

Brains vs. Braun

Flex your game

WORDS JEREMIAH J. SHAW

Portal [\$20]

Portal is, without a doubt, the best video game I've played in a very long time. And I've played a lot.

The premise of Portal is rather simple: You are a test subject for "Aperture Laboratories," and you solve puzzles by opening, well, portals in the walls and jumping through them, all while being recorded by more security cameras than a London protester. That's where the simplicity ends, though, as the puzzles in the game become progressively complex and require cleverness, quick reflexes and a radical redefinition of normal spatial thinking.

It utilizes the "first-person shooter" PoV, a convention typically reserved for blasting zombies in half and redecorating the interiors of spaceships in arterial red. However you never see another person/alien/zombie/etc. throughout the entire game. In fact, your only contact is GLaDOS, an omniscient computer that monitors your progress through each testing chamber and offers helpful advice along the way like, "any contact with this chamber floor will result in an unsatisfactory mark on your official testing record ... followed by death. Good luck!"

This dry sense of humor is a big reason why Portal has gathered a cult-like following of fans. "The cake is a lie" has entrenched itself into the online lexicon, and the mere mention of the "Weighted Companion Cube" to someone who's played Portal will trigger a wistful, grief-stricken look. (It seems that we euphemized our Weighted Companion Cube faster than any test subject on record. We miss it terribly.)

The only negative thing we can say about Portal is that it was over far too quickly. The inclusion of a few more challenges and "Advanced Levels" would have been nice. And some form of online play/community level design would've been even better. But hopefully the wild success of the game will solidify it as an entirely new franchise for Valve Software.

So if you're in the market for a new kind of gaming challenge, one that rewards intelligence and creativity over having the fast-twitch reflexes of a 13-year-old hopped up on Bawls, then Portal is definitely your game. It is a triumph. Huge success. It's hard to overstate our satisfaction.

Wii Fit [no MSRP as of date]

Remember the Nintendo Power Pad? Remember how we convinced our parents that it would be good for us? And remember how long it took before we realized that lying down and slapping the pad sensors with your hands like an epileptic penguin was infinitely more efficient than all that running in place nonsense? Ah, the misty watercolor memories...

Well the newest incarnation of such ridiculousness is the Nintendo Wii Fit. Utilizing cutting-edge research in "digital bathroom scale" technology, this unassuming plastic dais has sensors that detect pressure on its surface and transfer that information to the Wii. This data is then used to play various mini-games like balance challenges, dance competitions and the blazing fast, hardcore 3D exhilaration of hula-hooping.

And if all that excitement proves to be too much, you can calm your frazzled nerves with a home yoga instructor program that claims to be able to judge the correct form for all your warrior posturing—double entendre intended. Although, if you ask us, Nintendo is talking out of their asanas with that one.

So to those rare few who've rocked out to Muse's "Knights of Cydonia" on Guitar Hero III only to stop and think, "Hey, this is awesome and all, but how cool would it be if my Wii could count some push-ups for me?"—then you're definitely of the type who should purchase a Wii Fit immediately. And may God have mercy on your soul.

