

Game On!

**GAME
BITS**

By Heather Newman

VIRTUAL GRIT


**JIM
SCHAEFER**
FREE
PRESS
GAME
MASTER

I've long had a soft spot for filmmaker Sergio Leone's 1960s spaghetti westerns that starred a young Clint Eastwood as the Man with No Name. So it's my pleasure to endorse a video game that pays homage in a slick, atmospheric way to the style of those old films, known as spaghetti westerns because they were produced in Italy.

"Red Dead Revolver" isn't the best-looking shooter game out there. But what it lacks in its slightly bulky characters and less-than-crisp details it gains in tone and impact.

The music is so evocative of the old Eastwood westerns that I had to check it out. Sure enough, the score in "Red Dead Revolver" employs licensed soundtrack music from that era, including an old piece from composer Ennio Morricone, who provided the haunting scores in Leone films like "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly."

You'll notice this before you even draw your six-shooter. The game begins with familiar, melodic whistling and tolling of a bell, which always gets me in the mood for gunslinging.

You are Red, the young son of a prospector who has returned from a long venture where he finally strikes it rich. But the reunion at the ranch is short. Pops sends you down the hill to practice with your first revolver, plinking bottles and pans until you hear a ruckus back up at the homestead. Bandits! There's a hellish flying of lead, and in the end you're the only family member still standing.

The game then cuts to years later. Your character is grown, and I'll be darned if Red doesn't look and sound a whole lot like Eastwood's squinty-eyed character. You set out as a



bounty hunter to avenge your Ma and Pa, collecting rewards as you send each bad guy to the big ranch in the sky.

There's training as you acquire better guns, rifles and other upgrades. Switching back and forth from gameplay to training was a bit clunky, but I made it work.

I found the targeting to be surprisingly simple and forgiving of minor aiming errors. You swirl the Xbox thumbsticks in conjunction to dodge screaming bullets and fire your own. Gun battles happen in places like wagon train camps and dusty little towns.

You'll also play the roles of several side characters, including a native American and a female ranch owner.

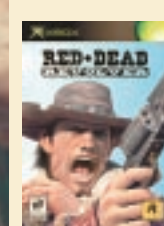
There are outrageous ricochets and occasional buzzing flies that mark any good spaghetti western, and the summaries at the end of each level are stamped onto paper in an old western-style typeface.

There's a multiplayer mode — alas, no online play though — that offers deathmatch-style options. During duels, you don't just pull and shoot. The Dead-eye function puts everything into slow motion, and you can target your opponent with up to six bullets. When you fire the gun, all the shots ring out in a hail of lead. Don't dally or your opponent will take you out first — and the Man With No Name never gets taken out first.

So brush up your skills. "Red Dead Revolver" will make you want to do Eastwood proud.

Contact **JIM SCHAEFER** at 313-222-5995 or games@freepress.com.

'RED DEAD REVOLVER'
CAPTURES THE ATMOSPHERE
OF A WESTERN FLICK


'Red Dead Revolver'

★★★

out of four

Price: \$49.99

Players: Up to 4

 Web site: www.rockstargames.com/reddeadrevolver

Format: Xbox (also available on PlayStation 2)

Category: Third-person shooter

Rating: M (Mature)

RECENT RELEASES


"WARIOWARE, INC.: MEGA PARTY GAMES"

 ★★★
Nintendo for GameCube, \$29.99. Rating: E (Everyone).

The "WarioWare" games are bizarre. There's just no getting around that.

Last year's well-received Game Boy Advance title offered an eccentric and zany collection of

microgames that had players doing everything from building robots to putting out fires to spiking volleyballs — all in the blink of an eye. If you hesitated, you lost, plain and simple.

To milk that winning formula further, the impish Wario is back at it stirring up some multiplayer mayhem on the GameCube.

"Mega Party Game\$" lives up to its billing. This

"WarioWare" title is a collection of mindlessly fun challenges built around the same intense microgames found in the Game Boy title.

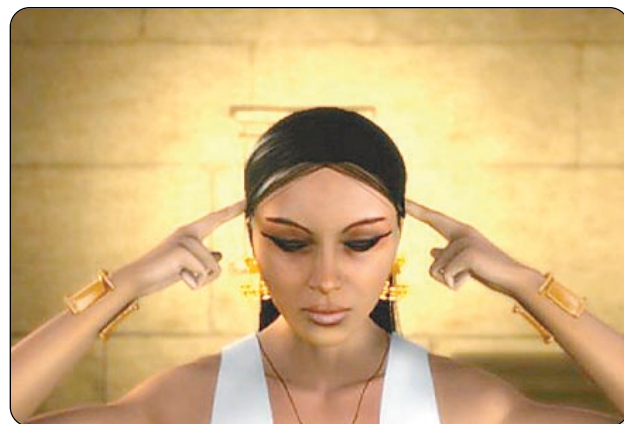
In "Listen to the Doctor," for example, you and three of your friends take turns performing a variety of oddball tasks — as directed by the Doc — while trying to complete a minigame (for instance, try to beat the "shake the dog's paw" microgame while keeping your hands on your cheeks). If you pull off the stunt, your buds applaud your efforts by pounding on their buttons. The player who gamers the most applause after a handful of rounds is the winner.

"Survival Fever" throws all of the players onto a virtual stage. When the spotlight stops on your character, it's your turn to flaunt your microgame prowess. Fail several times to beat the speedy tasks, and you're booted off the stage. The last person (or cat or dog — the characters are odd, too) standing wins.

"Mega Party Game\$" is stocked with oodles of similar variations, including a one-player mode very similar to the Game Boy original. While the game play is goofy fun, the visuals look a bit junky; these speedy challenges seem much better suited to the tiny GBA screen.

That said, keep in mind that this game retails for less than what its Game Boy cousin was peddled for when it hit store shelves last year. At that price, it's a steal — albeit a weird one.

By Ryan Huschka, Detroit Free Press


THE EGYPTIAN PROPHECY

★★★

The Adventure Company for Windows, \$19.99. Rating: E (Everyone).

Late one night, we explored the shadowy recesses of an ancient Egyptian mystic's cave. This mysterious woman had us left alone for awhile, and we had seized the opportunity to snoop around her

lair, when a deadly snake sprang at us. Suddenly, poison was coursing through our veins, and we realized that we had only a few minutes to remember the recipe for one of this woman's healing potions.

Soon we were rummaging through her heaps of baskets, boxes, jars and bottles to cook up a batch of salve. As we searched feverishly for the necessary ingredients, the images on our computer screen began to take on a reddish tinge. We weren't working fast enough. Our vision was fading. The venom was taking its toll. Suspense rose. An even darker crimson hue spread across the computer screen.

Then we died. The screen went dark.

In the universe of PC gaming, of course, death is temporary. "The Egyptian Prophecy" gave us multiple opportunities to spring back to life and try, time after time, to speed up our preparation of the life-saving medication.

If this challenge sounds intriguing, then you'll probably agree with us that this latest offering by the Adventure Company is well worth the investment. This is the same company that produces a popular series of PC-based Nancy Drew adventures and, as in those mysteries, there's a strong narrative here that draws players from scene to scene.

Along the way, the puzzles that unlock each new chapter are varied enough that each one feels fresh. In addition to the snake, other challenges include finding a hidden tunnel or exorcising an evil spirit in a secret chamber.

Best of all, the game does not require a high-end PC, but its graphics are impressive in depicting exotic characters in the pharaoh's court, eerie temples and sun-baked African landscapes.

By David Crumm and Benjamin Crumm, 15, for the Detroit Free Press


"ALIAS"

★★

Acclaim for Xbox (also for PS2), \$44.99. Rating: T (Teen).

All right, full disclosure: I'm a nut for "Alias," the cult she-spy TV show. I can explain in detail the teachings of the inventor-philosopher Milo Rambaldi and why they affect the CIA. I've seen every wig Jennifer Garner's ever worn.

The "Alias" game is a better-than-average treatment of a TV license, and the voice acting (with the real actors) and dialog are spot-on for the real thing. The graphics aren't bad — Sydney and Dixon are sometimes eerie in their resemblance to the real actors, though Jack and Sark are generally atrocious — and the story is true to the series, though somewhat more slow-moving. It was written by series creator J.J. Abrams.

But despite the respect shown to the series, I can't bring myself to love this game the way I love the TV show. It's an easy combination of pseudo-stealth, melee fighting and the occasional dead-simple puzzle. It's also short.

Fights are sometimes fun to watch because of Sydney's cool moves, but the controls feel completely random. There's quick attack and special attack buttons, and getting them to combo properly — and in the right direction — is a clumsy mess.

The camera will sometimes shift unpredictably as well during fights, which doesn't help. You can move the camera, but you're hardly going to want to deal with that in the middle of a battle.

The stealth bits are fairly easy. Most guards won't see you until you're on top of them, and stealth kills are some of the most rewarding moves in the game.

The story, while absolutely true to the show (at roughly the end of last year's season), is as convoluted as most "Alias" episodes, and there's no additional explanation of the back story for series beginners. This is one of the reasons why "Alias" has remained a cult hit on TV, and failing to allow for the idea of people new to the series isn't going to help sell the game, either.

If you're already a fan of the TV series, this is worth a rental just to participate in the story. If not, there are better choices.

By Heather Newman, Detroit Free Press

A room of your own in new wave of online games

First came just-in-time manufacturing, where parts arrive at the assembly line at the moment they're needed. Then came "have it your way" at the burger shop.

Now get ready for nooks and crannies of online games made specially to order for you.

One of the developments you'll see in online world games this year is the creation of dungeons, dens of high-level monsters and even cities that are individually constructed for each group of people or even single individuals.

They're called instances, and they're one way game designers are trying to ease the congestion that happens when online players converge on a game area that has high-level targets or something many people need to complete a quest.

Most of the new online world games shown last week at the video game industry's biggest trade show, the Electronic Entertainment Expo, included instances.

I've had the chance to experiment with them in "World of Warcraft," the online world game due out this summer from Blizzard that puts players in the role of characters based on the best-selling "Warcraft" strategy games.

"World of Warcraft" uses instances to limit certain dungeons to a single party of people. When you enter a dungeon instance in the game's beta test, you see only the other members of your group and the native plants, animals and people. There is no evidence that anyone else has been in the area, because to you, they haven't. Anyone else's group who enters the dungeon experiences the same thing, stepping into their own private world.

So what's it like? Oddly quiet. There are no lucky chances to run past monsters that someone else has killed for you, but on the other hand, there's no waiting around for a bad guy you need to respawn because someone else just killed him.

Gear on the horizon

The E3 trade show showed off the best of what's to come in the gaming market, including some downright interesting hardware and accessories.

As part of the hype surrounding Sony's PlayStation Portable (PSP) mobile gaming device, due sometime next year, Logitech has pledged that it'll launch the "widest range of products ever introduced by the company for a non-PC platform." Details on exactly what those accessories will be are sketchy.

While the PSP and Nintendo's DS dual-screen portable are snagging the headlines, another portable gaming gadget caught my eye this week: Eve, the mini gaming console that runs PC games, put out by a company called Ministry of Mobile Affairs. It's based on a PC processor and hardware, and you gotta give it design points for style — not to mention a nod for the vast catalog of PC games.

Release dates for all these products are flexible, and prices haven't been set.



The Eve gaming console promises to put PC games in the palm of your hand.

New sound accessory

If you play games on Xbox Live and choose to put the sound through the TV's speakers rather than listen in on the headset, you may be mocked as a new player by other gamers, since most people who don't have the headset are using the two-month free trial included with some games.

Nyko is attempting to put an end to the stigma for folks that just plain don't like playing with headphones. It's launching a new SpeakerCom, which combines a speaker and microphone into a doodad that plugs into the controller and the headset. It requires no batteries, and lets you talk and listen.

For console players, the Ultimate Game Chair (www.ultimategamechair.com) promises to be the gift for gamers who have everything. It's a high-end leather seat that includes surround sound, full-body game vibration, controllers — everything but the fridge for your pop. It's compatible with PS2, Xbox and GameCube.

Contact **HEATHER NEWMAN** at 313-223-3336 or neuman@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. "Mario vs. Donkey Kong." Game Boy Advance, Everyone.
 2. "Sonic Advance 3." Game Boy Advance, Everyone.
 3. "Bujinagai The Forsaken City." PlayStation 2, Teen.
 4. "Warlords Battlecry 3." Windows, Teen.
- Source: Amazon.com Video Games Store