NintendoWorldReport

ISSUE 3

POWERED OFF

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In defense of Sega

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The Magical Quest Starring Mickey Mouse

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Pokémon singer extraordinaire

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IF I WERE IN CHARGE OF ZELDA

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This Month

By Nicholas Bray

Bad games. We have all felt the burn of one, some more than others. Poor James Jones and Zachary Miller know this feeling better than most.

In the review section for this month, you will find two reviews of infamously bad quality games; limited to two, because, well, it would simply be too painful to include more.

This issue also has some great exclusive articles. Radio Free Nintendo host Jonathan Metts discusses whether Pikmin is really a strategy game, and James Jones returns to elaborate on the practices of Sega.

We also have a pair of Yarn Yoshi blogs with very different opinions, a look at what Nintendo could possibly do to make Zelda less linear, an interview with Jason Paige (who sang the original Pokémon theme), staff profiles, a Zelda comic, and some more cool fan art submissions!

Enjoy the issue!

We would still like to include a mailbag section eventually, so, if you want to have a question answered in the pages of a future issues, send them to: poweredoff@nintendoworldreport.com.
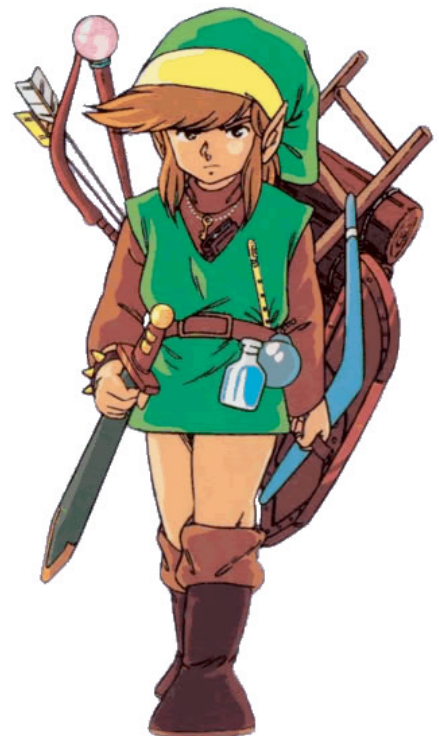
Is PIKMIN™ Really a Strategy Game?

By Jonathan Metts

On a recent episode of our [Radio Free Nintendo podcast](), we discussed Pikmin in the context of various strategy games released on Nintendo systems. NWR founder Billy Berghammer and I were surprised to find that our comrades, James Jones and Guillaume Veillette, didn't consider Pikmin to be a strategy game. This difference of opinion resulted in a great discussion of the Pikmin gameplay and the player's options in managing different Pikmin varietals. I'm not sure anyone was converted in the process, but the conversation was enlightening to me, having had no idea opinions were so split. One observation revealed the possibility that this idea of Pikmin as an original strategy franchise may come from Nintendo itself, as Billy and I were immersed in the company's PR and marketing efforts back in 2001. Back then, it seemed like everyone was in agreement—but could it be my decade-old memories smoothing over some ambiguity that was present even back then? I decided to hit the NWR archives (going back to the Planet GameCube days) to find out.

First, it's notable that all three Pikmin games are classified as "Strategy" in our database. That label is primarily used for filtering when you explore the thousands of game profiles on our site, but considering the pages were likely created by two or three different staff members over the span of a decade, it's worth mentioning. We have two full reviews of the first game; you already know Billy's stance on this question, but Dan Bloodworth's [review]() also implies that Pikmin is a strategy game by noting some ways in which it defies your expectations of that genre.

The multitude of E3 impressions are more concerned with describing the game's hilarious animations, but almost all address the real-time strategy comparison and the degree to which it's appropriate, with several different responses from the various writers. David Trammell's [hands-on impressions]() of the final game, however, are direct:

"Pikmin is not a strategy game. Let me repeat that. Despite what you may have read, Pikmin is not a strategy game. It's a unique hybrid of many genres."

Of course, Dave goes on to list a few of those genres, one of which is... strategy. And like anything else on the Internet, it's easy to find someone who disagrees. Mike Sklens wrote his own [impressions]() of the final game, which include this telling statement:

"There is so much strategy in this title. Getting something done often requires some planning as to how you will do it and which Pikmin you will need to accomplish the task at hand."

Maybe it's stating the obvious, but genres are meant to be loosely defined tools for organization, not strict categories to which all games must conform. You could argue that Pikmin's defiance of easy labels is part of what makes it such a great series. Still, these things can make for fun arguments and help demonstrate the importance of a critic's personal perspective, which is especially apparent for an old game that was covered by nearly every member of the Planet GameCube staff back in 2001.

Perhaps more interesting is the creator's opinion. Our gigantic, multi-section [preview]() of the original Pikmin paraphrases a Famitsu interview with Shigeru Miyamoto in which he insists that the game is not real-time strategy, a classification that concerned him due to frequent comments to that effect from media and fans. (Keep in mind that the general definition of real-time strategy back in 2001 would have been dominated by extremely complex PC games like StarCraft and Command & Conquer.) Yet in a different excerpt from the same interview, Miyamoto seems to reverse direction:

"There is a lot of fun to be had, planning your moves and making strategies. As with a job in real life, if you plan well, and advance successfully - you enjoy your job."

This line of inquiry is sure to come back around as Pikmin 3 gets closer to finally launching on Wii U, and we're going to hear many different answers, just like before. The important thing, as Mr. Miyamoto clarifies, is to "enjoy your job"—and enjoy the game!
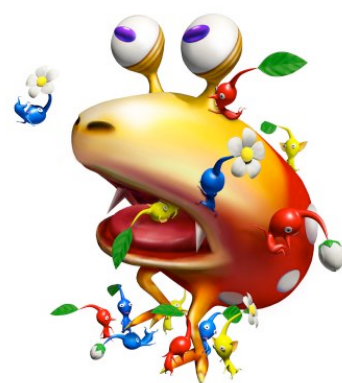
In Defense of SEGA®

By James Jones

I've had harsh things to say about Sega during my five years as a panelist on Radio Free Nintendo. While some of the cuts were purposefully antagonistic, I earnestly believe the harshest criticism I've leveled against the company was deserved.

Quality control often seems the furthest thing from Sega's heart. Just this month, Aliens: Colonial Marines earned near-universal ridicule for easily recognizable flaws and a deceptive (at best) "gameplay" video shown at last year's E3. Before that, Sonic and All-Stars Racing: Transformed launched with a series of bugs that range from bizarre to hilariously lazy.

While it is worth noting that Sega was not the developer of either title, and that All-Stars Racing: Transformed is apparently a good game, its history of publishing half-baked (or worse) titles stretches back well over a decade[1]. Many mistakes seem to flow from game to game, without any real evidence to suggest they're understood.

This isn't to say Sega can't put out good games. It has, both as a developer and as a publisher within the last few years. So, as opposed to talking about its failures, I think I'd rather examine its successes and try to understand them. The two titles I've chosen to examine are both games I hold dear: Infinite Space and Rhythm Thief[2].

An important thing both games possess is clarity of purpose. I can summarize both titles in a single sentence, with every aspect of the respective game fitting within that context.

Infinite Space does a lot of things. Clarity of purpose doesn't preclude diversity in action, but the game has a specific mission statement: "You are captain of a spaceship and must brave the unforgiving expanse." Tasks as varied as assigning the ship's quartermaster and raiding pirate bases are fit within the context of the mission. Everything you do is part and parcel with being a captain. Building a fleet is an organic and rewarding mechanism for establishing the RPG convention of the leveling mechanic, and dovetails beautifully with the game's essence.

As a parallel, a phrase I've adopted for the Sonic series as of late is "Sonic and His S**ty Friends." While the simple reading of the joke is that characters like Big the Cat are poorly designed, which they are, that reading is merely superficial. The real meaning of the phrase, and the real problem, is the lack of purpose the characters represent. Nobody buys a Sonic game to fish. People buy Sonic games to go fast, and to play segments that don't do that feel

horribly off track. It is, however, in those moments where you bumble about collecting crystal doodads, that the importance of the focus is most clear.

Granted, Infinite Space was developed outside of Sega, but Rhythm Thief is a Sega-developed product, and in fact shares much of the same central figures as Sonic 2006. It too never wavers in its singular mission: "Provide a mysterious and jazzy story told through rhythm games, featuring a suave and debonair Parisian."[3] Everything in the game can be attached to that sentence.[4] The game's visual style is informed by the choice made to emphasize a jazzy and mysterious Paris. Even the setting and musical choices are sort of chicken-and-egg: was Paris chosen for its connection to jazz culture or was the music picked to complement the setting? The effort that went into creating this cartoon Paris ties the player's perception of an iconic city he or she is statistically likely to have never visited[5] to an abstract version of a real-world place, allowing the game to operate in a fairytale world of magic and mystery. I have yet to mention the obvious fact that Rhythm Thief's "dance in time with the music to avoid capture" gameplay ties tightly to the game's core essence[6].

In both Infinite Space and Rhythm Thief, clarity of purpose sometimes comes across as idiosyncratic and off-putting. Infinite Space was one of the most challenging reviews I've ever written, simply because there's so much content that—while decently explained—is convoluted or complicated. It isn't that I disliked the complications, although some are far more opaque than necessary[7]; I simply felt I had an obligation to the reader to make it absolutely clear: this game makes you work. Rhythm Thief is considerably less guilty of this behavior; most of its lack of introspection pertains to gameplay that is literally rhythm. It lacks the sort of musical experience you get from clearing stages in Rhythm Heaven, and instead feels as if you're just tapping downbeats. I can't defend some of the decisions in these games. They are both flawed titles, but they're flawed by slavish devotion to the goal, so for that I can't excoriate them in quite the same way.

In film, this sort of focus usually requires a hands-on director, who slavishly enforces his vision on every aspect of production. While it may not focus so much on one individual, there is no reason to believe a small cadre of senior staff can't drive game development in the same way auteurist directors, writers, and producers can drive film production[8].

Infinite Space cleared this hurdle easily. A co-production of the seemingly infallible Platinum Games and the serially over-ambitious Nude Maker, this complex game is probably the most simplified version of the design game that designer Hifumi Kono (of Steel Battalion infamy) would allow out the door. In fact, Infinite Space shares many aspects of the Steel Battalion design. Customization of your units is not just a thing to do between battles, it is a motivator to action, and while Infinite Space doesn't come with a massive control dock, it does feature complicated touch screen button commands for managing your fleet during combat. While it's more inviting than a 21-button-press series of commands to power up your mechanized unit, the game never offers you a fresh pot of tea and cookies[9].

The argument is a bit more difficult to make for Rhythm Thief, in part because the game's director, Shun Nakamura, is also associated with some of Sonic Team's less savory endeavors. Even the Coen Brothers have their "The Ladykillers,"[10] so I'm willing to examine this game within the context of his other work while ignoring his role on games like the aforementioned Sonic reboot. The most important parallel here is Nakamura's role in the Dreamcast cult classic Samba de Amigo. For the unaware, Samba de Amigo was a game where you played (real) maracas to control a monkey who was tapping out rhythms to Latin pop music in a piñata-colored world. Sound familiar? Granted, Sega wasn't shy about making Dreamcast accessories[11], but I think convincing your company to build you maracas (in the pre-Guitar Hero days) is taking creative control to a whole new level.

I've always quietly hoped both titles would get sequels. As I touched on before, they have noteworthy flaws I'm able to overlook, but not totally ignore. I think both flirted with greatness, and perhaps the inability to smooth out these edges is a consequence of the characteristics that made them so good to begin with. That said, both franchises could easily have truly ascendant titles with some relatively minor changes. It's the great tragedy of Sega's situation: so much of its economic weakness is self-inflicted, not just by poor games, but by terrible business decisions dating back a full two decades[12]. As a result, its image is badly tarnished with gamers and the press. Hopefully it finds a way to keep risky projects like these going, not just these franchises but new initiatives lead by a motivated development team deeply involved with a concept it values. I don't want to see this kind of game go away, swept aside in an ocean of annualized franchises and shooters. God bless Sega for trying, because it is one of the few companies that regularly tries to make these kinds of games. It is a shame many of its larger projects don't seem to try nearly as hard.

1. Do yourself a favor and watch gameplay footage from games like Sonic the Hedgehog (2006) and marvel at the kind of glitches that garner it comparisons to Busby 3D.

2. I don't think either game is perfect. Both have flaws.

3. Alternatively, and more cynically, you could say their mission was "Make our own Professor Layton, except with an art thief and set in Paris." And even if that was in fact the goal, they were successful.

4. His dog's name is Fondue!

5. I traveled to Paris within a month of completing Rhythm Thief. Its maps were not to scale, as my feet could attest.

6. Which it does.
7. The pirate raids are, at best, poorly designed. Too much of the net result is chance in a game that prides itself on preparation, and the instant death traps are just manifestations of malice.

8. The list of video game developers accepted as auteurs is not long. Hideo Kojima is probably the perfect example of the best and the worst of auteurist theory in gaming.

9. The game also doesn't delete your save if you die, which is good, because completing Infinite Space takes between 30 and one million hours. There is an unlockable mode where ships don't repair and other such chicanery, but they at least had the decency to keep that from the main story.

10. There was no need to have Tom Hanks lilt about for just long enough to meet the bare minimum runtime to classify as a theatrical release while his crew of merry men fail to kill an old woman. Chief among this movie's sins is the casting of a Wayans brother in any role—this is not a thing a self-respecting director should ever allow.

11. The fishing reel is probably still the strangest accessory they made, although it is close.

12. Every add-on for Genesis, the entire Saturn fiasco, the Dreamcast, the Nomad, etc.

Fire Emblem Frustration

By Kimberly Keller

Kim takes an emotional ride through Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones.

With the release of Fire Emblem Awakening still fresh, I thought I'd share something. Though I have played far more games than any sane person would be comfortable with, I've never played Fire Emblem. Any of them.

The first I heard of its existence was back in good ol' Super Smash Bros. Melee when I unlocked Marth and Roy, to my utter confusion. Where are their powers? They have a sword, and they… swordfight. OK, so do I (modern fencing, that is). Moving on… hello Falco!

(I always play as Falco, don't know why…)

Anywho, last month I heard a new Fire Emblem was coming out. "What is that?" I asked my friends, and they laughed in my face. The end.

So yesterday I decided to try out this so-called super-awesome amazing series once and for all by playing… the free one on my 3DS, because right now I'm cheap like that. To be honest, I didn't even realize I had a Fire Emblem game on my 3DS from the Ambassador Program until two weeks ago. Yes, I know, start yelling now. Apparently I just glazed over the games I hadn't heard of and promptly forgot anything else existed once I got my hands on a new Pokémon game.

It's been one day of playing Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones now, and I'm on Chapter 5: The Empire's Reach. So, I've decided to look back on my experience so far.

First off, the main character is a girl? Whoa, I'm a girl too! This game just got way more interesting. Instead of running and cowering in fear, Eirika is able to fight enemies just like her paladin protector, Seth. This is so cool! She has a sword, I have a sword. She uses hers to fight for the honor of her fallen kingdom and find her brother, and

I… wear copious amounts of protection and hit other people in hopes that a buzzer will go off and I'll get a point. Hmm, OK, not as impressive, but still, it's a girl! I promptly try to kill as many people with her as I can, especially the bosses. She rocks. So do Vanessa and Lute. I'm not biased, I swear.

Secondly, this setup is pretty amazing. When the instructions first started, and went on, and on, I was getting pretty frustrated. Just how many things did I need to

> "So yesterday I decided to try out this so-called super-awesome amazing series once and for all by playing… the free one on my 3DS, because right now I'm cheap like that."

know? Kill the guys in red, end of story, right? Nope, apparently there is a weapon triangle, neutral characters, villages, special movements, and special attacks. Walls crack, characters have support conversations, story elements are crucial when I decide who should talk to someone new, etc. Holy cow there is a lot—so much, in fact, that there is a permanent guide link on the menu. I really thought this was going to be the end of the game for me, that I was going to be bored out of my mind and never pick up the game again. Amazingly, though, I had work I wanted to procrastinate from. So I stuck with it, and I am insanely glad I did. All these elements work great together! This is like a far more entertaining version of chess! (OK, that sounded way less lame in my head.) I found myself eagerly looking forward to the next map so I could scope out my plan, strategically placing my allies in the best spot for them to strike the enemy, slowly closing in on their overconfident leader. I can't believe how much fun I'm having with this power. For these past few chapters, I've felt god-like, ordering around my tiny minions and sending anyone with the audacity to wear red to their inescapable grave.

Which leads me to my third, and last, discovery.

People die?? Like, straight up die and never come back? I was not prepared for that! Let's backtrack a little to Chapter 4: Ancient Horrors. Apparently, hell has decided this war has provided the perfect opportunity for everyone to catch some sun and party up on Earth. OK, I can dig it. Enter Artur and Lute, my first introduction to magical people, or people with magic. Whatever, I'm jealous; it's Harry Potter all over again. Lute, I will admit, is cute. He has perfect wavy red hair and wears an outfit I once saw in a Bollywood film. Predictably, I am absolutely psyched when he joins my team after demonstrating his insane light magic by blowing up a gigantic floating eyeball.

Finally, the introductions end, the enemies line up, and the battle is on! I chose Artur first because his light magic explodes people and he's awesome. First encounter: scary zombie thing. Bam! Obliterated, ha! I moved everyone else with equal expertise (I'm so obviously a Fire Emblem prodigy) and then it's the enemy's turn to wet themselves—they've seen the might that is my army. First a skeleton challenges Artur; boom, dead. Then another skeleton challenges… Artur. Dang, maybe I shouldn't have moved him so close to the other monsters. OK, now a zombie is battling him and he's not taking it too well.

It suddenly hits me: what happens when they die? Stab! Artur's health empties. "The rest… is up to you." What?!? The game fades back to the map and Artur is nowhere to be found. No body to resurrect. Nothing. What the hell??

…Home page, please. "Close this software and return to the HOME Menu? Any unsaved data will be lost." Yes, please. Loading, loading, fade up. Click on Fire Emblem: Sacred Stones. Loading, intro, load game.

Wait, what? Where's Artur? Why is everything just as I—oh my god it auto saved! What kind of sick game kills off characters for good and then auto saves just to make sure I can't play god? I'm speechless. OK, not true: I immediately yell and rant from the couch just so my whole house and neighborhood can know the injustice that has just befallen me. My boyfriend continues to work; apparently he's never heard of Fire Emblem either.

I finished the chapter without ending anyone else's life prematurely, but I felt a little empty inside. This was Artur's battle, afterall. When I first arrived in this area, Artur risked his life to warn my company of the undead menace lurking ahead. I learned about hiding in the forest from him! So noble and caring, it was he who was tasked with the dangerous mission of protecting the townsfolk, a mission he took with no thought to his own safety!

OK, I'll admit I might be reading too much into this, but I am seriously considering restarting the game. It's only five chapters, and another day of my life. It's a tough call, actually. So here's my question: should I restart the game, or just get over it? Maybe this happens all the time, and this game is teaching me life lessons here. What do you think?
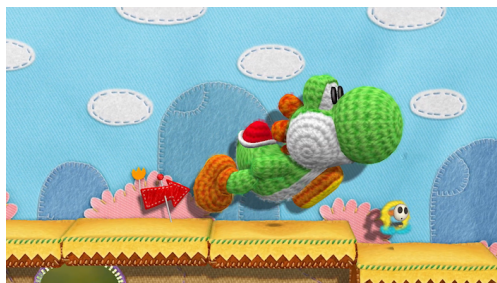
Spun Up in Yoshi's Yarn

By Neal Ronaghan

VS

Yoshi's Epic Garbage

By Alex Culafi

As one of the folks charmed by Kirby's Epic Yarn, Neal is super-hyped for the new Yarn Yoshi game.

I think we all had a feeling that Good-Feel, developer of Kirby's Epic Yarn and Wario Land: Shake It!, was going to make a Yoshi game. It just seemed to make sense, being the prediction of many Nintendo World Report staffers recently. Finally, nearly two and a half years after Epic Yarn's release, Good-Feel's next game, starring Yoshi in full wooly regalia, has been unveiled for Wii U.

I am stoked, as I both love Good-Feel's work and the charm of the aesthetic. I also think the crocheted world looks beautiful in HD. Is there that part of me that would love to see Good-Feel do something different than that tried-and-true style? Sure, but as long as this Yoshi game doesn't just replicate the concepts shown in Kirby's Epic Yarn, I won't complain.

Some of the flourishes, like how Yoshi's yarn outline fills in when he eats an enemy, are adorable. Yoshi's transformations, as shown in Yoshi's Island, might make a return, as some of the footage shows a giant Yoshi. Either he ate a Mega Mushroom or he's getting transformed somehow. Remember, in Epic Yarn, Kirby transformed in ways similar to Yoshi.

The last exciting part about this new Yoshi game is Takashi Tezuka's involvement. Tezuka, best known for designing every relevant Mario and Zelda from 1986 to 1996, has been spending most of his time with 2D Mario titles. Considering Tezuka was a co-director on Yoshi's Island, I have faith he will make sure Good-Feel keeps up the legacy of that fantastic game.

When will this game come out, though? I think it's safe to assume this game could be a fall 2013 release, likely hitting in October. Tezuka's game generally seem to come out on time, as does Good-Feel's. With close to three years of time since Epic Yarn's release, it seems like Good-Feel should have had enough time to learn the Wii U hardware and make a kick-ass game. Seriously, just look at this freaking game. It is beautiful.

Alex anti-hypes the heck out of the new Yoshi game.

During the recent Nintendo Direct, when the new Yoshi game was announced, there was some rejoicing. Some people were insanely happy that Good-Feel wanted to take on a Yoshi's Story follow-up, while another, significantly smaller camp was disgusted that the Yoshi series was being handled by a group that has already proven incapable. I am in the latter.

I guess the largest issue is that the studio making this game is the same one that developed Kirby's Epic Yarn on the Wii a few years back. Despite the game's (then-) creative art style and excellent music, its difficulty was insanely low and static (yes, even counting collectibles). And when style is taken out of the equation, the game as a platformer just isn't creative or high quality. The vehicle segments ranged from OK to not very fun, and the boss fights were a yawn. Moreover, should the new Yoshi game be developed in a similar style (and it already includes those gems), I can promise that what we're going to get is another blatant case of style over substance (and a potential rehash, for that matter).

And yes, Takashi Tezuka is taking some kind of reins on the project, but I wouldn't get my hopes too high. While there is always a chance he could "Miyamoto" it and improve (well, not always) or change direction as he sees fit, he could instead pull a Tarantino, having his name attached as producer while only doing basic consulting. Furthermore, even though he was the director of Yoshi's Island, he also produced the most disappointing follow-up to a game ever, which is also the basis of this game.

Oh, yeah. And as I've touched on, I reckon there won't be anything here for Yoshi's Island fans. No Baby Mario, and no crayon art style. Instead, this game is almost assuredly both a follow-up to Yoshi's Story and the apparently established Yarn franchise.

The reason why I'm upset, though, is that Nintendo seems to be ruining everything the original Yoshi's Island did right. While easy, at least the boss fights were creative, it was possible to lose, the platforming was masterfully designed, and the difficulty actually existed for those who wanted it. If this game turns out how everyone expects it to, I fear it will be years before we actually get a proper Yoshi game.

Skylanders: Swap Force

By Neal Ronaghan

Mix up up your figures and jump in this year's Skylanders game.

We're entering the third year of Activision's Skylanders franchise, and as such, the third game, called Skylanders: Swap Force, is set for a fall release. Sales for the figures are out of control, outselling the Star Wars and Transformers figures combined, and fortunately, Activision and developer Vicarious Visions don't seem to be resting on their laurels for the third entry.

First off, this Wii U game is being built on a whole new engine, and it looks dramatically better than the first two games, which were derived from the Wii engine made by original developer Toys for Bob. Characters animate vividly, and the in-engine cut scenes look like something out of a Pixar movie. Vicarious Visions is going for a self-declared cinematic story, emphasizing the humor and action of the series' side characters, namely Flynn, who is still wonderfully voiced by Patrick Warburton.

The gameplay is, for the most part, what you'd expect from the series: finely tuned, delightful dungeon-crawling using vibrant action figures. All the characters from the first two games will work in Swap Force, and they'll feature the same move sets from the earlier games. However, now they can all jump. Finally, after two games, Skylanders on home consoles has a jump button.

The new characters highlight the new gameplay, which is based around swapping characters and "Swap Zones." 16 new Swap Force characters, two from each element, can be split in half and rearranged with other characters to create new characters. So, the octopus-

like Wash Buckler (a Water element) and the explosive Blast Zone (a Fire element) can be combined to create Wash Zone or Blast Buckler. Wash Zone features Wash Buckler's head, meaning he gains the experience and deals out the attacks, and Blast Zone's legs, giving the character rocket boost movement. The legs are used in new Swap Zones, which require certain types of movement to go through short mini-games that hide treasures. Blast Zone flies using rockets, and Wash Buckler has ladder-like tentacles that help him climb. Some other Swap Zones will revolve around teleportation, digging, bouncing, and more.

Some other Swap Force characters that were shown (you can see them in the trailer below) include Freeze Blade (Water), Night Shift (Undead), Stink Bomb (Life), and Magna Charge (Tech). During a hands-off demo, I got to see Wash Buckler, Blast Zone, and Magna Charge in action. Wash Buckler uses a sword and a bubble gun while moving slowly using his tentacles. Blast Zone has all sorts of fire power, lobbing bombs, shooting rockets, and blowing stuff up with his rocket charge attack. Magna Charge is nimble, rolling on a ball and using magnet attacks.

That's not all, as Swap Force will also introduce 16 new characters, eight new

LightCore characters, and 16 reposed Series 3 characters. Some of the new characters include Roller Brawl (Undead) and Countdown (Tech). Roller Brawl is kind of like a roller derby zombie or something, scooting around on sawblades headbutting and clawing enemies. Countdown is literally a ticking time bomb, and can throw his bomb head to blow up nearby enemies.

Skylanders: Swap Force is set for a fall 2013 release, so basically the same October window as the other two entries. The game's starter kit, which will likely retail for $69.99, will include a new Portal of Power, two Swap Force characters, and one returning reposed character. The Wii version, which will reportedly feature the same content as the Wii U version, is being developed by Beenox, and the 3DS version will again be developed by n-Space.

Disney Infinity

By Neal Ronaghan

Disney Infinity is gigantic, ambitious, and potentially never ending.

Just summing up the parts of Disney Infinity is a gargantuan effort. It's similar to Skylanders, with a variety of collectible figures that act as in-game characters that level up. It's similar to LittleBigPlanet in the way you can create experiences. With origins in developer Avalanche Software's open-world Toy Box mode in their Toy Story 3 video game, Disney Infinity is slated for release on June 18 on Wii and Wii U (a 3DS release by Altron will vary from the other consoles, offering what developers called "a portable party experience."). A huge component of these games is the Toy Box mode, a sandbox mode where players can interact with a variety of characters and objects across all Disney's properties to make their own fun using all sorts of tools, ranging from world creation to logic-using contraptions.

DISNEY INFINITY: MONSTERS UNIVERSITY PLAY SET © Disney © Disney/Pixar

Toy Box is only half the experience, though. The other half, designated as Play Sets, features whole worlds and adventures based off Disney properties. In this mode, you can only use specific characters; for example, only The Incredibles can be used in The Incredibles play set.

Before diving into the details of Toy Box and Play Sets, some things need to be cleared up on the Nintendo-specific front. On Wii, the experience should be a quality release on the dated system, as Avalanche has worked with porting Toy Story 3 and Cars 2 to Wii successfully. On Wii U, that level of confidence isn't there. Developers seemed to have a unanimous view

point that the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 versions will be the best, as the Wii U development started a little later than the others. Still, when all is said and done, the Wii U version will have been a part of the development for around a year and a half. Because of that limited time, mostly due to Disney not getting final development kits until later, features such as Off-TV Play and other Wii U-exclusive features might not make it. For one, the Wii U will still use the stand every other system uses instead of using the GamePad's NFC functionality.

What was shown at the Disney Infinity reveal event was unfortunately limited, but showed off a good cross section of the experience. Each play set shown, all part of the Starter Kit coming at the platform's launch, gave a good idea of how they will be different and interesting. The Incredibles was more of a beat-'em-up, as you controlled the heroic family to take on different enemies. Each character had unique abilities and attacks, though they

all controlled similarly. Pirates of the Caribbean starred Jack Sparrow, and while we didn't see much of it, the sword fighting and exploration seemed to be the key, along with some interesting naval battles.

Monsters University was the one we spent the most time with. Controlling Sulley or Mike, you helped Monsters University engage in prank wars with Fear Tech, which involved dismantling booby traps on your home campus, and sneaking around Fear Tech at night armed with a fantastically ridiculous toilet paper gun. What was shown of Monsters University was unfortunately hampered by the fact that the team at Avalanche is under heavy embargoes for any details related to the upcoming movie. The team members present were mum on additional characters for that set, though they are assuredly on the way.

The Toy Box mode highlighted a lot of the extraneous items that are coming out alongside the figures and play sets. Circular and hexagonal power discs, which will come in blind packs for $4.99, added buffs to characters and new toys to the Toy Box respectively. The circular discs featured characters ranging from Frankenweenie to Bolt, with things such as increased health and speed added to your characters. You can stack two of the buffs underneath the figure on the stand. To make the process easy to tinker with, your character does not immediately disappear when you remove from the stand, giving you a few seconds of grace time to line up some power discs.

DISNEY INFINITY: THE TOY BOX
© Disney © Disney/Pixar

The hexagonal discs add new toys to the Toy Box, mostly vehicles. However, these toys are only accessible using the discs. At the event, they had everything from the Electric Mayhem Bus from The Muppets to Cinderella's carriage. The carriage could even be tricked out in Toy Box mode by using goop, which gave the carriage monster trucks wheels and added a huge boost for it.

That goop touches on what makes Toy Box so compelling, as you can use it to make anything bigger or smaller, including other players. It can be completely insane as you build worlds with your friends, joyously griefing each other along the way. The developers from Avalanche I spoke to all had fun stories of the countless times they tested the game together and got lost in it because of how much fun they were having. That could be a cute line, but when a team is making a game they are having fun playing, that is usually a good thing.

During my time checking out Toy Box, I witnessed a chaotic soccer game bolstered by characters using invisipads to turn invisible and sneak up on the goal, I attempted a squirrel suit obstacle course created by all four players, using a glider unlocked in The Incredibles play set, and I drove along a winding race track using all sorts of vehicles that all controlled nicely (Avalanche also made Cars 2, a well-received licensed game). It's the sort of fun that you can get lost in, much like the toys and figures they are trying to emulate.

Toy Box can be played with four players online, which could be a way that the experience has more life than just with the younger crowd. It reminded me of the kind of fun chaos you could get into in Grand Theft Auto IV multiplayer. Two players can tackle Toy Box locally, as well as the Play Sets. Avalanche's goal is to get four-player online working across the board, but as of Disney's own press release, the firm commitment to four-player Play Sets is missing.

Disney Infinity is coming to Wii, Wii U, and 3DS on June 18, with starter kits retailing for $74.99. The kits will include the game, three characters (Sulley, Jack Sparrow, Mr. Incredible) and three Play Sets (one for each character). Individual Play Set packs will be $34.99, while individual figures will be $12.99 with a three-pack of figures retailing for $29.99. Lastly, randomized power disc packs will be $4.99.

Still, the most compelling aspect of Disney Infinity is, by far, its potential. With the idea of Play Sets accompanying every major Disney release, this platform should almost standardize Disney licensed video games, making the unfortunate rush and pressure for each title to hit the film's launch less daunting. Also, with Disney's growing portfolio, the possibilities are worth salivating over. Can you imagine if an Avengers Play Set launched alongside Avengers 2 in 2015? What if the next Star Wars movie had a Play Set launch alongside the movie? What if legacy Marvel characters got their own Play Sets? I smiled broadly when I asked a developer about Tron, and they busted out a Recognizer almost immediately. The hooks for your Disney-related IP dreams are in this game, and if it works and succeeds, the possibilities are, dare I say, infinite.
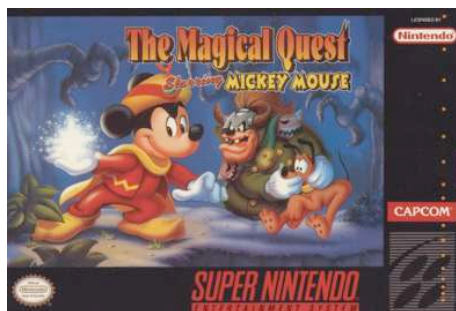
An Unexpected Sidequest

A few days later...

Extra Life
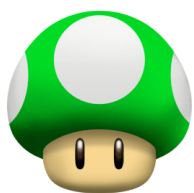
The Magical Quest Starring Mickey Mouse

By Pedro Hernandez

Mickey Mouse is a magician, a fireman, and a mountain climber in this classic SNES adventure.

With Mickey Mouse being one of the most beloved and recognized American icons, it is no surprise that many video game companies have created games based around the cartoon character. Out of the countless games made, one of my all-time favorites is The Magical Quest: Starring Mickey Mouse. Developed by Capcom, a company who already had significant experience developing games for Disney, Magical Quest stars Mickey Mouse as he travels to a magical land in order to rescue Pluto, who has been kidnapped by Emperor Pete. There, he meets a friendly wizard who gives him advice on how to complete the worlds and gives him the tools he needs to succeed. Even Goofy drops by to help the mouse out.

The storyline recalls Fantasia, specifically the Sorcerer's Apprentice sequence, in that Mickey Mouse is playing a character outside of his traditional universe, facing a larger-than-life threat, but surrounded by a lot of familiar faces. That made the game more appealing to me, as the universe presented in this game is beautiful and captivating. Out of the many games released for the NES and SNES by Capcom, Magical Quest best captures the Disney "essence."

One element that helped the game achieve this Disney-like quality was the costume system. Mickey is able to don different costumes that give him different abilities. This mechanic is similar to the different abilities Mega Man would obtain after defeating a boss. The Capcom influence was definitely apparent in Magical Quest.

The best and most advertised costume was the wizard costume. When wearing it, Mickey is able to shoot blasts of magic. When charged up, the blast is bigger. The second coolest and most unique costume was the fireman costume. Mickey is able to shoot water, which helps him attack enemies as well as put out fire. The last costume was the mountain climber, which gave him the ability to use a hook and reach high places.

As a kid, the reason I loved the game was because it was just easy enough that I would be able to complete it, but challenging enough that it kept me coming back for more and left me feeling highly satisfied once everything was finished. A common complaint I hear about the game is that it was too slow, especially when compared to other platformers like Mario and Sonic. While I did notice the slow movement and level progression when I played it again as an adult, it certainly didn't bother me when I first played it.

The bosses were the one thing that really impressed and intimidated me as a kid. They were larger than life, effectively using the Mode 7 graphics. They nearly covered the screen and would rotate in ways that would surprise and at times scare me.

Speaking of graphics, the presentation in Magical Quest is, for lack of a better word, magical. It isn't as fluidly animated as games like Mickey Mania, but the warm colors and cartoon design made it resemble a classic Mickey Mouse/Silly Symphony. Aside from the bosses I just mentioned, the game cleverly used the Mode 7 graphics in order to create captivating levels and enemies. The music also helped establish the mood and feel of the game. It didn't feature any classic Disney songs, but they all felt very "classic" in their execution.

There were several sequels to this game released throughout the '90s, including one where you could finally play as Donald Duck in a world resembling the film "Mickey and the Beanstalk" from "Fun and Fancy Free." There were better Mickey games before and after the release of Magical Quest, but for the sake of nostalgia, the first Magical Quest game is the one I cherish and enjoy the most. The Magical Quest is the game that most embodies the spirit of Mickey and the magic of Disney.

If I Were in Charge of Zelda

Re-Structuring, Structure By Nicholas Bray

A look into a possible restructuring of a Legend of Zelda game.

For the past few years, Legend of Zelda fans have been hoping for a change to the way that Zelda games are structured. Since the release of A Link to the Past on the Super Nintendo, most of the games have followed the format of a beginning with three dungeons, then some sort of plot reveal/twist, moving into another five to six dungeons, and finally into a small dungeon leading up to the final boss.

The exception, at least within the 3D home console entries, has been The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask, where the game had only four dungeons. Nintendo instead decided to focus on player interaction with the various inhabitants of the world to acquire masks that helped Link to navigate about the land. Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker didn't feature as many dungeons, but still followed a similar structure to A Link to the Past and Ocarina of Time.

With the release of Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess, it had become enough for long-time fans of the series, and while it is still an enjoyable game, many started to feel the overall structure and mechanics were a bit stale.

In a lot of discussions about the structure of Zelda, making the game structure non-linear is often something people would like to see return. Or at least, having the choice of a few different dungeons to tackle that are not in a strict order. However, this is difficult to pull off. Firstly, telling the story can become difficult. Since the way you acquire items is from finding them inside the dungeons, there needs to be a set order to the way you complete the various areas, so you can move more freely across the land, and have more complex dungeon designs as you gain more abilities.

If I were to change Zelda, the first thing I would do is to take the items out of the dungeons altogether, or at least the majority of them. That way it should be possible to structure the game so you can acquire items in almost any order you want, and in turn be able to tackle multiple dungeons at any point in the game. It also allows for free-form boss designs. Most Zelda bosses require the player to use the item they find

in that dungeon to defeat it. Taking the items out would force the designers to be more creative, and it would take the player longer to figure it out, as they would have to try different strategies to find out what works. Multiple items could be effective, but with some being more-so than others.

So, if we take the items out of the dungeons, where do we put them then? Some could be hidden throughout the overworld, giving you more incentive to actually explore. Others could be linked to Majora's Mask style side quests. The player would then have to interact with the non-playable characters in a more meaningful way, and this could also be used as a means to tell the story.

"What you wanna buy stranger?"

The problem with taking the items out of the dungeons though, is that it would be possible to run into a roadblock halfway through an area, and then the player would have to go back out and find a new item, which could frustrate some players. One way around this would be to create shorter areas to complete; think of it like Super Mario Galaxy, where a lot of the levels were bite-sized, and usually concentrated on a couple of mechanics. Some of the areas could be made in a similar way, so instead of, say, eight dungeons in the game, maybe the number could end up somewhere between 15-20, with some being smaller, more concentrated pieces of design, and others resembling the more lengthy Zelda dungeons. This would reduce the chances of someone having to keep going in and out of dungeons if they had not found enough of the items, or at least give an indication early on that they need a new item to continue.
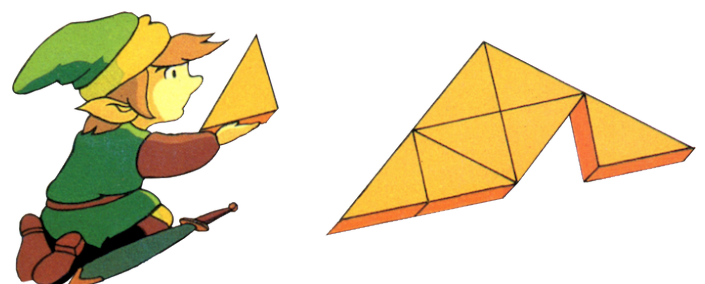
The story conceit I came up with for this could be that at the beginning of the game, the Grand Temple, used to house the Triforce, gets separated into small pieces to protect its contents from being stolen. The temple is scattered over the land, and only by completing each of the pieces will the temple be restored and the Triforce given to the one who did it. When the temple is reconstructed, it would also provide a large final area that uses every item that the player has at their disposal.

The villain of, course, tries to restore the temple himself, and gives the world's inhabitants grief by trying to extort information/items out of them. That would give a reason for completing the side quests, and give the player tips to temple piece locations and the various tools and weapons, while also telling the story.

A lot of the game would take place out in the overworld, something which hasn't been a big part of Zelda games for many of the 3D ones. I enjoy exploring the land, but there has to be an interesting design for me to become invested in it. Having better rewards is also a key point in pushing players to find hidden nooks. These points are what drove my design idea.

Overall, Nintendo has been providing excellent Zelda games since the creation of the series. A lot of fans want Nintendo to shake up the formula with the forthcoming Skyward Sword, and hopefully they will succeed in not only changing the way the game controls, but also in changing the way the player progresses through the game. I have come up with something I think could work, and I hope Nintendo has something fantastic to surprise us with in regards to the Zelda formula.
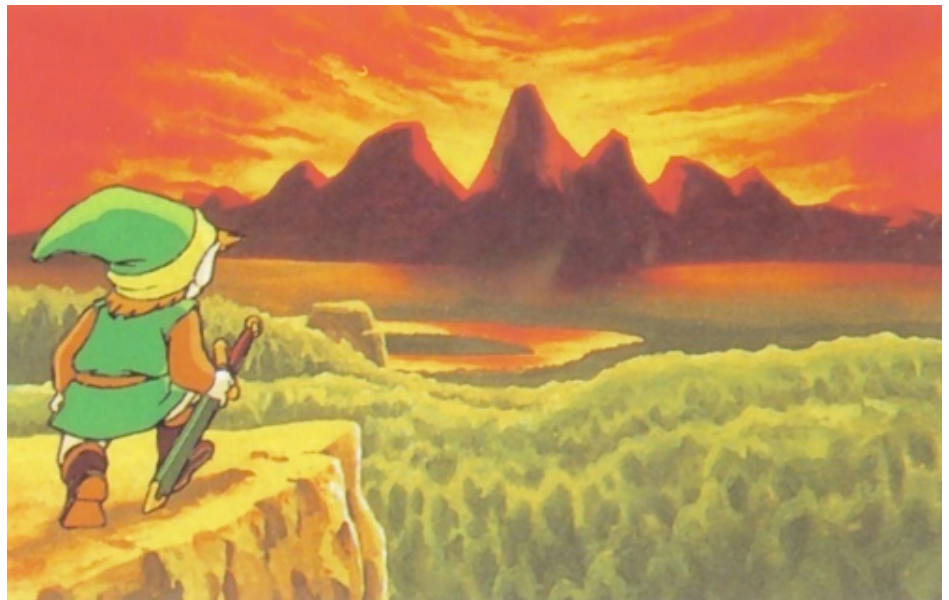
Talking with Jason Paige: Pokémon Singer Extraordinaire

By Alex Culafi

NWR chats with the guy who sang the theme from the original Pokémon anime.

Whether or not you think you've heard of Jason Paige, you have heard Jason Paige. Paige, among other things, is known as the original singer of the Pokémon anime's theme song, a tune many of us may connect directly to the Pokémon series, or perhaps to some of our childhoods in general. We talked with Paige to discuss his career, his experience as a singer for the show, and whether he himself is a fan of video games.

How did you get the original job 14 years ago? What was the experience like?

I got the job through a music house that I had sung other jingles for. I was singing about 100 jingles every year and this was just another demo for an unknown Japanese TV show. After haggling over multiple possibilities, the tag line "gotta catch 'em all" was settled on. Once the TV show became a success, millions of video tapes were sold, dozens of products/toys were invented. Many of these included sound bites of the theme. Watches, room greeters, etc. There was soon a rush to record a full-length version of the theme for the 2.B.A. Master album. I recorded the extended theme and the song "Viridian City" prior to receiving a contract on good faith that it would cover the dozens of known uses that I had yet to be compensated for. When a contract was finally presented it covered none of these additional uses and little compensation for the CD as well. Long story short, after over two years and six attorneys to help me bring claims against the seven companies whose products my voice appeared on, I was forced to take a settlement that was equal to far less than what the original contract offered.

That experience was painful and somewhat tragic. Mostly because there's no precedent for what it's worth. There aren't cases much like this. Let me ask you, what would a jury decide on this question: What percentage of the success of Pokémon from that point on can be attributed to the voice of theme song? One percent? 1/1000 of one percent? The phenomenon went on to make millions each year. Whenever any cash register went off from a pokésale, a little "gotta catch 'em all" went through someones mind. When I do the math it brings me to tears. Not.

**How did you react to the fan reaction to your work?**

My reaction to the fans reaction is ever-changing. Initially, my fans were between the ages of 3 and 15, and now they're between the ages of 3 and 30. I'm always flattered when someone is moved by my voice and vocal performance, and also by the Pokémon phenomenon. Some people's childhoods were and are filled with Pokémon events. When you look at the amount of times the song has been played, it is staggering. Every time is three minutes with me blasting melodies and lyrics into your ears connecting you with whatever your memory of Pokémon is. Ultimately, when I'm announced at events and people find out I sing the song and are fans or haters, I'll sing a snippet.

Did it lead to anything?

It led to many things. The recognition of my voice is a major credit in my resume, that, alongside the other things that I've done that have been broadcast at such high levels… it's one of many jobs. Everything you do leads to something—leads to many things—this has also led to many things for other people, obviously, and the company of Pokémon. Directly related, it also led to my releasing the Pokémon Ron Paul theme song; it led to me beat-boxing the Pokémon dust-up, it led to me singing it for my friends, [at] parties for little kids. And it also led to many people hating the song.

Do you play video games?

Back in the day, I [played] Missile Command and Donkey Kong. And actually, I had an Intellivision system; that was one of the first home video game systems—Atari and Intellivision. So those were my video games back in the day. It's only right that I should have inspired another modern video [game] craze.
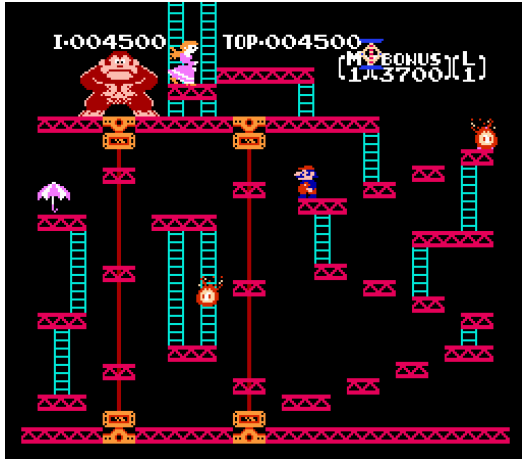
What do you think of the show?

I think the show's great! I think—more so of the whole empire than the show—is a… there's many different tentacles that you can latch onto, from the cards to the video aspect—the cartoons, the live shows—[to] the games, the online community. It's a phenomenon. It's almost a… I don't know what it actually would be called. Maybe even a subculture of sorts, because there are conventions and stores and gatherings and tournaments… people spending their lives in this subculture, as much as any other subculture. In this case, millions and millions of people having lots of their lives affected by it. So absolutely, it is a great thing in the universe, and I'm glad to have been a pivotal part of it.

How has your career been since original role?

My life has been pretty much the same… I've been a rock star beforehand, I've been a rock star since. And I will continue to be a rock star as long as they'll let me! [I'm] the same rock star that everybody is, expect I have my voice distributed through multiple means of public media and mass media, but then again, so does everybody now, on YouTube and in their own way, projecting themselves throughout the digital universe, with great success, from their bedrooms and their webcams. Maybe even greater than the success of Pokémon is [Charlie] as he bit his brother's finger. I mean, that's a rock star right there, and he doesn't even know it. I have had relative successes in my life as other ways, so whatever success you attribute to the Pokémon theme song can be attributed to other things that I've done in my life.

Have people identified you on the street or at conventions?

People have not identified me on the street or conventions because they don't know who I am. I'm the voice of a song that has no face, until now, and most of that's because of my resentment of the lawsuit, I think, just because I have not approached even parodying it […] In the first few years, I didn't take advantage of the opportunities to perform at dozens of events, I'm sure—I can't even imagine how many thousands and thousands of place there would have been for me to perform the Pokémon theme song, back in the first few years of Pokémon mania. And even now, perhaps there are places—I have not sought them out—but you might see me singing it somewhere in the future, since I'm singing the parody of it for my Libertarian choice in Ron Paul.

Have you released albums or held concerts?

Yes. I perform four days a week at Bar Vermont, north of Hollywood Boulevard, and "For the Record: Boogies Nights," (the fifth in a series) a concert of songs from the soundtrack and themes from the movies of Paul Thomas Anderson (Boogie Nights and Magnolia). It's really effing cool. I have performed in many other incarnations and concerts, from everybody from Michael Jackson, to my own one-man show… I'm building a list of deceased people who I've sung with: Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, Luther Vandross, Jani Lane… Jim Henson—I sang backgrounds on the Muppet Movie and it was behind an original track of Henson singing.

Interview conducted by Alex Culafi and transcribed by Nate Andrews. Thanks to Jason Paige for his time.

Nate Andrews

Nickname: NdIGiTy
Age: 20
Location: Michigan
Favorite Nintendo System: GameCube
Favorite Food: Coffee
Nintendo ID: nandrews

Game of the Month
With what little time I've had recently, I've been trying to get in some ZombiU. Even with all the word of mouth, I wasn't prepared for how uncomfortable being in that game's claustrophobic world can be.

Best Multiplayer Memory
When my brothers and I were young, we went to a babysitter who happened to have a game-obsessed son. When he left for school each day, my older brother and I would turn on the N64 and play race after race of F-Zero X. The manic guitar squeals of that game's intro screen were the soundtrack to many a wonderful morning.

Zachary Miller

Nickname: Halbred or That Guy With CF
Age: 30
Location: Anchorage, AK
Favorite Nintendo System: Tie between SNES and GC
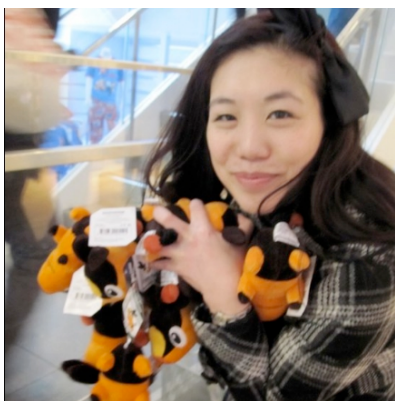**Favorite Food:** Pizza
Nintendo ID: Sillysaur

Game of the Month
Gunman Clive, because I'm not interested in Fire Emblem.

Best Multiplayer Memory
Nights spent playing 4-player Mario Kart 64 and Goldeneye 007, even though I was terrible at it.

Karlie Yeung

Nickname: Namekoneko
Age: 27
Location: Germany
Favorite Nintendo system: DS Lite
Favorite food: Tuna onigiri
3DS Friend code: 2664-2274-8530

Game of the Month: New Style Boutique/Savvy. Just waiting for the Gracie Grace and Liz Lisa Spotpass clothing. I played a lot of Animal Crossing of course and actually wear Liz Lisa clothes.

Best Multiplayer Memory: The Rare game multiplayer playthroughs on N64. Usually with more than 4 players, so controllers were rotated. Of course Dark Bot stalking in Perfect Dark was a common past-time, but we also included plenty of Smokey Castle banana capturing in Diddy Kong Racing and Grunty Trivia in Banjo Tooie. Goldeneye's 2 player would still make it in sometimes, but after playing Perfect Dark you realise that whoever gets the gun first wins in a one on one when both of you have memorised the levels and spawn points.

King of Clubs By James Jones

REVIEW

Guaranteed to make you hate Putt-Putt, and life.

King of Clubs is a "quirky" mini-golf title developed by Oxygen Interactive. They were apparently under the impression the Wii needed another fun golf game, which I suppose is technically true, and that the Wii needed another PS2 port, which is patently false. Being the enterprising sort, Oxygen Interactive gifted us with this Vegas-themed mini-golf disaster.

King of Club's narrative destroys any preconceived notions that games have shallow stories, by forgoing the story as a simple formality to be dispatched in a grainy CG video produced in Mr. Hasternick's "Intro to Computer Graphics" class at the learning annex. From as near as I can tell, the game's story is that Elvis is not dead, but is in fact a caricature of Elvis impersonators, and between peanut-butter and banana sandwiches, he has hired actors from the local community college to play "zany" characters like: a caveman, a knight, a Pharaoh, etc. at his mini-golf course outside Las Vegas. They accompany a set themed mini-golf courses, all of which play terribly. Indeed Elvis, bless all our souls.

You see, if you're making a putting game on the Wii, you have a few examples of good controls from which to draw inspiration. If you bought your Wii outside of Japan you have a copy of Wii Sports. I'm going to give you a minute to go find it; I'm looking at you, Oxygen Interactive. Go putt. Notice the controls actually working. That's a fine feature for a golf game. Now, if you're feeling adventurous, go locate a copy of Tiger Woods PGA Tour '08. The controls not only work, they're fun. Putting is fun. Now King of Clubs is all about putting, so certainly they took effort to polish the putting controls, right? No, of course they didn't.

Instead we have a control scheme so incompetent, so far removed from being intuitive, that the game actually has to remind you of them every time you boot it up. To putt, a novel concept in a putting game, you set your vector (a term far too complex to be used to review this title) with the D-pad, then lock your position with the A button. By swinging the Remote back, you fill the power gauge. At this point it all starts to fail miserably. The power gauge isn't set by the force of moving the Wii Remote. Instead, it is based on how far from being pointed down you are. This, predictably, doesn't work. Each club has its own gauge. On the gauge there are a series of four hash-marks, one placed every quarter of the gauge. In a move of sheer idiocy, the gauge on the default club has its hash-marks spaced at befuddling intervals (three feet, twelve feet, twenty-four feet, forty-eight feet), despite a common distance between them on the bar. This makes nuance shots impossible. Or rather, it is yet another reason that nuance is impossible, as the simple act of adjusting your power already makes it impossible. The Wii Remote can be a little flakey with exact angles, so this whole "distance from zero" approach doesn't work that well.

Once, if by some stroke of luck, you set your power, you "lock it in" by pressing AND HOLDING the A Button. Don't forget to hold the A Button, because if you release it the whole byzantine ritual of setting your swing power must be started over again. You will forget to hold A, because after you depress the A button (and your soul), you must swing the Wii Remote back to the zero position. If the game recognizes this action, you will strike the ball. If it does not, you get to flail around wildly until the gaming gods grant appeal and let you strike the ball. Be sure to pray your flailing did conform to their rituals. If it happens that your dance offended them you will accidently brush against the B-Trigger. This is a fate worse than releasing the A-Button because it not only cancels out your power settings but even the fact you've already locked a vector in. At this point, the correct course of action is to begin writing a review for King of Clubs.

One of the game's holes, "Stone Age Rage", is accurately named. Many times the course's various obstacles make play as painful as the control scheme. Some might view the game's 96 holes to be a great feature, but I know better. Each hole is seemingly designed to crush souls. Any time a game needs to sell mulligans in packs of ten, there is a problem. Often times, it feels like the best strategy is to hit the hell out of the ball and pray, because the obstacles and the very physics that drive them are seemingly out to get you. These creative obstacles include: pits, lava pits, boiling oil pits, tar pits, pits with monsters, pits that have other pits inside them, pits that have monsters that themselves are living pits, bumpers, moving bumpers, moving geometric bumpers, rotating bumpers, rotating geometric bumpers, rotating moving bumpers, rotating moving geometric bumpers, ramps, ramped walls, ramps of indeterminate slope, ramped walls of indeterminate slope, and the controls (not listed on the back of the box, but I know better).

To summarize, the gameplay is a mess, which is why they included multiple gameplay modes. On top of the 96 holes, which honestly reads more like a threat than feature, the game lets you play alone (career mode), against one of the aforementioned costumed buffoons (tournament mode), or against a person you hate (multiplayer mode). If you score below par on a course, you unlock another "wacky" themed course. You also earn money by either collecting the floating money bags flung about the holes or by simply scoring well. You can use that money to buy clubs, special balls, mulligans (you'll need them), or to unlock those "goofy" characters.

However, my experience with the unlocking mechanics is pretty checkered. You see, the game asks you every time you turn it on if you would like to load your game-data from the Wii console. Answering "yes" doesn't load a profile; it just populates the profile list so you can choose a profile to load once you start the game. I don't really understand why that choice even exists. Why would you not want to load save data? This may seem like a petty thing to bring up, but the default answer is "no." After hammering on the A Button to make the stupid controls splash-screen go away, I always hit "no". This meant that I either had to restart the console or, if I didn't notice, continue on playing with no ability to save my data. It does, however, let you select a profile from the now pointless profile list, which adds to the possibilities that you won't notice the lack of loaded data.

> "I also renamed the profile to "BOOBIES" if only so I would be amused every time it was my turn and the screen displayed my character and "BOOBIES" in giant letters."

The game also has a series of stupid bugs that have no business existing in a retail game. It took me a long time to finally get below par on the first set of courses. I was happy to free myself from the grips of the prehistoric hell (the first theme being "cavemen"). However, in a moment of "make your own fun", I had changed the character I was using from the default (an emaciated DJ Jazzy Jeff sporting a member's only jacket and 3D shades) to generic "buxom blonde bombshell" (the game's own words). I also renamed the profile to "BOOBIES" if only so I would be amused every time it was my turn and the screen displayed my character and "BOOBIES" in giant letters. This action apparently caused some game-crushing glitch that meant my completing of the first course was invalid because my profile was named, at the time, "profile1." Once I completed the second course, as "BOOBIES," I found that I could not proceed. The game would tease me by briefly showing me the next course, an Egyptian themed set of holes, but the option would disappear before I could select it. I was forced to replay the entire first course in order to proceed. Another bug inexplicably gave me a score of 99 strokes on a single hole, despite the fact the game cuts you off at fifteen and that my final tally indicates that it only counted as three.

Unsurprisingly, King of Clubs has terrible graphics. When this game came out on the PS2, it could not have looked worse than it does now. The game tries to capture the "Vegas" aesthetic with some limited success. The wood cutouts of creatures that move about the perimeter of the course give it the over the top, yet still cheep feel, one would expect from mini-golf in Las Vegas. However, they are so poorly rendered that it really makes the game feel more "over the top, yet still cheap" than the culture they're parodying. While the game does have some unique characters, they're all so ugly, so poorly animated, and so stilted that they're not even worth discussing.

The game is also full of little graphical quirks. For example, if one of the rotating moving geometric bumpers passes under your character, you suddenly appear on top of it. If you manage to swing before you go back down, after it moves away, you'll manage to strike the ball despite being inches over it. Graphically, this game would be bad by PS2 standards, and it is totally unacceptable on the Wii.

The sound, somehow, is even worse than the graphics. Each of the themed "worlds" has two songs. They're not good, but they're not usually terrible. They do, however, only last about twelve to fifteen seconds and will loop for an entire play

session. This will do little to sell copies of the game's soundtrack, but it might be enough to push the general disgust for the game's controls out of your mind. The sound effects are just as limited as the music. As far as King of Clubs is concerned, there are about seven sounds that encompass the entire world of golf. On top of those sounds, each of the "quirky" characters gets his own set of insipid lines to deliver repeatedly. If I have to hear Jazzy Jeff say "I'm takin' my ball and goin' home" again, I swear somebody is going to die.

So what is there to like in King of Clubs? Not much. The game tries to be a tamer Outlaw Golf, but its attempts at humor are utter failures. If a game is trying to sell itself as being crazy, wacky, or some other adjective in the vein of kooky, at the very least I should crack a smile at some point after playing it for ten plus hours. So that leaves us with it simply being a mini-golf game. However, as a mini-golf game, it fails in pretty much every respect. The controls are awful, the courses stupid, and the mechanics sketchy. Simply put, this game should not be played by anyone, and it should have never been released.

Score

2

Pros
+ Nothing

Cons
- Bad controls - WHY
- Bad gameplay WOULDN'T I
- Bad graphics WANT TO LOAD
- Bad humor   DATA!?
- Bad sound

Brain Age: Concentration Training By Tyler Ohlew

REVIEW

Dr. Kawashima's devilish side is a lot nicer than you think.

Brain Age: Concentration Training reboots the series without making sweeping changes. Nintendo hasn't changed the colour of Dr. Ryuta Kawashima's hair, or outsourced the work to a Western studio. Instead, it's created a Brain Age game suitable for today's audience.

Instead of simply honing your brain to a target age, Concentration Training aims to improve your working memory. As Dr. Kawashima describes it, working memory is the area of the brain that handles temporary information. The game uses a soccer match to illustrate the concept: as players move about the field, those with the ball take note of the other players' positions and pass accordingly. This isn't information one would retain for a long period of time, and is used just once. Likewise, the aim of Concentration Training is to improve the player's focus and to train the brain to avoid distractions.

Concentration Training's Devilish Training exercises differentiate it immediately from previous Brain Age games. Kept to five minutes in length, these eight exercises call on the player to make good use of their working memory. The difficulty is also adaptive; the better you perform, the harder the exercises get. Devilish Calculations, the exercise found in the game's eShop demo, requires players to recall the answer to the math equation previous to the one shown. Scoring 85 percent or higher from 22 questions asked increases the difficulty, first speeding up the procession of equations, then requiring an answer to the equation shown two prior. This system of difficulty involves the

player far better than would competing for time or striving for a particular brain age. The game also feels as if it grows along with you, always presenting a challenge. Where you finished on a given day determines the level of difficulty you begin with on the next; there's no climbing from the bottom with each new day. Completion of a Devilish exercise adds to an experience bar associated with your Mii. As you "level up," the letter grade displayed on your Mii changes in kind. It's hooks like these that allow for more investment in your performance, with the visual representation helping to gauge your improvement.

覚悟はいいですかー？

Although the exercises are capped at five minutes, you can tackle as many as you like (though you can play each game only once per day). Highlights of mine include Devilish Blocks and Devilish Reading. Blocks shows an arrangement of blocks to the player, one of which disappears. Depending on the difficulty, the number of arrangements shown increases or decreases. After a full set is shown, players see the arrangements once again, and must tap which blocks went missing. Devilish Reading tasks players with reading a series of sentences and memorizing the underlined word of each. This exercise employs the 3DS's mic (you read aloud) and prompts you to tap the screen when you're ready to move on to the next sentence. Once you read them all, you write the underlined words (in any order) on the touch screen. Deceptive appearance is a common theme among Concentration Training's games. These tasks may seem simple at first glance, but prove difficult in practice—as it turns out, remembering five words from five sentences isn't the easiest thing in the world. One knock against the Devilish exercises is that, of the eight, three share the same mechanics. Devilish Calculations, Listening, and Shapes require you to answer a question previous to the one displayed. An unlockable mode, Concentration Challenge, also follows the same principle. While these modes have a unique flavour, they don't offer much variety on the whole.

While Devilish Training is the main attraction, Concentration Training also includes Supplemental Training, Brain Training, and Relaxation Mode. Supplemental offers exercises in line with what you'd find in the Devilish mode, except with a focus on setting a time-based high score, and without Devilish's adaptive difficulty. However, I had the most fun in this mode with games like Word Attack (race to spell a word that flashes on the screen) and Sum Totaled: Battle (add the numbers that compose the bodies of attacking monsters). The Brain Training exercises are mostly less thrilling, composed of a few cards games and an odd piano simulator, but gems like Block Head manage to stand out. Relaxation Mode, as the

name implies, provides simple fun with which to unwind. Some patience is required, however: the majority of exercises require a set amount of days trained to unlock. Within a week's time, most of the content is available, so as long as you're serious about your "training," it takes little time to access.

Brain Age: Concentration Training provides a variety of new challenges , and allows players to choose how they train. With so much on offer, I never felt I had to take on challenges I did not prefer. The presentation is terrific, getting to what you want to do is kept simple, and Dr. Kawashima's comments and advice are concise and to the point. Overall, it's a well-rounded experience that works well as an educational tool, and makes a point to appeal to a player's mindset by constantly offering rewards for a job well done.
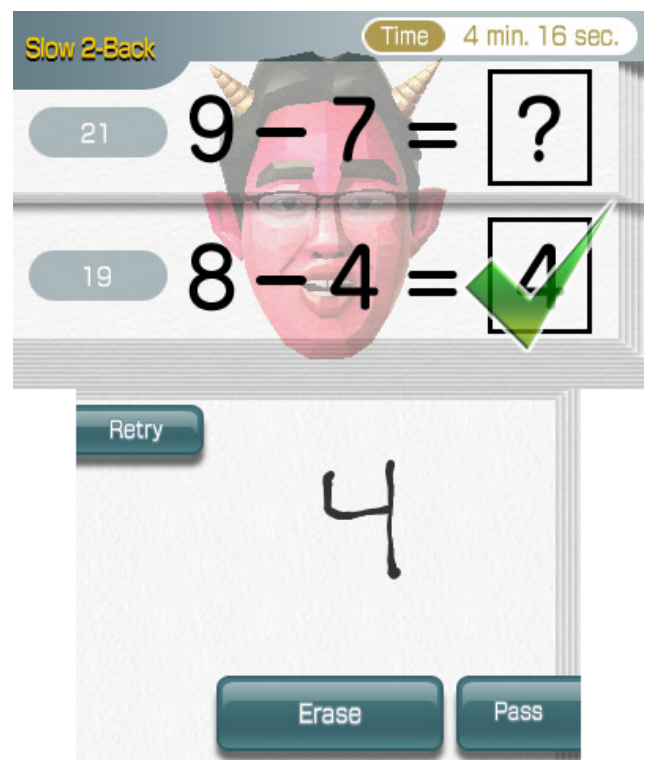
Score

7.5

Pros
+ Large variety of experiences and challenges
+ Progression system keeps you coming back

Cons
- Some exercises are too similar to each other

Homie Rollerz By Zachary Miller

REVIEW

Oh, when will death come?

One of my friends asked me the other day why I review awful, horrible, cramp-inducing shovelware without pay. My knee-jerk answer was "free games in the mail," but there's a larger, nobler motivation at work here. In playing such dreck as Animates, Bee Movie Game, Rockstar Presents Table Tennis and most recently, Spitfire Heroes, there comes a responsibility to relay to the public just how terrible these games are. If just one kid reads my review and avoids playing Nitrobike, it'll all be worth it. Also, I get lots of free store credit.

Homie Rollerz is one such example of a game with absolutely no redeeming qualities. The characters alone make me want to punch a squirrel. According to the always-reliable Wikipedia, the "Homies" brand consists of a bunch of vending machine figurines which portray campy stereotypes of Mexican and Latino people. Basically, they're all wearing bling and have sagging jeans. And the women are whores.

At any rate, Homie Rollerz drops these timeless characters into various vehicles (one guy is in a wheelchair) and forces them to race through awful, seizure-inducing racetracks. It's not just that the racetracks are poorly designed; the fact that the camera is centered on the back of your car means that the slightest turn left or right rotates the entire landscape. With all the unnecessary twists and turns that the courses offer, you'll get a headache pretty quickly.

The graphics range from terrible to Lovecraftian. The environments are so blocky, and the framerate and draw distance so inconsistent, you'll swear you were playing a beta, or even an alpha (is there something earlier than alpha?). The sound is also terrible. You know how sometimes you'll pull up to a truck at a red light, and they've got their bass beating away with only a faint suggestion of overlying music? That's what you'll find here. There's no voicework or really even sound effects…only horrible, horrible music to go with terrible graphics and offensive characters. It's the complete package of suck, really.

LAP 1 OF 3

6th

At least the controls are good, right? Well, no. Aside from the camera problems mentioned above, D-Pad movement is jerky and disorienting. You can use items, but they don't seem to have much of an effect on your opponents. My favorite (read: least favorite) item is the one that switches you with the kart ahead of you. I imagine Nintendo would have handled this item wonderfully in Mario Kart, but in Homie Rollerz, it leads to crashing into things! You can do tricks involving hopping, leaning, and…hopping off of ramps. These altogether menial tricks award you NOS (nitro), which you can use to boost ahead. But you don't really, because there's no feeling of speed, and it's not like you can ever pass anybody.

That's another disappointing aspect of Homie Rollerz: its difficulty. It takes a significant amount of re-tries to make it out of last place during any given race. And even then, some courses seemingly cannot be won. For example, the haunted house course is rife with twists, turns, blind corners, and ill-placed ramps, yet your 'bot opponents never have any trouble with the course design. They always go for the open lane, and know how to avoid trouble sections. But you? You're only human. When controlled by human hands, your kart can only turn so sharply, and the draw distance only shows so much.

But wait! Perhaps things are only this difficult when you're racing with a beginner's kart. After all, you can…pimp your ride (my English degree just caught fire) by earning Respect, and spending that Respect on new gear for your vehicle such as better tires and engines. Sadly, these customizations have little positive effect on the performance of your kart. In some cases, improvements in one area actually decrease performance in another. The best (and most expensive) parts require an ungodly amount of Respect which would require you to continue playing Homie Rollerz past the five-minute mark, which is not a premise I can encourage.

Homie Rollerz offers up to eight-player single-card download play, but if you don't have seven friends (like me), 'bots fill in the blanks. These 'bots will always win the race – a race that takes several minutes to load on multiple systems. There's also multi-card play, but having such a feature implies that more than one person will accidentally get Homie Rollerz for their birthday, which, I pray to God in Heaven above, will not happen.

Score

1.5

Pros
+ Up to eight-player multiplayer

Cons
- Awful license
- Demonic control
- High level of difficulty
- Horrifying graphics
- Poor course design

SPACE HARRIER 3D™

3D Space Harrier By Daan Koopman

REVIEW

Welcome to the Fantasy Zone... in 3D!

This Space Harrier remake is based on the game's arcade version, in which digitized voices greet you with classic lines as "Welcome to the Fantasy Zone!" The game takes place in the Fantasy Zone, a weird wasteland that you guide your character through. Space Harrier is a third-person shooter at heart, with the player following a strict path in every level. The player tries to defeat an array of enemies, like gigantic dragons, old prehistoric creatures, and various invading aliens. At the end of every stage, a boss tests your skills to see if you can handle the next brightly colored world. Even with age, the gameplay style holds up, and is quite a spectacle.

The 3DS version duplicates the precise control of the arcade classic. Players can use the Circle pad and buttons, or use the touch screen to move the character around and have him automatically fire on enemies. The latter option should allow newcomers to ease into the game's difficulty, and give veterans a new way to experience the game. Players can also tweak various settings to get the difficulty, screen size, and audio levels to their liking.

The game comes with added features, including the ability to select a starting level, and to save your progress at any time. The only notable gameplay omission of this version is that of any shared leaderboards. The game's original aesthetic lends itself well to the addition 3D, and does a splendid job of

presenting the depth of each plane. There used to be an arcade cabinet that would move alongside the movement of the joystick, and the 3DS version duplicates that feel exactly. You can even add button sound effects to relive those good old days.

It seemed like a risk for Sega to take the 3D Classics approach, but this version of Space Harrier excels in every way. Its iconic gameplay remains intact, complemented by smooth controls and crisp 3D visuals, and the array of options makes it a more worthwhile version of the classic than any of its other releases.

SPACE HARRIER

Score

Pros

+ Replicates the arcade feel well
+ Smooth, fun gameplay
+ Variety of options

9

Cons

- No online leaderboards

Nintendo World Report T-Shirts are available to buy over at:

ninwr.spreadshirt.com

The various designs feature logos and artwork from two of our great podcasts, Radio Free Nintendo, and Connectivity. Go on and grab yours today!

The original RFN shirt design features "character art" of Jonny, Greg, James, and Lindy, all provided by listener David Ochart. The overall graphic design is by Amanda Albert. The front features all four beloved RFN personalities arranged in the style of the classic "black box" NES packaging; the back says "NintendoWorldReport.com" and "Est. 1999".

Jeopardy Questions

By Zachary Miller

1. It's the planet Samus finds herself stranded on in Metroid Prime 2: Echoes.

2. First seen in Super Mario World, these dungeon bosses were recently revived in New Super Mario Bros. 2.

3. This incredibly rare item in Super Mario Bros. 3 kept the level's airship from moving.

4. It's the name of the first dungeon in Link's Awakening.

5. This real-life racer is an unlockable character in Sonic All-Stars Racing Transformed.

6. Kine, one of Kirby's animal friends, is this kind of fish.

7. Heidi Klum was the Bond girl in this well-regarded game.

8. The PlayStation 3 has gone through this many hardware iterations.

9. "Atomic Purple" was a color variation for this Nintendo handheld.

10. This is the most powerful sword Link can wield in The Legend of Zelda (NES).

Answers to these questions will be given in the next issue!

Fan Art

By Crystal Chappell

Send your Fan Art to:
poweredoff@nintendoworldreport.com

By Nat Silva

NEXT ISSUE

We hope you enjoyed issue #3. Next month, we'll have some more great exclusives from various members of the staff, possibly some more low-scoring games, If I Were in Charge of Zelda, the answers to the Jeopardy questions, and, if we are lucky, the mailbag!

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

poweredoff@nintendoworldreport.com

- Nick

NintendoWorldReport

ISSUE 3

POWERED OFF