

Reviews of recent video game releases

By Billy O'Keefe

**McClatchy-Tribune News Service
(MCT)**

"METROID PRIME 3: CORRUPTION"

For: Nintendo Wii

From: Retro Studios/Nintendo

ESRB Rating: Teen (animated blood, violence)

We knew the Wii's unique control setup was destined to deliver a first-person shooter that took shooters to another plane of immersion. Now, 10 months and many failed attempts later, we have proof.

Conceptually, "Metroid Prime 3: Corruption" mostly does what those failed attempts did. The analog stick on the nunchuck attachment moves Samus' feet, and the Wiimote allows her to look around, aim and turn. Holding the Z button allows her to lock into a viewpoint and strafe around it _ helpful against speedier enemies.

The difference lies in how expertly Retro Studios tuned these controls. It's hard to explain until you try it firsthand, but "Corruption's" controls just gel, particularly on the advanced sensitivity setting. The action moves fluidly, hit detection is spot-on, and the way Samus' arm cannon moves in time with your own arm movements bridges the immersion gap to an exceptional degree.

While the new controls easily are "Corruption's" biggest selling point, they don't turn the game into something it shouldn't be. An increased emphasis on combat is undeniable, but the game doesn't shirk on the grandiose puzzle challenges that made the first two games such classics. Platforming challenges are prevalent as ever, and one could argue that the two-dimensional sequences involving the morph ball play an even larger role in "Corruption" than in games prior.

Happily, "Corruption's" controls are up to the task in those instances as well.

Fittingly, things come to a head during "Corruption's" boss fights. List the 10 best gaming boss encounters of the last five years, and "Prime" games likely account for at least half of them. "Corruption" continues the tradition, fully utilizing the new shooting controls (and an awesome trick involving the nunchuck) in doing so.

On the same token, things that irked "Prime" gamers before are bound to irk them again. Backtracking through discovered areas, particularly if you overlooked energy and missile upgrades and need to find them in lieu of a pending boss battle, can be demoralizing. Ditto for yet another late-game fetch quest, which robs momentum from what otherwise is the most cinematic "Prime" storyline to date.

But "Corruption" is such a pleasure to play that these problems threaten but cannot possibly kill the deal. There's simply no game out there that can do what "Corruption" does, and that's the literal truth rather than some hyperbolic cliché. Fans of shooters should not miss it.

"WARHAWK"

For: Playstation 3 (\$60 on disc with Bluetooth headset, \$40 as a download from the Playstation Online Store)

From: Incognito/Sony

ESRB Rating: Teen (blood, mild language, violence)

In "Warhawk," as in life, sometimes it's best to know your role. Maybe you're destined to cruise the skies as an ace fighter pilot, but maybe you're not. Perhaps the tank is more your speed, or maybe you're better off just hoofing it on foot or manning the rocket turret.

Whatever your poison, the game gives you options, and it gives you some impressive and expansive battlegrounds in which to flex those options. Consequentially, the 32-player wars that erupt in "Warhawk" are fast, explosive and capable of hosting a ridiculous number of entirely human-made combat scenarios.

It's imperative to reiterate, before continuing, that "Warhawk" is strictly a multiplayer game. No single-player component exists, and the only real way to experience the game in its true glory is to take it online or pony up for an inhumanly expensive LAN setup. Sony makes no misconceptions about this on the packaging and in the PSN store, but it still bears repeating.

The multiplayer-only approach makes "Warhawk" a non-starter for some, but it doesn't really chip into the game's value for those who intended to play it this way all along. At least Incognito made sure to do online right, adding lots of community features and eliminating lag entirely.

That said, a little something to allow players to get acquainted with the game on their own terms would have been nice. "Warhawk" features no tutorial segments or bot matches, and the only way to become acclimated with the game's controls is to take on live competition. New players must immediately fight an uphill battle, and the hill will only steepen as veteran players widen the gap. If you want to excel, you'd best get in on the ground floor.

Fortunately, that's a worthy endeavor, because "Warhawk" is a blast with the right group. The on-foot controls are rather jarring _ they feel straight out of the "Quake II" days _ but the weapon selection and arcadey feel make them more fun than not. Ground vehicles move more like you'd expect, and the turrets are a riot considering their limited abilities.

Fittingly, the Warhawk jets are the main event: They're by far the hardest to master, controls-wise, but they're also the most fun to command once you do. The first time you successfully evade a heat-seeking rocket, you'll know you have arrived. From there, the fun grows exponentially.

"CARNIVAL GAMES"

For: Nintendo Wii

From: Cat Daddy/Global Star

ESRB Rating: Everyone

The Wii needs another mini-game collection like a cloud needs moisture, but "Carnival Games" stands out by at least bringing a concept to a crowded party. A collection of mini-games isn't exciting in its own right, but when those games emulate a trip to the carnival or the boardwalk, that's a little more interesting.

Fortunately, Cat Daddy gets it right more often than not. Some issues with presentation arise and some games miss the mark, but "Games" nonetheless emerges as an oddly fun and surprisingly comprehensive compilation of carnival-themed games.

If you have fond carnival memories, something here is bound to surprise you by mere presence alone. "Games" includes many usual suspects, including a dunk tank, skeeball, the duck shooting

gallery and the ring toss, but it also boasts such niche favorites as the frog leap, the horse races and nerves of steel. Success at these games awards you with prizes and tickets, which you can use to play arcade games like the love-o-meter and a claw game that's as cheap as the real deal.

More than not, the games are fun to play, especially with friends. "Games" doesn't quite capture the same level of intuition as, say, "Wii Sports," and there are instances in which you'll feel out of sync with your motions and what results on screen. But a little adjustment typically is all that's needed to overcome these issues when they arise. "Games" offers some stiff challenges _ as any good carnival would do _ but the game never feels difficult to the point of broken. Not every game will make you want to come back for seconds right away, but they do work as intended.

Aesthetically, "Games" is unspectacular but sufficient, ably capturing the look and sound of a carnival despite some awkward character designs. Navigating between games means bouncing between menus, which isn't as cool as being able to walk through a virtual carnival and discover different games that way. A create-a-character feature lets you design your own persona, but it's limited to the point of potential offense. Why only white faces?

Those gaffes aside, it's always good when the biggest issues lie in presentation and not gameplay, and that's definitely the case here. "Games" isn't the standout title of the year, month or week, but it's a fun party game that serves its purpose better than most probably assume it will.

(Billy O'Keefe writes video game and DVD reviews for McClatchy-Tribune News Service.)

© 2007, McClatchy-Tribune Information Services.