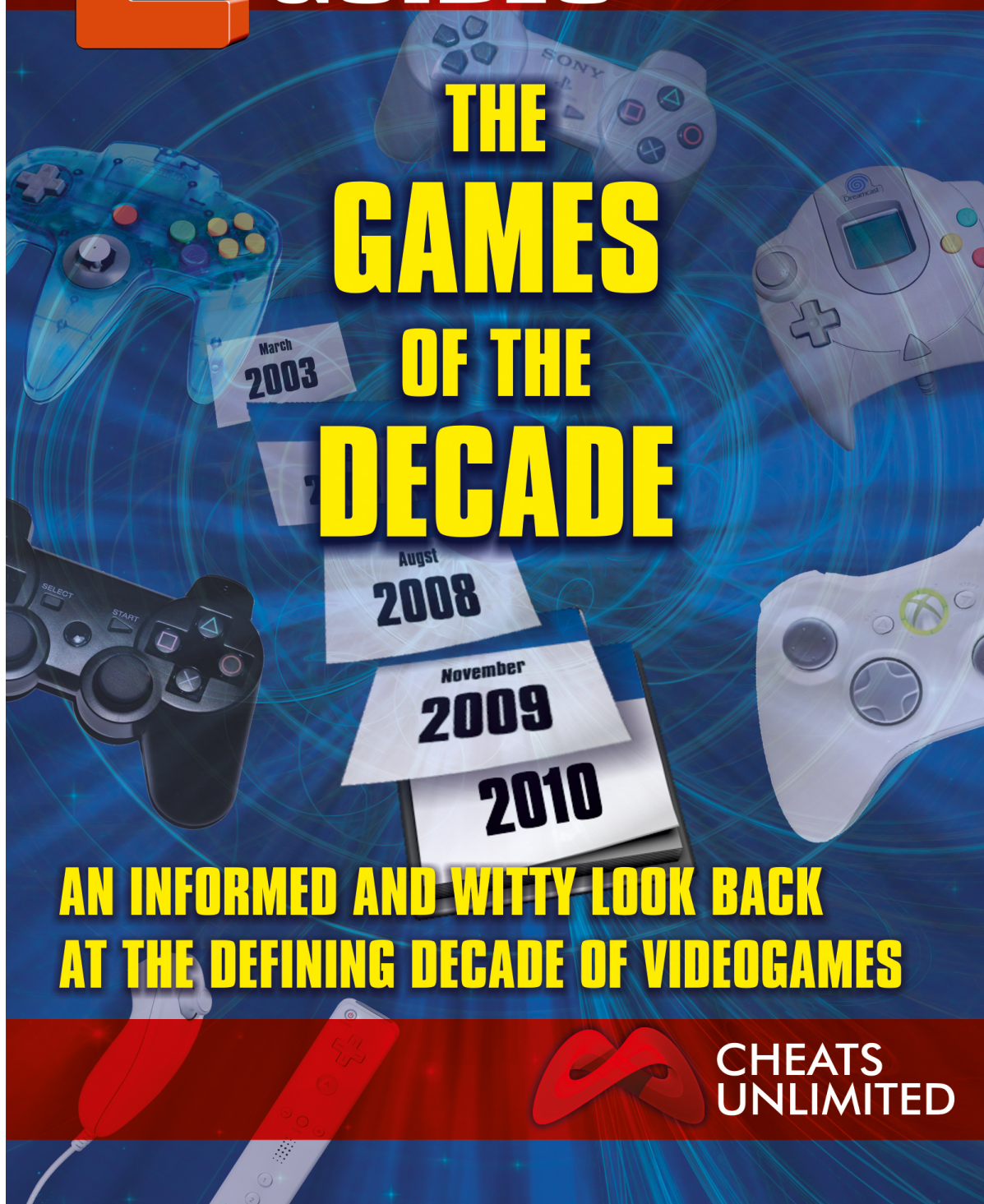




# THE GAMES OF THE DECADE



**AN INFORMED AND WITTY LOOK BACK  
AT THE DEFINING DECADE OF VIDEOGAMES**



**CHEATS  
UNLIMITED**

**EZ Guides**

# **The Games of the Decade**

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## **Rise Of The Machines**

### *From Pong to Today*

In the late 70's, everyone marvelled at a revolutionary new computer game that allowed a square ball to bounce between two rectangular blocks, in the style of table tennis. Simply called Pong, it had the equivalent impact of a new Zelda game released today.

Pong was the first computer game that took the world by storm. Some thought it nothing more than a fad that would be forgotten the following year - after all, computers were the size of fridges weren't they? Who would want one of those in their house? Well, the gaming arena is now a \$10 billion a year industry full of every kind of game you could wish for: games for little girls, games for 30-something men, gambling games, memory games for old people, violent games, funny games, memory games for old people, games about games. The list goes on. Every year the market gets bigger with more consoles, more powerful PCs and broader interactive possibilities via the internet.

In the 70's, the closest thing we had to the consoles of today was a pinball machine in the local arcade. These were coin operated and based on a mechanical system rather than anything electronic. Slowly, games like Pong (created by Atari in 1972) replaced old-fashioned pinball machines, but it would be another five years before such games would be available to play at home. Then, Atari sold nearly twenty thousand copies of Pong and it was the most popular game of its type. That is until Taito created Space Invaders in 1978 and sparked other companies to enter the fray. The same year Atari hit back with Asteroids and as the 70's became the 80's, colour games like Pac-Man became the next big thing, replacing the already stagnant black and white outer space Defender format.

Almost thirty years after its debut, Pac-Man remains one of the all-time favourites amongst gamers. It's still regularly played as a flash-game online, downloaded on mobile phones and the old arcade machines are prized collector's items (although The Guinness World Records maintain that Space Invaders is the highest ranking arcade game). Pac-Man was one of the main selling points for Atari when they released the first commercially viable gaming console in 1977: The Atari 2600.

Such was Atari's confidence of the 2600, that the rights to E.T. The Movie were snapped up and a game was rushed out to cash in on the film's success. But E.T. Ended up flopping so badly that hundreds of thousands of unsold units were buried in a landfill in New Mexico and it's widely considered one of the main reasons for the video game crash of 1983.

Two years later, Nintendo put gaming back in the green with the American release of the Nintendo Entertainment System, or NES for short. A wealth of games were available and these helped push Nintendo to the front of the console war, up until the Sega Mega Drive (aka the Genesis) arrived in 1990 and temporarily stole their thunder, thanks in part to a certain blue hedgehog in '91. But for five solid years, games like Donkey Kong, The Legend of Zelda, Wild Gunman, Mega Man and, perhaps most iconically, Super Mario Bros were the must-haves of the 80's.

It's worth noting that, apart from the light-gun controlled Wild Gunman, which dated rather quickly, all of these NES games remain strong selling names in the gaming world today. Donkey Kong Jet Race, The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess and Super Mario Galaxy being just a few of their most recent outings, showing that if a game is strong enough, its name will stay in the public consciousness for decades or more. Of course, this will be in part thanks to the nostalgic gamers who have followed the titles since their origin, but as the newer editions remain strong, they will naturally attract younger gamers that won't be largely familiar with their history.

The first home computers such as the 8-bit Sinclair ZX Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and the Commodore 64 were more like the PCs we know today, although they were clunky, had no Windows-style user-interface and apart from playing games the only other thing you could do on them was type (or write code to create your own games). While consoles like The Atari 2600 used cartridges, home computers ran games on floppy disks or separate cassette players. These were prone to glitches and god help you if you scratched or snapped the cassette tape itself. Sometimes, getting a tape game to load successfully felt like a triumph on par with, say, completing Oblivion nowadays. It often felt like it took as long as that too.

Consoles were relegated to 'fun', arcade-style games, while home computers attempted a slightly more cerebral approach, with things like flight simulation games. Alone in the Dark challenged the player to use their brain and help a character solve a mystery - something that hadn't really been done before, but today 'survival horror' is considered a standard genre (Resident Evil, Silent Hill and an updated AITD).

Advances in technology were being made each year, and it wasn't long before the first popular racing game, Pole Position, pioneered a rear-viewpoint driving style that was the benchmark for racing games, right up to the present (although these days you have a choice of several different viewpoints).

Since home computers lacked the focused graphics power of a console, interactive fiction games became more popular due to their reliability on text-based action (Snipes, Elite and Mystery House being prime examples). With time, typing controls gave way to point and click 3-D adventures like Maniac Mansion and Spasim which would inspire later exploratory classics like Doom. Real-time strategy games began in 1992 with the release of Dune II, in which the game was viewed from above, with a map running parallel. In games like this and Command & Conquer, you could explore in any direction and control your armies to conquer foes.

CD-ROM games were the laser-disc of their time. They didn't really catch on, but still managed to produce the odd success, such as Myst and Monkey Island. Meanwhile, in 1992 arcade beat 'em ups like Street Fighter and Mortal Kombat made public arcades temporarily cool again before being ported to indoor consoles. After that, the arcades largely died out, except for a resurgence in Japan in the late nineties/early noughties that incorporated the latest dancing and Guitar Hero style simulations, as well as old coin-op favourites.

In 1989 the Nintendo Game Boy made it possible to play games anywhere you liked and its trademark game Tetris was a massive hit. Other companies tried to follow with things like the Atari Lynx and the Sega Game Gear but these handhelds were chunkier and more expensive, with colour graphics proving a drain on battery life in the days before rechargeable hand-helds. The Game Boy was black and white until the Game Boy Colour arrived in 1998, followed up by the Game Boy Advance in 2001.

With the release of 16-bit consoles like the Mega Drive, Nintendo stepped up to the plate and replaced the NES with the SNES(Super Nintendo Entertainment System) in 1991. This is where the ball really got rolling, and competition was high. Atari released the 64-bit Jaguar system in the fall of 1993, but this proved too expensive, especially when people knew that the household names, Nintendo and Sega would soon follow. Within a year Sega released the Saturn, while Sony also made a sudden but hugely successful debut on the console scene with the Playstation. This and its brother the Playstation 2 would go on to be the best-selling consoles of the last decade.

The N64 by Nintendo followed in 1996 and held some impressive 64-bit gaming titles: Goldeneye, Super Mario 64 and The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time. However, it was held back somewhat by Nintendo's decision to stick with the cartridge format, instead of moving to CD-based games. The Sega Dreamcast (the first 128-bit console) and Nintendo's next effort, the Gamecube stumbled from a lack of cross-over games, and they were aimed at a younger audience rather than the diehard gamer, who could find epics like Final Fantasy VII on the Playstation. Both still retain cult-like followings, however.

Seeing the runaway success that Sony had with the Playstation, Microsoft got in on the action with the X-Box in 2001 (2002 in Europe), using strong PC technology to create more powerful games. It's follow-up, the X-Box 360, was released in 2005 and capable of connecting to the internet for hi-def online gaming and playing DVDs. It would match up against the formidable Playstation 3 from Sony. It seemed as though Nintendo were being handed their hat and coat before they then released a unique gaming console that allowed players to control the action by spacial movement of their controllers. Though less powerful than the PS3 or 360, the interactive possibilities of the Wii saw sales rocket from its release in late 2006 through to 2007.

The Wii had the advantage of taking the same games from other platforms and converting the controls into their own style, so you could aim your gun for Call of Duty 3, shake it to get rid of groping zombies on Resident Evil 4 and flick it to score a goal in Super Mario Charged Football. The potential not just for teenage boys, but for the whole family was simply huge. Fans of classic games were also drawn in by the Virtual Console, which allowed owners to download classic games from old console (Nintendo or otherwise) to their machine. The Nintendo DS also offered a wide range of hand-held brainteasers that have single-handedly cornered the market. Even games that once required the power of a weighty console can now easily fit in your pocket, Mario 64 being a prime example.

As 2008 draws to a close, the gaming industry is still expanding. New technology and new consoles appear every year, more powerful and less expensive than their replacements. Yet,

for all the online multi-player games, and the improved graphics processors giving us more lifelike environments, it's telling that sometimes the simplest games remain the most popular.

Fan-sites are dedicated to the games that started it all: Donkey Kong, Mario, Dizzy The Egg, Tetris, Pac-Man...The list goes on. They swamp the wanted lists on download sites, are used as avatars in chat-rooms and adorn retro T-shirts. Go anywhere in the world and chances are most of the people you talk to will recognise Pac-Man. ALL of them will know Mario. So why in a modern gaming world where anything is possible do we still play the classics? Games with bad sound, basic design and repetitive levels?

Maybe because a good game defies the platform its released on. It's either addictive or it's not. Or maybe it's simply a case of the original being the best. In twenty years will the youth of today be wearing Resident Evil 4 T-shirts and downloading old Sims games to marvel at the archaic graphics? Only time will tell which of the current generation hi-def games will have a nostalgic pull for the children of the noughties the way we regard Pac-Man. But there's a good chance the names Mario, Zelda and Sonic will still be among them.

## **A Gaming Retrospective**

*2000 - 2009*

A lot has happened in the space of a single decade of gaming.

The Y2K bug fizzled into nothing as the PS2 raised itself like a mighty behemoth above the cowering Dreamcast, roaring life into the DVD age and bringing an air of maturity to the Playstation generation. The PC market floundered and Microsoft struggled to become a force in home console gaming, while Nintendo reversed its fortunes to once again rule the roost.

Out of everything that has happened over the last decade, of all the business changes, development breakthroughs and, most importantly of them all, the games, what has been the most important year for gaming since the turn of the century?

2008 was certainly a great year for gaming, even if it did end on a bittersweet note, with many a ruined Christmas thanks to the ruination wrought by Moneygibbon. With so many 2009 releases dropping like flies at the moment, we might not have another year like 2008 for a while, but at least we have it to thank for the massive growth of downloadable content and games, the continued rise of casual gaming's importance and the 360's New Xbox Experience, the first time a console has received a massive software and firmware retrofit.

It was also a fantastic year for sequels, with so many high profile follow-ups storming the charts; Devil May Cry 4 brought Dante to the next-gen and Ninja Gaiden II redefined the meaning of 'difficult'. Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots ended the Solid Snake era, while Gears of War 2 took the fight against the Locust to a new level, Fable II gave gamers more moral choices than ever before and Saints Row 2 provided a much cheerier alternative to the grim, broken American dream of Grand Theft Auto IV.

If any year from the past decade has promised so much but delivered far less, it has to be 2003. Following the rampant, unrelenting success of the GameBoy Advance, Nintendo continued its march into handheld saturation with the SP, a clamshell-style reinvention of the GBA. Despite its much maligned front-lit lighting system and the lack of a normal headphone jack, its design and success would end up paving the way for the DS, which would finally seal the fate of the GBA and the GameBoy name. Does anyone even remember the GameBoy Micro?

The Xbox was fraught with problems from day one, from an overpriced launch, an oversized, unpopular controller and eventually some fire-hazard power cords, but Microsoft never gave up on its (almost literally) bulletproof black and green box. Xbox Live finally made its first strides in 2003, courting controversy over Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tides of War having its downloadable content allegedly on the disc, rather than downloadable. The service was also very slow in adopting subscribers to its broadband-only, monthly charge system. It didn't help that 2003 was a lean year for Xbox exclusives, with Panzer Dragoon Orta, Project Gotham Racing 2 and Amped 2 being the only real must-haves.



The GameCube had its last true hurrah in 2003, as the future for the mini multiplayer purple cube was sadly grim once 2004 set in. 2003 was its finest year, with two notable big name titles attracting people: The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker, the controversial-but-brilliant cel-shaded adventure for Link, and multiplayer mainstay Mario Kart: Double Dash. The little 'cube flourished, but its perception as a kid's console, lack of online features and dwindling numbers of games sealed its fate through the following year.

2001 is a definite front runner for the best 'noughty' year in gaming, simply because so much happened that shaped the whole industry for years to come. This was the year that Sega was finally squeezed out of the hardware market, announcing that the gaming hardcore's darling console, the Dreamcast, would be its swansong, although even to this day the internet is still abuzz with homebrew projects and unlicensed titles.

This was also the year that the GameCube and Xbox made their debuts in North America, but their releases would ultimately mean very little to Sony. PS2 sales started out strong, and continued to get stronger throughout 2001 thanks to a few key titles - perhaps you've heard of them. Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec during the summer, Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty later on in the year, and of course Grand Theft Auto 3. Although 2002's Vice City and 2004's San Andreas would go on to overshadow the game in terms of sales, the impact of GTA3 on gaming can never be understated. Any and every single free-roaming third-person shooter we play today be it Red Faction: Guerrilla, Saint's Row 2 or Crackdown, simply wouldn't be the same if Rockstar North hadn't pioneered its own unique mix of sandbox game-play, big budget storytelling and a great sense of humour.

2004 is a year infamous for being the true birth of PR overhype, thanks to the inescapable ilovebees.com alternative reality game (or ARG). This complicated, interactive storyline, although only tangentially linked to the Halo series, was a new and unique way of capturing people's imagination, alongside the usual marketing technique of drip-feeding videos, screenshots and information to drooling, desperate gamers itching for frags over the growing Xbox Live service. The Xbox had a golden year in 2004, despite increasing rumours Microsoft was already readying a replacement console.

Portable gaming received a shot in the arm during 2004, although the benefits of this boost weren't to be felt in Europe until 2005. Both the Nintendo DS and Sony PSP were revealed during 2004, promising to reinvigorate the handheld markets with differing approaches. The PSP, with its large widescreen, would be a multimedia powerhouse featuring video and audio playback via UMD and memory stick, alongside games playing on a system only slightly less powerful than a PS2. The DS would be the first indication of the direction Nintendo was to take with the Wii, offering a more 'hands on' approach with its touch-screen portable, giving it a more personal, approachable angle that has made the console such a hit with female and casual gamers. With the DS Lite's sleeker look and the launch of the Brain Age (aka Dr Kawashima's Brain Training) games, the DS found an even older audience willing to open up to gaming.

It was also the year that Half-Life 2 hit PCs, following a year-long delay due to German

hacker Axel Gembe cracking Valve Software's internal network and leaking the source code for the... Source engine. At the time of its release, Half-Life 2 marked the debut of Steam, Valve's proprietary game client that would eventually become the huge game store, community and game launching hub it now is, but it was far from plain sailing at first, following system bottlenecks, server downtime and the forced downloads of sizeable updates.

No year in the past decade has quite matched 2005 for sheer anticipation, though. This was the year that all of the current generation of home consoles were finally revealed to the public for the first time - although the Wii would still be the Revolution until 2006's E3, the Wii-mote was revealed for the first time at the Tokyo Game Show.

Microsoft kicked off the craziness by getting former hobbit Elijah Wood to unveil the Xbox 360 at a special MTV event before E3 '05, following months and months of speculation about a new Xbox. No one was quite expecting that Microsoft would stagger the world by revealing the console would be out before the end of the year, however. Only history will show whether it was a brave but stupid or a shrewd and successful strategy to release before the Playstation 3, but the dash to retail and lack of development time is likely to be remembered as the key cause behind the Red Ring of Death.

Sony retaliated a few days later at their pre-E3 conference, unveiling the suspiciously slim PS3 and the hilarious boomerang SixAxis, before showing the world the most controversial PS3 demonstration videos of all time. Claiming to be real in-game footage, videos for Killzone 2, Motorstorm and a Formula 1 game raised the ire of many gamers as the footage turned out to be pre-rendered, even if Killzone 2 eventually ended up getting pretty close.

Things got even better in 2006, with Microsoft desperate to eek out a lead over the PS3, which itself would eventually see a release in Japan and North America that November. The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion got the ball rolling for Microsoft, with a little help from Tom Clancy's GRAW, and the 360 spent the year building up as much strength as it could amid hardware shortages and rumours of hardware problems persisting into the new year. The PS2's dominance was clearly coming to an end during 2006, but Sony's stalwart had a strong run that carried on through to the PS3's first few months of life Europe.

Lara Croft finally returned to our lives in 2006, with Crystal Dynamics breathing life back into the Tomb Raider franchise with Legend, while a new legend was born in Marcus Fenix when Gears of War launched in November. The true stars of the year were Nintendo's Wii launch titles, such as the fantastic Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess, which sold with one in every four launch consoles, and Wii Sports, the most successful video game of all time. It helps that it was bundled with every console, mind.

Yet none of these can claim to be the best year in gaming this decade. They were good years, certainly, but most were no prize winners. Without a doubt, 2007 was the best year in gaming this decade. There were no major console announcements, E3 was a limp and floppy excuse for trade show, but 2007 was a fantastic year to be involved in the games industry, and a truly brilliant year to be a gamer.

The Playstation 3 launched in Europe to the sort of resounding chorus usually reserved for internet forums: 'meh'. The PS3 launch was far from a disaster, but it wasn't helped by the ludicrously high launch price and scenes of midnight openings attended by mere handfuls of gamers, rather than a street-spanning throng desperate to get their hands on the latest tech.

Just two months earlier, World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade broke all first-day records to become the fastest selling video game of all time, shifting 2.4 million copies in just one day. Wrath of the Lich King went on to break its record with 2.8 the following year, but at the time its impact was unprecedented, especially for an MMO expansion pack.

2007 also went down in history as the Summer of the Red Ring, with unprecedented numbers of 360s succumbing to the painful-sounding hardware failure, losing Microsoft a rumoured \$1 billion in repair bills and thousands upon thousands of fans. Yet it was also the year that the 360 fought back stronger than ever, thanks to a hardware reshuffle and one small, insignificant little game most people had never heard of. Halo 3.

In all seriousness, it was the biggest video game launch of all time, possibly the biggest 'event' launch of the year. It was an audacious, expensive, star-studded event which made the other entertainment industries look on nervously, truly fearful of the financial clout that video games were capable of generating. Microsoft created the biggest console game release of all time with Halo 3 on September 25th 2007, even though it didn't sell as fast as The Burning Crusade and the series is regarded as good, rather than great.

The Wii continued to steamroller its way into people's hearts, flying off the shelves all year long as Nintendo continually failed to match supply with demand. They made up for their shortages by Christmas, with the superb Super Mario Galaxy winning over everyone who played it, and introducing casual gamers to Mario and Sonic, teaming up for the first time at the Olympic Games.

Steam finally came into its own with the release of The Orange Box, the mega collection of Half-Life 2 and its episodes, Portal and Team Fortress 2, while Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare took the Activision series further than ever before, becoming one the biggest multiplayer games of all time. 2007 was also the year the Guitar Hero series finally hit the big time, while Rock Band (from the original developers of GH) made its US debut.

There were so many great games released during 2007, most people are only now finally getting around to finishing them: Crackdown, God of War 2, Bioshock, World in Conflict, Project Gotham Racing 4, Assassin's Creed, The Witcher, Uncharted: Drake's Fortune, Forza Motorsport 2, The Darkness, Metroid Prime 3, Stranglehold...the list of great games goes on and on.

So, what do you think has been the best year in gaming since 2000? Was 2007 a golden year for you too, or was maybe 2003 a glorious era for your gaming?

## **10 Years of Playstation 2**

### *A Decade Of Delights*

The past 10 years have brought up many things; changes in fashion, the decline of print and physical music media, and that confusing feeling you get whenever you see Pixie Lott on television - is she hot, or just one of those girls from school who was a complete bitch? One particularly important thing that it did bring us was the Playstation 2.

Released in October of 2000, the PS2 saw Sony's new-found dominance of the console scene step up a gear, and provided some of the most memorable moments in gaming. Here, our team looks back on several key games from the PS2 era, including some of their personal highlight moments for us all to remember. In alphabetical order:

#### **Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King**

I'm not usually one to enjoy a Square Enix RPG. In fact, turn based fighting as a whole tends to be a major no no for me, but with Dragon Quest I can make an exception. A major exception at that, as I have a special place in my gaming heart for Journey of the Cursed King, as it's delivered in a charming way, with appealing weapons and powers and a unique bunch of foes to kill.

After 30 hours of gripping story and awesome game play, and just when you think you're at the final boss, the game informs you that actually you're only 1/3 of the way through. Naturally that's a great thing as this is the type of game you never want to see end. In addition to the god knows how many hours, you also have the added bonus of the dragon trials and the arena. Add to this an alternate ending and this is a game that, actually, doesn't want itself to end either. The best RPG on the Playstation 2, and one that stands the trying test of time.

#### **Fahrenheit**

Fahrenheit has earned a place in this list purely due to its brave and intuitive game play. Until recently, the style adopted in this title was barely touched upon and this title almost single handedly created the gaming genre, Paranormal Thriller. What I remember most about Fahrenheit was the feeling I got when making crucial decisions that helped shape the entire end outcome of the storyline. This led to each individual experience being unique and personal. With Lucas Kane, I remember being horrified when hearing of a series of brutal murders - each carrying the familiar trait of normal people killing complete strangers in public places.

The switching from one character to another is another feature that sticks in the memory, as does the extensive use of all the available controls on the PS2 controller. I also remember getting slightly annoyed at points when my sequences didn't seem to be registering (of course we had to wait for the 'Ready' prompt!) but these being counteracted by the intense fight scenes. The genre defining content was a landmark in the PS2's illustrious life.

## **Final Fantasy X**

The 00's were not the best for the Final Fantasy series. In all we saw four releases, none a bigger letdown than the simply awful FFXII. However one shining light saved the franchise during this time and that came in the form of Final Fantasy X. The main memory I get when remembering X was the fresh and bright environment of Zanarkand. Wakka is the first character that automatically springs to mind with his lessons on Blitzball, triggering the feeling of utter incompetence as he strives to teach you the ways at first. I loved Blitzball and I remember being more satisfied after winning a match than I had done when fulfilling the title's other objectives.

Yuna also has a place in the mind, triggering the remembrance of getting all alpha-male and feeling the need to protect her at all times. Whilst nothing new came in terms of gameplay, it was a relief to see the series get back to an extensive and enjoyable plot line. Although this was interrupted on numerous occasions by being dragged into fights whilst exploring the huge map (was it me or did this happen more than usual in X?). Final Fantasy is easily the best in the series this millennium...so far!

## **The Getaway**

Time for a controversial choice now, as Sony's GTA-wannabe certainly divided opinions amongst PS2 gamers. Looking back, I'd like to think that a general compromise could be reached, along the lines of acceptance that the game's fully realised map of London was flat-out awesome, but the clunky game-play, dodgy stealth sections and lousy "cock-er-ney geezers" script let it down. While the idea that leaning up against a wall for a few moments was enough to cure gunshot wounds is thoroughly ridiculous in reality, it can't be denied that several other games have taken up the regenerating health path since then. The Getaway's legacy will ultimately be a case of what might have been, rather than what was - especially given that Part 3 is unlikely to ever see the light of day. The clear highlight of this one has to be driving down roads you know, backwards. Or at the very least, getting through those one of \*\*\*\*ing \*\*\*\*y \*\*\*\*hole stealth sections.

## **God of War**

Not to be confused with Gears of War (because quite frankly, save for two words in the title, they're nothing alike), God of War was the next generation of hack and slash adventuring, and the game many will claim was responsible for the influx of QTE sections in games (it was doing it long before Resi 4 chipped in). Kratos' adventure was balls-to-the-wall action sequences, mixed with precarious platform running and jumping, and the occasional puzzle to keep your mind active. An equally epic sequel followed, and in just a couple of weeks, the third game will give undecided gamers a further reason to lay down 250 8-legged aquatic creatures for a PS3. Highlights are many, but who can forget seemingly defeating the final boss, only to be thrown into another fight against multiple clones of yourself - followed by yet another boss fight afterwards?!?!

### **Gran Turismo 3**

GT3 was (and forever will be) the very first PS2 game that I bought, purchased on its release date along with the console itself, and boy did I ever invest some hours into that baby (admittedly, the only choice I had was that, FIFA 2001 and my PS1 back catalogue at the time). The detail on the vehicles was staggering at the time, the sheer level of competitions, cars and upgrades breathtaking, and the ability to win and drive Formula 1-style cars made this truly one for the ages as far as driving sims go. When you consider how much longer it's taken for Polyphony to make GT5 in comparison to the sublime 3, it does leave one wondering just how awesome it could possibly be. That being said, the engine was beginning to feel tired by the time GT4 rolled up to the start line (after a couple of over-priced spin-offs), so perhaps GT's time has now passed. My highlight for this one? Pulling into the pits during an endurance race and waking up 20 minutes later.

### **Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas**

When Grand Theft Auto almost single handedly created the term 'Sandbox' for gaming, the third main title created all sorts of bench marks. Vice City followed and then San Andreas came along and created an entirely new set of standards, some of which fans believe have still not been matched. One thing that I will always remember about San Andreas is the feel you get when being reacquainted with your family and home city. The mood created was terrific and the orange shaded skyline reminded you of those lazy summer evenings, only this time you had a gun and a thirst for revenge on the brain. Another memory that will live forever is the feeling of getting my very first tattoo in the game.

There was no reason for it, I only did it purely because I could. Gang Wars was another stand out element and the 'big and clever' feeling you got when you first own your own turf was awesome. The multiplayer mode added for rampages was yet another cool feature and I'll always remember that feeling of dread when your opponent finds that rocket launcher before you do. Never before has legging it as fast as possible entered my mind so quickly. This is why San Andreas is still seen as The Don of the Grand Theft Auto series amongst its fan base.

### **ICO**

Unless you are hardcore, there's a big chance that you've never played this gem before. If this is so, then you're missing out big time and should be ashamed of yourself. This action / adventure / platformer stands above any other with its sheer beauty and charm. As Ico, you must find a way out of the puzzled castle with the princess in your hand. It's true that partner characters generally suck and know how to ruin a game, but with this princess you really will care about her. It's a short game, but the clever puzzles, and extremely likeable character will send tears streaming down your face when the credits roll. Not something you should be admitting on the internet, but some games are worth the confession. ICO is one of them.

### **Manhunt**

In the PS2 era, following the success of GTA 3, having the Rockstar Games stamp on your front cover was often a guarantee of success, regardless of quality - State of Emergency, we're looking at you specifically. But that badge also usually came arm in arm with something else, controversy. Few games courted this more than Manhunt, though the worst would come long after the game's release, rather than before it. Ultimately, this mixture of shadowy stealth and all out shooting action was a decent enough affair with a few overly gory moments. Its use of dark locations, creepy masked enemies and (initially) restrictive weapons, make for a great atmosphere, one that spilled out of the game, leaving players incredibly wary of anyone sneaking up behind them for weeks afterwards. The highlight moment has to be either the tense showdown with super freak Pigsy, or finally getting revenge on Brian Cox's sinister director by chasing him down with a chainsaw.

### **Max Payne**

Having never really been a PC gamer, I was relieved when Max Payne came to the Playstation 2. Reviews and screenshots of the PC version were enough to make me want it and my decision was justified on first play through. It's dark, noir-style setting created an atmosphere that was unparalleled at the time of release and, when coupled with the black-hearted plot line, a game of pure quality was born. That was until the ridiculously frustrating Blood Trail sections kicked in and we got a first hand glimpse of life through the eyes of Max Payne. Not only was it difficult to see just what the hell was going on, the feeling of annoyance when falling to a grizzly fate was something that will live long in the memory of this title.

One stand out element, aside from the general, all empowering feel you got from controlling Max, was Bullet Time. With just the press of the L1 stick you were sent spiralling into a John Woo style slow motion scene where you were able to shoot your opponents accurately one by one. Sheer genius. We still look back on Max Payne with a great deal of fondness and we can only look forward to the third instalment.

### **Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence**

Raiden fan or not, there's no denying that Metal Gear Solid 2 was great, but it's the third instalment of the Solid saga that proved to be more memorable. Taking the role of Big Boss in a 1960's Soviet jungle proved to be a genius idea from series creator Hideo Kojima. Not only was it awesome to stand in the shoes of the big man, but the story and the setting proved to be the most fascinating yet. Using the jungle as your camouflage delivered tense game play making every sneak through the trees an exciting one.

The special edition, Subsistence, was the one to get. Not only did it contain a whole host of features, including multiplayer, it also gave you the option to switch to 3D camera. This option alone aided Metal Gear Solid 3 to be one of the best games on the Playstation 2. The one-on-one sniper battle against The End tested your patience and your stealth skill. Sneaking up behind him and ending the battle with a well placed bullet defines satisfaction and defines Metal Gear Solid, if you're awesome enough to pull it off. Even after all these years "I'm still in a dream, Snake Eater!"

## **Okami**

In Clover Studios short life span, they managed to develop a few outstanding games. None more so than Okami. On the surface it may seem like a Zelda rip off. The fact that you control a wolf could be seen as Twilights Princess's annoying bits. Not so. Even if it is a Zelda clone, Zelda is a great game to copy and lead developer Hideki Kamiya (Viewtiful Joe, Bayonetta) is the man to do it well.

Okami brings together great missions, awesome visuals and the type of game play that forces you to play on into the early hours. The Celestial Brush was more than enough to bring originality into the familiarity, as you had to paint your way through obstacles and enemies. The game was excellently brought over to the Wii, but it's the PS2 that started it, and although a DS sequel is in the works, if ever a game deserved a true console follow-up, it's Okami.

## **Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time**

It was a great day when Ubisoft announced they were bringing back the prince in full 3D glory. It was an ever better day when we realised that it was an awesome game. Ok, so the combat was as repetitive as a CD with dirt on it, but if you go into a platformer expecting top-notch action then you're bound to be disappointed. Much like Tomb Raider, Sands of Time keeps combat to a bare minimum and focuses on ridiculously hard platform puzzling. Just how we like out platformers. If you did make a silly mistake, however, which is normal, you could rewind time with the power of the sands and try again. As fun as the two PS2 sequels where, they never came close to the greatness of this one. Let's hope The Forgotten Sands stands hand in hand with this when it's released in the Summer.

## **Pro Evolution Soccer series**

While FIFA has always been the runaway winner in the sales charts, during the PS2 era, Pro Evolution Soccer was the must-have football game on a yearly basis. The early groundwork had been laid in the PS1 era with Konami's ISS Pro series, but the move into 128-bit territory, along with the change in name (distinguishing it from the lagging ISS brand) saw a six year period of unbreakable dominance on the pitch. Over the years, small subtle changes affected the way the game played, to the point that those who argued it was just more of the same were shocked by just how much things had changed when going back to the first title. For many, the peak of the series was Pro Evolution Soccer 4 - ironically the year before PES finally got its hands on the some juicy Premier League team licenses that it had been craving for so longer. Ultimately though, no matter which version you were playing, the game came into its own on booze-fuelled multiplayer nights with the lads. A personal highlight? Being near blind drunk and still able to defeat my two much more sober opponents.

## **Project Zero (Fatal Frame)**

Back in the day survival horror was all about guns and knives and deranged monsters. Along came Project Zero (Fatal Frame in the US) to change all that. Rather than put you in the



shoes of military trained special forces soldier against slow moving zombies, Project Zero shoves you in an abandoned haunted mansion as a vulnerable young girl. Your only defence against the many ghosts wanting to make you one of them: A camera.

Of course, it can be said that the action of the camera is the same as a gun: point and shoot, albeit a lot less on the 'hardcore' side. The idea is to inflict a fatal frame upon a ghost, which happens when they're up close and on the attack. The difference with Project Zero, and other survival horror titles, is that when you do release the shutter, the ghouls face is up close and personal with yours in first-person viewpoint. Not nice when the said face is the spiritual remains of a rotting Japanese man. Add to this a creepy location and lack of camera film and things become a whole lot more scarier.

Project Zero Spawned two excellent sequels, plus a fourth part which will never see the light of day in Europe or America (Keep your eyes peeled for the import review). Even to this day, the series stands shoulder to shoulder with Silent Hill as the scariest franchise to ever grace video game consoles.

## **Resident Evil 4**

Very early screenshots of Resident Evil 4 looked promising, albeit a little stale: Leon walking alone in the gloomy Umbrella facility, being chased down by a hooked shadow. It really looked as if Resident Evil had turned to Silent Hill and Project Zero for inspiration. This is not something that concerned me, as I'm a big fan of both, but Shinji Mikami had other ideas. He knew the current formula was running out of steam and canned this completely (Resi 1.5 all over again).

Back to the drawing board and many months later, Resident Evil was reinvented. Zombies: Scrapped. Static Camera: Scrapped. Umbrella: Scrapped. Survival Horror: Altered. New Setting: Check. New Story: Check. Action: Double check. The only downside to this awesome reinvention was the tacky story, which introduced ridiculous characters and OTT settings, but the game play was enough to justify the means.

Sure, Resident Evil 4 debuted on the Gamecube but the PS2 version came packed with enough extra content to make it just as relevant on the console. This included the Ada story, which pinpoints sections of the game from her point of view, in addition to several new weapons. I had no issues with buying the game a second time and playing it several times over.

## **Shadow of the Colossus**

The spiritual successor to Ico may not have taken the sales charts by storm, but this enchanting game deserves every piece of credit given to it. Fumito Ueda and his Team Ico colleagues managed to create a game that was so atmospheric and so beautiful that it can almost be considered an 'experience' and not a game at all.

The 16 colossi on your hit list each offered a unique and breathtaking challenge, from under water battles to fights in the sky, no two bouts were the same. Ico was a bit of a tear jerker

and Colossus bettered that. Even if you have a heart of stone, you'll be getting the tissues out by the end of this one, before starting over and doing it all again. Bring on The Last Guardian!

### **Silent Hill 2: Director's Cut**

If this article was celebrating the life of the Playstation 1 then I'd be singing the praises of the original Silent Hill, which is easily one of the freakiest games ever made. If you had told me back then that the next gen sequel would better that, I wouldn't have believed you. I would have been silly, because if ever a game is so freaky as well as so psychologically and emotionally draining it is Silent Hill 2.

Director's Cut (Platinum) extended the game play by including the Maria scenario, in which players could learn a lot more about her before her meeting with James in the main campaign. The short scenario could be completed in an hour or two, but it didn't stop it from being an eerie and revealing add on. Play it with the lights out and volume high and you'll forget you're even playing a game. To this day I class Silent Hill 2 as one of my all time favourites, even if the ending did make me want to slash my wrists.

### **The Simpsons: Hit and Run**

The PS2-era saw Simpsons games following Patty and Selma's advice by leeching off the popularity of other games. We saw clones of Crazy Taxi and Tony Hawk set in Springfield (and the less said about the latter, the better), but it was the attempt at doing GTA Simpson-style that proved to be the most successful, featuring in or around the PS2 Top 10 for around 3 years, and it was actually quite good to boot. Admittedly, you didn't get a full, free-roaming Springfield, rather a series of split up areas that you could walk around at will (with day and night versions) looking for missions and side quests. You never actually killed anyone either - even hitting someone with your car just made them bounce down the road. Still, despite that it possessed plenty of fun moments, and a great script, even if the dodgy 3D Simpsons characters in the cut-scenes looked a little weird. What better highlight than running around Springfield as Evil Homer, devil costume and all?

### **SingStar**

Let's face it, none of us really want to be accountants, shop workers, builders, plumbers or journalists - we all want to be rock stars. Ultimately though, we know that ship is never going to sail, so there are two options. The first is to go on the X-Factor and make a complete fool out of yourself ("oh please, Simon, please, please, Simon, you have to, it's my dream"), and the second - for those of us with a shred of sanity and dignity - is to play SingStar. From pop classics to stadium rock anthems, via 80s cheese of course, SingStar allowed you warble the hits and giving you that ever awesome highlight of pretending, if only for a few short minutes, that you were Simon Le Bon or Kylie. No prizes for guessing which one I was - I've still got the gold hotpants to prove it.

Of course Lara Croft made the list:

## **Tomb Raider: Anniversary**

Film remakes tend to suck, as they usually fail to capture the mood of the original. Not something that often happens with video games however. Fact: Resident Evil remake on Gamecube is much better than the original. Fact 2: Tomb Raider Anniversary on Playstation 2 is much better than the original. Why? They both manage to recreate the original while improving every aspect of it. Tomb Raider Anniversary brings triangular breasted Lara to the smooth graphics of modern day. Also, every area may be very familiar, but the puzzles have been improved to create the ultimate action platformer. Sure, the infamous meeting with T-Rex may not be as breathtaking as it was back in '96, but that's only because it was expected. It's still awesome to match the skills of Lara up against the king lizard and the challenging platforming puzzles. Fact 3: Lara Croft > Everyone else.

## **WWE Smackdown: Here Comes The Pain**

While there have been five Smackdown games released since this, the fifth in the series, long-term fans will still challenge anyone who dares claim that there was a better SD game than this particular one (although Smackdown vs Raw 2006 certainly runs it close). It boasted perhaps the best cross-over roster to date - this is the only game where you'll see Cena, Edge, Batista, Orton, Rock, Austin, HHH, Angle, Undertaker (twice), HBK, Nash, Jericho, Lesnar, Goldberg and some other Canadian guy all line-up together (Hulk Hogan and the Ultimate Warrior were removed due to contract disputes), a never-ending, brand-split season with fully integrated title belts and surprise trades, a new control system, and the debut of the Elimination Chamber match. Highlights? How about surviving the Chamber on the hardest difficulty setting, starting at number 1, or being able to have damn near the most star-studded Royal Rumble you could possibly image.

I'm sure you'll agree, this is one heck of a list. If you haven't already ticked these off your 'played' list, then you owe it to yourself and your ageing PS2 console to do so.

## The Games of the Decade

*Our picks from the genres*

How things can change in a decade. 10 years ago, GTA was a top down game, a Red Ring of Doom was a result of a dodgy curry, and you'd do a whole lot of jiggling and waving about *before* you had a Wii. It certainly can't be denied that the gaming industry has come on strong this past decade, as the "Playstation Generation" evolved and demanded more from its interactive entertainment. Now, as we arrive at 2010, the time has come to take a look back at the last 10 years of gaming, and determine what title stands out amongst the many we've seen.

Of course, it would be foolish to just grab one title from out of the air, so together our team sat down and discussed several of the most popular gaming genres, selecting stand-out games from amongst them, before finally making that all important decision as to what was the Game of the Decade.

### Action / Adventure

Choosing our favourite action game of the decade was no easy task. After all it's the genre that covers so many games, top quality games at that. So what actions and adventures has the last decade taken us on? Well, when it comes to adventure we can always rely on Lara Croft to deliver, well sort of. Lara began the year with **Tomb Raider Chronicles (2000)**, a game that was severely lacking in originality. By the time **Angel of Darkness (2003)** was released it seemed Lara really had died a poor unfortunate death. Of course a change of developer and some fresh ideas was all she needed. Tomb Raider re-discovered its form with **Legend (2006)** and the stand out best Tomb Raider of the decade **Anniversary (2007)**, a excellent remake of Lara's original adventure. We're hoping for bigger and better things for Lara's next decade, but we don't expect her to age much, and rightly so.

The decade also saw the 3D return of the 1989 Amiga classic the Prince of Persia, with his adventures with time manipulation. **Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time (2003)** was a fine mix of platform, action and adventure and even though it spawned two sequels, the first one was by far the best in the series and one of the best action / adventure games of the decade. We look forward to the next chapter in the Sands series in 2010 with **Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands**, we certainly haven't forgotten about them.

There's no point in talking about action / adventure if we're not going to talk Zelda. Not too many people were happy to hear that Link will be taking his adventure to the high seas, until they played it of course. **The Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker (2003)** turned out to be an outstanding adventure. The best high seas adventure of the decade on any console. Link returned again at the very end of the Gamecube's life (and the beginning of the Wii) for another mesmerising adventure in **Twilight Princess (2006)**, but I don't think anyone can deny the sheer quality of Wind Waker, whether you're a Zelda fan or not.

While it's worth mentioning that **Assassin's Creed 2 (2009)**, **God of War (2005)**, **Gears of War (2006)** and **BioShock (2007)** were all also excellent action / adventure titles, one game

stands out as being the best of the decade.

### **Shadow of the Colossus (2006)**

The spiritual successor to the equally as excellent **Ico (2002)** may not have taken the sales charts by storm, but this enchanting game deserves every piece of credit given to it. Fumito Ueda and his Team Ico colleagues managed to create a game that was so atmospheric and so beautiful that it can almost be considered an 'experience' and not a game at all. The objective is simple: There are 16 colossi inhabiting the world, slay them all and your girlfriend will be brought back to life. Each giant was different and taking them on caused tension that no other game managed to deliver. Ico was a bit of a tear jerker and Colossus bettered that. Even if you have a heart of stone, you'll be getting the tissues out at the end of this one. The best action / adventure game of the decade, or perhaps the best game ever made! If you haven't played it yet, find it, play it and see why it's the worthy winner.

## **Platform**

What a decade it has been for the platform genre. We've lost count of how many times the bar has been raised in terms of quality and you only have to look at what we were treated to in the year 2000 and compare it to what we have in 2009 for this to become apparent. One of the most recognisable characters to come from the genre has to be **Crash Bandicoot**. In all we have seen him in seven titles during the last decade, including his current gen leap with the release of **Crash Of The Titans (2007)**. Whilst on the subject of lovable critters we can't help but mention Spyro who has kept up with the times, most recently with Dawn Of The Dragon. Ratchet And Clank also deserve a mention with no fewer than nine adventures featuring the two being released this decade.

2005 saw the introduction of a new platformer with **Psychonauts**, a game that went on to win various awards, including the Best Original game Award at the 2006 E3 convention. **Kameo (2005)** was also a hit and followed later in the year. Whenever the subject of platform games is raised, one name is the first to come out of many a mouth. That's correct, Mario, the gaming icon kicked off his decade of console releases with **Super Mario Sunshine (2002)** for the Gamecube, and later made a triumphant return to 2D with **New Super Mario Bros (2006-09)** on DS and Wii. Bettering this title however was our Platform Game Of The Decade.

### **Super Mario Galaxy (2007)**

After a five year absence from our consoles, Mario came back with an intergalactic bang in Super Mario Galaxy, the little Italian's first venture on the Wii. It incorporated all the classical aspects we have come to expect from the legendary series but with a graphical and controlling upgrade. Set in outer space and with a familiar focus on star collecting, Galaxy utilised the Wii Remote and Nunchuck controls excellently providing a new, innovative and even more enjoyable Mario experience than any other we have experienced in recent times. Super Mario Galaxy stands head and shoulders above this decade's competition in the Platform genre in almost every department.

## Sandbox

When the year 2000 rolled around, the sandbox, or open world, genre was largely unheard of, but nowadays you can't move for the damn things. Of course, there's one clearly dominant franchise amongst the many games, which was Rockstar's Grand Theft Auto. It was **GTA 3 (2001)** that truly got the ball rolling, followed later on by **Vice City (2002)** and **San Andreas (2004)**. Several other pretenders to the throne emerged - the likes of **Saints Row (2006)**, **Mercenaries (2005)**, **Just Cause (2006)** and **True Crime: Streets of LA/New York (2003/05)** all spring to mind (not all of them good, mind you).

Superheroes like **Spider-Man (2004-08)** and **Superman (2006)** finally had the freedom to move around big cities instead of playing disjointed levels, and even the Holy Land and Renaissance Italy could be explored, courtesy of the Assassin's Creed games. Closer to home, Sony's GTA rival, The Getaway had us roaming the streets of London. Sadly, the attempts to move the Driver series into open-world play were often met with derision.

### Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (2004)

The biggest selling video game of all time, San Andreas took what GTA 3 and Vice City did, and stuck a great big magnifying glass over the top. 4 may have been the better looking title, but it lacked exciting things to do when the story was over (aside from the two DLC pieces, but those were technically separate games). When a save file clocks in with over 70 hours of play, and the 100% mark is nowhere near being reached, you've got an epic on your hands. Our recent "5 Years Later" review showed that while many other games in the genre have come and gone, San Andreas remains on top.

## Racing

A staple of gaming for many, many years, the racing game genre is one that has many cast members but only a select group of stars. The serious racers would find their joy in the likes of **Forza (2005-09)**, **Gran Turismo (2000-09)** or **Race Driver (2000-09, various evolutions)**, Rally fans would get their kicks with the **Colin McRae (2000-09)** series, despite his untimely passing, while those who didn't know a carburettor from a crank-shaft could still have an awesome night of fun playing **Mario Kart (2001, 03, 05 and 08)**.

Meanwhile, the long-running Test Drive series evolved into an open world, online racer with **Test Drive: Unlimited (2006)**. Those who spent more time smashing up their cars than driving them sensibly had an outlet with the **Burnout (2001-08)** franchise, which was snapped up by EA to sit alongside the briefly very popular, but always annual **Need for Speed** games.

### Forza 3 (2009)

Is the best racing game of the decade really one that's only been out a few months? Perhaps if Sony had pulled their fingers out and finished Gran Turismo 5 at some point in the last five

years then maybe it might not have been. As things stand, Forza 3 is pretty much the ultimate mixture of racing titles, featuring a wide selection of cars and tracks, races long and short, the return of point-to-point races from the first game in the franchise, both detailed and quick upgrading options depending on your motoring knowledge, fun customisation and online sharing modes, and even the ability to rewind time and correct mistakes, rather than having to restart the whole race (though they can thank Codemasters for that option).

## First-Person Shooter

The beginning of the decade and the beginning of the original Xbox saw the first-person shooter genre get off with a bang with **Halo: Combat Evolved (2001)**. Master Chief captured the minds of gamers worldwide spawning two sequels, further spin-offs and a massive online following. Halo was known as the best FPS and even **Killzone (2004)** tried and failed to beat its quality and popularity.

It probably wasn't until **Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare (2007)** that the new FPS popularity contest was taken away from the chief. There's no need to go into detail on how much **Modern Warfare 2 (2009)** captured the sales charts by storms, becoming the must own game of all time! Of course, that doesn't make it the best first-person shooter ever. No Sir, that goes to Valve's masterpiece...

### Half Life 2 (2004)

Forget Master Chief and modern warfare, it's all about Gordon Freeman and his battle against Black Mesa. Half Life 2 slowly draws you in by idly taking you through City 17 with very little action. Before you know it your shooting out against foes, hitting creatures with crowbars, and taking on War of the World style tripods. Whether it's stalking the night streets of Ravenholm or cruisin' Highway 17, this game is a master class of FPS from beginning to end. Modern Warfare could learn a thing or two about Half Life 2's structure and pacing and Halo can learn plenty from it's variety. The best FPS ever made hands down. The game even had two episodes to continue on the story. Both of which were equally as great as the main game. Now, can we have Half Life 2: Episode 3 please Valve?

## Sports

A category that caused much debate, and one that it can be very difficult to determine an overall winner from, especially given how one person's favourite sport is another's idea of torture. Across Europe, the **Pro Evolution Soccer** vs **FIFA** debate raged on, with both sides claiming superiority (though EA's effort remained No 1 in sales).

In the States, where they don't care much for the beautiful game, it was all about **NFL**, **NBA** and **MLB**, with EA and 2K Sports leading the way. If you liked to get extreme, the likes of **Tony Hawk** and chums took you on boards and bikes. Meanwhile, **Tiger Woods** liked playing a round. Of Golf.

### Wii Sports (2006)

A controversial choice? Maybe so, but there's good reason for it. Bundled with every Wii console, Wii Sports attracted not only people who might otherwise have ignored sports games, it attracted people who perhaps wouldn't even have taken a second glance at consoles full stop. Some "hardcore" gamers may resent that situation, but that's just tough luck. Multiplayer nights on Pro Evo may be a laugh for the lads, but getting 4 friends or family members together, wildly swinging their arms in Tennis, Boxing, Golf or Baseball, or flinging their arm at the TV in Bowling (while the owner of the Television watches on and winces) is hard to be beaten. In fact, it jolly well can't be.

## Fighting

In the fighting genre we've had series returns and continuity but there was a lack of 'new' titles which resulted in 10 years worth of familiar faces. The most recent of these came in **Tekken 6 (2009)** which was released earlier this year, following on from **Tag Tournament, 4, 5** and **Dark Resurrection (2000-06)**. Another household name to feature was Street Fighter which made appearances with its Vs series but most notably in **Street Fighter 4 (2009)** which was also released earlier this year. Wrestling games earned themselves high status with **WWE Smackdown (2000-03)**, which evolved into **WWE Smackdown vs Raw (2004-09)**, though the **Day of Reckoning (2004/05)** titles were also great. Less memorable grapplefests included **TNA Impact (2008)** and (shudder) **WCW Backstage Assault (2000)**.

**Virtua Fighter** has also featured heavily this decade with an incredible eight titles being released, most recently **Virtua Fighter 5 (2007)**. The **Dead Or Alive** series started the 00's on Playstation 2 and then jiggled its way to becoming an Xbox exclusive from 2001 onwards. **Soulcalibur (2003-08)** also demands an inclusion, despite the obvious tactic of using guest stars (Link, Yoda, etc) to garner extra interest. Characters are an important part of any fighting game and they do not come more varied than in our Fighting Game Of The Decade Winner.

### Super Smash Bros. Brawl (2008)

Although Street Fighter IV stands out, it's Nintendo's fighter that did it for us. Coming six years after Melee, Super Smash Bros. Brawl offers everything you could wish for in terms of the Fighting genre. As well as featuring some of the most recognisable characters from the world of gaming it also introduced online multiplayer to the series. SSBB retained the characters that made the series a great one and even added some new faces. For the first time we were able to battle it out with the likes of Snake from Metal Gear Solid, Mario and Sonic meaning we could finally put an end to the question of who would win in a fight between the fast footed one and his red hatted rival.

## Role Playing Game (RPG)

The RPG genre really breaks down into two sub-categories. On one hand you have the Japanese turn-based genre when a group or groups of combatants take turns in delivering an attack specified to suit the frailties of the enemy that is being faced. On the other there's the



Western real time strategy category, which involves the evolution of a character into a highly trained, well equipped individual who competes (sometimes) with the help of an assisting clan, in a world based on time that parallels that of the one we actually live in.

Now, we have had some fine examples of both this decade and one that falls into the latter category (and was for many 2008's Game Of The Year) is **Fallout 3**. One for the former is **Final Fantasy X** which was released in 2002, one year after IX but is the superior title within the series over the past 10 years. So far the FF series has reached Part XII, with XIII due out next year in the west.

**Dragon Quest** made three appearances during the 00's, starting with the seventh game of the franchise (then known as Dragon Warrior) at the turn of the century in 2000 . It took up its Dragon Quest name in 2004 with **Journey Of The Cursed King** for the Playstation 2, which is the most recent European instalment. Star Wars made an appearance in the RPG arena with **Knights Of The Old Republic 1** and **2** as did our famous plumbing duo, **Mario And Luigi in Superstar Saga, Partners In Time** and **Bowser's Inside Story** for the DS, plus **Paper Mario** on Gamecube. **Dragon Age: Origins** stormed onto the scene in 2009, released just last month, but unfortunately we can only have one RPG Game Of The Decade and here it is.

### **The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion**

Some might say that **Morrowind (2002)** was bigger and better, but we think **Oblivion (2005)** edges it. The moment you step out of the long windy dark prison and caves and into the daylight of Cyrodiil the (Oblivion) world is your oyster. Take on the main quest and free the world from the dark Prince Mehrunes Dagon's clutches, or ride your horse into the middle of nowhere and delve into the side quests. You can also join several guilds to become the best thief or the ultimate assassin. Oblivion draws you in and consumes your time, girlfriends and jobs mean nothing when this is in the console. Pure gaming bliss.

## **Music**

This was the decade when music games came to the mainstream, regardless of whether Nickelback liked it or not. The likes of **Dance Dance Revolution** (aka **Dancing Stage**) and other music-based titles crept out from the Japanese arcades and into our living rooms (via crumpled dance mats and other plastic peripherals). Games like **Frequency (2001)** and **Amplitude (2003)** from Harmonix didn't quite make the impact expected, but Sony struck a blow with the arrival of **SingStar (2004-09)**, which has evolved over the years into perhaps their most popular home-grown franchise, featuring an online store that dwarves any other like it in the genre - especially Microsoft's pretender to the throne, **Lips (2008)**.

Harmonix bounced back from their early disappointments with **Guitar Hero (2005/6)** and later (after GH publishers RedOctane were acquired by Activision) **Rock Band (2007/8)**. The popularity of these plastic instrument games saw several bands, including **The Beatles**, **Metallica** and **Aerosmith** having games specifically dedicated to their tunes. Admittedly, as the decade comes to a close, this genre is quite clearly being stretched to its fullest, and with

many more spin-off games planned, the bubble could well burst before long.

### **Rock Band 2 (2008)**

Harmonix got the ball rolling for Guitar Hero, but when they parted company from RedOctane, they knew they had to step things up. Bringing together elements of several previous instrument-based games, they gave us Rock Band - where players could unite on Guitar, Bass, Vocals and Drums for an amazing multiplayer experience. The original Rock Band game bore many hallmarks of Guitar Hero, but the solo instrument careers were bland in comparison to the far more elaborate multiplayer tour mode. When the sequel emerged shortly afterwards, it allowed even solo artists to experience the full World Tour experience, as well as online career play, full backwards compatibility with downloaded tracks, and even the opportunity to import most of the track-listing from the previous game. Okay, perhaps it didn't have as universal track-listing as, say, SingStar, but the varied game-play meant that everyone involved could constantly enjoy a new experience.

### **Casual/Puzzle/Social**

If there was an award for the genre that has experienced the largest amount of growth then the Casual, Puzzle and Social genres would be right up there with a shout. With the release of the DS, iPhone and iPod Touch, plus the boom of social gaming through networking sites like Facebook, an inevitable avalanche of fun, casual games ensued. **Tetris**, perhaps the ultimate puzzle game, saw rebirths on both the DS and iPhone/iPod Touch, cementing its gaming legacy into this latest generation. This decade introduced **Warioware** which was born onto the Gameboy Advance and Gamecube but really came to life with **Warioware: Touched! (2005)** when the DS was released.

The DS's release opened a barn sized door for games aimed at the casual gamer and no finer example can be pointed to than **Dr. Kawashima's Brain Training (2006)** series. **Portal (2007)** pushed the boundaries of the first person puzzler and the App Store has provided some of the most addictive titles in the genre. **Bejewelled 2 (2005)** was one of the many products which made its name through the internet but most notoriously via Facebook where it has grown into a puzzle phenomenon. The same can be said about **Peggle (2007)** which was originally released for Windows but has since made appearances on the 360, DS and iPhone/iPod Touch.

### **Professor Layton and The Curious Village (2008)**

The winner in this genre goes is a title that has revolutionised the way we envisage the brain busting arena. Professor Layton And The Curious Village expertly blends puzzle solving with an investigative story line and the result is truly amazing. Christmas 2008 was dominated by one game that was sought after by pretty much anyone who owned a DS and experienced nationwide sell-outs. The series has reached popularity bettering that of most within the genre over the last decade and its success is still growing.

### **Horror**

Games have had their pixels set on scaring us since the dawn of gaming, and the last decade has seen some of the scariest games of all time emerge from the ground. Many would consider Resident Evil to be the ultimate horror gaming fest, and why not, **Resident Evil REmake (2002)** on the Gamecube perfected everything the '96 original set out to achieve. It was dark, tense, scary and the best Resi? Another Gamecube exclusive which was probably not played by as many people as it should have been was **Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem (2002)**. This game tapped into our fears by showing false error messages (amongst others things) to genuinely mess with the mind.

The **Project Zero (2001)** series also offered us some spooktacular frights, most notably with **Project Zero 2: Crimson Butterfly (2003)**, which put vulnerable Japanese twin girls in the middle of a deserted and haunted town, with only a camera to survive. Too bad part 4, Mask of the Lunar Eclipse on Wii will never see the light of day in Europe. Most recently EA has revitalised survival horror with their awesome space horror fest **Dead Space (2008)**, reminding us why we love scaring ourselves senseless. Valve took the zombie approach with **Left 4 Dead (2008)**, scaring us in different ways. Konami have the winner though, and it came back in 2001...

### **Silent Hill 2 (2001)**

If ever a game was so psychologically and emotionally draining it was Silent Hill 2. Wandering the deserted and foggy streets of Silent Hill looking for a dead wife was never going to be a jolly trip. Trip is certainly the right word to use though, but don't expect whistling and dancing around lamp posts with umbrellas. Silent Hill 2 takes you on a dark journey as James Sunderland fights the horrors of his guilt. This was the game that introduced Pyramid Head, who has since become a horror icon. Play it with the lights out and volume high and you'll forget you're even playing a game. They certainly don't make horror game like this any more.

### **Strategy/Simulation**

There's a broad range of ground to be covered here, again making this quite a difficult category to pick a winner from. Naturally you can't cover this ground without mentioning **The Sims (2000)**, which across the years gave us a high tech means of playing house, and allowed us to get two girls to kiss without having to buy them drinks first. It, and its many sequels and expansion packs, also allowed many of us to spend hours at a computer/console screen while doing very little. Popular throughout the 90s, **Sim City (2000-07)** made a few comebacks too, with more advanced cities to build and then smash down with a monster attack.

We bid the **Microsoft Flight Simulator (2000-06)** a fond farewell too, though it was never really the same after 9/11. Meanwhile, staple names like **Command and Conquer (2000-09)** continued to produce sequels, while **Championship Manager (2000-09)** continued to produce divorce proceedings. Of course, it was one particular Championship Manager-related break up that led to our winning game.

## Football Manager 2007 (2006)

After the release of Championship Manager 2003/04, developers Sports Interactive split with publishers Eidos. The publishers kept the rights to the CM name, but perhaps more wisely, Sports Interactive kept the game engine and database, which they took to Sega. The result was Football Manager 2005. Inclusive of the original, there were six FM releases this decade, with Football Manager 2007 (released in 2006, naturally) the peak of the series as far as we're concerned. With a packed database, hundreds of leagues and teams to choose from, the introduction of feeder clubs, and an incredibly user-friendly console version to go alongside the PC release, FM 2007 is the ultimate release in the series so far, and provides the right mix of strategy and simulation to dominate this category.

## Stealth

There are not too many games that can be considered stealth these days, but when they do come along, they come along in style. Usually only two names can be mentioned though, who's better, Solid Snake or Sam Fisher? Well, Snake may be older, but they've both produced outstanding quality titles over the years. The most notable Sam Fisher adventure was **Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory (2005)**, which refined the first two games to deliver the ultimate Splinter Cell game, and one of the highlights of the stealth genre.

Rockstar added to their controversy tally by releasing snuff stealth game **Manhunt (2004)**. Behind the gore and the headlines was actually a quality stealth game, albeit one that did venture towards all out shooter towards the end. **Thief: Deadly Shadows (2004)** took the genre to the Victorian era, giving you a sword and bow and arrow as your tools. Anyone who's played the game will remember the Cradle. As great as they are though, Snake wins the crown and his finest adventure takes the tactical espionage action to the jungle.

## Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater (2005)

Taking the role of Big Boss in a 1960's Soviet jungle proved to be a genius idea from series creator Hideo Kojima. Not only was it awesome to stand in the shoes of the big man, but the story and the setting proved to be the most fascinating yet. Using the jungle as your camouflage delivered tense game play making every sneak through the trees an exciting one. Even the boss battle against The End is one of the best ever seen in a game. It's an emotional rollercoaster of an epic and one that'll have you singing for years afterwards: "*I'm still in a dream, Snake Eater!*" It's easily the best Metal Gear game and we have no hesitations in calling it the best of the genre.

## Online Multiplayer

Online multiplayer has reached new heights in recent years, particularly since the current gen console's capability upgrade to incorporate the feature. Playing online has been commonplace on PC's across the world for a while now and its appeal and potential has been exposed to an entire generation, particularly through Xbox LIVE and the Playstation Network. The **Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare** series was for many gamers, a first glimpse