

Reviews of recent video game releases

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(MCT)**

'FISHING MASTER'

For: Nintendo Wii

From: Hudson/Konami

ESRB Rating: Everyone

Gamers who recall the fun ushered forth years ago by the Sega Dreamcast's Fishing Controller can't help but look at the Nintendo Wii and imagine the possibilities.

Finally, with "Fishing Master," those possibilities are trickling in. "Master" doesn't quite match the depth and immersion of Sega's fishing games, but it proves beyond all doubt that the Wii can do fishing every bit as well as that cool little controller once did.

Overall, "Master" is a mixed bag _ sometimes within the same space. Take the interface, for one: The fish, fishers and their pets all look nice, but the various fishing spots are pretty bland. The icon-based menu system _ where you can access events, the shop and information about fish, bait and locales _ is inspired in its design, but maneuvering through it is clumsier than it should be.

But while "Master" is dotted with lots of small design grievances, it gets the important stuff right. Imagine the Wiimote as your fishing pole and turn the nunchuck attachment sideways and imagine that as the reel, and you can pretty much picture what fishing in "Master" feels like, because the game has the motions down cold.

The key to success in "Master" _ beyond using the right bait to catch the right fish _ is your ability to toe the line between letting a fish escape and breaking your line. As you reel a fish in, a balance meter appears. Reel too hard, and your line snaps. Go soft, and the fish escapes. You'll employ other tactics whenever a fish jerks sideways, but maintaining this balance is paramount.

At first, it doesn't seem to work. And then, once you finally get it, "Master" seems entirely too easy. But while catching the smaller fish (and, occasionally, someone's trash) isn't too difficult, reeling in the big fish means winning a long, delicate battle that can end at any point of hesitation on your part. More than 100 fish swim in "Master's" waters, and catching the big ones makes for a fun, rewarding challenge.

"Master" offers some nice variety in its events and locales, even if they're all variants on the same gameplay. The core mechanics make it a great game to come back to every now and then. That's especially true if you bring friends: "Master's" four-player multiplayer is low on frills, but fighting for the same catch is good fun all the same.

'MYSIMS'

For: Nintendo Wii

From: EA

ESRB Rating: Everyone

Like many of its console counterparts, "MySims" is a "Sims" game more in name than anything else. But while most console "Sims" games resembled chore simulators more than the sociological sandboxes that made the PC games popular, "MySims" embarks in such a different direction as to be completely unrecognizable.

That may not be a bad thing. In fact, it might usher in a wholly new franchise whose best days still lie ahead.

The first, most jarring change in "MySims" is the look. Fans of "Animal Crossing" will recognize a lot _ perhaps too much _ of that game in this one, with everything from the characters to the trees sporting an exaggerated, cartoonish look. Nevertheless, it's a clean, visually pleasing style that makes lemonade out of the Wii's limited graphical horsepower.

But the real surprise with "MySims" is that it's not really a "Sims" game at all. You can customize your sim's look, but there's no need to worry about gainful employment, bathroom breaks or going hungry. You can make friends around town, but relationships never advance beyond the friend zone.

Rather, "MySims" pits you in the role as a builder _ of houses, furniture and more _ who must restore a run-down town back to respectability. Beyond the time you spend making friends and foraging "essences" _ "MySims"-speak for the ingredients in the items you build _ the bulk of "MySims" has you building away in your workroom.

Fortunately, this is where the game (mostly) shines.

"MySims" initially asks you to follow blueprints when building items for your neighbors, but it gives you plenty of freedom within those blueprints to get creative. Eventually, you'll receive free reign to build whatever you can dream up _ a creative liberty you can sample immediately when designing your dream house and workshop.

The building tool _ essentially a virtual Lego set with a lot of cool pieces _ is pretty slick, too. Placing pieces can prove tricky with the Wiimote, which isn't as precise as a mouse or stylus. But the only consequence of a misplaced piece is taking a few seconds to readjust, so it's not a particularly damaging problem.

In fact, "MySims" doesn't really do consequence, and that's its biggest problem. It's a fun toy, but gamers looking for any kind of challenge _ even by way of multiplayer integration _ are out of luck. Should there be a sequel, rectifying this is job one.

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

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