

Reviewspotting #16 - FADE2BLACK

March 8th, 2006

Gun porn.

ReviewSpotting comes late this week, but the shell casings on the ground hope to serve redemption as we showcase our first dual-reviewer spotlight. Stick around for some more excellent reads via three ultra-competitive write-ups, some war veteran yammering, a critique of horse-racing, the obligatory not-zombie slaying and a franchise from the East that's been long absent in the West. Don't forget to share a chuckle at our first-ever Comedic Reviews spotlight, and take out some anger by beating up on some fools with our second GenreSpot entry. It's wild. It's crazy. It's gun-pornographic. It's ReviewSpotting #16.

-MrCHUPON



Featured ReviewSpotters: [FernandoDANTE](#) and [ian_fisher](#)

It's time to get "mad silly with the nine-milly." FernandoDANTE and ian_fisher load their heaters for armed combat - sixteen in the clip and one in the hole - as they square off with two distinct reviews of Electronic Arts' and Criterion Games' titillating first-person shooter, Black. While not necessarily "the best" reviews this week, they're deserving of appearance in ReviewSpotting - and the way that they unintentionally play off of each other is too refreshing to not spotlight. To one, Black wears thin. Rat-a-tat - it's all old hat. To the other, Black is king. *Click-clack, click-clack* - two bullets in your back and one in the sack. Two reviews. Two varying opinions. Two distinct voices. One game. Now how's *that* for Dual Wielding?

[FernandoDANTE](#) - [Black \(PS2\)](#)

All flash, no substance - 7.7

"Black makes for a great rental - and that's it."

[ian_fisher](#) - [Black \(PS2\)](#)

Just plain fun - 8.3

"Black is a fun game for action fans who always wanted to be their own Rambo or Harry Tasker."

[glassesgeek](#) - [Star Wars: Empire at War \(PC\)](#)

Worth playing - 7.9

"...don't fall for the fanboy syndrome here; just because the box says 'Fight at Endor and Hoth!' doesn't mean the greatest RTS battles lie ahead."

[stevenscott14](#) - [Mercenaries \(Xbox\)](#) **BEST EFFORT!**

Ambitious - 7.5

"...I'm straying far from the premise Mercenaries prides itself on, and that's obviously making stuff go boom..."

[amlabella](#) - [Shadow of the Colossus \(PS2\)](#)

Ambitious - 9.0

"How do I kill these things if they're ten times the size of little ol' me?"

[Jedo](#) - [Codename: Panzers, Phase Two \(PC\)](#)

Been there, Done that - 7.8

"...it's a World War II based strategy game. And once again the allied forces will win (what a shocker)."

[sethvswww](#) - [Gallop Racer \(PS\)](#)

Underappreciated - 8.8

"...if you so much as open the cover of the manual you will be wasting your time. This document stands out as easily the worst example of Japanese to English translation in the history of mankind."

[SolidSnake35](#) - [Resident Evil 4 \(PS2\)](#)

Immersive - 9.3

"Before long, you'll be overwhelmed by enemies, and get your first taste of the action that makes Resident Evil 4 a strong candidate for game of the year."

[Metamania](#) - [Ys VI: The Ark of Napishtim \(PS2\)](#)

Old-school - 7.6

"...Ys VI: The Ark Of Napistim is a nice reminder of what action/RPG games are all about. It doesn't bring anything new to the table and yet, it is a solid experience nonetheless..."



On the heels of one of our discussion topics in the boards about the supposed "death" of the Beat-em-Up, ReviewSpotting celebrates our beloved tooth-rattling, knuckle-baring, groin-smashing genre. Ah yes - the scent of fresh Fist in the air as Mayor Mike Haggar spinning-clotheslines criminals, and Billy Lee chases after the thugs who looked up his girlfriend Marion's skirt. Because really, with Marion, who needed Gun Porn back then? On with the show.

mysteralex - Death by Degrees (PS2)

Total letdown - 5.3

"Do you want a little fun with your tedium?"

NeoJedi - River City Ransom (NES)

Instant classic - 9.8

"Everybody remembers Mario & Luigi... but how many of you remember Alex & Ryan?"

Targett - Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks (XBOX)

Just plain fun - 8.8

"...we're talking 40 hit combos if you can handle the button sequences."

mrwisdom - Streets of Rage (GEN)

Old-school - 8.5

"...through it's simplicity is it's great playability."

drswank - Beat Down: Fists of Vengeance (PS2)

Ambitious - 6.3

"It just falls short on just about every level, but Beatdown can turn out to be an enjoyable experience for some."

Comedic Reviews

kirkover - Big Rigs: Over the Road Racing (PC)

Disastrous - 1.0

"The objective of Big Rigs is to cross different trucking routes and deliver cargo before the competition does it first. But, once again, some things aren't always what they are said to be, so let me relieve you of these terrible lies."

m0zart - Custer's Revenge (Atari 2600)

Pretentious - 1.8

"Getting hit by an arrow takes one of your lives, of which you initially get three, prompting the General to leap out of his boots in pain, and leaving once proud 'little Custer' limp with fear."

MrCHUP0N - Mortal Kombat (GB)

Disastrous - 1.0

"The confusion that you are experiencing right now is exactly the state the sorry gameplay will leave you in: dazed, confused, and drooling on your lap. Close your mouth, it's uncouth."

Staff Review

MrCHUP0N - Nintendogs (DS)

Mixed reactions - 8.3

"... now he's gone the cat ate him."

FernandoDANTE - BLACK

"All flash, no substance"

7.7 - Good

Gameplay	7	Difficulty: Easy Learning Curve: 0 to 30 Minutes Time Spent: 10 Hours or Less
Graphics	9	
Sound	9	
Value	6	
Tilt	8	

Black looks and sounds fantastic, but the rest of the game proves that great hype can bring great disappointment.

Criterion, the company responsible for Black, was made famous by the Burnout series (racing games notable for their fast-paced action and extreme explosions). Black was supposed to be a first-person-shooter bringing some of the same elements, most importantly the destruction. Criterion promised several things for Black, such as a system that would allow practically anything in the scenario to be destroyed. Thanks to a fantastic response by the media everywhere, Black's hype was sent into overdrive. As the release date became closer, the media suddenly started to back away and say the game wasn't as amazing as they first pointed it out to be. How was the final result? Read on to find out.

Indeed, Black has a lot of destructible stuff - several objects you would like to destroy can be destroyed. Wanna turn those weak walls to dust? Shoot away. Blow up that car near some enemies to kill the enemies? Yeah, throw a grenade to make it look good. Use a rocket-launcher to blow up a huge fuel container? Yup, do as you please. Blast a minefield with a grenade launcher? Sure, sure. Blow up barrels? You didn't even have to ask that one. Of course, all of that sounds amazing, but it's not as good as you think. If you took part in the overhyping of the game, you'll expect to destroy more stuff than the game allows you to. Therefore, the short explanation is: no, Black, doesn't allow you to destroy nearly everything in the scenarios.

As for the other promises made by Criterion, regarding visuals and audio, they are pretty much fulfilled. The settings and the guns of the game look fantastic, both from the artistic and the technical viewpoint. Light effects definitely get the biggest standout here, as they basically set what mood the current area should have. During the entire game, there will be a gun on your screen, so it's a real bonus that all guns look incredibly realistic (reloading some of them is made a pleasure thanks to this). All of this sounds almost as good as it looks. The tension in shootouts is greatly increased by the sounds of guns, explosions, your enemies screaming in pain, and walls being torn apart. Also, the soundtrack follows the action in a beautiful way. Unfortunately, the same thing can't be said about the voice acting, which includes some cursing language by the end of the game - and cursing feels completely unnecessary here.

Again about the voice acting, the game has some cutscenes between levels. Not computer-animated cutscenes, but instead scenes filmed with real actors in a real set. It's hard to tell the purpose of this, since neither the style resources nor the story pull you inside. The acting is decent, but that's not enough. Also, the storyline in Black doesn't help at all: weak clichés and a cliffhanger-ending conspire to make something not as engaging as you'd want it to be.

After all of this, you'd at least expect some sort of twist in the gameplay to make the game stand out - but there isn't such a thing here. You can carry two guns and some grenades, perform all the basic actions of a FPS (except for jumping), and use a certain type of health pack on-the-go. Sounds utterly simple? Well, it is. The one thing the gameplay has going for it is the waste of ammo: you pick up copious amounts of ammunition, and you are encouraged to shoot them as much as you want to. You'll rarely - if ever - run out of ammo, so you can shoot as much as you want to kill a single enemy. The box of the game says that "there's no need for stealth here", but that's a blatant lie, as your AI-controlled allies will "order" you to use stealth. Of course, you can still go and shoot the hell out of everything with no worries, as the AI of your enemies doesn't give you too much of a hard time.

The biggest flaw in Black is its length. The game only has 8 missions, which can be easily beaten under 8 hours on the Normal difficulty level. Each new mission is better and more fun than the last one (in fact, some level designs are utter crap when compared to other ones), but that makes it feel even shorter. To back that up, there's no multiplayer feature whatsoever.

All in all, Black makes for a great rental - and that's it. After all the hype and anticipation, it feels disappointing. The game can still provide entertainment, but you'll be wondering how better it could be. Perhaps this project could be greatly improved, if only it was pushed into the next-gen.

ian_fisher - BLACK

"Just plain fun"

8.3 - Great

Gameplay	8	Difficulty: Easy
Graphics	9	Learning Curve: 0 to 30 Minutes
Sound	10	Time Spent: 10 Hours or Less
Value	8	
Tilt	8	

Does Black live up to the title "Gun Porn"?

Over the years First Person Shooting games have quickly become one of the most popular and established genres in the game industry. The genre first gained popularity on the PC in the early nineties with games like Doom, Castle Wolfenstein and Duke Nukem. Fps games then moved to the home console with the likes of Goldeneye, Medal of Honor and Halo. While some titles are sci-fi or historically based, they are all the same. Swap out the weapons and settings and you have the same core gameplay. This has plagued the industry since some games have no character or present nothing new. Well this changes with Criterion's Black. Best known for their Burnout racing games, Criterion is now tackling the fps genre. But can Criterion pull off same magic they did with the racing genre with fps games?

The story of Black is like that of any Hollywood action flick. You play as a Black Operative, named Keller, in an organization so secretive that even the president doesn't know it exists. Your job is to fix the mistakes of missions gone awry and save the world from disasters that they didn't know of. The latest mission sends you to Europe to go after a rogue Black Op who is now with a terrorist cell called 7th Wave. Your mission doesn't go as planned and you find yourself arrested and being interrogated by your own people. The game starts with Keller being interrogated as he tells his interrogator what exactly happened. The story is actually told through live action cutscenes instead of prerendered cinematics. Now some may be worried about this since the track record of fmv's hasn't been that good as of late (e.g. Marvel Nemesis, Need For Speed: Most Wanted). The cut scene's are actually very stylish and have high production value. There are nice filter and editing effects used which convey the seriousness of the situation. The look of the cut scenes is similar to a Tony Scott film or TV shows like 24 and Alias. The use of live action actually is more engaging since it's like you're watching a high quality film or TV show and then you get to play the good parts. The story is pretty easy to follow, but don't be expecting much of a resolution as the game leaves the door open for a sequel.

Black has the same core philosophy as Burnout, provide Hollywood style action and make it fun to play. Criterion's love of action films is more evident that it was in the Burnout games. Several parts of the game clearly have inspiration from films like The Matrix, The Rock and Die Hard. The core gameplay of Black is simple, you go to areas and shoot bad guys but the unique thing about the game is how you go about obliterating them. Unlike other fps games where the environment is not fully interactive, Black for the most part, provides a truly interactive experience. If you see a truck and say to yourself, "Hey I wonder if I can blow that truck up and take out some enemies", well you can and much more. You can also shoot through walls, ricochet bullets off hard surfaces, and take out entire buildings. Yes, you can equip a rocket launcher and take out a good portion if not all, of a building, good times are ahead.

Those who are veterans of the fps genre may find Black similar to 2001's Red Faction. Red Faction was the first title to feature heavily destructible environments, but Black takes it to the next level. While Black doesn't allow you to damage every surface, it provides a deeper and more satisfying experience than Red Faction The amount of destruction that you and your enemies are capable of is simply staggering. During firefights debris is flying, cars are exploding and bodies are flying, it's simply amazing. The intensity that the game provides is truly unique and immerses you into the game. Firefights will often have so much debris flying that it's hard to see things. This leads to some confusion but in a good way since you don't know what's coming up next. Due to the intensity of battles you will often find yourself hiding behind cover. But what do you do when your cover has been shot up with bullets? Well you can simply blow up the enemies cover and then kill them. Or you can shoot a canister hanging from the ceiling and watch your foes burst into flames. The possibilities of destruction in Black are endless. Unlike other games, the destruction doesn't feel scripted; everything flows naturally because you have the freedom to destroy what you want. If you want to blow up the barrel under the bridge you can, or you could just snipe the enemy. If you see a door you could walk up to it and open it the old fashion way, or you could equip your shotgun, blow the door of its hinges and catch an enemy unawares. Now some may think that the interactivity is a gimmick but it really isn't. The game provides what would happen if you really had a gun of immense power and was going on a rampage. Shooting stuff up good doesn't get old thanks in part to different scenarios and your fabulous guns.

The star of the game is the weapons. The amount of time and detail gone into designing these weapons is amazing. Black's guns are like the cars in Gran Turismo, they're so beautiful that you'll just want to stare at them. Weapons in the game include a pistol, rocket launcher, AK-47, revolver, shotgun, and grenades. Each weapon resembles their real world counterpart with a few aesthetic details added. Some guns make have a few ridges or grooves on them which allow dynamic lighting on the guns. This adds some character to the weapons since each one will visually look different. The thing Black does that some fps games have failed is that it feels like you are actually shooting the guns. If you shoot the revolver at someone you'll see their body fly back 8 feet. Using the AK-47 on an enemy will result in their body moving in a violent dance of death. The shooting and reloading animations are simply fantastic. Rest assured though that the animations aren't long and complex like in Killzone. Black actually does something different with their reload animations that's never been done before. Whenever you reload the foreground becomes blurred out while your weapon is in focus. This technique is used to convey the importance of reloading during battle. The blurred effect look is very convincing and successfully pulls off what Criterion was going for. This effect also establishes a chance for the player to appreciate how detailed the guns have been modeled. Black by far features some of the best bullets ever seen in a game. Never before have bullets look so convincing both when exiting and entering a gun. When you reload your revolver you'll see the seven silver bullets in your clip glisten in the sunlight. The total number of guns you can carry is two. This may feel limiting at first but after awhile you'll get used to it. The limited gun options also add a small dose of strategy since you'll have to decide whether you should drop your AK for the Shotgun. When it comes to guns, Black provides true bliss for those enthusiasts out there.

Black has a diverse range of settings. Levels range from city streets, industrial areas, forests, and a graveyard. The way Black places the order of these areas is the interesting thing. In one level you'll be in a city blowing up buildings but then in the next you'll be in a forest trying to cross the border. This change of settings is a good way to keep things varied so you don't grow tired of playing in the same style of environment. It also changes the pace of the game since some levels are all out action but others are mellower. The different environments also provide different things to destroy since you won't be blowing up cars in the forest level. This helps to keep the game from being

monotonous and keeps things fresh. The levels themselves are quite linear so you'll be following the path the game wants you to. There is only one level where there is more than one path for you to take.

The Burnout series is known for its visual prowess and Criterion pulls it off in Black. The visuals are sharp and amazing for the PS2 hardware. There is no aliasing and hardly any slowdown which is surprising considering the action happening. The locales are loaded with detailed and unique production design. The city level actually looks like a war torn European country such as Kosovo, complete with dilapidated buildings etched with bullet holes. Each setting has its own color palette so the player won't grow bored of seeing the same industrial tones. The locales are further enhanced by dynamic lighting and explosions. The explosions are detailed and have a nice movie look to them similar to the truck scene from The Matrix Reloaded. There are also nice visual effects such as motion blur and blooming. Particle effects are also a key effect in Black. The amounts of particles on screen whether its dirt, sparks, or splintering wood is quite a visual treat. The particles help immerse the player in the game since it's a key factor to the power of the guns. Black also has some amazing smoke trails from the rocket launchers. The shape and density of the smoke almost looks like an effect from a next gen title. Character models are nicely detailed and varied. Soldiers have different uniforms ranging from camouflage and swat gear. After shooting an enemy a piece from the soldier's uniform will fall off. This is a nice effect but it would have been nice if there was a bit more damage modeling to the characters. The death animations are done quite effectively and are further enhanced by rag doll physics which help sell the power of the guns. You will be truly be convinced after you see an enemy move in pain and then slump over a railing and plummet to the ground.

One of the most important aspects of fps games and any games for that matter is the enemy A.I. If you have no competition then you may not enjoy the game, but if the enemies are too hard then you won't be having a good time. Finding the delicate balance between fun and skill is hard thing to do. Black for the most part finds this balance, but at times is too easy. Enemies will find cover and will mow you down if you're reckless but they don't reach the level of intelligence as found in titles such as F.E.A.R. Enemies won't notice anything after you've shot the comrade that was standing next to them, which makes the game a bit easy. There are times when the enemies will just stand there waiting for you to shoot at them which makes them easy targets. There are four classes of enemies to keep the action varied. Each class has different weapons and armor, which helps keep the game from being repetitive since you won't be seeing the same foes with the same weapons. In certain missions you are accompanied by squad mates. These characters help the immersion and feel of the game since they're shouting at you but for the most part that's all they're good for. Your allies aren't the best marksmen and you can't give any commands to help the situation. Most of the time your comrades will be running along you and firing at nothing. One good thing is that your squad mates don't physically get in your way, so you don't need to worry about being blocked in an area.

Criterion immersed players with the audio in Burnout and they do it once again ten fold in Black. First off, the game is best played with a 5.1 sound system. Playing Black without a sound system is like playing the XBOX 360 on a standard definition TV, you will still have fun playing the game but you won't be getting the full experience. The sound design in the game conveys that you're on some battlefield with mayhem surrounding you. Explosions sound massive and will give you that "Oh my god" feeling. The guns are loud and sound violent just like in real life. The blast of your shotgun sounds like a bomb being dropped on whatever you're pointing at. Hearing bullets whizzing by barely missing you adds to the immersion and intensity of the game. The game also has a lot of enemy voice over. Hearing loud angry foreign voices will pump you up and scare you at the same time since you don't know what's coming next. The in game chatter between you and your squad mates is well acted and doesn't get annoying. The score for Black is also exceptional. The score is composed by Michael Giacchino, best known for his work in the Medal of Honor series and film and TV work such as The Incredibles, Lost and Alias. The score is all orchestral and is on par with any Hollywood score and Mr. Giacchino's previous work. There is a nice espionage like theme in the game but the music is only really noticeable in the non action parts of the game.

The controls for Black are quite sharp. Moving your gun is easy and feels like there is some weight to it. Black doesn't give the player the option to change the sensitivity of the controls, so that may disappoint players who like to tinker with the settings. There is also no sprint action in the game so you can't go on a full speed rampage. The lack of the sprint buttons sometimes makes the pace of the game a tad bit slow. Black also lacks a jump button. While this is not necessarily important, it does make the game feel a bit confining. Black does get the important aspect of having the analog movement being tight and not loose like some titles.

One of the problems with Black is its length. When playing on the preset difficulty, the game can be finished in about 8 hour or less. There is a harder difficulty unlocked once you finish the game but it really isn't that much of a difference. There are a few bonuses such as silver plated weapons but nothing that special. The only reason for going back to the game would be to let off some steam or to master a level. Black also has no multiplayer modes, both online and off, which hampers its replay factor. Multiplayer modes are usually one of the most popular aspects of fps games, so the hardcore players are surely to be disappointed. Another issue with the game is that sometimes the game gets a bit tedious and easy. When you constantly go around shooting guys who just happen to be standing next to an explosive barrel, things may get a bit old. There also isn't a lot of variety in the missions. Basically the goal of each mission is to take out all the enemies and sometimes you've given the task of blowing up a particular structure. While it's still entertaining, Black is best played in multiple sessions.

Overall, Black presents an enjoyable and well polished experience. The game focuses on the important aspects of an fps game instead of trivial things like being able to throw garbage at guards. The time and effort gone into designing the guns and environments is evident and immerses the player into the world Criterion created. The game has a few flaws like questionable A.I, lack of mission variety, and despite lacking any form of multiplayer modes and short play time, the game is still enjoyable. Black is a fun game for action fans who always wanted to be their own Rambo or Harry Tasker. Black gives the player the chance to live in their own Hollywood action film and it's an opportunity that shouldn't be missed.

glassgeek – Star Wars: Empire at War

"Worth playing"

7.9 - Good

Gameplay	8	Difficulty: Just Right
Graphics	9	Learning Curve: 30 to 60 Minutes
Sound	10	Time Spent: 10 to 20 Hours
Value	7	
Tilt	7	

The best space battles in the Star Wars universe have finally arrived. Everything else is another story.

Even though I'm pretty sure I've killed Darth Vader at least a thousand times and I'm almost positive the Death Star can't be rebuilt like a set of LEGOs anymore, everything seems to reset itself nicely year in and year out thanks to Star Wars games. LucasArts, in one more attempt at truly covering the genre spread, presents "Star Wars: Empire at War," the publisher's latest attempt since "Star Wars: Rebellion" (and developer Petroglyph's first) at making the ultimate galactic management RTS with space and land battles. The end result consists of one of the most poorly written and rushed single player campaigns of any LucasArts title and a space battle system that is both mind-blowing and repetitive at the same time. If LucasArts hadn't embedded in every fanboy's brain that this stuff never gets old, "SW: EAW" would be no more than another RTS.

Yet somehow it escapes such a dire fate; it somehow makes the Kessel Run in less than 12 parsecs (yes, the Star Wars references are only beginning). It takes the manual from "SW: Rebellion" that was the length of the 9/11 report and turns the galaxy into an actually manageable world. Planets finally serve the purpose that RTS games are always hinting at in the first place: war! You build ground troops and space fleets; you buy barracks and space stations; and as always, you mine for resources until there's nowhere left to mine. With an entirely war driven galactic management system, you might expect the single player campaign's story to be an experience all its own to cover up the endless war. After all, it can't all just be war raging nonsense can it? Psst...it's called "Star Wars: Empire at War." Apparently it is.

Both the Empire and Rebel Scum campaigns try to delve into the lesser-known characters from "A New Hope" and what they were up to when the Death Star was making its claim to fame. This idea worked well in novels, but when it comes to keeping a gamer awake for 15 hours, only throwing roughly 25 minutes of aged George Lucas-like storytelling into the campaigns is highly unattractive. Every mission's objective is to either "destroy this" or "escort this" (which translates into destroying everything to make way for the escort). Usually these objectives turn into a lot of sitting around and waiting for a building or a space station to blow up. The story feels like it should have remained "unheard of."

Lucasarts and Petroglyph even downplayed the classic "Death Star blow up level" with an anticlimactic battle that is like any other space battle in the game. The final 15-second cut-scenes for each campaign prove the fact that neither Lucasarts nor Petroglyph had any intention of making the campaign worth playing at all. But like C-3PO realized when he first walked into a gay droid bar, there's always something out there worth playing around with. Surprisingly enough, the same goes for Star Wars games.

In a bright and bubbly revelation, every gamer who touches "SW: EAW" comes to realize that it's the battle system that makes the game mentionable. It's easy for a game with the title "Star Wars" to be forgotten quickly these days; it's all a matter of what key feature the latest title will bring that decides if it will be well-known or not. Land battles are, for the most part, quite bland due to repetitive and wide-open scenery fused with sub-par AI. Don't get me wrong, the scenery is certainly beautiful, but it's also spread about the entire map without any other variety.

Some of the vehicles have been enhanced quite a bit graphically since the "Galactic Battlegrounds" days, but there are no significant gameplay improvements. It's great seeing the AT-AT stomp around and even drop stormtroopers from its belly, but the monstrosity moves so slowly it's almost impossible to control (don't even think about turning it around). There's a nice feature that lets you have bombing raids if you have a fleet stationed above the planet. Features like that can go a long way to making both the galactic management and battle systems feel like one strategic game. There's unfortunately not quite enough of that to make the two feel balanced.

Little mistakes can also go a long way as well; for example, when you are defending a planet you can't build land forces from your barracks and factories once you enter battle. This not only disconnects the game's two layers (management and RTS), but is also unrealistic and rarely seen in the RTS genre anymore. Finding bad AI, on the other hand, seems to be quite common in movie-based RTS games. Although playing online with real people fixes this usually, getting through the campaigns can get frustrating when it comes to managing several ground troops that always need your direction. Overall, the ground battles feel like a sloppy version of "Galactic Battlegrounds" and serve only as more gameplay time to backup the game's true shining glory: the space battles.

No screenshot, no gameplay video and no prior experience prepared me enough for "SW: Empire at War's" magnificent space battles. They are tactical, strategic, graphically mesmerizing and as cinematic as it gets. The game's strategic balance for both sides is very well done; the Rebels come equipped with fast ships like the x-wings or the corellian corvettes while the Empire comes with the massive star destroyers that can barely turn, but deal loads of damage when they do strike. If you look even closer, each ship has its own time limited special ability such as turning off shields for maximum firepower or maximum speed.

But if you choose to look even closer, you may drool too much. Each large ship, such as the frigates or star destroyers, has specific points on its hull that can be targeted (this also applies to enormous space stations that hover above planets). In other words, in order to take down a star destroyer, you're going to want your x-wings to get in there and take out its engines or shield generator before you bring in the frigates. After those go down, you might target the destroyer's hangar bay and stop those tie fighters from flowing out. There are usually a dozen different points to target on a large ship and sometimes twice that number on the space stations. Surprisingly, the AI knows to follow this strategy on its own a lot of the time, leaving more time for you to sit back and enjoy.

Each space map looks beautiful and comes filled with dozens of asteroid fields and nebulas that can be used strategically for sneak attacks and tactical maneuvers. Off in the background, you can always see the planet that you are fighting above spinning and, in a sense, showing off its beautiful modeling. The game also includes a cinematic mode that lets you sit back and watch the action with a cinematic camera at any time during a battle. Zooming in on a star destroyer or a space station as it explodes into hundreds of actual pixilated pieces is quite

possibly as good as a Star Wars experience can get. Best of all, you won't need more than a 128 MB video card to get the full effect with the space battles (much worse on ground battles due to more units and a much wider area).

There's really no reason to mention anything regarding the sound simply because you know it will be perfect; they can steal every sound bite they want from the films and call it "authentic." What makes the game worthy of a sound paragraph, however, is the most repeated line in the game. I have no idea what type of ship reports it over and over again, but it is the most disturbing sound of death that I've ever heard in a game. "Sir...Sir, I've...AYEEEEUUUGH!!!!...Sir, sir I've got a...AEEEEUGHHHH!!!" Thank you, LucasArts for this authentic moment.

Roll all of the layers of gameplay together, throw it online and you've got endless hours to waste on another RTS. It's pretty easy for it all to get old when playing online, whether you're playing a simple skirmish or an all-out galactic management war trying to control every planet in the galaxy. The more you realize that the galaxy is just a bunch of planets used to fuel your army and nothing else, the more repetitive and meaningless it all becomes. The galaxy map can serve as a fun chess game to accompany the many battles, but it could also use a lot more depth to keep you hooked. Nevertheless, if waging war for hours on end in some highly repetitive scenarios is your kind of Corellian Ale, then don't waste a second in picking up "SW: EAW."

On the other hand, sitting back and truly analyzing the game can show that it has the same flaws that any RTS does. Essentially all that "SW: EAW" offers is a space battle system that can probably last two months at best. Hardcore Star Wars fans and hardcore RTS fans will certainly be overjoyed by the spirited and strong gameplay mechanics that the team at Petroglyph, whose programmers have worked on the best RTS titles ever made, have put together. But don't fall for the fanboy syndrome here; just because the box says "Fight at Endor and Hoth!" doesn't mean the greatest RTS battles lie ahead. It seems as though covering an entire galaxy is just too much work for a game that really just wants to capture the essence of RTS space battles.

If you're looking for a game with Civilization-like management and Command and Conquer worthy ground battles in a Star Wars universe, then keep waiting. I guarantee you the Death Star is dying to explode again and Leia can't wait to put her slave dress on a dozen more times before LucasArts calls it quits. If you've waited a decade since "SW: Rebellion" for epic space battles, stop daydreaming about what Yoda might look like naked and buy it. At some point, however, LucasArts had best balance the scope of their games with the amount of time and money they put into them.

stevenscott14 - Mercenaries

"Ambitious"

7.5 – Good

Gameplay	8	Difficulty: Hard
Graphics	8	Learning Curve: 1 to 2 Hours
Sound	8	Time Spent: 10 to 20 Hours
Value	7	
Tilt	7	

Despite the blow-everything-up-to-your-heart's-content slogan, this game didn't deliver the satisfaction I wanted it to.

The advertisement for this game was promising, I'll give it some credit. Despite the slightly gullible slogan "Blow everything up," Mercenaries still looked like an amazingly playable game. In case you didn't see the advertisement, I'll put it into words here, and show you the kind of promotion behind this title.

"Blow something up." *brilliantly visualized explosion*

slight pause "Blow it up again." *another sumptuous explosion*

slight pause "Blow the living hell out of it." *yet another massive explosion*

slight pause "Blow it up to your heart's content." *another colossal BOOM noise*

Insert more advertisement here, along the same lines as above

Now, there's no denying that this one 30-second advert could prompt a bored human, no matter the age, to get up from the comfortable corner of the sofa, and say to themselves, "I am going to buy/rent that game." And, there's no doubt that many people actually did do that. Because the prospect of blowing everything up again and again, would have made the typical action-hungry gamer utter the word "Cool" after every single explosion.

I was one of those people, and yep, I certainly went out and rented the game. And it's only a year on (is it that long ago) that I find myself sitting down and writing a review for the game that doesn't base itself around this sort of foundation: "omg i luv blowin stuff up an dat's y mersinary's iz da BEST GAME EVA."

Because, Mercenaries is far from the best game ever. It's actually quite far away from the description "a great game." And this cold, hard fact that Mercenaries is only just above average, is partly due to the undeniable truth that this explosive advertisement simply doesn't deliver the satisfaction Mercenaries desperately needs to.

Mercenaries wants to be the next GTA - a fully free-roaming world spanning an entire state/country filled with loads of stuff to do and countless little elements that amount up to a stunning experience. But, even when I don't particularly like GTA, Mercenaries doesn't live up to these ambitions. Yes, you get the freedom to go wherever you want, and do whatever you want, but Mercenaries doesn't always feel fun and immersive - sometimes it often falls down to the bottom of the barrel called "Novelty." Sure, the explosions are good - the first few times they, well, explode. And, sure, a vast array of vehicles and weapons are here, but none of them feel powerful or exceptional.

In Mercenaries, you take control of one of three mercenaries (obviously) and you're forced into the ravaged territory of Korea, which is filled with the stench of civil war and heavy with desolation. The world of Mercenaries is reasonably big, and there's no loading times within the world. Also, there's a lot of scope for exploration and discovery here, with North Korean bases scattered in hidden places across the world.

And, as a mercenary, in this world, you get to shape Korea's own future. You can work for any of the four factions (Chinese, Russian Mafia, South Korea, or the Allies) and each of them are reasonably hostile to each other. Depending on your loyalty, this can disappoint the other factions and disturb your relationships with them, often in a bad way (some of them have way more power than others) The factions can issue you missions, and the only similarity between them is that they all share one goal above all others - get on North Korea's nerves. But often you'll have to murder soldiers or associates from other factions, but hey - isn't that what mercenaries do?

Your equipment and vehicles are all delivered via the Mafia's online shop (Which can become inaccessible if you wrong them, as you will have to pay a hefty fine) This online shop is literally full to the brim of assorted items - you can even home in an air strike on a particular location (sadistically, this is most enjoyable when the air strike destroys an entirely innocent town or independent farmyard) The sheer wealth of vehicles is overwhelming - at a fee, you can gain the keys to a number of war vehicles (clunky), trucks (slow and unresponsive), civilian cars (dull), sports cars (out-of-place), street racers (bleh), tanks (good), APCs (good), and helicopters (excellent). Each of them, no matter which one, share the same distinctly unresponsive handling. Helicopters don't have the nippiness they need, and often feel like gigantic flying bricks, and tanks are delightful - until you drive into a lamp post, or professionally veer them into a clump of foliage.

Weapons don't have the oomph they need, rather like the perpetual disappointment called Pariah. The earlier machineguns are OK, but the RPGs and Anti-Air Missile Launchers feel flimsy, and aiming is crap when you're trying to shoot down a particularly avoidant helicopter. Close-range guns are fair, the shotgun is a highlight, and long-range weapons are similarly decent (land a copter on the top of a tower, abandon it, get out your sniper rifle and bust some stereotype skull)

There's some other enjoyable moments in Mercenaries, but they become tedious after a while and become novelties. One staple example is the helicopter's winch. This is a powerful magnet released from the hull of the copter, and this can easily attract metals. The control of the winch sucks - you'll often find it flying uncontrollably all over the place, and sometimes it just won't pick up what you want it to - but if you manage to get hold of a car, get ready for some radical reconstructing. Weirdly, swinging a car from 300ft in the air doesn't result in its destruction... if you repeatedly drop it from a great height it will eventually catch on fire and explode, nevertheless, and the first few times you do this, it can be hilarious. Just listen to the scream of the unfortunate driver, and you will laugh. Yes, sickening, but it's just so funny.

And these novelties contribute to the fact that Mercenaries just isn't compelling enough. Sure, it's a Playground of Destruction, but after you've blown up various vulnerable materials, and generally wreaked havoc on the wartorn world of Korea, you'll find the game becoming stale. And the repetitive missions, dull objectives, and tedious drive-around areas just don't cut it in this free-roaming landscape. After the first few hours, you will abandon Mercenaries because of its lack of immersion and flimsy storyline.

But now I'm straying far from the premise Mercenaries prides itself on, and that's obviously making stuff go boom with a well-placed explosive module. As I mentioned above, rocket launchers or missile blasters are nowhere near as satisfying as they should be, and this is a shame. Fire them at a car, and you'll be treated with an immense blast, with a weird outcome - once, I positioned myself on top of a corrugated iron structure, fired a rocket at a civilian car, and I was amazed - it exploded, and much of the bodywork was reduced to crisp - and the car randomly went flying a few hundred metres in the air, before landing with a barely audible splash in the sea. Sometimes the physics in Mercenaries can be a little too overpowered, but most of the time they enhance the otherwise mediocre fun factor.

The explosions themselves are sumptuous in the visual department. Some of the best flame effects on the console are featured here, resulting in fire so real-looking you can almost smell sulphur. And the sheer velocity of these explosions - fire a rocket at an innocent vehicle and an infernal sphere will burst out of the vehicle like a New Year's Eve party popper. The vehicles themselves (before they get blown up, of course) are modelled well. And the character models are beautifully animated. But the actual environment of Korea is foggy and grey - of course, this is for effect, but it just looks so damn dull. It's meant to have a sort of post-apocalyptic style, but the world of Mercenaries is washed-out and tediously rendered, regardless of its scale and size.

The audio in Mercenaries is good, too. The voice-overs are done well, and they do a good job of establishing accents, seeing as the characters in the game are multinational and come from completely different backgrounds. Explosions and sound effects are decent, but again, sometimes they don't pack half the punch they need to. The musical score amplifies this quiet, distilled atmosphere, and clashes well with the foggy, grey world, and overall, Mercenaries does a great job of making a fictional civil war a treat for our ears.

So, let me wrap things up - just because of the intriguing-but-gullible advertisement, this doesn't mean that Mercenaries is an essential game. Sometimes you can only stomach so much explosive content, especially when it doesn't have the panache or impact it needs to. Mercenaries is a content-filled game, with a sizeable world and lots of missions, but since the most enjoyable moments in the game are flimsy novelty acts, Mercenaries doesn't feel compelling or immersive. Once you've made it past the first few inferno-soaked hours, there's really no need to play till the end, as you basically see all it has to offer at the beginning. Ignore the comparisons with GTA - this has nowhere near the style or enjoyment of Rockstar's controversial series, and buying this game will result in cold, hard disappointment. Ambition gets this game nowhere.

amlabella – Shadow of the Colossus

"Ambitious"

9.0 – Superb

Gameplay	9	Difficulty: Just Right
Graphics	9	Learning Curve: 30 to 60 Minutes
Sound	9	Time Spent: 10 to 20 Hours
Value	7	
Tilt	10	

One of the most unique and truly great games you'll ever play.

With the release of ICO in 2001, a hidden gem emerged out of nowhere. With the game mainly consisting of escorting a young lady around with various puzzles and little combat, the word that may come to the mind of some is "boring." But this is not true. It was a truly original concept, and it showed that not everything needs to be about blowing away enemies in first person shooters or managing an army in strategy games. This has been carried over to Shadow of the Colossus, with many characteristics that look a bit familiar to the previous work that SCEI conjured up. There is one big difference though, and it can be somewhat picked up in the title and from pictures seen. This is a game like no other, and should certainly raise a few eyebrows and turn some heads because of it.

The body of a young woman lies still in a deserted temple, only populated by a warrior and his horse. A large, booming voice tells the man that the only way she can be revived is to destroy the colossi that roam around the lands near by. With the introduction of the story, many questions arise. Who is this man and woman, how are they connected, and what will happen if all the colossi are brought down? The sense of anticipation bottles up inside as you embark on a journey to bring back this lady, and answers to the previous inquires swirling around the heads of many are revealed.

In your quest to rid of these foes, you will travel on horse with your sword and bow as weapons. When ready to fight each next colossus, you will go to that location on horseback, with a light from your sword showing you the way, acting like a compass. The controller vibrates once you have it aimed in the appropriate direction. This is a nice and easy way of getting from point A to point B, and riding your horse is always fun seeing as how you rarely do it in any games. The controls for it are a bit shaky, but once you get the hang of it, you may find yourself doing it just for fun. From there, the game consists of simple plat-forming elements; jumping, climbing adjacent cliffs and whatnot. All of this is like an opening act for the main attraction, the grand finale.

What's best about Shadow of the Colossus is, of course, the battles with the colossi. The enemies are monstrous in size, each of their steps quaking the earth, sending chills down your spine. The fights are epic in size and scope, and are very rewarding. You really feel like you've accomplished something once defeating them, and well, you have. It's just tiny little you, with your sword and bow against these stone-like mammoths. The question forms, "How do I kill these things if they're ten times the size of little ol' me?" Every time you face off with a colossus, they'll reveal their different weaknesses which are called vital points. It's required that you climb up them as if they were a mountain, and pierce your sword through the thickness of their skin. It's important that you ascend strategically, as there's a circle meter which whittles down to nothing eventually, resulting in you falling off. You could be holding on for dear life, but it won't save you. It is a bit odd though, seeing as you take little damage falling from such a long height. Then again, if it were more realistic, you'd probably be dead after one tumble, and that's no good. What really makes all of this work is that each battle doesn't feel too familiar. Every colossi is different, from its placement of vital points to the look of it. At some points in the game, you'll find yourself facing colossi that resemble a horse, knight, and so on. This is very important seeing as how you have few of them to face off against.

From a technical standpoint, Shadow of the Colossus does have its fair share of problems. Most notably is the frame rate and camera. While on the backs of the colossi, the camera can become a hindrance, hiding behind your enemy. The frame rate also gets fidgety, especially when in the heat of the battle which can be frustrating. There is, however, an upside, and that's the animations. The look of your warrior climbing up each colossus, the fumbling around with each crushing blow of huge feet impressing themselves to the ground, and everything else is very well done. The negativity on the technical side of the spectrum is made up greatly with the artistic touch to the game. You can definitely notice a cinematic quality to the game's visuals, and the art direction is incredible. You'll be traveling large, barren lands, with a dark hue spreading through, wrapping around the world. Just watching the opening cut scene, you can tell this is going to be a visually arresting game. It's like a piece of abstract artwork. To some, it may not look good at all, but look closely and it's a thing of beauty. It's like a painting moving seamlessly in various images.

The orchestral score in the game is amazing. Soothing music follows as you travel towards each colossi. It's very low-key at first, helping flesh out the great sound effects such as the whispering wind and the clattering of hooves. Once engaged in combat, the music starts rising, fitting the mood perfectly. Dialogue in the game isn't present very often, but the voice instructing you of what to do is in an entirely made up language, which seems very believable. And having the voice in a different language was a good move, because English wouldn't have conveyed the look and feel of the game as well. Sound is certainly one of the game's strong suits, and helps embody the presence of darkness.

However, game's length is unfortunate. There are no other enemies in the game other than the colossi, and while that seems like a move the developers were going for, it does chop the game's replay value. There are sixteen colossi, and each of them offer satisfying and fairly long lasting encounters. The colossi aren't aggressive, but it is a difficult task to take them down. In the latter part of the game, the difficulty cranks up quite a bit. But at the end of the day, Shadow of the Colossus only clocks in at about 10 hours. You can go back and fight any of the colossi you want once finishing the game, which many people will want to do. Still, it's a shame it couldn't last longer, because what's there is so good.

Shadow of the Colossus can be loved easily, as well as disliked. It's something that no other developing team has ever attempted, with just boss fights. But it works, and is actually better than many would have thought or hoped for. The unique visual style and superb sound add to the great look and feel that the game has. Despite it being short but sweet, Shadow of the Colossus is easily worthy of being played. In fact, it may be one of the most enjoyable experiences you'll find in any video game.

Jedo – Codename: Panzers, Phase Two

"Been there, done that"

7.8 – Good

Gameplay	8	Difficulty: Just Right Learning Curve: 2 to 4 Hours Time Spent: 10 to 20 Hours
Graphics	7	
Sound	7	
Value	8	
Tilt	8	

A WW2 real-time strategy. Does more need to be said? Ok, with a few originalities but still a typical WW2 RTS.

FOREWORD

First, I'd like to state that I played this game out quite a while ago; however, I only now decided to put my hands on the keyboard for it. The reason for that is that there's really not much to say about Panzers Phase Two, especially to those who played the first part of the game. Well, maybe there is something to say about some of its original features, but somehow I'm not eager to. The reason for that, I believe, is in the fact that it's a World War II based strategy game. And once again the allied forces will win (what a shocker). And as the player once leads a horde of units (the only way to defeat an enemy group is to bring a larger group) on the battlefield thinking "That bush looks familiar", as he comes across places where, it seems, he's been in numerous other WWII games. However, the reason could also be in the fact that Phase Two doesn't annoy the player in any way seriously, and neither does it stand out much. It plays like it's expected to, and when things go like they're expected to what's there to note about them?

GAMEPLAY

It's the first half of the 2nd World War (wouldn't you be able to guess that blindly from the title alone?), and the Italian corps are in Africa helping the Germans to fight the Allied forces. The player first sees the war through the eyes of an Italian commander who, besides working as a buffer for the Germans against the English, is searching for his lost brother Sergio. There are three interrelated campaigns, providing the player with control first over the Axis, then Allied and finally the Partisan forces. In the second campaign the focus turns on an English and an American commander, who, after Africa, take part in the invasion of Italy. Finally the focus goes to the Yugoslavian rebels, fighting for their freedom. Missions, although relatively scripted, mainly consist of shooting at something until destroyed. There are main, optional and secret objectives. Yes, the latter ones are completed by accident (or by listening to common sense).

Although the three campaigns are connected with the story, each of these campaigns is interrupted rather abruptly at the end of each campaign. The last one, the Partisan campaign, in particular feels too short and kind of unfinished. In any case, the story is not particularly interesting. Perhaps it's because the characters are not well played and not well presented to the player.

From the name of the game one might conclude that it's all about tanks. Well, it's not entirely true. Phase Two is a typical strategy game with a tone placed on the armored vehicles. Unfortunately, most of the infantry units do play a very insignificant role.

It quickly becomes evident that the game has an unbendable rod of tactics that, although surrounded by many tactical freedoms, dictates a certain mandatory strategic path, and it's important the player understands that as early on in the game as possible. The tutorial, although clear about the main features of the game, does not explain this important notion to the player.

Firstly, the performance in each mission, and in particular the first one, is very important for two key reasons:

1. Whatever the player has leftover will be part of his force the next mission. That means he has to take very good care of his troops.
2. Depending on the player's performance, he will receive a certain amount of points, with which he, from time to time, will be able to buy reinforcements. Therefore, he better perform well. What exactly is meant by "performing well" is somewhat unclear.

Secondly, there's the strategic issue. The victory mainly lies in the smart use of snipers, medics, artillery and two trucks specializing in repair and the distribution of ammo. The other vehicles and soldiers are useful (and are sometimes necessary), but they aren't the spear of the arrow. The player must therefore be cautious with what he shops for, and there's a lot he can shop for, using the earned points. The units are provided from both countries that participate in the current campaign. As the campaign progresses, better tanks become available. However a lack of a repair or an ammo truck in battle will mark all that new armor useless.

The first time I found out that the infantry can't inflict any damage to the tanks with their bullets and the tanks need to restack on ammunition, I rejoiced. Had I finally found the strategy game that praises reality and logic? Well, no. What I saw next was a tank firing directly at a tightly placed group of infantry, and the life bar of that group slowly reducing like an installation bar. The same I saw in a fight between two tanks. It was almost like they were hitting each other with tennis balls. And, by the way, one of these "super-tanks" was Sherman: the small and cheap cart, which in reality, especially in the first part of the war, was leaving small dents in the Tiger's massive armor. All in all, Phase Two leaves an impression of an arcade RTS (real-time strategy) game we've seen so many times before.

Not to strike a feeling in the reader that Phase Two is lacking in originality! The wrapper of the previously mentioned mandatory rod is really varied. The tank crew (that often survives the destruction of their tank) can occupy any empty vehicle. Enemy vehicles can be "emptied" by using the flamethrowers or Molotov cocktails to smoke out the enemy crew. Infantry can occupy buildings, and in large numbers it can wreak havoc on the armored vehicles by throwing their grenades (unfortunately the "havoc" part is only achieved in the experienced hands of the AI). Another interesting strategic element is the armor system. Different sides of a tank are of different strength, and the armor integrity is reduced on each side separately. This forces the player to choose the position of his tanks wisely. Oblivious to which side is turned are the artillery and air strikes, which can often tip the tide of battle. There are also plenty of other small-scale features like mines, which are only visible if you outfit your infantry with minesweepers, or the lights that increase the visibility during night missions. Overall, there's plenty of interesting content for a new player to appreciate.

Apart from the main campaigns, Phase Two offers an interesting skirmish and multi-player mode. The first one is practically the second one, but with an AI enemy instead of a living competitor. There are two types for both modes. The first one simply brings victory to the last man

standing. The second goes further and throws several neutral bases on the battlefield that, if captured, can produce either infantry or vehicles. The end goal is the destruction of enemy units, of course.

There's not much that annoys the player during the game. However one of the few things is the enemy AI. After commanding your forces to move to a certain point on the map and following a 30-second game freeze, you might find that half of your forces, if not all, will declare the inability to get there. And sometimes they might stop half-way to the objective. That means you will sometimes have to guide them through the corners like a baby who's barely learned how to walk.

VISUALS

The graphics are what you might expect from a good strategy game: detailed but not well shaped. The effects are nicely done though. Explosions are realistic (and plenty). The environment is destructible. That means buildings can be blown up, while trees and other obstacles can be trampled. Although the setting is generally the desert, that desert is well depicted with its sandstorms and dry cracks in the ground. It does make one wonder if the developers have again used the if-we-place-most-of-the-events-in-the-desert-then-we-don't-have-to-model-much-trick.

SOUND

The only really noticeable thing about the sound in the game is the acting. It's hard to say whether it's good or bad. The characters are given strong accents, and it feels like they are made fun out of. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. Their text is a little cheesy though, and the few jokes that are said aren't funny. For the rest, everything seems to be present sufficiently but not noteworthy.

PERFORMANCE

Important to note is that for the level of graphics that the game offers, its general performance is inexcusably low, especially when you contrast it against other strategy games with better visuals. On the other hand, the game doesn't crash and there are few bugs, if any.

THE VERDICT

Panzers Phase Two is another WWII game (gag). Although it has plenty of original content, in its essence, it's still a typical RTS (more gag). It follows in the path of its predecessor to be a good RTS. With a single-player campaign, a skirmish and a multi-player this game has plenty of replay value. For someone who looks for a new quality game in this genre, Phase Two will be of interest. Other than that there's not much to note about this twin brother of Panzers Phase One.

sethsvswww – Gallop Racer

"Underappreciated"

8.8 - Great

Gameplay	8	Difficulty: Very Hard
Graphics	8	Learning Curve: 4 or More Hours
Sound	7	Time Spent: 40 to 100 Hours
Value	10	
Tilt	10	

If you can get past the worst manual ever to disgrace the inside of a CD case, Gallop Racer is as great as it is unique.

I picked up Gallop Racer on the recommendation of a friend a few years back. Wow was I in for a surprise. I have never had any interest or knowledge of horse racing, but my friend's talk of how deep and engaging the game was piqued my interest. By the time I was finished playing it, which was months later by the way, Gallop Racer was firmly in my top 10 PS1 games of all time, probably top 5.

First off let me start by telling you right now if you so much as open the cover of the manual you will be wasting your time. This document stands out as easily the worst example of Japanese to English translation in the history of mankind. I challenge you to find one grammatically correct, legible sentence in the whole thing, and if you come away with even the slightest hint of knowledge of the game from reading it then you're much more perceptive than myself. The frustration is compounded when you realize just how complicated this seemingly simple game is. You'll soon learn that unless you master all of the intricate nuances of the game you're not going to be winning many races. If you want to know how to play this game, and trust me you will need help, then I suggest searching the Internet, as there are several very good and informative FAQs out there.

Gallop Racer is so incredibly unique it can't really be compared to any other game, but if I had to I would classify it as an RPG-type game. You start out as a virtual stable owner/jockey, and you are given a set amount of money (depending on what difficulty you choose) to buy your first horse with. From there you go through season after season, winning races to unlock new tracks, titles, and horses. I still have pages and pages of notes that I wrote while playing, including strategies, awards, secret races, and statistics on many of the several hundred unlockable horses. One of the things that is so endearing about this game, in my opinion, is that there is no published strategy guide. If you master this game, it's because you and you alone put the time and effort into doing it, and that's a pretty good sense of accomplishment, at least until you realize that you're sitting in your basement playing a horse racing game at 3 AM.

Another unique thing about Gallop Racer is that it can't be beaten; there is no "ending cut scene" or anything of that nature. It is certainly possible to unlock every horse and every race, which will take you most likely well over 50 hours, but even after you have unlocked everything the game has to offer, there is still much to keep you playing. This is where breeding comes in. I spent hours going through horse careers for the sole purpose of using them to breed a superhorse. Each horse has around a dozen different traits that are passed on through breeding, including pace, temperament, grass and dirt ratings, and even physical characteristics. Since you need a male and female to breed, obviously you're looking at 2 careers minimum, and later in the game you will be using 3rd generation horses to breed your superhorse, then laughing maniacally as your colt or filly destroys the competition by 10 furlongs every race.

Basically, if you're looking for a totally unique gaming experience, and truly one of the more rewarding ones, then look no further than the Gallop Racer franchise. I knew absolutely nothing about horse racing before playing this game, and quite honestly I could still care less about the sport, but for some reason I was completely drawn in by the uniqueness and complexity of the game. Just be patient when you get whipped your first 10 races, because when you finally start winning it will be that much sweeter.

Solidsnake35 – Resident Evil 4

"Immersive"

9.3 - Superb

Gameplay	8	Difficulty: Hard
Graphics	10	Learning Curve: 0 to 30 Minutes
Sound	9	Time Spent: 20 to 40 Hours
Value	10	
Tilt	10	

A brilliant and often chilling experience which should not be overlooked by anyone.

After originally being released for the Gamecube, the developers of Resident Evil 4 decided to re-release it on the Playstation 2. As well as keeping the entire game just as good as the Gamecube version the developers added extra features, such as the side story 'Separate Ways', extra cut scenes, and bonus items. All of these new features mean that Resident Evil 4 is just as good, if not better, on the Playstation 2 than the already successful version on the Gamecube.

The game starts off relatively slow, compared to the fast and frantic action later on. Beginners and first time players are given the chance to learn the basics before moving on to more complicated techniques. There are also in-game button cues, so you'll know the controls without having to read the manual.

Don't be put off by the gentle start to the game though. Before long, you'll be overwhelmed by enemies, and get your first taste of the action that makes Resident Evil 4 a strong candidate for game of the year. There are many strategies possible for situations like these. You may decide to use an element of stealth, rather than ripping through them with a shotgun and a few grenades for good measure. Whatever option you choose it will be a rewarding experience. However, sneaking can be slightly difficult due to the fixed camera angle, which looks over Leon's shoulder. The environment also plays a huge part and gives the player many advantages, such as the ability to kick down ladders and dive through windows.

Most of the game's weapons have a laser used for aiming. Though it can be difficult to tell whether or not you'll hit your target, due to the dot's small size. Most people, however, will be glad that there's any aiming device at all. The variety of weapons available to the player allow different strategies and techniques to be used, making the game an enjoyable and satisfying experience. The shotgun, easily the weapon of choice for close combat, makes easy work of grouped enemies; often knocking them to the floor. Two options are then available. Running straight past requires significantly less risk taking, but failing to kill your adversaries may quite literally come back to haunt you. If you are feeling in a violent mood then taking advantage of your stumbling enemy would be the best choice, which can be done using the cleverly implemented kick, performed by pressing the x button when prompted to. If you want to avoid these mass fights completely, why not use the sniper rifle?

In addition to using your massive arsenal of guns, it is possible to take out enemies at close quarters using the knife, which you will be grateful for when you run out of bullets. My only complaint with the weapons is the changeover between them. While swapping to the knife is smooth and quick, as only a single button must be pressed, changing primary weapons can become awkward. The game must be paused so that a new weapon can be selected, breaking up the speed of the action.

Controlling Leon's movement is very responsive. The camera angle, situated over Leon's shoulder, makes it easy to spot where attacks are coming from and where you should be heading next. The ability to spin 180° to face attackers from behind adds to the feeling that you are in control and cuts down on situations of complete panic. Without this feature, the game would be a lot more difficult as Leon turns very slowly. Movement in general is pretty slow, providing a cautious air about the game. Still, Leon can run when needed simply by holding down a button. Other small additions to the gameplay, which will go unnoticed by some, add quality and realism to the game. A good example of this is the way Leon shakes more and more profusely as he becomes nervous and quite often terrified, making aiming a lot harder because of his shaking hands. This is similar to how fatigue affects aiming in Metal Gear Solid 3.

During the game there are various scenes that require your own quick reactions to save Leon from injury, or even a gruesome death. These appear when you least expect it and usually consist of smashing a button repeatedly to run, and then a combination of buttons to finish. Don't worry if you feel overwhelmed here, on screen cues are displayed at the appropriate time so you'll know what to press. The difficulty of these encounters begin easy to give the player chance to understand what is happening and what they must do, but later require lightning quick reactions.

Graphically, this game is sublime and virtually flawless. The environment is amazing, and adds to the horror theme throughout, due to the dark and derelict appearance. As with most videogames in the horror genre, the theme is very dark, but also very detailed thanks to the high resolution textures. The characters are just as impressive. The enemies look so realistic, and vary in such different ways, that you'll be glad you just blew its head off with a shotgun. The cut scenes are excellent and create a cinematic experience, which is enhanced by the widescreen format displayed at all times.

Despite some awkward dialogue, the sound remains just as inspiring as the rest of the game. Chilling music will often ensue at tense and dramatic moments, and the voiceovers are good without being spectacular. The environmental sounds are what make the audio so great for this game, as you will often find yourself checking the surroundings after hearing an eerie noise. There's nothing worse than entering a new area and being greeted by an ominous silence, followed by eerie ruffling from the shadows.

The main storyline and extra side mission are long enough to satisfy, but still leaves you wanting more; a good thing or bad thing depending on your point of view. Those who opted to first play through on the easy difficulty setting will want to try their skills at the harder setting, while others will no doubt want to play it again because of its great storyline and, simply, because it is great fun to play.

The exclusion of a two player mode may put people off who enjoy playing games with others, but it is not really an issue thanks to the perfect one player mode. Maybe with a co-operative style multiplayer option this could have been one of the greatest games of all time. It may, however, have been poorly implemented as just a side thought, which would have spoiled an excellent game.

Any fan of horror games should see this as a must buy. While anybody else willing to give it a try will see that it's an amazing game; even if at first it does not appeal to you. This game is definitely one of the best games released this year and would not disappoint anyone who plays it.

Metamania – Ys: The Ark of Napishtim

"Old-school"

7.6 – Good

Gameplay	8	Difficulty: Hard
Graphics	7	Learning Curve: 0 to 30 Minutes
Sound	7	Time Spent: 20 to 40 Hours
Value	7	
Tilt	8	

A solid, entertaining adventure that doesn't last very long, yet is still fun and enjoyable for all gamers of all ages.

The Ys series. It is not that surprising that many gamers in the United States are not familiar with the series. It has, however, gained a loyal fanbase in the Rising Sun, with only five games released in the series. Even if three games in the series did manage to see the light of day in the US, it was enough to capture the attention of those specific gamers as well. Few factors can attribute to the phenomenal success of the series. From the intense difficulty to the melodic, memorable soundtracks, it is apparently enough for any Ys connoisseur to sit up and defend the series as a whole. Unfortunately, while more games in the series kept on being released in the Rising Sun, it has been at least twelve years before gamers crossed paths with the series since the third installment. Now, this is all changed. Being the fourth game to ever be released in the United States, the Ys series is back in the form of the sixth installment, The Ark Of Napishtim.

You could say that the plot itself starts with a bang, putting our young hero, the legendary red-haired Adol Christain, into a mess. Being chased by the Romulus military forces, he is forced to accept the help of pirates as he, along with his famous pal and sidekick, Dogi, gets himself on board and to sea. Things don't get peaceful for long as the Romulus catches up with them, attempting to destroy their ships. Admst the destruction and chaos of the battle that follows, Adol is thrown into the Great Vortex, a Bermuda Triangle anomaly (think of it like a maelstrom). A few days later, he is found lying ashore on the beach of the Canaan Islands by two priestesses and is brought back to their village for recovery. Under the reclusive care of a elf race known as the Redha, Adol soon recovers and starts off on his adventure, to discover the mysteries of not only the Canaan Islands, but of the Great Vortex as well. Unfortunately, the plot isn't the greatest thing in the world, as some of the twists and turns witnessed in the game are predictable. On the upside, however, it only becomes a natural excuse for you to discover the real reason what made Ys series so legendary in the first place – the combat.

This is the sort of combat that any fan should be adjusted to by now, a form of warfare that is seen in many Action/RPG games of the past, such as The Legend Of Zelda or Alundra. As you tackle on many of the game's richly detailed enemies and cool-looking bosses, you have your trusty swords and its excellent abilities to rely on, such as the downward stab to its magical capabilities, such as the chain-lightning spell. However, in order to earn these abilities, you must collect Emel, blue stones that you pick up from monsters that you defeated in battle. With these Emels in your purse, you can level up three type of elemental swords that you are given in the game – fire, ice, and lightning. As your forge these weapons each time, a new ability will be unlocked, like a combo that ends with a fatalistic blow to a spell that each sword contains. Combat also relies on the deal to executing plenty of jumps from one platform to another in order to avoid the enemies and their constant annoyance throughout the game. Annoyance is the best way to describe the foes inhabiting the world, for they can kill you rather quickly if you do not take the time to level up your swords or your character. Charging into the battlefield with everything you have now simply isn't going to work. Strategy and patience are the two key elements you'll need to survive in the game. Even so, players are expecting to commence a lot of button-mashing throughout the entire game and to few gamers, it may get to the point of where it tends to be repetitive and, quite frankly, not needed.

However, even with all of this button mashing going on, the action doesn't get tiring for awhile, as the terrain changes, along with new enemies. Therefore, a lot of capabilities need to be mastered. Since Adol is a legendary warrior himself, he is given a few techniques for the player to master, such as the aforementioned downward stab to the basic slash and all of these resourceful techniques can be pulled off with ease, with the exception of the dash-jump maneuver, which takes time to master. The three elemental swords that Adol retrieves throughout his adventure also serve an important role and you can switch them on the fly via the shoulder buttons on the controller. With all of this in mind, you can apply these techniques to your advantage as you destroy these monsters, one by one, so that you may gain enough Emel to make your way back to gain and level these up.

Keep in mind that you'll be spending most of your time in the game leveling up instead of moving to the next part of the storyline or engaging yourself in a sidequest, as the monsters and dungeons themselves tend to get a tricky and you may die a few times before getting past the obstacles barring your path. Its not that these monsters are impossible to defeat, as you can exploit their weaknesses with either the right sword that holds the right magic or with a simple slash from the ground or from the air. But a few monsters do require thinking on your part and testing Adol's capabilities before a final solution is discovered for each creature. However, the bosses are considered the main meat, so you'll have to look for a particular weakness or pattern before defeating the bosses for good. In the end, the upside of all of this dungeon-crawling, monster-killing escapades is that this is indeed old-school RPG leveling up, bringing back old-school gamers plenty of nostalgia of the days when they sat around and leveled up, day or night, until their character or party were strong enough to take on the next set of enemies.

The visuals in this game are excellent, but not groundbreaking. You'll be viewing the entire game through an isometric view and it is true that there is no option to move the camera manually; it is enough to see where everything is in each area. The worlds inhabiting the latest installment of the series is completely in 3D, from the character/enemy models to the towns themselves and, for the most part, it is incredibly done so well.. Every non-playable character in the game is provided with anime-style character portraits and different poses to convey their emotions to Adol, which is a nice touch that one would have think it would have not been included, but the developer thought otherwise, therefore it is a plus. All the action runs smoothly and to a crisp, not in sixty frames-per-second fashions, so to speak, but fast enough to keep your eyes glued to the television. It only slows down a lot when a ton of enemies are on the screen, all at once, but this is a rare sight to witness and therefore it should be ignored. The little effects of the game are also pleasant and make their presence known constantly, making the world of Ys a joy to explore and go through. In the end, the visuals, while not new to any gamer of today, are still attractive enough for any gamer interested in this game to see what new areas and creatures look like.

Soundwise, it's unfortunately a mixed bag. On the positive side of things, each and every single character of the game, excluding the monsters, are given voice talent and in some aspects, it shines, as few actors deliver their lines correctly and accurately. Because of that, you may grow to be attached to those certain individuals. On the other hand, this game also contains some of the worst voice acting in an

action/RPG. It's like hearing chalk scraping through the chalkboard in class, forcing you to cringe in your seat and cover your ears until the ugly deed is done. Luckily, you can switch from the English voice acting to the Japanese voice acting, making the entire experience a better one. Music is also a letdown. After all, the series is known for its wonderfully, orchestrated scores, but here, it fails its task to be either memorable or unforgettable. In fact, the only track worth noticing is the boss music, a classic rock instrumental that you'd hear in just about every Ys anime and game invented. To its credit, though, the soundtrack isn't necessarily a bad one and some tunes do have catchy melodies, but it is, for the most part, forgettable and the developer should have taken some more time to create better music tracks.

Even when this may look good, a few flaws hinder its progress from becoming the greatest thing since sliced bread. First off, there are some areas of the game that are hard to get through, such as the third Alma trial, where you are trying to beat a wave and yet get pushed back. Also, since jumping is a necessary requirement throughout the game, either from pushing the wrong direction while jumping or through trial and error, you'll slip and fall to the floor below and have to work your way back to where you previously started. Not only that, but monsters will kill you very quickly, resulting in a few "Game Over" titles to flash across your television screen, especially the bosses! Finally, even if you manage to overcome those frustrating flaws and beat the game, the experience is too short. Any gamer, if patient enough, can conquer the latest installment in twenty-five hours or less, unless if you decide to gather everything in the game before heading into the last area.

All told, Ys VI: The Ark Of Napisim is a nice reminder of what action/RPG games are all about. It doesn't bring anything new to the table and yet, it is a solid experience nonetheless, even if it is a short adventure. If you are interested in heading down on a trip to the past, this is a good game to go with, for it provides nice-looking visuals, solid gameplay, intense challenge, rounding it all out as a great package for both new and old gamers to either get accustomed to or settle back in with the series. It's been such a long time that a Ys game has graced our side of the world and for the most part, it has been receiving excellent praise and is, all told, a nice addition to your gaming library.

Fistspotting: mysteralex – Death by Degrees

"Total letdown"

5.3 – mediocre

Gameplay	6	Difficulty: Just Right
Graphics	7	Learning Curve: 30 to 60 Minutes
Sound	6	Time Spent: 10 to 20 Hours
Value	4	
Tilt	4	

Do you want a little fun with your tedium?

See, the problem with games like this is that they're so full of potential, yet so damn difficult to take seriously. The designers took their time making the game look good, yet half the time I just wanted to get through the thing so I wouldn't have to look at the same areas time and again. Repetition arrives very early in this game, as the load times crept on my nerves like no other game has in the last three years. It's seriously tasking to go to the map and inventory screen. At times, I risked death so that I wouldn't have to stomach going to the inventory screen to heal Nina. It has an unresponsive nature to it due to the fact that unnecessary images are loaded, each two seconds at a time, and displayed to match their descriptions. The game's mapping system is position-specific, meaning you must have a sense of direction while looking at it. The thing is the game's camera isn't as concerned with giving players a sense of direction as it is at feigning a cinematic presentation. What this leaves one with is no sense of direction, unless one pauses and studies their position on the map. The map features a strange position indicator of some kind; it looks nothing like a helpful arrow--more like a wishbone(?!).

But these are not the worst of the flaws...

The greatest flaw (just a hair in front of the game's annoyingly long load times) is the fact that game's controls--from combat to traipsing through locales--are so confusing that I wonder whether they were made for Metal Gear Solid, Tomb Raider, Resident Evil, or some random puzzle game, such as Myst. The fighting could have been excellent, but there are times when the game's camera system totally gets in the way, so accurate stick presses (no buttons, save for the shoulders, are used for fighting) are never assured. The unwieldy camera totally defeats the enjoyment of the direction-specific fighting. Again, this phenomenon stresses the total missed opportunity for an outstanding game.

The sound effects are decent enough, and the soundtrack does its best (though, also to its detriment, due to repetition) to convey a sense of intrigue by using one common theme which switches its tone throughout the game.

The game's story also attempts to convey intrigue, yet it totally misses the ball and it all comes off as somewhat amusing, yet, ultimately, dull and distant. The dialogue is sparse and full of one liners; character development is nowhere to be found. The game tries very hard to feel somewhat familiar, like Metal Gear Solid with its relevant character interactions. If the original MGS didn't teach 'em all how to do it in this generation of action video games, I don't know what did. None of the cut-scenes are as involving as those of the Metal Gear Solid series, however. So, what were left with is a bunch of uninteresting villains and peripheral characters posturing on-screen as if they're saying something special.

I can put up with elaborate cut-scenes that features somewhat uninteresting aspects as much as the next video game geek, but putting up with the game's tedious interface, confusing camera system, wacky combat controls, and frustrating loading times will test the patience of any gamer who just wants to play a fun game featuring a prominent female fighting game character. Nina actually comes off well in this, despite the story's poor planning and pacing, as her distant attitude and demeanor are about the only thing worth remembering the story over. There are moments where she really does seem like a female Solid Snake. She's all business, and has no time for friendly encounters in this game. If she hadn't opened her mouth to speak the few times she did, I'd have likened her to Metroid's Samus Aran.

Nevertheless, this game could've been brilliant; instead its ambition bites it in the butt time and again. It's as if the programmers slapped whatever random video game convention they'd remembered from other (ultimately better) games and slapped them into Death By Degrees just to pad it out. However, there are many instances where this game begins to shine past its flaws. The sniper and stingray sections are interesting diversions, and the limited use of melee weapons and firearms is very well-implemented. The exploration aspect is decent at best, with your having to search for items and weapons in lockers, suitcases, and weapons storage boxes. Most of the exploration is based on an elaborate procured fingerprint system, which is actually a very clever implementation, in theory, yet it all plays out a little boring in this game.

It's truly a tasking experience to play this seriously the first time. With needlessly long load times for needless cut-scenes, ridiculously lame and poorly-planned puzzles, and bothersome camera angles, this game soon becomes a true test of one's nerves. Too bad...There really is an excellent game struggling to break free of this ambitious tragedy.

Fistspotting: NeoJedi – River City Ransom

"Instant classic"

9.8 – superb

Gameplay	10	Difficulty: Just Right
Graphics	9	Learning Curve: 0 to 30 Minutes
Sound	9	Time Spent: 100 or More Hours
Value	10	
Tilt	10	

Often overlooked & forgotten, River City Ransom is one of the best on NES.

Everybody remembers Mario & Luigi... but how many of you remember Alex & Ryan? Although they were the stars of one of the most addicting and innovative games on the NES, they are often forgotten amongst a sea of other big names.

River City Ransom was released in 1990 in North America by Technos, after enjoying a very prolific and popular run in Japan under the name Downtown Nekketsu Monogatari, which was part of a series of games titled Kunio-kun. The story begins when Slick, the game's protagonist and powerful ganglord of River City, takes over the high school and unleashes his evil gangs to take control of the fear-stricken streets... all the while capturing Ryan's girlfriend in the process! Luckily for everybody (and you), Alex & Ryan didn't attend school the day it was taken over and now it's up to them (and you) to kick Slick's butt, get the girl and live happily ever after.

RCR may seem like any other beat 'em up when you first lay your eyes on it... but what set this game apart from all of the others was that it included a certain RPG element. Not only did you beat up gang members while going from point A to point B, you could also stop in different shops and restaurants to buy different sorts of food to power up your different abilities, by paying for them with money dropped by the gang members when you beat them up. For example, you could go into the expensive Sushi Bar and buy a Swordfish, which would cost you \$28.75, and add 4 points to your Punch, Throwing & Stamina, while maxing out your health bar. The abilities were as follows: Kick, Punch, Throwing, Agility, Defense, Will Power, Stamina & Max Power. You could also buy books at the Book Store to learn special techniques such as Stone Hands & Dragon Feet, which made you punch and kick faster, and the infamous Acro Circus, which was a running somersault combined with a jump kick. This really gave a tremendous depth to the game and made it revolutionary for it's time.

The gameplay was tremendous fun: the fighting was like nothing I'd ever seen before. I remember that you could grab your partner and hit the enemies with him! The story was very well written for a beat 'em up and was hilarious at times, especially when you stopped by a shop to purchase some items. Each time you faced a boss, he would give you a lecture on how he was superior to you in every way. Those lectures made me laugh each and every time.

The graphics were very funky looking. You could immediately recognize a gang by their outfits and look, whether it be the MOB with their sunglasses or the Cowboys with their spiked hair. The colors were very bright and the game looked fantastic back in 1990. The music used in the game was very catchy and entertaining.

The only bad thing I have to say about RCR is the passwords you had to enter at the beginning of every game... they were 66 characters long! Both upper and lower case letters and numbers were used in them. You always needed a pen and piece of paper handy to write those suckers down and that could become a pain, especially if you shut off your NES without taking them down. (Yes, it happened to me on several occasions)

All in all, River City Ransom is an extraordinary game that had me hooked for several weeks (if not months). I remember going through the game endlessly, trying to get enough money to buy everything the shops had to offer to boost up my character. No other game on the NES had me so captivated and hooked, and because of that, it deserves it's rightful place amongst the greatest NES games of all time.

Fistspotting: Targett – Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks

"Just plain fun"

8.8 - Great

Gameplay	9
Graphics	8
Sound	7
Value	8
Tilt	10

Difficulty: Just Right
Learning Curve: 30 to 60 Minutes
Time Spent: 10 to 20 Hours

Giving Shaolin Monks a rental would be an understatement - for fans of the series that is.

Mortal Kombat was the trendsetter for violent and gory games back in the day of the arcade. With blood, guts, and brutal fatalities it was known mainly for its brilliant trick combos and captivating characters. A decade has past and it's now evolved into a side scrolling beat-em-up that does more than set the series on firm new ground.

The minute you get your turn at control you'll be knee deep in chaotic yet surprisingly intricate kung fu battles. There are various attacks such as quick attack, strong attack, and throws to manoeuvre that you can also be used to string together breathtaking combo's. This not only stays with the series killer combo nature, it keeps the fun intact. Another quality kept in the transition is the games love of blood and gore, you can; split enemies in half with swords, slice off their heads, and even pummel them with punches only to kick them up into the air and batter them back into the ground for a smashing -literally - eradication.

Visually, this is as good as a Mortal Kombat is going to get on this generation of consoles - Midway could have gone the extra mileage to pull off more stunning and dynamic arenas but that might just have congested the already atmospheric scenes - it's nothing new but upon closer inspection it looks really good. Character models are detailed enough and remain true to the series look, and the fluidity fuelled with the mythological special effects create quite the mood when combined with the dynamic lighting. In terms of sound you'll be barraged with the continuous cries of whichever character you choose, it can become a nuisance mixed with the mediocre melodramatic music.

Where Shaolin Monks lacks in graphical creativity and sound it makes up with clever and addictive game play. The series has always been known for its hardcore combat and adherent style, and Shaolin Monks deals both in spades. The various attacks can be upgraded and stringed together to create unique and creative deaths, we're talking 40 hit combos if you can handle the button sequences. Additionally there are fatalities which require a certain button combo to execute, the gratification is great when you see your character slice off an enemies head with his foot then kick it back into him exploding his corpse. Things can get fiendish with the story mode, but that's not where the fun lies, the fun lies in the Co-Op - or should I say Ko-Op. Two players can combine combos and fatalities while helping each other out, the carnage is equally challenging and exciting. All in all, giving Shaolin Monks a rental would be an understatement - for fans of the series that is.

Fistspotting: mrwisdom – Streets of Rage

"Old-school"

8.5 – great

Gameplay	8	Difficulty: Easy Learning Curve: 0 to 30 Minutes Time Spent: 10 Hours or Less
Graphics	8	
Sound	10	
Value	8	
Tilt	9	

A classic that paved the way for modern gaming. A truly fun to play title - no collection is complete without this.

Streets of Rage is 15 years old as I write this. Recently I was browsing through a second hand store and found the game. For only \$3 it was a bargain - and I happily went home with my purchase - I was sure to have some happy gaming moments with this. This is a game that I played after school at the local Milk Bar - with the chips in the hot fat sizzling behind me - ahhh memories.

But Streets of Rage is more than a trip down memory lane - it is a fantastic game in its own right - spawning 2 sequels, and sporting a soundtrack that was revolutionary for the time. Hailing from Yuzo Kashiho - who went on to do some of the most influential soundtracks of all time. There is a mix of techno and some hip hop, mixed to great effect and really drawing you in to the game.

The game also featured a semi 3D engine - with an overhead camera angle, where your characters - 3 of whom you could choose, would walk along a left to right path, with the ability to move down to the bottom of the screen as well. The top of the screen was always cordoned off - via buildings or walls.

This system works well - focusing on hard and fast action. Taking the cue from games like Double Dragon and Final Fight, Streets of Rage was Sega's first attempt at getting into 2D beat-em-up action gaming - and they have done extremely well. Starting without a story - because in this type of game, you dont need one - you are tasked with getting from the start to the end - and throughout the many baddies who are quick to hit.

You are given a choice of 3 characters, each with different stats and attacks. You can choose between Adam - a strong but slow character, Blaze - who is a quick but weak fighter, or Axel, who is a mixture of the 2.

Not only do you have all the normal punch and kick combos - you can also pick up some weapons, like baseball bats - and pipes. You can use these simply - as well as in combos. The game can get a little hectic, with enemies crowding around you.

The level design - and even the gameplay itself is simplistic - as was the norm in 1990. However through it's simplicity is it's great playability. The game is just great fun to play - and it doesn't get bogged down by trying to be anything it isn't. Just left to right, fight and then beat the boss. Repeat - for the total 8 levels.

However - this is a highly polished and highly playable game. For its time - it was revolutionary. In 2005 - it remains a classic. if you can find a copy of this, then I urge you to get it and enjoy all the nostalgia that goes with late 80's to early 90's gaming. Classically playable.

Fistspotting: drswank – Beatdown: Fists of Vengeance

"Ambitious"

6.3 - Fair

Gameplay	6	Difficulty: Just Right Learning Curve: 0 to 30 Minutes Time Spent: 10 to 20 Hours
Graphics	6	
Sound	5	
Value	5	
Tilt	8	

It just falls short on just about every level, but Beatdown can turn out to be an enjoyable experience for some.

Beatdown: Fists of Vengeance is an interesting concept. It's an open-ended sandbox game that combines the beat-em-up gameplay of Final Fight and Double Dragon with one-on-one match-ups that are reminiscent of games like Tekken and Virtua Fighter. Add on some role-playing elements for good measure, and Beatdown sounds like it should be the sleeper hit of the year. That would definitely be the case had these elements been executed better. Instead, Beatdown boils down to a game that tries to mean well and while it's not bad by any means, it just falls short of pulling everything off.

In Beatdown, you play as one of five members of a mob run by a man named Zanetti in the city of Las Sombras. After coming across a drug deal gone awry, askew, and amiss, they're discovered and blamed for mucking up the deal all together and labeled as traitors. The individual members split up to escape and thus begins Beatdown's story mode. You're one of these five members who are on the run from both the law and their former gang. After visiting a local bar and meeting up with a gossipy informant, you set out to clear your name and get revenge on your gang. While you can choose which character to play throughout the story, the story line really never deviates – only the gameplay aspects. Some characters are walking tanks that manhandle anything that gets in their way while others are quick and capable of stringing together some massive combos.

A bar called "The Hole" is your unofficial base of operations. You can go to the bartender to get side jobs, order drinks to bring back health, or learn new moves when you're strong enough. The aforementioned informant will give you missions that will continue the plot of the game. You can also save your game with the local reporter as well.

Once you get accustomed to getting around, you can finally set out to start clearing your name. You can wander freely around Las Sombras and talk to pedestrians or pick fights with random people, if you're not already performing a side job. There are some dangers to look out for while wandering since the cops are on the lookout for you as well as the mob and you'll have to disguise yourself to avoid frequent run-ins. There are icons displayed at the top of the screen that show a percentage of which faction will recognize you. You can avoid frequent run-ins by visiting the local clothing store or street vendor and buying new clothes to make the percentages drop. You can also go to the hospital and get plastic surgery done for some more drastic results. There isn't much of a clothing selection available and your character will end up looking like a thrift store junkie later in the game since combinations of your old duds won't help to bring the percentages down. Male characters can even purchase and wear women's clothes which is just wrong.

If you pick a fight with someone in a group, the gameplay becomes a beat-em-up where you're free to roam and put the beatdown on any enemies you'd like. Other fights, most often fights that help to advance the story, are one-on-one affairs. These fights take on more of a fighting game mechanic and have a surprisingly deep set of moves. In addition to your health bar, there's also a pride meter that will diminish anytime you or your opponent is hit or someone is taunted. Once the pride meter reaches zero, you can "negotiate" with your opponent by hitting the circle button and the negotiation menu comes up where you can recruit your opponent to your side, rob them of their cash, interrogate them for info, or simply stomp their faces into mush courtesy of a beatdown. While some fights can get pretty hairy, none of them are too challenging. You'll eventually learn that some well-timed button mashing will take an enemy down with little or no effort. Oftentimes, repeatedly pressing the kick button will allow your opponent to constantly walk into your incoming foot time and time again which makes fighting pretty much a no-brainer. Once the fight is done, you'll get experience points which will let you gain levels and give you points to increase stats in three areas, namely stamina, power, and technique. The higher the stats, the more new moves you can learn from your friends on the black list and at the bar. You can also pick up money, weapons, and health recovery items off of fallen enemies, though every time you take something your cop percentage goes up by one percent which means you'll eventually be heading back to the clothing store and hospital for another makeover and another trip that goes out of your way.

When you recruit friends, you can call them up and summon them to fight alongside you. You can bring a maximum of two friends at a time, but you can always recruit more and leave them on call, given that you're not doing a side job. During the beat-em-up sequences, your allies will automatically fight alongside you, though they're not really effective and have a tendency to get beaten up easily. Their path finding is also pretty bad as you'll frequently see them running into walls to get to an enemy on the other side. During one-on-one fights, they'll stand on the sidelines and cheer you on unless you're defeated. At that point, the next ally in line will step in to fight which essentially gives you three tries at taking down some particularly tough enemies. If you build a good enough relationship with them, you can earn some ineffective double team moves to perform. The problem is that it's not really worth trying to keep your cohorts alive or happy enough to earn these moves. Especially since allies tend to cry like little babies if you dismiss them from the group because of a mission or you need to add a new member.

Each of your friends have certain abilities and skills that will help make your adventure a little easier. If you team up with a pickpocket, you can earn extra cash by going on pickpocket side missions with them and carjackers will be able to get you to destinations easier. You'll also have different fighting styles that come into play. Grapplers can pick up and manhandle anyone in their way and are better at wielding large weapons like metal beams and tree trunks that pop up here and there. While anyone can use weapons such as boards, bats, bottles, and brass knuckles, weapon masters are more proficient with them which is great for difficult one-on-one battles since an unarmed character can't block a shot from a weapon.

Las Sombras isn't quite the sprawling metropolis it's made out to be, it's more like a bunch of small sets that you can explore. There are only six different areas to explore and wander through which are neither expansive nor really open. There's barely enough room on the sidewalks for you and your compatriots which means that you or your friends are bound to be hit by the random cars that careen by at eighty miles per hour. Beatdown is strife with load times which you'll encounter virtually at every turn. Not only do these load times run a little long, but they also help to break the flow of the game.

The visuals help to give Las Sombras a gritty and dark feel, given its eternal night time. Environments and textures aren't anything impressive and are usually pretty blurry. Outdoor environments lack any kind of detail like simple traffic lights and fire hydrants and indoor environments fare worse and lack any detail at all, save for the two bars you'll visit.

The game's characters all look good and show signs of battle damage on their faces after tough fights, which is a plus. They are also well animated during fights while performing moves, getting knocked down, and countering with seamless animations that go with the fast paced action and help to make your button mashing a little more stylish.

Each section of the game has its own hip-hop influenced soundtrack to go with it. While they're pretty catchy while you're playing, they're hardly memorable. There is some spoken dialog in the game, but it's mostly saved for pivotal points and cut scenes. Strong language is the order of the day with any of the spoken dialog and you're sure to get one curse word for every three to four words spoken. A lot of it sounds like it was just thrown in for shock value and really doesn't fit. Pedestrians and allies all speak via printed text that actually has a few misspellings and typos, which is a first for me outside of bad translation. If you don't believe me, take a look at the tutorial for the pickpocket side mission. Your character and allies all have a couple victory lines that they say at the end of fights which can get tiring after an hour of play.

To classic gaming fans, the brawler has been a sorely missed genre and it's good that Capcom attempted to release a game that puts a new and updated spin on it. It just falls short on just about every level, but Beatdown can turn out to be an enjoyable experience for some. You'll just have to rent it first to see. Sure, the developers could have done a better job, but then again, NARC showed us that they could have done far worse.

Comedic Review: kirkover – Big Rigs: Over the Road Racing

"Disastrous"

1.0 - Abysmal

Gameplay	1	Difficulty: Very Easy
Graphics	1	Learning Curve: 0 to 30 Minutes
Sound	1	Time Spent: 10 Hours or Less
Value	1	
Tilt	1	

Big Rigs is a disgrace to what we call gaming, and can't be called anything other than pure garbage.

You see, there is a fine line between what is considered a game, and what is not considered a game. Well, despite the fact that Big Rigs: Over the Road Racing is meant to be considered a game, the developers did not even take the time to develop a game that is in any way enjoyable, nor a game that even functions properly. When you find a game that is so bad, that it can not be comprehended by the average human mind, you know that you have come across a game that has crossed that line. Big Rigs is that game. Big Rigs, is pure garbage.

Big Rigs is an epic truck racing game, were you push your truck-driving skills to the limit. Alas, despite the fact that this is what the game claims itself to be, it is quite the contrary. Big Rigs has absolutely no redeeming qualities, and can not be considered a real game. The reason being that Big Rigs is broken. It seems as if the developers put forth absolutely no effort into this game, and released it when it was far from complete. This is pretty obvious, considering the uncountable number of glitches in Big Rigs.

The objective of Big Rigs is to cross different trucking routes and deliver cargo before the competition does it first. But, once again, some things aren't always what they are said to be, so let me relieve you of these terrible lies. There is no significant mission in Big Rigs. There is no cargo to be delivered. In fact, there is no apparent goal in Big Rigs, other than forcing you into a state of fear of what type of horror may be bestowed upon you if you were to play it any longer. Simply put, do not play this game.

Now, while most games don't, some games immerse you in a wonderful world, full of incredible sights, breath-taking monuments, and stellar visuals. While Big Rigs' visuals are parallel to the visuals of any other game, that does not necessarily mean a good thing. Big Rigs has some of the worst visuals to hit the PC, no, anything of this current generation of gaming. The trucks in Big Rigs look incredibly abysmal, and have absolutely no detail. Due to this, they look nothing like trucks. The trucks can be described as just plain ugly at the word's best use. The same goes for the environment, as they look more like barren wastelands than the lush, green fields they are meant to look like. And it only gets worse from there. Big Rigs is chocked full of bugs and glitches, thus, it only makes the graphics look worse than they already are, if that is even possible. Parts of the environment dissapear, the game may freeze up, and it is even possible for part of your truck to dissapear. Big Rigs is one of the only games to ever look this bad. Once again, when playing Big Rigs, the word "garbage" comes to mind.

Ah yes, but the races must be pretty good, eh? Big Rigs must have some pretty good artificial intelligence, right? Wrong! In fact, there is not a trace of AI to be found in Big Rigs. Big rigs is meant to be a "racing" game, therefore, there should be a computer controlled opponent to race against. Alas, there isn't. When you enter a race, you see an opposing trucker at the starting line, but when the race actually starts, you will notice that the opposing trucker does not move. The reason for this is that there is no AI, despite the fact that this is considered a race. Oh, but thats not what a real trucker would say, is it? A real trucker would enjoying winning every single race, and hearing the super special, yet grammaticly wrong phrase "You're Winner!", now wouldn't they? Well, maybe in this incredibly mediocre excuse for a video game, but surely not in reality.

Now, just like in all racing games, you may be driving, and look ahead, and find an obstacle blocking your path. But in Big Rigs, there are no worries about any obstacle that may block your path, when you can merely defy the laws of physics, and drive right through them! Yes, any obstacle that blocks your path can be driven through. Houses, trees, walls, bridges, you name it, and you can drive through it. This extremely bad glitch only goes to show that the developers put forth no effort in the creation of Big Rigs, and that Big Rigs was not complete before it was released. Now, I don't know what kind of gamer would like the fact that you can drive through obstacles, but I know I don't. Even worse, it is possible to drive straight up the boundaries of the course that you are on, and drift off into a world of absolutely nothing, if you can understand that.

Now, maybe you could listen to the sounds of the pleasent environment around you to soothe your anger. Oh wait, thats right, Big Rigs has no sound whatsoever. There are absolutely no sound effects in Big Rigs, unless you count one music track that dosen't even usually play. Because of this, you can't be distracted from the utter terror of Big Rigs as you wonder why anyone would create such a horrible game.

Simply put, there are no reasons to buy Big Rigs. You will feel ashamed of yourself for spending any amount of money on this worthless piece of garbage, and possibly encouraging the developers to release another game as horrible as this. Big Rigs is completely broken, and looks terrible to boot. Anyone who would try to sell this would deserve a slap right in the face. To wrap it up, do not play Big Rigs at any time, any place, in no circumstance whatsoever, and feel glad that you saved yourself from playing Big Rigs, one of the worst games to ever be bestowed upon us gamers.

Comedic Review: m0zart – Custer’s Revenge

"Pretentious"

1.8 - Abysmal

Gameplay	2	Difficulty: Very Easy
Graphics	3	Learning Curve: 0 to 30 Minutes
Sound	3	Time Spent: 10 Hours or Less
Value	1	
Tilt	1	

The Battle of "Little Bighorn"

Large mountains, blue skies, and fluffy white clouds loom large against the yellow sands of the desert. An Indian teepee sits off in the distance, putting out a regular smoke signal. The sound of the American Cavalry's bugle plays loud, immediately followed by what is presented as an Indian battle tune more than common to the ear of any American television audience. War is looming on the horizon. A naked Indian maiden stands tied to a pole, faced with the daunting reality of an encroaching General Custer. Custer, prepared to take his revenge, rushes for the squaw. He braves arrows falling towards him, and random cacti sprouting out underneath him, all while wearing a cowboy hat, scarf, boots ... and nothing else.

Yes you read that correctly. No need to adjust your eyeballs. It's General Custer alright. He's naked, angry, and that long thing at his midriff isn't a gun! In a game that attempts to give "The Battle of Little Bighorn" new meaning, we are rather left with a mixed bag of hearty laughs, moral turpitude, and very little else.

The goal of this gem is to traverse your naked self from one side of the screen to the other, while avoiding the diagonally flinging arrows sent your way courtesy of the Sioux and Cheyenne Indian tribes, and reach the lady in waiting on the other side. At that point, you press the Atari joystick's fire button and, excuse the pun, "score". When arrows try to interrupt your attempts at pixelated coitus, you must guide Custer away for a moment, and move back in when the coast is clear. Every time you score 50 points, you are returned to the beginning to repeat the process, where things are sped up significantly. Getting hit by an arrow takes one of your lives, of which you initially get three, prompting the General to leap out of his boots in pain, and leaving once proud "little Custer" limp with fear.

This is, as far as I can tell, the first example of a pornographic video game in the history of the gaming industry. It also happens to be among the most politically incorrect games ever made. When it was released in 1982, It met sharp criticism from religious moralists, women's rights organizations, and Native American interest groups across the country. The reasons should be obvious. While the producers of the game, which also produced the popular erotic film series "Swedish Erotica", likely thought of this as nothing more than setting to joystick a quick and dirty storyline that might appear in any one of their many mass-produced "feature" films, it was immediately noted by the aforementioned outside interests that the game's depiction of sex was a little on the sadistic, non-consensual side, and it's depiction of Native Americans was perhaps just a tad bit racist as well.

It's hard to tell what the goals of the producers and developers actually were. The game tries to be explicit, but on a system like the Atari 2600, which was capable of so little graphical prowess, the detail is laughable. There are plenty of interesting sound effects, and corny music that any fan of cowboy westerns would recognize, but together they aren't up to even the already-low standards of a pornographic movie soundtrack. The subject matter is obviously offensive to some, and just plain comical to others. If they were attempting to portray any sense of eroticism in the then new and popular medium of the home video game console, they certainly missed the mark there. Whatever their goals were, what they accomplished is a certain notoriety that hasn't died in more than the two decades since. This title will live in infamy as the first video game to stir up one of the censorship storms that have become so common in the gaming industry. It's also easily one of the worst games that industry has ever put out (no pun intended).

Comedic Review: MrCHUPON – Mortal Kombat

"Disastrous"

1.0 - Abysmal

Gameplay	1	Difficulty: Hard Learning Curve: 4 or More Hours Time Spent: 10 Hours or Less
Graphics	1	
Sound	1	
Value	1	
Tilt	1	

I suffered through this tripe. So humor me. Let me be at peace with writing an inanely, insanely long pointless review.

[Note: This is a re-review. The original review I wrote three years ago does not do this game justice. Sit back, relax and enjoy the slough.]

It was a Wednesday night. I had Eduoard Lalo's Cello Concerto in D minor blaring from the stereo, while reading Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales on the couch. My pipe was running out of tobacco, and I got up to refill it when a single odd, disturbing thought ran amok in my head:

"O captain my captain, Mortal Kombat for the Gameboy really sucks."

Yes, this happens. Fairly frequently. No, not the Chaucer; I'm practically illiterate when it comes to great works of - well - literature. And no, I don't smoke anything but the disgusting second hand smoke that permeates New York City. Lastly I haven't heard that Lalo in a while - the fact that it was the last piece I was playing before I stopped practicing cello altogether makes me want to avoid reminding myself what a dolt I am for dropping things I was good at.

No, I speak about randomly thinking just how exceptionally horrid the Gameboy port of Mortal Kombat was.

You may be asking yourself, "Why does MrCHUPON find it necessary to revisit an old Gameboy relic that no one in their right mind should care about in this day and age?"

I counter: "Why did you click on this link?" Besides, whoever thought I was ever in my "right mind" is not in THEIR right mind.

But enough volleying of comments, especially since it looks like I'm talking to myself. Aesop's moral of this based-on-fact fable is this. I've gone through plenty of bad games for the sake of knowledge - Final Fantasy: Pystic Quest, Rayman BS, Entrail the Matrix and Bill Laimbeer's Combat Basket of Utter Crap to slander a few. It must be said plain and simple: the Gameboy port of Mortal Kombat was such an absolute massacre of a major intellectual property that its sheer ineptitude continues to reverberate in my head a full twelve years after I had the displeasure of suffering through it, and it clearly eclipses the rest of the tripe in the list I just mentioned by leaps and bounds.

Searching for a negative to begin with is like trying to step in horse manure in Central Park: hold your nose, spin around, and pick a pile. So let's start with the most obnoxious, obvious (but not nearly the worst) negative since it really doesn't matter at this point. As soon as you turn on the game, you're greeted with a choppy rendition of some random theme from Mortal Kombat that is synthesized so gratingly that you'd think parmesan was about to flutter out of the speaker holes in your Gameboy. Nevermind that half the music throughout each of the stages in the game sounds nothing - NOTHING AT ALL - like the source material from Midway's arcade original. Developer Probe managed to take such creative licenses with the music that listeners from afar might think you're playing China Kung Fu Gong Quest Fight. Or something of that nature. "Hey, this sounds Asian. Let's put it in!" "Otay." As an American-Asian, I am halfway offended.

So, the volume is turned down. That's all well and good, because you can't turn down the brightness lest you lose the ability to play a videogame. You can't play what you can't see, agreed? Well then, I ask you this. Would you want to play what you saw, if what you were trying to see was Mortal Kombat for the Gameboy? For your own sake, answer negatively. For with what some of the games that the spinach-colored 4-tone wonder could pull off (Killer Instinct and the Donkey Kong games actually looked really nice on the Gameboy screen), Mortal Kombat is a lost cause. The only background out of the available three that has any sort of lingering detail to it is Goro's Lair, which is laden with stone brick walls. Everything else is a gray sky with your characters atop a bridge in one case, and in front of a bunch of shiny orbs meant to look like bald heads in another.

Let's not get too into the characters, lest I blow a blood vessel in my eye. (Stewie Griffin did that once when he tried to force flatulation - and it wasn't pretty.) But I must talk about it a little to get the weight of this universe off my chest. My god, I never thought that a completely 2D game would have such horrid ghosting and frame-rate problems. Is this for real? Did "ghosting" and "frame-rate problems" even exist circa very early 1990s, on the Gameboy Spinach no less? Not only do characters have literally two frames of animation per action (idle, punching, kicking, jumping and being useless), but they animate at the speed of tripe, too. South Park has smoother animation than this game. What's worse is that you'd think my complaint about ghosting should be irrelevant because of the slowness of the animation. You thought wrong. It's as if Probe was ahead of its time - "Hey. Let's do this motion blur. I hear it'll be really hot in 12 years when consoles connect to the internet and have multi-core processors that overheat at launch." "Otay." It's so horrid that character sprites almost look as if they're in two adjacent places at once.

Brief tangent. Did you see Time Cop? The whole science about how any part of you can't be in the same place at the same time with an earlier version of yourself? Boy, in this game Kano would be dead before he hit the ground.

So the aesthetic presentation is basically shot. Gameplay over graphics, I say. Try dividing zero by zero, then - zero over zero equals? One of you math wizzes knows the answer, because I sure don't. If $X = Y$, then X/Y should be one. But if $Y = zero$, then a computer would return a divide by zero error (our feeble human minds only interpret this as "undefined"). But then, if $X = zero$, X over anything should equal zero. The confusion that you are experiencing right now is exactly the state the sorry gameplay will leave you in: dazed, confused, and drooling on your lap. Close your mouth, it's uncouth.

As is the damn gameplay. I have witnessed that it is possible to squeeze some semblance of Mortal Kombat's core gameplay into two buttons. It's called "The Game Gear version." Also known as, "The one you take to the bathroom instead of the Gameboy version." The Gameboy port fails miserably in this aspect as well. In many Gameboy action game ports (see "Man, Mega"), there's an unfortunate slight delay between

your button press and the actual action on the screen. In this game, it's not simple misfortune; you've basically broken nine mirrors in a previous life to deserve what you get here. Couple this with the exasperatingly slow animation of the graphics, and you get a punch that connects a full 1.5 seconds after you've pressed the B button.

Hmm, wait. It probably wouldn't connect. Nevermind.

The point is, don't even think about trying to do an uppercut. But that ain't the half of it. For some reason, Probe got creative here too. I don't recall roundhouse kicks EVER knocking an opponent back in the original Mortal Kombat arcade machine. Apparently in Probeworld, though, they do. The special moves, too, are all out of whack - possibly due again to the slow reaction time of the game. Scorpion's spear move - back, back, B - should be the easiest thing in the world to do. Yet, on the Gameboy you're required to have the timing of God I don't know what in order to pull that move off. You can't do it too fast, pretty fast, or fast. You can't do it slow, pretty slow, or too slow. You can't even try to replicate the timing you use in original game or the ports to other systems.

Oh, and did I mention that many of the input commands for the fatalities are COMPLETELY DIFFERENT? Because yeah, there was a good reason to change Scorpion's input from Up, Up, Block to Forward, Forward, Forward, Block. "Hey, Midway liked putting in secrets and changing moves with every new arcade revision. Let's do that in the Gameboy version!" "Otay."

Wait a second. I just remembered another sore spot that I didn't want to - the Fatalities. If you're not familiar with the liberal 1992's, when Mortal Kombat came out there was this whole hub-bub about the blood and death in this game. It was a hotly debated topic, the Hot Coffee of yesteryear if you will. Nintendo decided to completely censor out the blood for their ports. In the Super Nintendo version, it was replaced with sweat, the Fatalities were renamed Finishing Moves, and they weren't overly gory. They were still fatal, but for instance, Sub-Zero's spinal cord yank became him freezing you and then crushing you into ice cubes. Creative. A bit lame, but creative nonetheless.

In the Gameboy version?

It's a SLIDING PUNCH.

WOOOOOOOOSH. *Thud* *collapse*

Here's another example. In the SNES version, instead of ripping out your heart, Kano simply punches clear through your sternum. Not creative, and pretty lame. But at least it looks like the old arcade animation, even if there is no blood, no beating heart, and no Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom chanting.

In the Gameboy version?

It's a SLIDING ROUNDHOUSE.

WOOOOOOOOSH. *Pirouette* *Thud* *Collapse*

I'm a consultant in real life. I get staffed on different projects for the clients of our corporation. I'm going somewhere with this. My past two roles have been testing roles; the first, a mere tester, and the second, a test team lead. We had rigorous testing schedules that required us to make sure we're delivering a quality product. I made damned sure my peons were testing the product as much as possible. Granted, it was for a multinational corporation that was getting paid lots of money by the client to deliver this product, but I'd imagine testing of any sort should be rigorous and thorough. It's called Quality Assurance.

So I wonder how and why Probe and publisher Acclaim decided to eliminate the "-urance" suffix of that important second word.

Did they have it out for Nintendo?

Did they hate portables whose colour palette was spinach1, spinach 2, green, and black?

Did I just dump my clumsy American roots and spell color with a "u"?

I think it's a foregone conclusion that, indeed, this entire review was pointless. You could have stopped right at the "O captain my captain" line and gotten everything you needed to from it - the purchase recommendation was made before I even began analyzing this piece of compost.

But I suffered through this game years ago, knowing that one day I would come to the aid of portable gamers old and young browsing the Used Games shelf for a novel, antique game to buy for fitty cents (oh dear God please stay away from Bulletproof too). See, I predicted - with a crystal ball - that I would advise you, my friends, my colleagues, my fellow gamers, to stay away from Mortal Kombat for the Gameboy, because we all know what a hotly anticipated title that would be in 2006.

I suffered through this tripe. So humor me. Let me be at peace with writing an inanelly, insanelly, and incoherently ridiculous and long pointless piece of prose about how Probe and Acclaim had forsaken Gameboy owners more than a decade ago. After all, the Genesis, Game Gear and PC versions - all of which Probe developed - turned out quite well all things considered. But Popeye's spinach machine would get no love. Aw, why you hatin'?

I'm going to close this review with the quality writing that this game deserves. so like i when i first played this game i was like yeah cool its moral kombat to play onthego but then i played it alot on a field trip on the bus and wow. lmao this game was like, you know it sucked, and i borrowed it a year later to see if it aged well with age and no it was still trash but i played it for hors anyway lol and rofl this game sucked so dnt by this gam omfg

I think my hairline's receding. Oy vey.

"Hey, you wanna promote hair loss in 24 year old men?"

"Otay."

Staff Review: MrCHUPON – Nintendogs: Chihuahua and Friends

"Mixed reactions"

8.3 – Great

Gameplay	9	Difficulty: Just Right Learning Curve: 0 to 30 Minutes Time Spent: 10 Hours or Less
Graphics	9	
Sound	9	
Value	6	
Tilt	8	

It's really like owning a puppy - then neglecting it after you start playing Advance Wars: Dual Strike.

To: jingle.kringle@north.pol
From: bornyesterday@lol.com

dear santa

i want a puppy can i pls have a puppy for xmas? thanks!

-BY

To: bornyesterday@lol.com
From: jingle.kringle@north.pol

Ho ho ho, B.Y.!

Merry Christmas. I've given you the means to raise your own puppy, in this little card no larger than a postage stamp. You'll notice that you can choose to raise one of many different types of puppies. Pick out which one you like. Pet him - he won't ever bite you - and cuddle him.

Soon you'll be able to name him - make sure you speak to him clearly so that he can hear you. You'll have to repeat his name so that he can understand you're calling out to him. Once you've done all that, he's yours to train and play with!

Enjoy, my child!

- K. Santa Claus

To: jingle.kringle@north.pol
From: bornyesterday@lol.com

dear santa

thx sooo much for teh dogs! i Went to the kennal and play with the dogs there. they let me pet them it was so cool. Each puppy came to me and wanted my attention. this one chiwawa he kept sniffing me south of the border a lot so I named him Comander Taco.

playing with taco is so easy. i just pet him and rub his stomach. and then pick a ball and i can throw it against the walls of the house and he goes crazy!

i want to say tho that i was able to teach him to sit. i just pointed down. and then after doing it three times he sat. I thought it be prety funny to tell him something else than "sit" so i told him to "w00t" and now every time i say "w00t" he sits. i think i can make him do tricks and then call the trick anything!

he keeps chaseing his tale around. i think i will call that trick "buttcrack". lolz!

also where can he poop. i've had him for three days in the house and he didn't poop. so now he's starting to sulk and look sick.

-BY

To: bornyesterday@lol.com
From: jingle.kringle@north.pol

My dear child,

Um. I'm overjoyed that you're having fun with your chihuahua! I would advise you, though, to not tell your dog "buttcrack" whenever you want him to chase his tail. Commander Taco should be treated with respect like any other member of the family.

Did you buy him food and water from the store? I understand that you might be short on money, so ask your parents for some, or buy him dry food and water. Just remember that once in awhile, if you pamper him with wet food and milk, Commander Taco will love you all the more.

Don't forget to walk him, either - he can't go potty in the house. Make sure you plan out a safe walking route for him on your map! It's very important that he goes to the bathroom outside, and also make sure to keep the route short in case your dog gets tired. Commander Taco will get stronger as he walks more and as you train him to catch a frisbee. That's his exercise. Don't forget that!

When you've grown comfortable with him, do enter him into some tournaments. It will win you some money which you can put towards buying nicer things for the little fella. Get enough money and you might even be able to go back to the kennel and get a second dog!

Enjoy,

- K. Santa Claus

To: jingle.kringle@north.pol
From: bornyesterday@lol.com

santa

soooo i enter my dog into a doggie show. they told me I had to chose obedience, obstacle course or frisbee throw. I chose the obedience becoss I tought him lots of tricks like "w00t" which meant sit, buttcrack and shake my hand. But when the anouncer told me to make him do something i coulnt do it at all. its like the dog was hard of hearig. I had to shout the comand over and over. Comander taco is sick maybe?

then so i put him in the frisbee thing. i threw it real far and he took so long to bring me back the frisbe, and he didn't even cach it! so i got no points. what to do

-BY

To: bornyesterday@lol.com
From: jingle.kringle@north.pol

My dear B.Y.,

Perhaps "w00t" is too hard for the dog to understand, especially under the pressure of competition. You should really re-train him to sit and use a more clear, distinctive word or words, like, "Please sit down!" The dogs may have trouble discerning words, you know. You must speak loud and clear at it. Also, to ensure your dog's health, you need to bathe it. You have been cleaning it, yes? If not, you'd better high-tail it to the store and get some shampoo. Wash those fleas out by putting lathering Taco up with the shampoo and then spraying him down with water. His coat will literally sparkle when you're done. You'll see!

As far as the frisbee goes, are you sure you spent enough time training Taco? You know, you can take him out to the park and get a feel for how far he can run to jump and catch a frisbee in his mouth. As you keep testing him, he absolutely will get stronger and more energetic. Just keep at it, and be patient! Everything takes practice. Also, make sure Taco has the opportunity to play with other dogs at that park.

Have you met any other friends with my special brand of puppies yet? If you're feeling nice, you can try exchanging gifts with them so their puppies can use them too. If you have nothing, don't fret. Taco will often seek out gifts and bring them back to you, which you can then re-gift to other dog owners later. Make sure it's not an Osterizer though. I've gotten plenty of returned Osterizers because they're always being re-gifted. My North Pole warehouse is full of them.

My dogs are special, so I have to ask. Have you gotten Taco to break-dance yet? It's an amazing trick that not just any dog can do.

Yours,

- K. Santa Claus

To: jingle.kringle@north.pol
From: bornyesterday@lol.com

Hi santa so i went on vacation for the past two weks and i left my dog at home. when I came back, he had fleas everywhere and didn't come to me at all. like he was mad at me. What to do!

-BY

To: bornyesterday@lol.com
From: jingle.kringle@north.pol

B.Y.,

I see you didn't think to leave Taco in a doggie hotel! Oh, my. The staff at the doggie hotel will treat him right whenever you have to leave him alone for awhile. For goodness sake, I can't believe I didn't mention this to you. I truly apologize!

Give him a good bath, feed him some wet food and milk, and then toss the tennis ball around a bit.

- K. Santa Claus

To: jingle.kringle@north.pol
From: bornyesterday@lol.com

hi santa

just update nmews

I left Taco alone for a while. he was in the house but i dnt feed him. also i dnt bath him or play with him either. i started playing videogames and kind of forgot about him. i had much fun with him for the last two months but then when i started playing the games i forgot to pay him attention.

last time i saw him was three weks ago. its like when i forogt to put him in the hotel he was mad at me and just sat on the ground.

now he's gone the cat ate him.

-BY

To: bornyesterday@lol.com
From: jingle.kringle@north.pol

B.Y.,

That is impossible! How can your cat eat your puppy? You need to be careful when telling stories. I certainly hope you don't lie about more important matters! You might end up on my naughty list for next year.

- K. Santa Claus

To: jingle.kringle@north.pol
From: bornyesterday@lol.com

wtf

i'm not lying. see the pic.

