

Game On!

8G SUNDAY, MAY 29, 2005

Editor David Blomquist can be reached at 313-223-4288 or gameon@freepress.com

WWW.FREEP.COM/GAMEON



GAME BITS
By Heather Newman

A twist of the wrist solves the puzzles in a new 'WarioWare' challenge



JIM SCHAEFER
FREE PRESS
GAME MASTER

I have a thing for "WarioWare" games. And the new "WarioWare: Twisted" for the Game Boy Advance continues the fresh, frantic fun of the 2003 original, which took a couple hundred of the weirdest, shortest games you've ever seen and threw them at you in five-second bursts.

The premise of this game series is to successfully complete as many of these quick little challenges as possible. The game turns odd tasks like ironing a shirt, slicing a pizza or picking a nose into frenetic entertainment. Complete one such puzzle and up pops another, followed by another, and so on, until you best the boss stage or run out of lives. Completing one set of micro-games opens up another level filled with more. The original "WarioWare" asked you to punch buttons quickly to meet these challenges. "WarioWare: Twisted" requires you to tilt the Game Boy left and right to make things happen, sort of like a marble rolling around a dinner plate, tilting allows for all sorts of weird new mini-games, many of which are controlled solely with this new ability.

This feat is accomplished with an odd-shaped game cartridge, which has a bulbous mutation on one end to house a gyro sensor that detects motion. You plug the cartridge into the GBA slot, then start tilting. The action translates crisply



"WARIOWARE: TWISTED"
★★★
out of four
Price: \$29.99
Player: 1
Web site: www.warioware.biz
Format: Game Boy Advance
Category: Puzzle
Rating: E (Everyone)

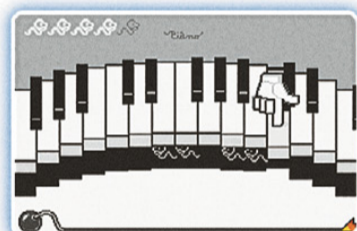
to the game screen, and the mutated cartridge also adds a rumble feature to the game. It's not a perfect feature. For one thing, the screen can be hard to see while you're flopping the machine back and forth. Also on the down side, after three "WarioWare" titles for Nintendo's year), the novelty of the quick games has dulled a wee bit for me.

But this is still some of the most creative gaming you'll find on Game Boy Advance. With more than 200 micro-games, "Twisted" can be fascinating. Plus, there are more than 130 souvenirs you can unlock by performing well. These are little things that are deliciously bizarre, like a kaleidoscope, a piano and a music box, all of which you control with the tilt feature.

This game also transcends age groups. My 11-year-old nephew, Sam, commandeered my GBA on a recent Sunday and darn near beat the whole game in a couple of hours. Don't worry, though: Even after you've played all the puzzles, you'll probably come back again to see how many you can string in a row.

This addition is what I like about "WarioWare: Twisted." I guess you could call it twisted love.

Contact **JIM SCHAEFER** at 313-223-5995 or games@freepress.com.



Free Press photo illustration by ED HAUJIN and PAT SEDLAR

European gadget maker seeks sales in the U.S.

LOS ANGELES — It can take the country by storm with its games. But can Take 2 Interactive, home of Rockstar Games and "Grand Theft Auto," win us over with its hardware accessories?

That's the question as its hardware company, Joytech, makes the leap across the pond. It's the leading maker of game accessories in Europe, but it has never sold much in the United States. Two products really caught my eye at the recent Electronic Entertainment Expo trade show: an 8-inch widescreen-style monitor designed to hook up to a PlayStation 2, and the AV Control Center 240, a slim stereo system component that easily organizes the inputs from all your gaming systems and DVD players and CD players and whatnot.

The monitor, which retails for \$150, was lovely, a solid black screen with a nice-quality display, designed to match the size of the newer, smaller PlayStation 2 and fold flat against the console when it's not in use. Total size when folded of both the monitor and the PS2: about that of a Stephen King hardcover.

The AV Control Center 240 include six component video plugs (for high-definition viewing), seven S-Video inputs, a pile of digital audio ports, a built-in computer hub for splitting your Internet connection between consoles or your TiVo, and a remote control for switching between different sources and sending them to your TV. It retails for about \$90, which sounds like a lot but actually works out to be a bargain for what you get.

See www.joytech.net for the full product line.



Joytech makes this 8-inch LCD Monitor for the PlayStation 2 console.

PSP stands are outstanding

All the usual accessories for Sony's PlayStation Portable — headphones, chargers and the like — were on display at the expo. Two products stood out, though, and both were stands.

Nyko's Theater Experience acts as a case for the PSP, recharging it as you play. But it also has an adjustable bracket to hold up the PSP at the angle you want, perfect for watching movies. And it has two built-in speakers, which actually sounded pretty darned decent.

It'll be available this summer for \$79.99. Check out www.nyko.com.

The other neat stand for the PSP was more oriented towards its role as a music player. Hip Gear's Stereo Station + suspends the PSP in midair above a heavy ring-shaped foot of speakers. It acts as a charger, puts the PSP (again, at a comfortable angle) up where you can cycle your songs quickly, and it folds flat for storage. The stand is on the market now and sells for about \$50. See www.hipgearproducts.com.

RECENT RELEASES



"PARIAH"
★★★
Groove Games for Xbox (also for Windows), \$49.99. Rating: M (Mature).

Finally, some familiar ground to battle on. The towering spires of earth sprouting from the ground to the north inspire some hide-and-seek thrills. A small watery inlet surrounded by hills and trees for cover offers gorgeous scenery for action. And a small passage hides a canyon behind the mountains to the south where I can find two vehicles and all the ammo I need.

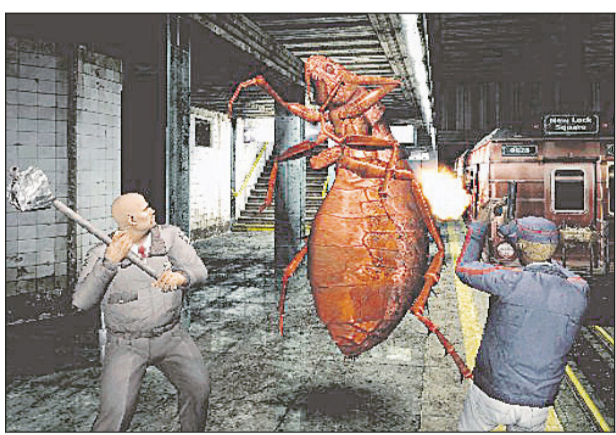
Yes, in this first-person shooter deathmatch I definitely have an advantage. That's because this rugged level — dubbed "Teeth to Spare" for its horde of gigantic spikes — was meticulously crafted by me.

The mapmaking feature is the coolest sthick this sci-fi shooter has to offer. While it's not the first game to offer this feature, this one seems the easiest to use. You can even share your creations with other players and battle on them via Xbox Live. (If you want to try out "Teeth to Spare" — it's my first attempt at mapmaking, so don't laugh — send me a friend request and you can download it; my gamertag is Huschka.) Unfortunately, the rest of the game isn't nearly as polished; "ordinary" is probably the best word to describe it.

The graphics are fairly detailed, although the frame rate occasionally stutters. The physics are a little sketchy in spots. The controls are easy to pick up (they're almost identical to "Halo"), yet targeting and vehicle control often gave me fits. The story — a tale of Dr. Jack Mason's attempt to transfer a prisoner infected with a mysterious virus across the planet's wastelands, which are filled with scavengers armed to the teeth — is more likely to keep you playing than shooting the often dumb-as-rocks thugs.

All told, this game is no pariah. But even with its map maker, co-op mode and upgradeable weapons, "Pariah" is too flawed to seriously compete with the Xbox's big-name shooters.

By Ryan Huschka, Detroit Free Press



"RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK: FILE #2"
★★★
Capcom for PlayStation 2, \$29.99. Rating: M (Mature).

If the gaming populace was clamoring for an online version of the classic "Resident Evil" horror series, this is not the answer. This attempt at team play is rather like the zombies you kill: relentlessly lumbering and numb. "File #2" brings together eight Raccoon City residents from previous "Resident Evil" games. They must work together to survive the release of a biological weapon that has turned the citizens into a zombie army. Each character has his or her own special abilities: Kevin, the cop, can do great damage with a gunshot; George, the doctor, can mix up herbs into medicines.

In single-player mode, you pick a main character, whom you control, and a couple of sidekicks, controlled by the computer. You pick from several scenarios to progress to the final objective. Online, you and up to three other players team up. Each mode shares a significant problem: team communication, the very reason for this game's existence. Going solo, you'll have to put up with the unresponsive computer AI. Online, you don't have the benefit of voice chat. Instead, you have to use your controller to issue canned one-line commands — very frustrating, given the complexity of some scenarios.

Further complicating things is the convoluted control scheme. Just to attack, you have to hold down the R1 or R2 button to get into an attack stance, then press X — not good if you need a hair-trigger reaction to survive a monster horde.

I can't fault the presentation: cinematic camera work, creepy backgrounds, spooky music, labored breathing — signature "Resident Evil" touches, all good. The sights and sounds are almost worth the tedious game-play.

Hard-core "Resident Evil" fans might consider renting "File #2." But for online thrills, I'd rather do "Halo," and for a real thrill, "Resident Evil 4" is much more worthwhile.

By Omari Gardner, Detroit Free Press



"DONKEY KONGA 2"
★★★
Nintendo for GameCube, \$49.99. Rating: T (Teen).

And now for something completely different: The "Donkey Konga" games are so unusual, compared to the typical role-playing games, shooters, races and sports simulations lining most gamers' shelves, that it may be worth picking up a copy just for its oddball appeal. The challenge here is to clap our hands and beat on plastic bongo drums along with pop music and colorful cartoon graphics that pour out of the TV set. In our couple of weeks of playing it, "Donkey Konga 2" proved to be the first game in quite a while that we were able to convince non-gamers to try. There's something so silly about it that it prompts almost anyone to laugh as they play with other people.

This second volume of "Donkey Konga" is essentially the same as the first, except that it has an entirely new musical score and some new mini-games. The songs come from many genres, and there's sure to be at least one that you've heard (though most of the game's 32 songs likely won't be your personal favorites). But ultimately the game is not about the music itself. Whether you like the songs becomes a moot point once you start going head-to-head in multiplayer mode. The intensity of the action focuses all your mental energy on properly timing the beat.

The game seems ideal for gatherings of friends, because it allows for multiple modes of competition. Your friends don't care for one style of play? Well, try another.

We found the single-player mode fun for a while. The main mode here let us earn coins that we later spent to purchase access to mini-games within the larger musical challenge. Occasionally, we could use our coins to pick up new electronic sounds for our bongos, but often these new sounds were more annoying than anything else. Perhaps that explains why, though the drums did have their allure, we found that we could take them only in small doses.

By David Crumm and Benjamin Crumm, 16, for the Detroit Free Press

Hardware hard to resist

Other cool hardware at the expo:

■ There were several new PCs and laptops that offer Intel's new Pentium D processors, which are rather like two computer chip brains in one. They're quite a bit more expensive than your standard Pentium line processors, but they can significantly up the speed of complex tasks like video editing, manipulation of 3D graphics and gaming. Dell and Alienware both announced new desktops PCs featuring them.

■ One of the coolest gaming-nerd collectibles before or at the show: Master Replicas' Darth Vader Force FX Lightsaber, a replica of the nasty red lightsaber Vader sports in the "Star Wars" movies.

Not only does it have the realistic red light encased in a plastic-and-glass tube, but it also has some very familiar sound effects triggered by motion as you wave the lightsaber or use it to whack on things. (Not recommended, according to the press materials, but irresistible.)

Pure quality like this doesn't come cheaply, folks: The lightsaber comes with a stand and sells for about \$120. But what price would you pay for the ability to turn on your saber with a satisfying "whoomph" and yell, "Luke, I am your father!" while you wave it in front of your bemused family? I thought as much.

Contact **HEATHER NEWMAN** at 313-223-3336 or newman@freepress.com. Find her gaming online as "Gbits."

NEW THIS WEEK

- Most-ordered games going on sale this week at Amazon.com, including title, platform and ESRB rating:
1. "E.R." Windows. Teen.
 2. "Digimon World 4," GameCube. Everyone.
 3. "Advent Rising," Xbox. Teen.
 4. "Digimon World 4," PlayStation 2. Everyone.
 5. "Digimon World 4," Xbox. Everyone.
- Source: Amazon.com Video Games Store