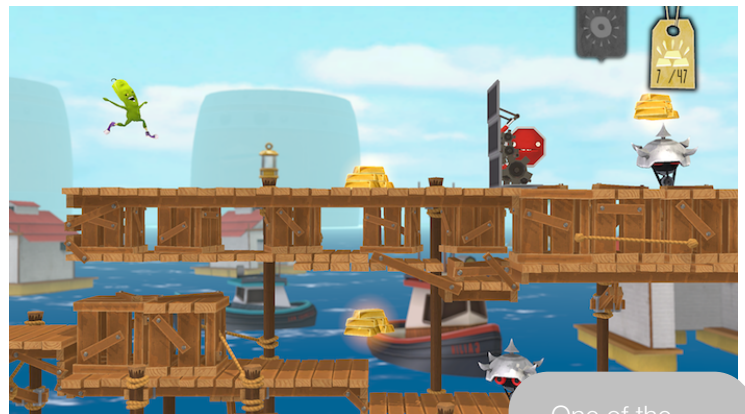


Nothing says new fangled HD graphics quite like a happy mountain smoking a pipe.

With the Runner gameplay being so focused around tight reflexes and pattern recognition, adding too many new elements risks giving too much to think about, but these mechanics seem to have smartly refrained from introducing a load of new control inputs and overcomplicating the experience. A different bonus system has also been

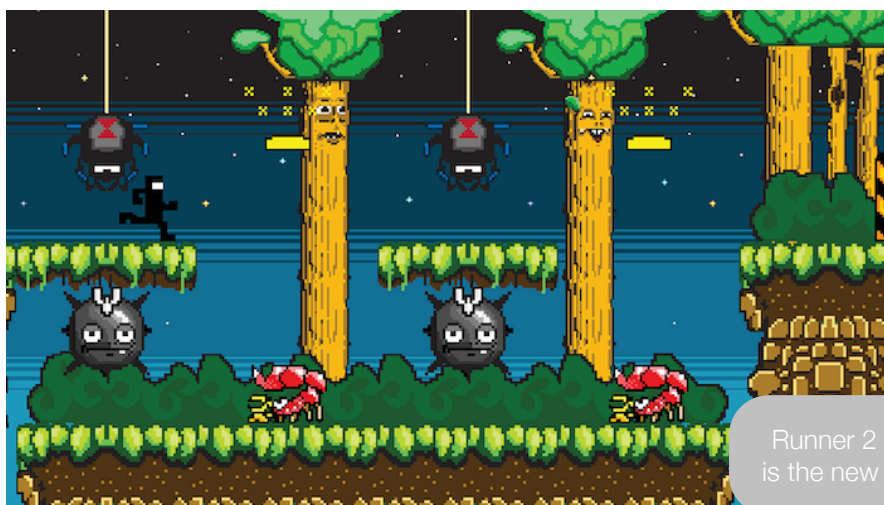
implemented, so that completing a level with all gold bars collected will now result in Commander Video running into a cannon at the end. The player must time their button press to fire him as close to the centre of a distant target as possible, so as to maximise the number of bonus points.

Furthermore, there will be more exploration in Runner 2, as the stages will sometimes split into multiple paths. Players will need to cover both the upper and lower routes in each level if they are to find all the collectibles, which include keys for unlocking secret levels, coins for unlocking costumes and an assortment of extremely bizarre playable characters (a guy with a cheeseburger for a head, anyone?) The Wii U version of the game will also have some exclusive unlockables - finding special Famicom cartridges hidden in certain stages gives the player access to Retro Challenges. These are played on the Wii U GamePad screen and are themed after specific Famicom games.



One of the many strange new characters, Unkle Dill, decides to take the high road.

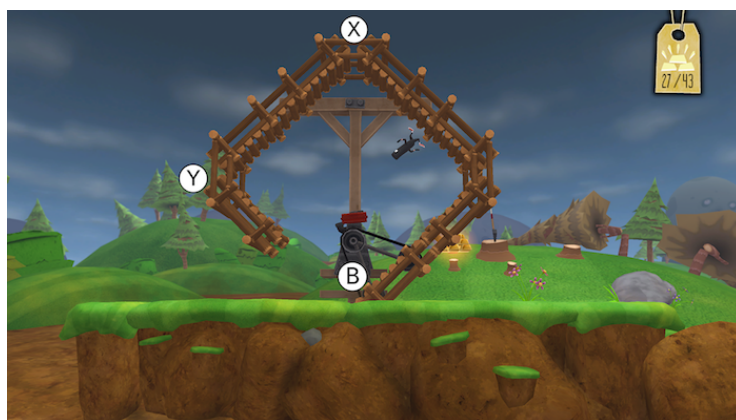
The developers have promised a tonne of content for Runner 2. Apparently, the game will have approximately three times the number of levels as the first Runner, with 100 stages, including boss encounters, spread across five differently themed worlds. This may sound a bit daunting, given the difficulty of its predecessor, which some people were unable to even finish. However, there are a couple of things that could make Runner 2 more accessible. Not only are there now selectable difficulty levels, but checkpoints have also been added, which should make the punishment for failing slightly less unforgiving. Purists need not fret though, because if one felt so inclined, they could jump over and forego the checkpoint to accept a challenge, doing so will earn the player more points making for a potentially very interesting risk-reward trade-off.



Runner 2 - where old is the new new.

Naturally, there can be no discussion of a Bit.Trip-related product without referring to the soundtrack. Gaijin has a history of bringing in guest composers to contribute music to games in the series, and Runner 2 is no different. For this title, the guest composer is Rich Vreeland a.k.a. Disasterpeace, a chiptune artist whose previous work includes, among others things, Shoot Many Robots, Nelson Tethers: Puzzle Agent and most recently, FEZ. The music samples released thus far sound fitting for the game and, as with the original Runner, take a nice progression as the player moves through Commander Video's different modes, going from Hyper to Mega, Super, Ultra and finally Extra.

It has been more than a year since the Bit.Trip saga officially concluded, but Commander Video appears alive and well in his latest game where the goal is, once again, to run, run and run some more. Bit.Trip Presents Runner 2: Future Legend of Rhythm Alien is currently expected to launch during the Wii U launch window.



Staff Profiles



Alex Culafi

Nickname: Dad

Age: 18

Location: MA

Favorite Nintendo System: DS is the only correct option. Everyone else is objectively wrong.

Favorite Food: Chinese buffets are the best.

Nintendo ID: aceman

Game of the Month

I haven't played any Nintendo games this month, but I've been fixated on the Yakuza series for all of January. For those out of the loop, it's like if River City Ransom was in 3D but had a fantastic story about the Japanese mob and had way better combat. It's a really great series for any of you out there with a PS2 or PS3, and it's very accessible.

Best Multiplayer Memory

I'm not much for multiplayer, but the stuff in Black Ops 2 made me really happy. From someone who used to blindly insult the series, the multiplayer gameplay is really fun and addicting, and I don't regret a single moment of the 15 hours I've spent with Team Deathmatch.



Tyler Ohlew

Nickname: Tyler "Schlew" Ohlew, however, I dropped that nonsense in the past couple of years. Just Tyler Ohlew for now.

Age: 27

Location: Oshawa, Ontario.

Favorite Nintendo System: Have to go with the DS. Despite growing up with the NES and SNES, the DS's library just can't be beat. My preference lies with Japanese developed games, and the DS is drowning in them.

Favorite Food: Pizza. Specifically Pizza Nova. But my favorite Nintendo branded food is Samus-O's, a clever concoction made by removing all but the red and green pieces from Fruit Loops. Delicious? You bet. Wasteful? Absolutely.

Nintendo ID: tylerohlew

Game of the Month

Easy choice. Gunman Clive by a long shot. I'm a terrible gamer, and Mega Man is something I'd love to enjoy, but it's notorious difficulty gets in the way. Gunman Clive is the action platformer I've been waiting my entire life for. It's hardly a cake walk, and there's multiple levels of difficulty, but it played perfectly for me. A terrific art style certainly doesn't hurt either. I adored watching it morph from a western into...well, I'll leave that to you to find out. And while it's a brief game, the unlockable characters keep you coming back. Check it out, it's only \$1.99 on the 3DS eShop!

Best Multiplayer Memory

I wish I could present you with some wonderful tale of narrowly escaping death and wave-dashing my way to victory in Super Smash Bros. Melee. Well, I can't. Like I said, I'm a terrible gamer. The only thing I'm proud of is a better than average skill set for Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour. After being trumped for years at games like Mario Kart and GoldenEye 007, I finally had my time to shine. It was a terrific game that I happened to be terrific at. I was proud to finally wipe that smirk off my friends' faces.



Andrew Brown

Nickname: I don't really have one. Online? KBK (King Bowser Koopa)

Age: 30, going on 10.

Location: Melbourne, Australia.

Favourite Nintendo System: Wii, for Virtual Console!

Favourite Food: Pasta carbonara, no onions.

Nintendo Network ID: KBKkoopaa

Game of the Month

I've been replaying Skyward Sword the last few days, does that count?

I never finished Hero Mode and it was nagging at me to be done. I'm just up to the Thunder Dragon's boss rush for the second time, I want that Hylian Shield!

Best Multiplayer Memory

Mario Party and Nintendo Land are both pretty awesome for a quick multiplayer jaunt, but I think it would have to be Mario Kart 64's Battle Mode as a kid. We would play Block Fort - I'd

claim the top of one of the blocks as my own and set up a barricade of bananas and fake item boxes on the ramps and bridges to seal myself in, then camp up there while firing red shells over the side towards passersby's.

NWR Staff's Top 10 Games of 2012



What a year this has been for Nintendo fans. Not only was a new console launched, but the 3DS continued churning out some great titles.

After some deliberation among the staff, we have finally put together a list of our 10 favorite games of 2012. We did not rank them, and the order they are presented in is simply random.

As a note, last year we awarded *Xenoblade Chronicles* a spot on our favorites list, making it ineligible for an award this year.

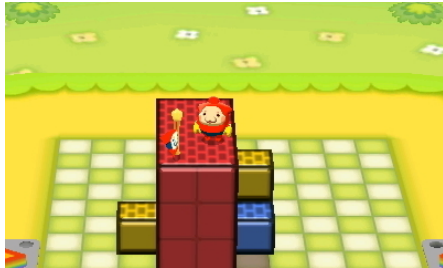
Crashmo

By Tom Malina

Once those blocks drop, you just can't stop...playing Crashmo.

'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.' The ethos of sticking to a tried-and-tested formula has become more and

more pervasive in today's sequel-driven video games industry. To be fair, it's a reliable approach to game design; Nintendo itself has built its legacy on the backbone of its stable base of franchises, forever updating the classic ideas that people still know and love. So it came as a huge surprise when, just one year after Intelligent Systems' colourful puzzle platformer Pushmo (known as Pullblox in Europe) was released on the 3DS eShop to critical acclaim, a follow-up arrived in the form of Crashmo (known as Fallblox in Europe) – and it reinvented just about everything established by its predecessor.



To an avid fan of Pushmo, the differences might not be so obvious from glancing at these screenshots. At a macro level, the player still has to guide the bulbous sumo wrestler protagonist Mallo through hundreds of elaborate, abstract structures to reach the goal. But right from the first stage of Crashmo, it is readily apparent that the very fundamental nature of how the game works is completely different from the one that came before it.

In every puzzle, each individual block shape on the playing field can separate from the others, and if there is nothing underneath to support them, the blocks will fall. Whereas the structures were predefined in the previous game and it was simply up to the player to figure out a way to climb, these new rules in Crashmo, particularly the effect of gravity on the blocks, mean that it is now the player's job to create their own structure that will enable them to reach the bird signifying the end of each stage.

It is initially a weird concept to wrap your head around, especially if you logged considerable time adapting a mind-set for Pushmo. Once you start to understand the intricacies of Crashmo, though, it feels almost impossible to go back. After the basic tutorials, the game wastes no time in getting to the challenging puzzles, introducing new mechanics like anti-gravity blocks and warp points at a good pace before mashing these ideas together just as you started to think you had mastered

them individually. However, the difficulty never becomes overwhelming thanks to a wealth of helpful tools, including advanced camera controls, a time rewinding function and the ability to skip to the next stage at any moment.

The optional training levels, meanwhile, are useful for teaching the tricks of building a stairway out of seemingly nothing, allowing you to apply those tricks in more complicated scenarios in the main mode. It's a game that requires astute spatial awareness and pattern recognition to conquer, but also allows players to adjust the difficulty curve and progress at a speed that suits them, with no penalty discouraging them from doing so.

Most importantly, Crashmo holds the qualities of the most successful brainteasers, in that it engenders feelings of both intelligence and stupidity, often simultaneously. Towards the end, Pushmo started to produce monolithic, twisted levels that, in practical terms, needed some degree of brute force to solve. This game, on the other hand, appears to be simpler at face value, with the puzzles frequently containing only a handful of components.

But that's the deceptive genius of Crashmo; it is without a doubt more difficult than its forebear, and as a result, it's all the more satisfying when you finally figure out that one area that had you scratching your head for hours. You will feel like an idiot for taking so long to put together what suddenly looks like such an easy solution, yet at the same time feel like the smartest person in the world for devising what is actually a measured solution to a carefully crafted puzzle.

Crashmo is the quintessential example of a Nintendo game. Underneath the infinitely accessible atmosphere of friendly characters, sugary-sweet visuals and cheerful music lies a game of great depth and finesse. For this reason, Crashmo is one of our top games of 2012.



Little Inferno

By Tyler Ohlew

Burn everything and anything just to stay warm with your new Little Inferno Entertainment Fireplace.

There's some kind of justice being served here. Despite my glowing review, Little Inferno still faced a lot of accusations of not being a game. Suddenly, its structure not only determined where it fit in our "gamer" vocabulary, but also if it was fun.

By making our list, we're making it clear that game or not, Little Inferno was a great way to spend the remaining days of 2012.

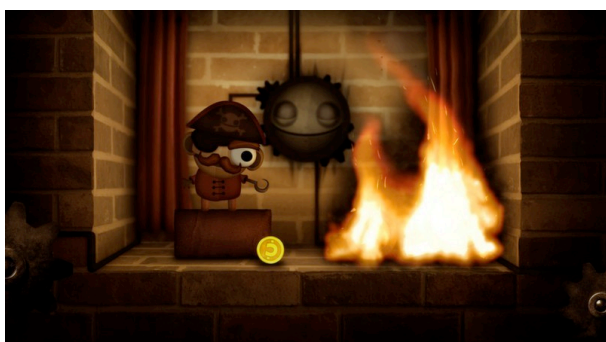
In tasking players to burn, and nothing more, Tomorrow Corporation's debut effort hid its genius. Placing items within the Little Inferno Entertainment Fireplace is simple, and setting them ablaze was just the same. The game's combo list, composed of vague descriptors that hinted at which items were to be burned together for bonus incentives, certainly adds an interesting layer to the gameplay. But the game's true appeal lies in its story.

As you progress through the game, letters from various characters begin to arrive. Each brings a sense of unease, a feeling that something else is going on. Despite it being very clear that Little Inferno's goal is to burn as much as you can manage, you begin to doubt your motivations. Despite tales of an arctic wasteland just outside your front door, you've never seen it for yourself. A neighbor of yours seems unhinged, her cutie-pie letters making you feel uncomfortable in your own skin. She begins to request items, though never properly explains why she needs them. The figurehead behind the fictional Tomorrow Corporation (the in-game manufacture of the Little Inferno Entertainment Fireplace) writes letters in attempts to soothe you, warming you to the idea of constantly feeding your fire. But her marketing spin is far from normal, and her writings become just as disturbing as your neighbors. You quickly feel very alone, not sure who or what to trust.



But there you sit, in front of your fireplace. No matter how unsure you are of just what it is you are doing, you have to keep stoking the flames to progress. The letters keep coming, and you read a person's mind spinning into what you believe to be insanity.

You end up not only playing to just be playing, but to see just where things are going. Holding one's interest can be the most difficult goal of any product. Some games can achieve that through one aspect alone, relegating other parts as fluff. Little Inferno engages in every way. What you do and how you do it is fun, simple, and never frustrating. It's a very well-rounded product, and while it may never be clear whether it's a game or not, what can't be argued is how enjoyable it is. And what could be more important than that?

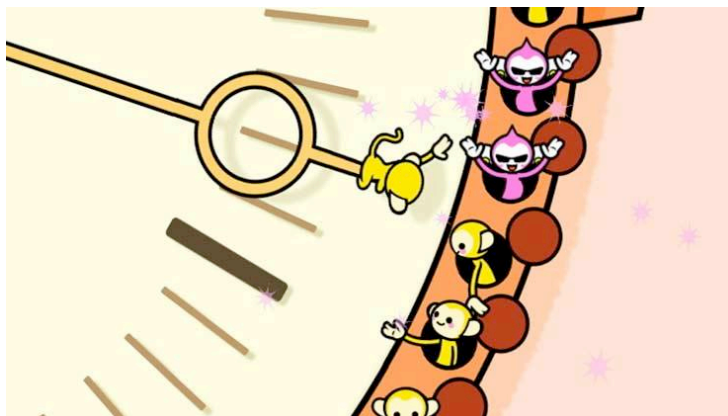


Rhythm Heaven Fever

By Nate Andrews

Pose for the fans!

"It's your first date with the girl of your dreams! Also, some weasels are on a date! Don't let the double date be ruined by flying balls!"



This atypical, highly specific scenario is the kind of inviting weird that players of Rhythm Heaven Fever encounter over and over. One of the last significant titles for the Wii, Fever is leagues more spirited and exciting than the fading console on which it was released, delivering a tight collection of eclectic and just-plain-fun rhythm experiences.

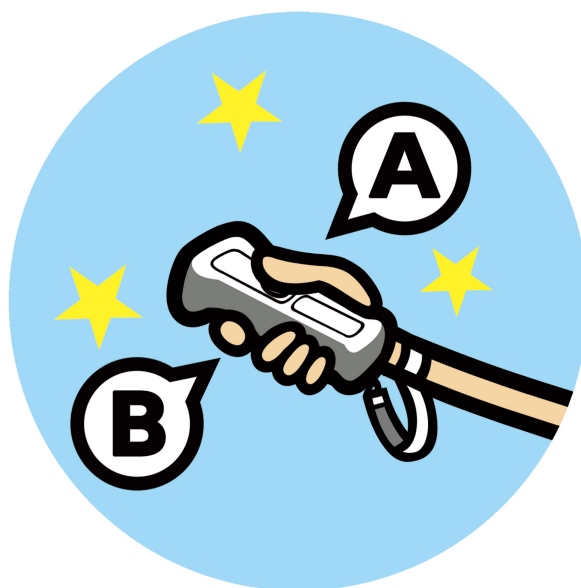
The Wii Remote can be an unwieldy, multipurpose tool in the wrong hands. For Rhythm Heaven, which uses two buttons and a minimum of motion control, it's an exercise in reduction and simplicity. Each of the mini-

games within starts with the same simple premise—push one or two buttons on a cue, often visual, in time with music—but the directions in which they run wild with it are as distinctive as the pattern of an exploding firework.

Much of the fun of Rhythm Heaven Fever is in exploring the curated madness of its many experiences; you may find yourself trading skin with fellow monkeys as you make your way around a watch face, or sternly conducting seals as they practice their flips. Little is exempt from the game's polished incorporation of rhythm, humor, and visual delight, and nothing comes up short in any regard.

Even so, gameplay is the first priority in each moment of Rhythm Heaven Fever. The design of focusing on only two of the Wii Remote's inputs gives a wide berth for both accessibility and difficulty. Although the cheery exteriors of its games often hide some tricky rhythmic challenges, the basic concept and execution of each is simple enough to attract and satisfy even the most modest of players. Its mini-games are absurd and charming curiosities, fantastic, tightly produced scenarios that act as echo chambers for the player's few inputs and channel the complementary music into surreal and often hilarious visual presentations.

Each piece of Rhythm Heaven fever is unique, delicious treat; visually, aurally, and for the few fingers you'll use in playing it. If you can find a way to have a less than downright delightful time with it, your soul may need an ice pick.



ZombiU

By Scott Thompson

Wii U

The dead have never been so appealing.

An exclusive title from Ubisoft launched alongside brand-new Nintendo hardware; stop me if you've heard this one



before. In 2006, we were fed trailer after trailer, preview after preview, touting Red Steel as the game mature, would-be Wii owners should have on their shelves for when the kids went to bed and the grandparents went home, elbows sore from hours of virtual bowling. Well, we both know Red Steel didn't exactly live up to what was sold. So, who would expect anything different six years later, with the poorly named ZombiU heralded as the third-party game to pick up alongside the usual Nintendo offerings? The thing is, though, ZombiU is not only a fantastic and overbearingly frightening game, it is also the go-to game for illustrating how the Wii U GamePad can be used effectively outside of Nintendo Land.

You are a survivor (and then another, and another, and...) tasked with the ho-hum goal of outliving the zombie apocalypse. Living, it turns out, is no guarantee, as death is waiting for you throughout the barren roads and still flats of London. Even in the opening scene, which has you sprint deep into a subway station toward the "safe house" at the request of a man on a loudspeaker, you can die. Dying is so omnipresent that it actually becomes a gameplay mechanic. When your character does finally fall to the undead horde, you wake up as another survivor with an immediate choice to make. Do you return to where the previous survivor was struck down, risking death once more to reacquire all the loot previously in your possession, or do you forsake the supplies and instead move forward with your quest? It's a choice that is much easier to make on paper than from the empty safe house, your motion tracker beeping in steady rhythm.

Even so, death alone isn't what makes the game so terrifying, so "I have to stop because I'm actually scared." The world is, at times, littered with zombies, and large firefights will ensue. Yet, it is the moments between that are most frightening of all, the moments where an absence of movement and sound around you instills dread, a quiet yet growing sense of foreboding. Something is coming... but when and where? Nothing encapsulates this more than the Nursery, where you must go to retrieve medicine. Children's furniture and toys are scattered about the seemingly empty building, and lullabies quietly hum along in the background. I won't spoil the events of the Nursery, but the level is absolutely one of the scariest moments I've ever experienced in a video game. Or across any medium, really.

Other survival horror trappings, somewhat lost in recent years, are revived by ZombiU. Ammo and medkits are extremely scarce and require careful rationing throughout the game. With a limited (but expandable) amount of inventory space, excess supplies can be stored securely at the safe house, and will be available to your next survivor should you perish. Weapons can be upgraded and leveled up through found items and amount of usage, respectively. Save points are also scarce; you can only save at the safe house and at a few designated hideouts throughout the world. Oh, and don't think you can go back to a previous save should your survivor die; there is only one save file, and the game autosaves the second you die. This all makes for a punishing system that will no doubt turn some people off, but isn't that sort of refreshing? A game that never loses its focus to instead cater to a wider audience; that's ZombiU.

Another core element in building ZombiU's oppressiveness over the player is the utilization of the GamePad in inventory management and lockpicking. When opened, your inventory displays on the GamePad's screen, and the TV transitions to a third-person angle to allow you to see around your survivor. While you muck about in your inventory, using a medkit or equipping a Molotov cocktail, the world around you continues to move. You'll find yourself shifting your eyes up from your inventory every few seconds to make sure nothing is lurking toward you. The same is true for picking locks, looting dead bodies, and more. The extra screen the GamePad presents isn't really used in a way to benefit the player, it's more of a way to keep the game moving and present opportunities for ambush.

ZombiU also features some of the best online implementation of any Wii U game. True, there is no actual online multiplayer to speak of, but what you'll find instead is that the perished survivors of players on your friends list will actually come to inhabit your game. Typically tougher than a random zombie, these survivors will meander about where they were killed and, should you kill them once more, you are able to collect all the loot they had upon their demise. I'll never forget the first time this happened to me, as our own Andy Goergen shambled toward me, his Nintendo Network ID displayed proudly above his walking corpse so I knew exactly who was trying to eat me. It's a really remarkable feature.

Perfection is not a word anyone would use to describe ZombiU; animation is limited and repeats constantly, sewer environments are often recycled, the game doesn't exactly look next-gen, and every now and then, a zombie will get stuck on something in the environment. Still, these are mere pinpricks in the foot of a giant. ZombiU isn't for everyone. It probably isn't even for most people, but that's exactly what makes it so remarkable. The game isn't watered down; it isn't cheapened to make the experience more accessible. It is a terrifying, trying game that wonderfully illustrates how the GamePad can impact gameplay. It is an unforgettable experience that beckons to only a few, and it is without a doubt one of the best games of 2012.

New Super Mario Bros. U

By Andrew Brown

The best Mario platformer in 21 years.

Not since Super Mario World in 1991 has a 2D Mario game been quite this good. New Super Mario Bros. U is the fourth and latest game in the revival series of Mario platformers, and while the others have their merits, this latest instalment is the first that seems to just get it all right.



From the moment you find yourself looking at the open, seamless game world on the map screen, memories of classic Mario platforming nostalgia come flooding in. This game was clearly designed to showcase the best of the best from Mario's rich history, while finding inventive new ways to mix up old gameplay elements. For example, chubby little Baby Yoshis appear in the game, but unlike their first appearance in Super Mario World, these ones don't grow into full-sized Yoshis, and they'll instead harbour unique abilities such as blowing enemy-trapping bubbles or temporarily inflating like a parachute to help Mario progress through the levels.

Many familiar enemies make their return including some surprise cameos from years ago, but Nintendo has thrown in a reasonable handful of new baddies to mix things up and make things fresh. Even the Koopalings, criticised for unoriginal battle sequences in New Super Mario Bros. 2, each feature unique weapons this time around. You'll see some of the most creative boss battles in a Mario game yet!

Being the first true high definition Mario game, NSMBU looks gorgeous. The levels are vibrant, colorful and exciting, with plenty going on in each stage. Occasionally the backdrops get particularly creative, with stunning cartoon renderings of cobwebs in the haunted house stages, glittering gemstones embedded in the walls of the caverns or stone slabs and pillars in the castles. Each Koopaling's airship cockpit has a different décor to suit their particular personalities and tastes. Easily the most visually impressive stage is The Painted Swamp, an eerie toxic lake littered with precarious, tilting pipes that Mario must carefully navigate while

Boos attack from all sides. In this level, every piece of scenery is presented as an oil painting inspired by Vincent Van Gogh's *The Starry Night*, with a particularly awesome Mario-themed surprise in the background as you draw close to the goal. Really, it's a shame art such as this wasn't used in more stages!

As in the Wii predecessor, portions of the stage will often move and shift around unexpectedly. This feature is also taken in new directions as entire levels revolve around caves with giant chunks of crystal that slide around or ghost houses that inexplicably (and creepily) sway back and forth like a pendulum.

The game is all about exploration and discovery, and just like its Super NES inspiration, the map will blossom and unfold with secret paths leading to hidden levels and mysterious new areas. Many times it appears that there must be a hidden path at a certain point on the map, but finding all the level exits and uncovering every last Star Coin is a challenge greater than ever before.

For those who still want more, there are special Nabbit stages where you must chase down a nimble foe to retrieve Toad's stolen items, or an entirely new series of challenges in which you have to complete a level within a certain time limit or bounce off enemies to earn as many 1-ups as possible without touching the floor. These challenge stages quickly become very difficult, and perfectionists will have their work cut out for them to earn every gold medal in the game.



With absolute sincerity, this may just be the best 2D game in the entire Super Mario series, and thus it's no wonder that the game is on our top ten list for 2012. If you have a Wii U, picking up New Super Mario Bros. U is simply a no-brainer.

Theatrhythm: Final Fantasy

By Danny Bivens



Final Fantasy brings rhythm back!

Final Fantasy has been around for 25 years. While gameplay and story have always been main selling points for the franchise, the games' music is not only integral to each experience, but also in defining the series as a whole. When news of a rhythm-based Final Fantasy title hit, fans were excited and curious to see what Square Enix was going to do with some of gaming's most iconic pieces of music.

Theatrhythm Final Fantasy plays a lot on nostalgia. The game transports those familiar with the classic franchise back to some of their favorite moments, and allows new players a unique look at the series' history. Underneath its layer of FF history is an approachable rhythm game players of all familiarities can appreciate and enjoy, with three kinds of music stages and varied levels of challenge.

It is obvious that the developer, Indies Zero, wanted to add the same kind of depth in this rhythm game as is found in most main entries in the series. The ability to choose your party members, equip them, and even level them up adds another layer of intricacy that gives players more to do than just tap and slide. Theatrhythm is also riddled with unlockable items, secret characters, music tracks, videos, in-game trading cards, and more, so if your goal is to get the most from it, it'll take a considerable amount of time!

Theatrhythm Final Fantasy breathes life into both the genre and the series itself. This game shows that simple concepts and the smart addition of elements that many people love can be a recipe for something amazing.



Kid Icarus: Uprising

By Neal Ronaghan

Regardless of the controls, Kid Icarus: Uprising is freaking amazing.

The concept of Kid Icarus: Uprising, first revealed at E3 2010, was extremely appealing. The game looked kinetic, with action running at a mile a minute and gameplay that echoed Sin & Punishment. Then, I played the game before release and wasn't a huge fan of the controls. I was a doubter of the game's director, Masahiro Sakurai. I was a fool.

When the final version of Kid Icarus: Uprising came out in March 2012, it was a verbose, action-packed triple does of insanity. The story was over-the-top and insane, and went everywhere from the Greek Underworld to outer space, complete with some of the best humor and voice-acting in all of video games. The script was penned by Sakurai in Japanese, but thanks to smart usage of Saturday Night Live and The Onion writer Mike Drucker for the localization, the game soared in English, with references to Nintendogs and Metroid among other things.

The gameplay was divided into magnificent halves, with auto-scrolling air segments that were as cinematic as nearly any moment in Star Fox (or Star Wars, for that matter), and controversial ground areas that featured puzzles, fierce combat, and oodles of secrets. The controls might not have been everybody's bag, but if you put time into them, the portable brilliance shined. While slightly obtuse, the method of control is finely tuned to work with the game, as the touch screen is used like a trackball with excellent precision. Even this lefty, who originally used a Circle Pad Pro religiously, adapted to the right-handed controls and enjoyed them.



taking intensity. I'm not normally an online gamer, but Uprising turned me into one for several months. Rekindling that magic every time I pick up the game and play multiplayer is wonderful, especially since there are almost always more weapons to craft and collect.

The weapons are glorious, as they offer such variety, and with so many weapons with so many variations, you can find the perfect weapon for your play style, and then try to make a better version of that. In addition, The Fiend's Cauldron gave you near-endless difficulty settings, and a high barrier to strive for. And you can't forget the Treasure Hunt, which featured hundreds of challenges to accomplish to earn different weapons, abilities, and more. The AR Cards, while largely superfluous, added another fun element to the game. Seriously, Uprising is bursting at the seams, so much so that my own case for the game is bursting at the seams because I placed my AR Cards inside of it. Kid Icarus: Uprising is a damn fine game, and easily one of the best of 2012.



The multiplayer might be Uprising's greatest achievement, though. With intense Free for All and 3 vs. 3 team battles both locally and online, Uprising is like a third-person Smash Bros., with zany items and a breath-

Nintendo Land

By Zack Kaplan

Short lines and enjoyable attractions.

Nintendo Land's announcement at E3 was met with little enthusiasm, until we actually got to play it. The boisterous theme park's 12 attractions make it not only a great launch title, but a surprisingly deep experience.

Each of Nintendo Land's games represents a unique reason for it to be on our list. The challenging, tilt-based design of Donkey Kong's Crash Course made everyone at NWR go bananas, and the unique gameplay of Animal Crossing: Sweet Day led to a lot of asymmetrical fun.

Like other mini-game collections published by Nintendo, Nintendo Land is best played with friends. While collecting coins and playing attractions like Balloon Trip Breeze in single-player is fine, multiplayer is where the Wii U magic happens. The GamePad offers different ways to interact with friends, which in turn gives multiple people in the same room different gaming challenges.

Miiverse also provides a new multiplayer element, allowing you to see the activities of others in Nintendo Land. It's just like walking around a real theme park, except without being hit by strollers and whatnot. Nintendo Land is worth the price of admission, so buy your ticket today!



Mutant Mudds

By Tyler Ohlew

Unlikely success and great fun.

Mutant Mudds' success was never guaranteed. Not only is *Renegade Kid* responsible for one of the best games of the year, they also produced one hell of a story. There's no shortage of tales of a phoenix rising from the ashes, but few faced such a tumultuous history.

Originally unveiled as a Nintendo DS title in June of 2009, *Maximillian and the Rise of the Mutant Mudds* (as it was originally known) was a change of pace for *Renegade Kid*. Coming off more mature rated games, the colorful 3D platformer seemed an interesting departure for the developer. But it was not to be: *Renegade Kid* had trouble finding a publisher for the title. Later, in December of 2010, *Renegade Kid*'s co-founder Jools Watsham took to his computer and put out a request for 1000 comments on a blog he had written concerning the potential of *Maximillian and the Rise of the Mutant Mudds* reaching the DSiWare service. Sadly, the quota was not met.

But, perhaps living up to the studio's name, Mudds didn't take the news lying down. It resurfaced in June of 2011, in the form we see today. *Mutant Mudds* was finally coming, and what a game it turned out to be.

As an homage to the 8- and 16-bit days, Mudds soars. While it prides itself in those nods to the past, it never dates itself or chooses to skate by on nostalgia. With its three-plane mechanic, Mudds successfully blends the old and new. Its visuals not only honor the NES generation, but also allow the game to focus on its gameplay. It may not pack god rays and 30 simultaneous particle effects, but Mudds' platforming is top-notch.



Difficulty is integral to *Mutant Mudds*. You're never let down by poorly balanced enemies, dawdling frame rates, or a multitude of glitches. When you fail, there's no one to blame but yourself. For as simple as *Mutant Mudds* is on the surface (run, jump, and shoot guys),



Renegade Kid was meticulous in its design. Far off platforms are always just within your grasp. Escaping falling bombs requires quick thinking, not luck. The game is able to impress with its gameplay, a rare feat when so much focus in modern development is on the visuals.

There's good reason why *Renegade Kid* never gave up on Max. While it may have been harder for others to see in those early days of its production, they knew they were on to something. While there have been attempts made to recapture that magic of the NES and SNES days, few knew the formula. But it wasn't something to just emulate—it had to be built from the ground up. It took a few years, but *Renegade Kid*'s end result was exactly what we remembered, and just what we needed.

The Last Story

By James Jones



A fitting final addition to the Wii library.

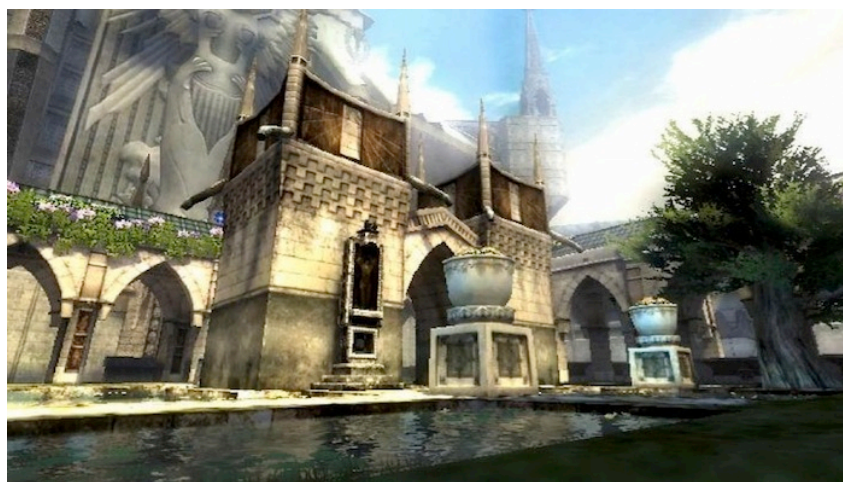
It's a party-based JRPG. It's a squad-based action game. It's a dungeon crawler. It's a tactics game. The Last Story is all of the above. A tightly wound adventure that defies easy description, it was a tremendous step forward for the RPG genre on Wii and for Japanese role-playing games in general.

The Last Story creates a tremendous world, which your band of misfits fits perfectly. It strings together the story's events without the negative gameplay ramifications that usually accompany such directed a plot. The chapters provide both focused plot arcs and neatly compacted segments of gameplay. And while building your characters is rewarding, the way your party becomes family is infinitely more so.

Combat is an absolute dream. Blending elements of action and strategy titles, each battle offers the chance to hone skills that ultimately lead to victory. Every encounter feels finely crafted, and the site of each battle perfectly chosen. A keen eye and a sharp mind will benefit from terrain that offers an opportunity for a quick victory, while recklessness will result in ambushes and resounding defeat.

A lush soundtrack and convincing voice work compete for attention with the game's detailed cities and ominous caves, with its smaller areas containing more detail than almost any Wii title. The character models change with equipment, enemies are embellished with scars and tattoos, and the structures bear the kind of fine detail not usually equated with a Wii title.

The Last Story shares a creator with Final Fantasy and yet it ranks among his most groundbreaking work. Nintendo took a chance when they opted to hire Hiranobu Sakaguchi's studio to produce a title for them, but the risk paid off. It is a fitting send-off for the Wii. Players owe a debt of gratitude to the people who made this great game available worldwide.





Little Inferno Interview with Tomorrow Corporation

By Tom Malina

The masterminds behind World of Goo and Henry Hatsworth fill us in on the inspirations and thought experiments that led to their new game about burning stuff.

It took Nintendo a few years. They may be a generation late. But at long last, the Big N has decided to go all-in with digital distribution with the Wii U launch. This time tomorrow, players in North America will be able to log onto the eShop to find five download-only games available to purchase right from the start.

One such game is Little Inferno, a curious new project from Tomorrow Corporation in which the goal is to throw your worldly possessions into a fireplace. The team, which numbers just three souls, is comprised of Kyle Gray, who spearheaded the DS oddity Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure, Kyle Gabler, the lead designer and artist behind World of Goo, and Allan Blomquist, who helped bring the latter title to WiiWare.

Much of what Little Inferno entails, even so close to its release, is still shrouded in mystery. In this interview, we found out more about the nature of the game, as well as the team's influences, processes, and aspirations for it. Enjoy!

Nintendo World Report (NWR): Little Inferno is Tomorrow Corporation's first

project, but many people know you as the guys behind World of Goo and Henry Hatsworth. How did this crew of people come together?

Kyle Gray: The three of us met in grad school years ago, back when the Wii was just a gleam in Miyamoto's eye. We made a bunch of tiny student projects, and talked about working together one day when we made it in the "real" games industry. Back then, the only way to make games was to join a giant company and work your way up from the bottom, but after a few years at EA, Kyle decided to leave and form 2D Boy. Allan joined shortly after to port World of Goo to the Wii, and I was the last to jump the EA ship after Hatsworth. A few months later, we started Tomorrow Corporation.

Dandy Wheeler, PR Rep: The future is ... Tomorrow!

NWR: The idea behind Little Inferno, a game set entirely in front of a fireplace, is certainly very unique and intriguing. How did you come up with the idea for a game where the objective is to burn things? I suppose everybody has a firebug somewhere inside them, right?

Kyle Gabler: You may have heard of the Yule Log TV program - the burning log you find on TV around the winter months or in hotel rooms. It started in 1967 by a TV

station in New York, originally as a 17 second loop of a flaming log. And we thought "Man, that's like a super boring game that some awful company will totally make for the Wii or smartphones." And then "Wait, WE could be that awful company! But I wonder if we can start with an exceptionally underwhelming premise, but then actually make the game really really surprisingly good?" And Little Inferno is the result. We hope we've succeeded!

NWR: From what we have seen and heard through the grapevine, the game seems quite like a sandbox, where you're really encouraged to play around and experiment with stuff just to see what happens. What is the driving factor towards making progress? Are there puzzles, missions or goals of any description?

Gabler: The game certainly has a huge sandboxy element, but you are never left alone and cold without a goal and a string of little surprises. There is a very clear direction you are heading. You can't play in the sandbox forever. There is an end.

There is a hilarious piece of Animal Crossing fan fiction from like 2007 that is a brilliant example of what can happen if you take a "sandboxy" game and give it an actual direction. It's called The Terrible Secret of Animal Crossing and is well worth a read if you have a free afternoon.

NWR: Video games like this are sometimes criticised as being more like toys than actual games. Is this a distinction you embrace? Or by its very nature, would you still classify Little Inferno as a game?

Gabler: Little Inferno makes no effort to be an ordinary game, and I expect there will be a wide range of opinions because of it. We enjoy the bewildered YouTube comments from folks like "What?! You throw things in a fire to get money to buy more things to throw in a fire? That's pointless and stupid!"

And of course it's pointless and stupid! The characters in the game muse about the very same thing in different ways. But why do we continue doing something that's warm and comfortable, maybe embarrassingly satisfying, even though it's clearly unproductive? It's a question the game is fascinated with.

NWR: Let's say, for example, that I'm the sort of gamer who likes to play games for the challenge and for the test of skill. How does Little Inferno evolve to keep me interested and challenged as I play more and more? Or are you going for something completely different with this game?

Gabler: Tests of skill can be fun, but games have so much more to offer more than rote, mechanical, time and dexterity trials.

Why do we enjoy roller coasters or traveling or music or exploring the sewer system under the neighborhood with flashlights? They aren't necessarily challenging, and you can't really get better at them, but they can be thrilling.

To the Moon and Dear Esther are two recent games that are beautiful and especially memorable to me for their distinct and intentional lack of challenge. Adventure games like Space Quest and the old

LucasArts games also had very little challenge, yet the genre has managed to remain one of the most beloved class of games.

There are whole worlds filled with characters inside of these games waiting



to be explored and talked to and licked and exploded!

So, nope! Not only does Little Inferno very intentionally have almost no challenge, but the fact that that's the case is a really central plot detail - and it's not lost on the characters within the game either.

NWR: The presentation and story is another aspect of Little Inferno that has definitely caught our attention. The teaser trailer you put out a while ago was somehow adorable and at the same time, weirdly sinister. It's a fascinating and kind of unsettling dichotomy. What was the inspiration behind this style and what do you hope to accomplish with it?



Gabler: A few years ago when Flash games were huge, Derek Yu of TIGSource commented something like "[This one Flash game site] is evil, in the same way as Disney Land or Church." Which I thought was an apt way to sum up that particular feeling of a person/company/whatever smiling at you with their face while simultaneously defiling you with their long fingers. It's a feeling I

feel constantly, like when ordering a Pumpkin Spice Latte at Starbucks, or when saying "thank you" to the nice TSA agent who just had his

hand on my inner thigh, and I wish there were a word for it. Is there a word for it?

And speaking of mashing up emotions together, I read an interview forever ago with the legendary Meryl Streep where she said she never acts just one emotion - she likes to act like 12 emotions all at once. Just watch how she breaks that egg!

I hope we can one day approach her repertoire of simultaneous emotions.

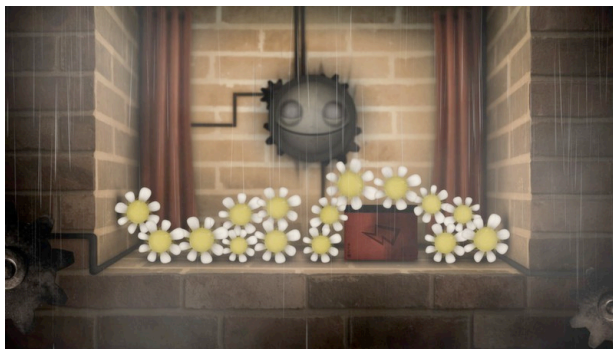
NWR: How about the game's soundtrack? One of the things I absolutely loved about World of Goo was its wide range of great music. What is the direction you're going in with the music for Little Inferno? Any influences to speak of?

Gabler: With World of Goo, I wrote two or three tracks specifically for the game, but all the rest came from a back catalog of music I'd written over the previous ten years or so - so the soundtrack became kind of a ragtag junkyard of previously-loved misfit music.

With Little Inferno, I'm pretending to be a real composer, and making all the music from scratch just for this game, which means this gets to be a more mature soundtrack with actual real live soundtrack features - like different themes for different characters that evolve over time. I'm a big fan of movie music from the 80's and 90's - like John Williams (1993 was his most amazing year), Danny Elfman's 90's heyday, Vangelis in the early 80's - all with strong melodic themes and instantly identifiable orchestration.

NWR: The game is, of course, coming to Wii U, and will be one of the first downloadable games to appear on the system. What has it been like working on the Wii U? What are the main perks and challenges of developing a game for a new console, and such an unusual one at that?

"Little Inferno makes no effort to be an ordinary game, and I expect there will be a wide range of opinions because of it."



Allan Blomquist: As a lifelong Nintendo fan, the biggest perk for me was getting to play with the new system before everybody else of course! It's also exciting as a developer to get your hands on more powerful hardware because suddenly it feels like anything is possible. Little Inferno definitely couldn't have existed in its present form on the Wii.

The flip side of getting early access is that there aren't already established conventions on the system. For example, if the player wants to transition from playing on their TV to playing on the Game Pad, how exactly will that work? Should it be a button press, or a menu? Should the game pause? What should we show on the TV once you're playing on the Game Pad? Next year, there will be a bunch of games that have all tackled these issues and the best ideas will become the unwritten

standard. Until then, it's up to the initial crop of launch titles to set the pace. No pressure!

NWR: We know that the Wii U version can be controlled using the Wii Remote's pointer? Are there any exclusive

features for this version of the game? How, if at all, does it use the Wii U GamePad controller?

Gray: Players will be able to play with their Little Inferno with either the GamePad or Wii Remote. While the Wii Remotes make natural fire poker, there's something comforting about snuggling up to a nice warm fireplace that you can carry with you around the house. We're also tinkering with multiplayer for a

possible future update. Fire is fun for the whole family!

NWR: How have Nintendo been involved during the development of Little Inferno? Have they taken a fairly hands-on approach or have you had free rein? How does it compare to your experience working on WiiWare?

Gabler: We have feelings filled with raccoon suits and invincibility stars for Dan and Shannon and the fine folks at the Mushroom Kingdom. They have been supportive from the beginning - of us, and this incredibly weird game. It's worth noting though, that Nintendo is not our publisher, so the question of hands on or off doesn't really enter into it, no matter how soft or white their gloves are. Like a lot of indie developers, we're a small team, fully self funded, and don't have a publisher. So there's 100% creative control by default.

NWR: Little Inferno seems to have had a shorter space of time between its announcement and its release than most indie titles. Was this intentional? Do you feel there is a risk in people losing interest when a game is known about and in development for a long time?

Gray: It seems like only a few short years ago all you needed was a decent review or an article in a game magazine to get noticed. With today's on-the-go society we're under a constant barrage of information.

Every time I check my email I have to parse through ads trying to drive me to their website to play crappy HTML 5 games. Every time I play a game on my phone, I have to sit through an advertisement for the next greatest tower-animal-ville sim. Every time I log on to a website I have to look at a dozen banners full of buxom fantasy wenches, touting their latest free-to-play social network title. With all the noise out there it's a wonder

that more game companies don't start hyping their next game as soon as they release their current one.

We believe the best way to make people interested in our games is not to talk endlessly about them ourselves, but to make games that people want to talk about. Games that



are good. Games that are different. Games that people will remember years from now.

With Little Inferno we're taking players on a strange and wonderful ride to somewhere they've never been before. We're excited to see what people think when it releases later this month!

NWR: Lastly, let's talk launch details. When will Little Inferno be coming out? And do you have any information to give on its price on the Wii U eShop?

Gray: We're pushing to release on launch day in North America and Europe. Thanks to some tremendous work on the part of our volunteer fan translators, we'll be launching in English, French, German, Dutch, and Spanish! As for the price, we're planning on launching at \$15 in the US, and should be releasing at a comparable price in Europe.

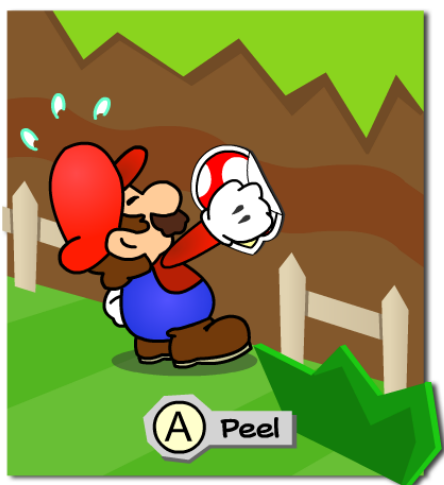
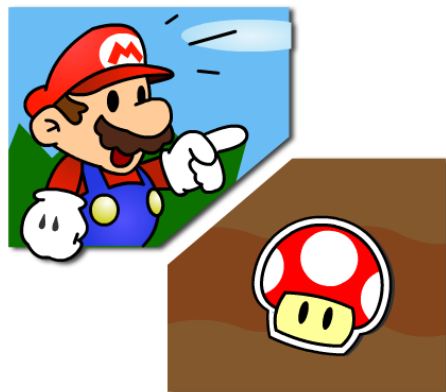
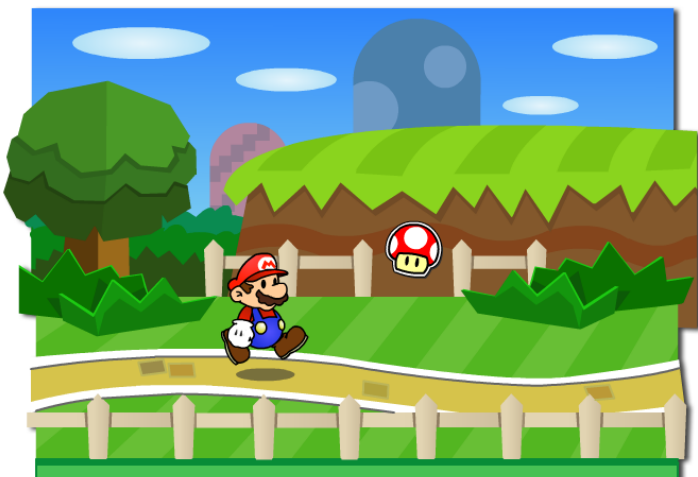
NWR: As a send-off, to everyone reading this interview: why should people be interested in this game? Why should they buy it? Give your final pitch for Little Inferno.

Dandy Wheeler, PR Rep: If you don't play it, you'll freeze to death. Hahaha. LOL. Tweet me! Mwah!



Comic Corner

The Setback with Stickers...



2013 Andrew Brown



Original Publication: November 26, 2002

Metroid Prime

By David Trammell

REVIEW

If there were ever a reliable way to determine the best game of all time, Metroid Prime would be a serious contender for the title.

I have something of a history with Metroid, but it's not all that relevant to my appreciation of Metroid Prime. When the first game was released, I was quite young and naïve. I simply tended to like some games and dislike others. I couldn't put any specific reasons on it most of the time and I didn't try; I just knew that some games were fun, and some weren't. I remember when I picked up the original Metroid. Neither of my two brothers were interested in helping me buy the game, so I eventually had to beg my dad to help me pay for it. This gave me weeks (months?) to get hyped up for it. Well, it did not disappoint! The graphics and music weren't quite as flashy as some Capcom and Konami titles, but I really enjoyed the game. I remember when our first Nintendo broke and we were saving up for a replacement, we each had a game that we were just waiting to play again. My game was Metroid. I didn't even beat the final boss until many years later. Even so, Samus's first adventure was enough to instill a love of the franchise in me. When Metroid II and Super Metroid were released, I jumped on each of them. There was just something about the series that I liked and even now, I can't really put my finger on it. I imagine it must have been the combination of powering up an awesome character by progressing through an intoxicating blend of action and exploration. I figure that must be it, because that's a huge part of what makes Metroid Prime such a joy to play.

When it was revealed that Metroid Prime would be a first person game, I was just as shocked as the next guy, but I was far from distraught. Some of my favorite games in recent years have been first person shooters. My only concern was that Retro would screw up the controls. In the realm of console first person shooters, my choice method of aiming is the one used in Goldene, Perfect Dark and Time Splitters 2, and I

practically demand full customization. I had a feeling that Nintendo wasn't going to use this scheme, and I also had a strong feeling that the controls would not be customizable at all (in Nintendo games, they rarely are). Thus my fear was that it would control like most other console FPS's: that is, I figured that the crosshairs would be locked to the center of the screen, leading to the usual aiming problems that are best solved with a keyboard and mouse. I should have known better when I heard in late 2001 that Miyamoto was getting involved specifically with the control design. I don't know who is ultimately responsible for making Metroid Prime's controls so perfect, but I shouldn't have feared once I learned that Shigeru Miyamoto was on the case. My worries were completely obliterated at E3 2002 where I played the game's intro and learned that Metroid Prime would feature lock-on targeting in a similar manner to the 3D Zelda games. This immediately put to rest any arguments that Metroid Prime was going to be a "Doom clone". By taking the emphasis off of aiming and putting it on timing and reflex, Retro and Nintendo have concocted the perfect vehicle for delivering Metroid in 3D, and boy have they delivered.





Metroid Prime's gameplay and control is exactly tailored to the GameCube controller. I was certain that the lack of dual analog would become extremely annoying, but it never does. Dual analog is only necessary for turning and strafing at the same time. However, the most vital time to do this is in combat, and this is handled automatically by the lock-on system. Even so, simple environmental movement is extremely smooth. The analog stick controls turning and forward/backward movement so if you really want to turn sharply while moving, you can simply jump and turn as momentum carries you forward. Another good example of Prime's flawless control is the ability to lock onto thin air. This converts your analog stick's horizontal axis from turning to strafing, and at the same time locks the vertical portion of your view at the current angle if you were looking with the R button. This is just perfect when you need to jump down to a platform below you or keep an eye on a grappling point as you jump toward it. Meanwhile, the C-stick and D-pad can function as visor and weapon selectors, and your right thumb is free to use the face buttons for jumping, shooting, firing missiles and switching to morph ball mode. The morph ball physics are detailed, but not at all unforgiving thanks to the environment design. Many will find long distance traveling in ball form to be a joy. It's also notable to me that you can change between forms even in mid-air and the camera system handles this just fine. It's not at all necessary (or helpful) to the gameplay, but it's a lot of fun and it does help you get around as quickly as possible if you're in a hurry. Overall, the controls provide simplicity for beginners, and at the same time, they hide depth for advanced gamers. This is the perfect balance that all game designers should strive for in control design.

What good would excellent controls do if they weren't used in an equally excellent game? Not much of course. Fortunately, Metroid Prime's excellence extends to every other portion of its design as well. The gameplay, in classic Metroid fashion, consists primarily of exploration, punctuated by intense fighting sequences with the rewards being an item or weapon of some type that increases your ability to explore the environment. Unlike most games of this type though, you'll find that

the areas you are hindered from are intricately woven together into one massive world that nearly defies description. Unlike previous Metroid titles, Prime is filled with a healthy dose of story, but it is completely optional. In fact, Metroid Prime may just be the most cleverly designed action-adventure title in gaming history. By using the game's built in hint system (turned on by default), impatient gamers can stay in the action with minimal effort and generally ignore all traces of the story. On the other hand, those who are interested in the little details can scan countless objects, enemies and documents to get a clear picture of what they are doing and why. For those who do get involved in the story, they'll find that it is well crafted and surprisingly well told, considering that Samus never encounters another living being who she can speak with. It contains everything from suspense to humor. The fighting is extremely fulfilling and contains just the right amount of difficulty. You'll find that new creatures (offensive ones anyway) can be mastered with time and effort. This is notable because Nintendo's first party efforts are usually too easy for experienced gamers. Finally, I have to mention Metroid Prime's inspired boss fights. Not since Link's N64 adventures have I found boss fights this satisfying in a 3D game. I'll leave the rest for you to experience first hand.



To play through *Metroid Prime*, quite a bit of backtracking must be done. Even in such a great game, this might become tedious if not for the exquisitely crafted world, the changing enemies, and the flawless control scheme. Still, not only is the backtracking in *Prime* bearable, it's mostly welcome because it gives you a chance to experience the breathtaking graphics again. The overall visual presentation is one of the best I've ever seen in any game to date (unreleased games don't count). Although I could pick out some individual areas where other games are better in terms of graphics, this completely misses the point. It's not about the individual parts, but how they come together. The now-famous visor system is executed extremely well. I'd rather not go into the details for fear of spoiling things, but it becomes a significant part of the gameplay. As for the environments, each room is somehow unique. There's something about every major room (and even most of the insignificant hallways that connect them) that distinguishes them from one another. Even within a single area where nothing really changes about the surroundings, each room has different character and life. In fact, each room has a name on the map. It gives the rooms a sense of purpose. These aren't just set pieces that are made to look cool; they have implicit meaning that is often explicitly clarified if you scan diligently. There are so many little details that you could replay the game many times and still see new things in a previously explored room. While the detail doesn't hold up if you get extremely close to a surface (there's no bump-mapping or anything), I found this to be more helpful than not. I might be accused of trying only to see the good side, but in truth, when a game features bump mapping or detail textures, it's usually not featured on every surface in the game. In these games I find myself examining walls and objects looking to be "wowed" by the detail, and when I don't find it, it's disappointing. In fact, the whole enterprise of seeking out the little details breaks the immersion that it's supposed to help create. If you were truly Samus exploring a foreign world, would you be concerned with closely examining every object and surface in sight simply because you think it might look neat? You would more likely take in the environments as they are: a complete world. This is exactly what *Metroid Prime's* graphic design does. It immerses you in a way that I haven't experienced since *Half-Life*, but it does it with the increased punch that you would expect from the current generation of hardware. When the budding graphics technology of today can be done in every part of a game at sixty frames a second, bring it on. In the mean time, I'll happily accept *Prime's* medium-high-res textures, gratuitous special effects, unmatched art design and perfect framerate any day. Though I believe in my newfound anti-surface detail philosophy,

during the elevator sequences (the only appreciable loading times in the entire game), the game pans across Samus's chest plate showing an extremely pixelated texture. Something should have been done about that since the game forces you to see it. Additionally, unlike other surfaces in the game, you often find yourself extremely close to doors; so a little more detail could have been used in that area as well. And in a couple of areas, there are some sun-cast shadows that could have used more detail. I'm just nitpicking here so that you know that the graphics aren't perfect even if they are nearly so. I should also mention that *Prime* accomplishes all of this with almost no stops for loading. The game loads new rooms as you approach them. A lot of gamers probably won't even notice this because you're free to walk around as you wait for the doors to open (although most open immediately or by the time you can finish running to them). Finally, for those who have the equipment, *Prime* can be played in progressive scan mode, but there is no wide-screen option.

In closing, I want to make a brief mention about the sound. I'm not a huge sound connoisseur, but I know detail when I hear it. It seems like something is always making a noise in *Metroid Prime*. The power suit makes many mechanical noises. Each beam weapon sounds different (even when charging). Samus's footsteps sound exactly as I'd imagine (especially those heavy metallic thuds after jumping). All of the creatures make various sounds as they attack or die trying. The music, though generated on the fly, is compositionally excellent (I am a music connoisseur). The tracks range from catchy to atmospheric. About half of them are remixed from previous *Metroid* games to good effect. To ice the audible cake, *Prime* features Dolby Pro Logic II surround sound. I've yet to experience this in a game, but you can bet that I'll be digging up my copy of *Prime* when I get hooked up with it.

There you have it. Unless you have an unfortunate aversion to the first person viewpoint, you owe it to yourself to put *Metroid Prime* on the very top of your wish list. This game is easily worth buying a GameCube for. It's the best game I've played in years and it might just be my favorite game of all time.



Score

10

Pros

- + Action-adventure gameplay that truly caters to fans of each individual genre
- + A lengthy and unique quest with good incentive to replay it
- + Flawless control scheme
- + One of the most polished games ever created
- + Progressive scan and Dolby Pro Logic II surround sound support.

Cons

- Extensive first person shooter experience could hinder the transition to *Prime's* unique control scheme
- No wide-screen mode



Original Publication: January 17, 2005

The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap

By Jeff Shirley

REVIEW

Excellent things come in small packages.

The Game Boy Advance has a somewhat unfair reputation as an SNES port house. However, this criticism rings true for fans of handheld Zelda games. And while the Four Swords multiplayer part of *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* on the GBA was fun, it did not replace the want of a new GBA Zelda title to follow the brilliant *Zelda Oracles* duo for the GBC. That void is now filled. *The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap* is a miniature masterpiece that is more than worthy of the series.

One of the first things you will notice about *Minish Cap* is that the game is truly gorgeous. Even though the GBA is an aging platform, *Minish Cap* truly dazzles with its visuals. Backgrounds sport a surprising amount of detail, especially when Link shrinks and views the ground up close, and these fantastic backgrounds show off the artistic flair of the developers. Link himself, his adversaries, and all of his NPC buddies animate fantastically in the best sprite animation on the GBA since *Mario and Luigi: Superstar Saga*. This is arguably the best looking game on the GBA yet.

My ears love this game. The sound quality and musical composition in *Minish Cap* are a treat. The soundtrack is quite memorable, and some tunes push what is possible on the GBA's sound processor. Sometimes I can't believe it's the GBA making this music. As for other sound effects like character voices and explosions and whatnot are executed without flaw. It is obvious that great care was put into the sound department, and it really shows.

Of course, gameplay is the meat of any Zelda game. *Minish Cap* does not disappoint here either. The game's core conflict starts when a sorcerer named Vaati turns Princess Zelda into stone. Link gets a hat that makes him small. And I think you probably know what happens next. You go off gallivanting through dungeons in order to save the kingdom and yada yada. Speaking of the dungeons, they are truly well designed. The dungeons left me scratching my head sometimes. Even *Zelda* veterans should be surprised at some of the tricks Flagship used in creating these dungeons, and especially the boss fights at the end of these dungeons. All of them are utterly creative and truly fun to the core. As an example: There is a lava dragon that you need to flip the spiky shell he sports upside down to poke him. Then you need to walk up his neck to commence the stabbing ritual. Half the fun is sometimes figuring out exactly how to tackle each boss.



In between dungeons are numerous side-quests as well as the usual Zelda treasure hunting that goes with Zelda. You can also fuse Kinstones with NPCs (and some inanimate objects) in order to bring "good luck." In other words, fusing Kinstones will open up some doors in Hyrule Field, make some chests appear, or make other NPCs do stuff. I love the Kinstone idea. It makes seeking out and talking to each NPC worthwhile, even if all they do when you fuse kinstones with them is make a treasure chest appear somewhere. While the world map in Minish Cap may appear a little small compared to other games in the Zelda series, in reality it is quite large given the fact of the Minish Cap itself. There are secrets in the tiniest crack in the ground. You really have to study a place and notice the little details in order to use the Minish Cap effectively. I am really amazed at the amount of content in this game.

There are a few nitpicky gripes I have with Minish Cap, and it really feels like I am stretching to find something bad about it. The R button is now your context sensitive button for reading and talking and such. Although using the A button to do stuff works too, you might destroy a sign or something if you had the sword equipped near one, Happened to me a couple of times. It is nothing you can't get used to. Also, despite the graphics looking fine on the GBA and the DS, on the Game Boy Player the more animated people look a little pixelly when they move about. No biggie really. Nothing so much as to bring down this game.



As usual, the handheld Zelda titles continue their amalgamation of most of the ideas and concepts from the previous games in the Zelda series. And once again, that amalgamation results in a title that is more than the sum of its inspirations. I hope the developers at Flagship are proud of their work, for Minish Cap is truly a treasure.



Score

10

Pros

- + Musical score is very memorable and well-composed
- + Such detail in a GBA game is truly remarkable
- + Truly extraordinary dungeon design

Cons

- R button context sensitive can very slightly confusing, especially if you played GB Zelda before
- The game's fantastic visuals do not exactly look the same on the GB Player



Original Publication: May 21, 2009

Punch-Out!!

By Neal Ronaghan

REVIEW

Rife with nostalgia, humor, and great gameplay, Next Level Games' take on Punch-Out!! was well worth the wait.

Little Mac has been out of the ring for 15 years, and now he's making his triumphant return in *Punch-Out!!* for Wii. The game centers on the diminutive hero in his quest to win the WVBA (World Video Boxing Association) title, defend it, and then retire. Developed by Next Level Games, *Punch-Out!!* is a wonderful nostalgic trip featuring great humor and gameplay that appeals to both rookies and veterans of the series.

Before any new players get confused, *Punch-Out!!* isn't really a boxing game; it's more of a puzzle/rhythm game, where each opposing boxer presents a unique challenge that players must decipher and overcome. The trend upward through the circuit tracks yields tougher and tough bouts. Series staple Glass Joe and newcomer Disco Kid barely pose a threat, while the powerful Mr. Sandman and the vain Super Macho Man are punishingly tough. Each boxer has different tells, which are shown when they flash red. The trick of the game is to learn the secrets and timing of each

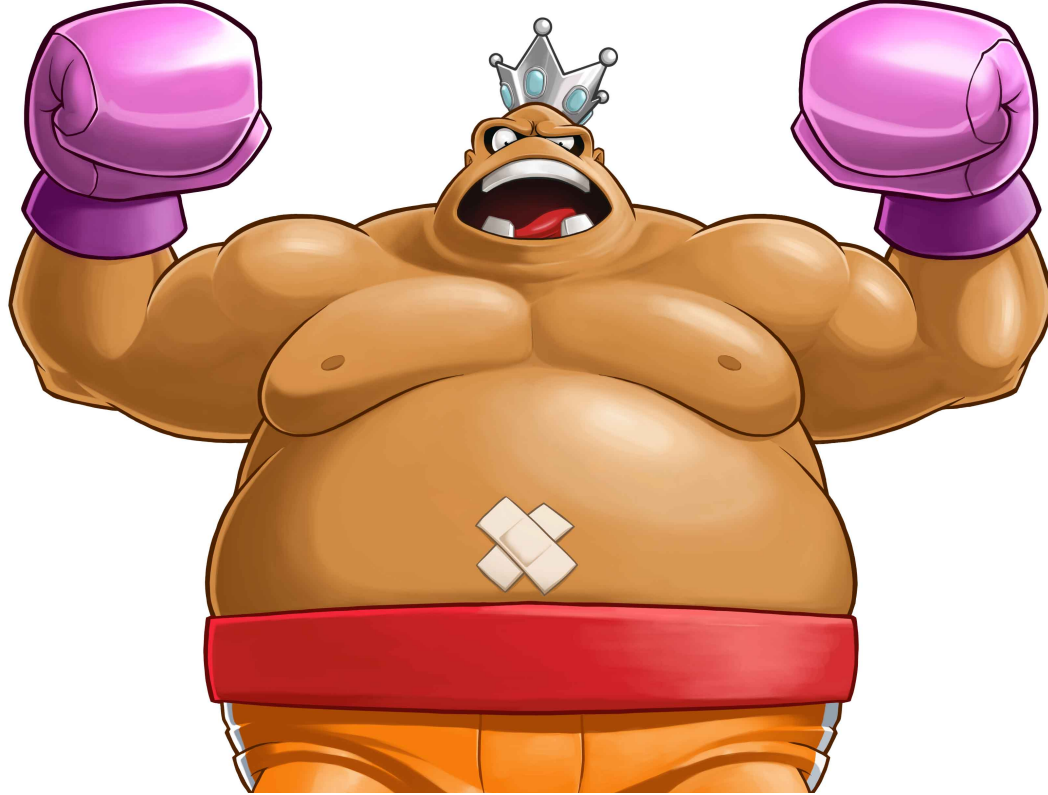
rival and then defeat them by knock-out or decision. It's pretty simple, but in that simplicity there is a lot of depth.

This rock-solid gameplay is made even better by the personality and charm that is exuded by every character. Each opponent has brief opening animation stills and various bits of comical in-between round banter. Even Little Mac's trainer Doc Louis has a treasure trove of funny sayings, most of which refer to his love of chocolate or make fun of his old sayings from Mike Tyson's *Punch-Out!!*

Punch-Out!!'s structure begins the same as previous games; you start off in the Minor Circuit, and then work your way up through the Major and World Circuits. However, once you get to the top, the game no longer ends. The Career mode continues on with Little Mac defending his title against every boxer in Title Defense. This time around Mac's opponents have trained harder and are looking for revenge against the new champ. There is also a little bit more to the Career mode, but you'll have to find that out on your own.



In the earlier games in the series, the only way to learn how to defeat these increasingly difficult foes was by playing the main game. The new iteration adds in a great new feature: Practice mode. Whenever players are stumped on a foe, they can boot up Practice mode and fight a hologram version of the character which cannot harm Little Mac. This is especially helpful because the hologram version allows players to clearly see when the opponent flashes red before their attacks, which is crucial in learning how to defeat each boxer.



The immense challenge of some of the opponents is one of the few drawbacks of the game, but Next Level Games added in unlockable headgear (available after 100 losses in Career mode) that makes Little Mac take less damage. While players still have to play a lot to get the added help, it goes a long way to make it less frustrating when players hit a brick wall in their progression through the game.

After players defeat a fighter, that fighter will be unlocked in the new Exhibition mode. Here, players can either replay the battle or try to tackle a set of challenges. These range from knocking out the opponent in less than a minute to defeating an opponent without missing a punch. There are three challenges for each opponent, as well as three separate ones for their Title Defense versions. Completing these challenges unlock various unlockables, such as each character's music and sound clips.

The game's control options are varied, with one utilizing motion controls and the other hearkening back to the original NES game's controls. The motion controls work well, but veterans of the series will likely frown upon them and immediately revert to the NES-style control. That is not to say the motion controls aren't good, though. The only motion-based controls that you use in the heat of the battle are for punches. Outside of that, everything is controlled by the buttons on the Wii Remote and Nunchuk. These controls lack the finely-tuned precision of standard ones, but they're easy for newcomers to the game and still work in the harder bouts.

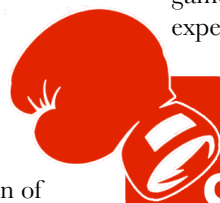
Sadly, Punch-Out!! doesn't make use of the Classic controller, but it isn't that much of a loss considering how tried-and-true the NES-style controls are. The

Balance Board can also be used for dodging (put your weight down to duck, and shift left and right to dodge) and it works quite well if you're into moving around a lot.

There is also a two player mode that does an admirable job at bringing multiplayer to Punch-Out!! Players take control of their own Little Mac and box each other in split-screen gameplay until one of them builds up their special meter. After that, the player transforms into the monstrous Giga Mac and the screen shifts to the series' standard view. After that, it basically becomes a normal Punch-Out!! fight with one player controlling the opponent. There's not a lot of longevity to it, but it is fun for a little while.

Punch-Out!! is a fantastic game on almost every level. It's entertaining for those who have thoroughly enjoyed the previous two games, and still accessible to people who are brand new to the series. The game is a one-of-a-kind boxing experience that transcends the boundary of sports games. The controls are great, the humor is there in spades, and the gameplay is almost unparalleled.

Fans of this series should have already purchased this game and newcomers should dive right in and experience one of the best games available on Wii.



Score

10

Pros

- + Both control methods work great
- + Each character is brimming with personality and humor
- + Takes the original's classic music and updates it beautifully
- + The gameplay is as solid as ever

Cons

- Could be a bit too hard for some
- No Classic controller support



Original Publication: November 14, 2011

REVIEW

Xenoblade Chronicles

By Andrew Brown

I simply cannot find fault in this masterpiece of a game.

Not often does one get the opportunity to play a game that is absolutely everything it promises to be. These are the rare titles where any complaint you could possibly have is entirely conditional with a “but” or an “if” attached to it, and those complaints are so trivial and outshone by the positive aspects that even bringing them up seems nothing more than grasping at straws. Xenoblade Chronicles is, without a doubt, the best RPG this generation.

A game for newcomers and RPG veterans alike, Xenoblade holds your hand just enough to keep things flowing at a steady pace, but makes no reservations about throwing you a sudden challenge.

At the beginning of time, two titans, the Bionis and the Mechonis, engaged in an epic clash that saw them simultaneously killing each other. It is on their gargantuan bodies, eternally locked together in frozen combat, that Xenoblade takes place.

The Homs, a race of humans living on the Bionis, are under constant attack from the vicious Mechnon, robotic beings who come to lay claim to their land and kill anything that stands in their way. The only known weapon capable of damaging the Mechnon attackers is a mysterious sword called the Monado. While its wielder is a valiant warrior, the Mechnon’s attack is overwhelming: there are only two Hom settlements remaining.

In one of these colonies lives the game's hero, Shulk. An attack on his hometown ends in tragedy, leaving it to him claim ownership of the Monado. In an effort to get revenge, he sets off on a quest to stop the Mechnon once and for all.

The storyline seems a little cliché at first, and the characters a little cookie-cutter. All the standards are here from the ignorant soldier who thinks with his fists to the obligatory cute, talking animal mascot. However, the longer you spend with the cast the more they'll grow on you. They all grow as people, and even the “annoying emo lead male” persona quickly dissolves away, leaving behind a character whose trials you can relate to and sympathize with. Fortunately, if there's a character you really can't stand you can just pack them away in the party reserves and leave them there; everyone gains experience whether they participate in battle or not.





Exploration is probably the biggest factor in the gameplay. There are many vast areas to wander around in the game, and most of them are easily on par with the size of Twilight Princess' Hyrule Field – all of Hyrule Field. As you travel you'll uncover landmarks that get added to your maps, which are used as destinations for your fast travel ability, allowing you to quickly jump from area to area. Along the way you'll encounter one breathtaking location after another, each with such a distinct, picturesque look that it's very hard not to be awed by the scenery. As the locations are literally on the bodies of the titans, you can often see where the other is located with a glimpse to the distant sky, or point out the massive shape of whatever body part you're walking around on by the layout of the land.

There are no random encounters, enemies all appear on the map and react to your presence differently. Some creatures are harmless and ignore you unless you attack, some will attack on sight, and some will even chase you down. Right from the start you might notice that each area has a very large range of creatures to discover, and many of them are far too big and powerful to even consider taking on until much later in the game. Say you're exploring some plains, taking down little level 10 monsters to beef up your party, when some gigantic, vicious, level 90 monstrosity stomps across your path. The only option is to run like hell, and hope it doesn't notice you until you're at a safe distance. Battles will only begin when you choose to engage an enemy, but there's nothing stopping enemies from taking a swing at you as you move through their territory. While fighting, the action will sometimes draw the attention of surrounding monsters who will hurry over to join in the fray.

Throughout the game, you take control of the one character that you put in the party leader slot while your two reserves follow along. In battle it is no different. You get free run of the field during a battle, where you can select which enemy to attack, or maneuver around to strategic positions and avoid their attacks. Park your character close enough and they will automatically hack away at the monsters with standard attacks, but at any time you can choose to initiate a special attack or skill. Everything happens on internal, unseen timers in the battle, so there's no waiting or turn-based mechanics. This speeds up the process tremendously and keeps everything running smooth.

Most importantly, battles are hardly ever dull. You can choose to allow your two supporting characters free reign to do what they wish, focus their attacks on the monster you're currently fighting, or simply surround you and wait for further commands. There's also a chain attack option in which you get to dictate a special move performed by each party member, and strategic use of status inflictions caused by the various attacks can prolong the chain and allow for bonus hits.

One of the coolest aspects of battling is the mysterious power of the Monado to grant you a kind of future sight ability. This allows you to see a powerful move that the enemies are planning, who it will attack, how much damage it will do, and whether or not the character being attacked will survive the hit. Once this vision takes place, you get a timer bar at the top of the screen counting down as you race to prevent it from happening by either incapacitating the foe that will use it or using the Monado's skills to intercept the attack. New elements are added to the combat gameplay but it never feels like you're juggling complicated mechanics – it's a breeze to conduct.



If you do fall in battle, there is no punishment, no game over – you simply revive at the last landmark you visited and any experience gained until the point you died will stay with you, and any treasure the enemies drop will remain there waiting for you to come back and collect it. The challenge instead lies in exploring, leveling, and effectively avoiding enemies until you're strong enough to navigate each new area, keeping grinding to a minimum.





There are no restorative items to use, your party's health replenishes automatically over time while you're not engaged in battle, putting the monotonous RPG cliché of backtracking to that last hotel or stocking up on tents and potions firmly in its grave. That doesn't mean there aren't a ton of items to collect, though. Vanquished enemies will always drop treasure chests containing crystals, weapons, equipment and a plethora of lootable trinkets and remnants. Items can be traded between NPC friends you make throughout the world, collected and given to people in side-quests, or used as ingredients to craft stat-boosting gems (which can provide bonuses such as elemental abilities, HP multipliers, or damage modifiers).

If that weren't enough, each area of the map has a checklist of naturally occurring items that can be found in glowing blue orbs scattered around the land. When the checklist has been completed you're rewarded with rare equipment or other valuable prizes. As for the equipment and weapons, whatever your party wears will be physically seen on the characters at all times, even in cut scenes. And yes, that does mean you can strip your buxom lady allies down to their underwear if you so desire – they even have “secondary animation.”

The soundtrack is nothing short of beautiful, covering a huge range of musical genres and tastes. Graphics, on the other hand, can look a little bit dated with slightly blocky character models, but with such an intricate design direction and whimsical beauty behind everything that goes into the game, whining about a few jagged edges is missing the point and entirely pretentious to even mention.

Apart from the epic main story, there's much to do. There are literally hundreds of side-quests that NPCs request of you and a huge cast of named NPCs in every populated location, each of which can be added to a giant friendship chart that traces their interpersonal relationships. There are achievements and accomplishments to unlock by meeting certain

requirements. You can build friendships and romances between your party members in the Affinity chart, allowing you to see little extra story-developing interactive cut scenes known as Heart to Hearts. And you can even play the role of city builder when you're tasked with the restoration of a major city that was destroyed by the Mechno, which opens up yet another series of side-quests and collection requests to complete at your leisure.

Add to this a large list of branching skill trees to develop and special attacks to learn, swap, and upgrade, and you've successfully combined the best elements from every RPG in the last 20 years into something gigantic that somehow works incredibly harmoniously. It's amazing that the whole thing fits on one Wii disc. If I were to give one suggestion though, it's to play the game with its original Japanese audio track. I'm sure the English voices would be fine if I sat down and gave them a chance, but the performances are just so hammy that I really can't take the English voices seriously. If you're ever curious, you can simply swap the language over at any time. All cut scenes are accompanied by handy subtitles, and the translation is, for the most part, very accurate.

I could easily go into greater detail on any of the above points, but there's not much to say beyond the following: If you don't have the game, go out and get it, even if that means having to bug Nintendo to release it in your region.



Score

10

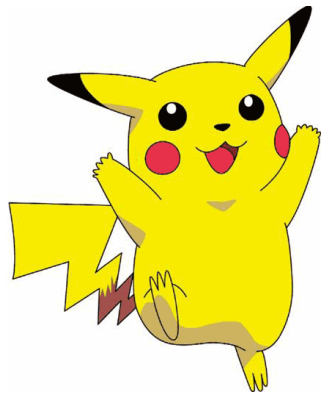
Pros

- + An epic story with many unexpected twists.
- + Beautiful, wide areas to explore, teeming with life and countless discoveries.
- + So much to do, yet never repetitive!
- + Successfully incorporates everything that makes the JRPG genre great.

Cons

- Nothing!

[RAPMASTER J: This is the intro, so it's key to get the people involved. Personally I would be telling people to wave their hands in the air like they don't care, but whatever.]



OK, guys, we gotta rap some Pokémon.
You just do the singing, I'll take care of the hard part.
Let's get it on!

[RAPMASTER J: For the R&B style I will smooth it out for the ladies if I absolutely have to. However, I prefer to call up one of my R&B brothers to handle the hook, as I'm more rough than smooth.]

I want to be the best
there ever was.
To beat all the rest, yeah,
that's my cause.

[RAPMASTER J: The key with all of these is breath control. Many a PokéMC has run out of breath before he's ran out of Pokemon.]

Electrode, Diglett, Nidoran♂, Mankey

Venusaur, Rattata, Fearow, Pidgey

Seaking, Jolteon, Dragonite, Gastly

Ponyta, Vaporeon, Poliwrath, Butterfree

[RAPMASTER J: I once used a full children's choir to sing this part, just for that gospel feel.]

Catch 'em, catch 'em, gotta catch 'em all,
Pokémon!
I'll search across the land,
look far and wide.
Release from my hand
the power that's inside.

[RAPMASTER J: This part is tough, as you have to maintain your street cred while rapping about Jigglypuff and Wigglytuff, but real PokéMCs persevere.]

Venomoth, Poliwag, Nidorino, Golduck

Ivysaur, Grimer, Victreebel, Moltres

Nidoking, Farfetch'd, Abra, Jigglypuff

Kingler, Rhyhorn, Clefable, Wigglytuff

Catch 'em, catch 'em, gotta catch 'em all,

Gotta catch 'em all, Pokémon!

Zubat, Primeape, Meowth, Onix

Geodude, Rapidash, Magnetron, Snorlax

Gengar, Tangela, Goldeen, Spearow

Weezing, Seel, Gyarados, Slowbro



[RAPMASTER J: The "Ow" here was inspired by James Brown, the Godfather of Soul. I like to think that I'm the Hardest Working Man in Pokébusiness.]

Gotta catch 'em all, gotta catch 'em all, yeah!
Gotta catch 'em all, gotta catch 'em all, yeah!
Gotta catch 'em all, Pokémon! Ow!

[RAPMASTER J: I once battled another PokéMC who called himself "E-Raticate". True story.]

Kabuto, Persian, Paras, Horsea
Raticate, Magnemite, Kadabra, Weepinbell
Ditto, Cloyster, Caterpie, Sandshrew
Bulbasaur, Charmander, Golem, Pikachu

[RAPMASTER J: This is where I get deep for a second, talking about my destiny. I like to keep it light, but sometimes I got to keep it real. That's what keeps the people coming back, ya dig?]



At least 150 or more to see.
To be a Pokémon Master is my destiny.
Alakazam, Doduo, Venonat, Machoke
Kangaskhan, Hypno, Electabuzz, Flareon
Blastoise, Poliwhirl, Oddish, Drowzee
Raichu, Nidoqueen, Bellsprout, Starmie

[RAPMASTER J: This dude was my hype man for a while. Unfortunately he wound up stealing some plushies that I picked up at the Nintendo World Store and I had to tell him to bounce. The posse was smaller, but tighter after that.]

Woo! We're at the halfway point, doing great so far.
We? What's all this "we" stuff? I'm doing all the hard work!
Breaktime's over, here we go!

[RAPMASTER J: I was at the BET Awards one year, and Jackie Chan was hanging out at the club next door. He came up to me afterwards and told me that he thought "Hitmonchan" was capitalizing on his popularity, so I had to set the brother straight. Let's just say he won't be stepping in a cypher again any time soon.]

Metapod, Marowak, Kakuna, Clefairy
Dodrio, Seadra, Vileplume, Krabby
Lickitung, Tauros, Weedle, Nidoran ♀
Machop, Shellder, Porygon, Hitmonchan

Gotta catch 'em all, gotta catch 'em all, yeah!
Gotta catch 'em all, gotta catch 'em all, yeah!

[RAPMASTER J: The word "Squirtle" always makes me uncomfortable. Even a hardcore brother like me has his limits.]

Articuno, Jynx, Nidorina, Beedrill
Haunter, Squirtle, Chansey (Pokémon!)
Parasect, Exeggcute, Muk, Dewgong
Pidgeotto, Lapras, Vulpix, Rhydon
At least 150 or more to see.
To be a Pokémon Master is my destiny.





[RAPMASTER J: By this point you're pretty tired. But you keep rapping for the people. And the children. Especially the children.]

Charizard, Machop, Pinsir, Koffing
 Dugtrio, Golbat, Staryu, Magikarp
 Ninetales, Ekans, Omastar
 Scyther, Tentacool, Dragonair, Magmar

[RAPMASTER J: When I was in the booth recording this, dude insisted on saying "Shake out those lips". To this day I still don't know why he was so fixated on lip-shaking. Needless to say, it made the final cut.]

Whoa, catch your breath man. Shake out those lips.
 It's downhill from here, just 24 more to go.
 Now it gets tricky so listen real good!

[RAPMASTER J: I believe Cubone is actually the little-known sixth member of Bone Thugs-N-Harmony.]

Sandslash, Hitmonlee, Psyduck, Arcanine
 Eevee, Exeggutor, Kabutops, Zapdos
 Dratini, Growlithe, Mr. Mime, Cubone
 Graveler, Voltorb, Gloom - We're almost home!
 Gotta catch 'em all, gotta catch 'em all, yeow!
 Gotta catch 'em all, gotta catch 'em all, huhh!
 Gotta catch 'em all, Pokémon! (yeeaahh!!)

[RAPMASTER J: This is where we smooth it out and take it to the bridge. Note: I don't know what that means.]

Charmeleon, Wartortle
 Mewtwo, Tentacruel, Aerodactyl
 Omanyte, Slowpoke
 Pidgeot, Arbok - That's all, folks!

[RAPMASTER J: This is the victory lap, in which I bask in the glory of all non-Pokémon-loving MCs getting served. PEACE]

Fan Art

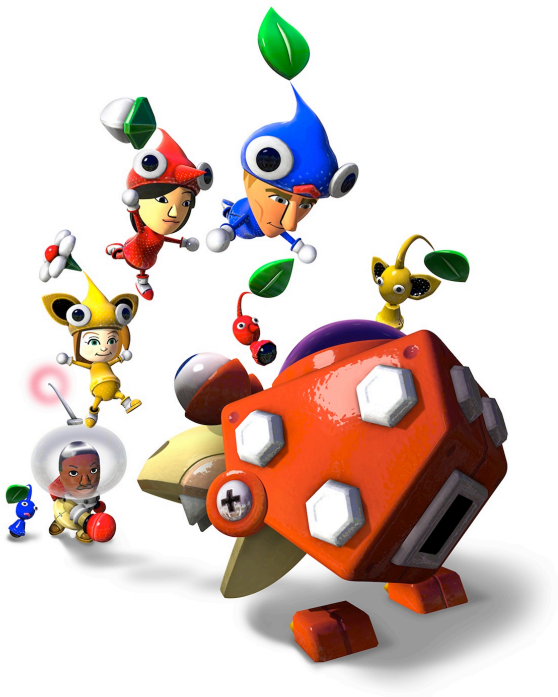


By Crystal Chappell

Send your Fan Art to:
poweredoff@nintendoworldreport.com



By Nat Silva



NEXT ISSUE

We hope you enjoyed issue #2. Next issue we will feature some more cool exclusives, along with some of our more infamous reviews!

Got some ideas? Or just want to have your say? Then send your mail to:

poweredoff@nintendoworldreport.com

- Nick

