

Photics

Special Wii Edition



Wii™ Review



Around 20 years ago, in a mall on Long Island, I was introduced to the Nintendo Entertainment System. I was mesmerized by the promotional display. A huge crowd had gathered to see the new video game system. After seeing the colorful graphics and fun gameplay, I knew that I wanted one. Soon after that day, I had my very own 8-BIT gaming console. I had so much fun with the NES that I picked up the Super Nintendo and Nintendo 64 on their release days. But alas, the magic faded. Something went wrong with the GameCube. I just wasn't interested.

**Wii Review by
Mike Garofalo
Photics.com**

The XBOX and the PlayStation 1 & 2 started to steal Nintendo's thunder. There was another leak in Nintendo's popularity - PC gaming. For the best graphics and the best online play, nothing beats a desktop machine. I got caught up with MMORPGs - EverQuest, Dark Age of Camelot, World of Warcraft and Guild Wars. While I was spending more time playing video games, I found myself focused on one game at a time. I wasn't excited about the next generation of console hardware. I didn't go to the arcades as much. I'd go almost an entire year without buying a new game. Caught in a gaming rut, I didn't see any reason to get excited about the new consoles. Originally, I dismissed the Wii. I thought that the name was stupid. I thought that the controller was a gimmick. Why would I want to flap my arms around at my TV? I viewed the Wii as a kid's toy.

Yet, one could not ignore the hype. With the launch of the Wii and the PlayStation 3, the Fall of 2006 was a revolutionary time in gaming. Huge lines were being formed for consoles. I couldn't believe it? When did video games become so trendy? I felt left out. Why wasn't I part of the crowd? Why wasn't I excited? That's when I started chatting with my MMORPG buddies. Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo, they all wanted gaming dollars from my friends. Which system would win out?

Wii... wii... wii... my friends said Wii.

I'm not one to follow the crowd, but the hype got to me. On November 19, 2006, I started my hunt for the Wii. It was a complete failure. I went to Toy R Us, Best Buy, Circuit City, Sears, Electronics Boutique, Saturday Matinee and GameStop. They were all sold out. I couldn't comprehend this scenario. During previous launches of Nintendo consoles, I had no trouble scoring a system. This time it was different. I was originally motivated by hype, but this grew into a vendetta. I'm supposed to be this hotshot webmaster, with the inside





track to all things gaming and technology. Yet, I was caught playing catch-up. I didn't understand the popularity of the Wii, but I was determined to find out.

I went straight to the source - Nintendo World in NYC. The word on the street - they had systems for sale. Unfortunately, my lunch break wasn't as long as the line. Day two was another loss. I returned on day three. This time, I got lucky. All I had to do was wait on the line and I was guaranteed a Wii. Another plus, the line was inside the building. I figured that I'd go for it. Nintendo World is located in Rockefeller Center - an elite part of Manhattan. Businessmen, donning power suits, were doing some early Christmas shopping. I had a big meeting to attend later that day, so even I was sporting a tie. We were like conquering heroes and this was our victory lap.

We talked about the system...

"Yah, it's supposed to use Opera as a web browser."

"You might as well get the nunchuck if you're getting an extra controller"

"I think it plays GameCube games too."



The anticipation started to grow. A cutoff point was named. "Anyone past the lady in the brown coat may not get a Wii today." My spot in line was precious, but my lunch break was running out. The line started to slow down. It was a tense moment. I tried to stay calm, but I was constantly checking the time. Am I going to miss the meeting? It's getting close... three more people... two more people... next... "Can I help you?"

Why did they even bother to ask? Do you think I'm here to pick up a copy of Super Princess Peach? Just give me my Wii, a copy of Zelda and there won't be any trouble. This little excursion set me back \$325.10, but I was happy. I waved goodbye to my fellow gamers, then I ran to the nearest train station. I arrived on-time for the big meeting - mission accomplished. For all I knew, I could have bought a plastic brick. It didn't matter. A silly smirk followed me all the way home. That's through two train rides, a boat ride and a short drive. Yet, all the hype in the world wouldn't make the Wii a good gaming system. It was time to put this little white box to the test.

As with most game consoles, the Wii is not terribly difficult to set up. Instructions, what's that? It's not rocket science to hook up some cables. The only thing that confused me was the sensor bar. I wasn't aware that the system needed one, nor was I thrilled to add more clutter to the top of my TV. Unfortunately, the Wiimote uses the sensor bar for orientation. You can put the sensor bar above or below your TV.



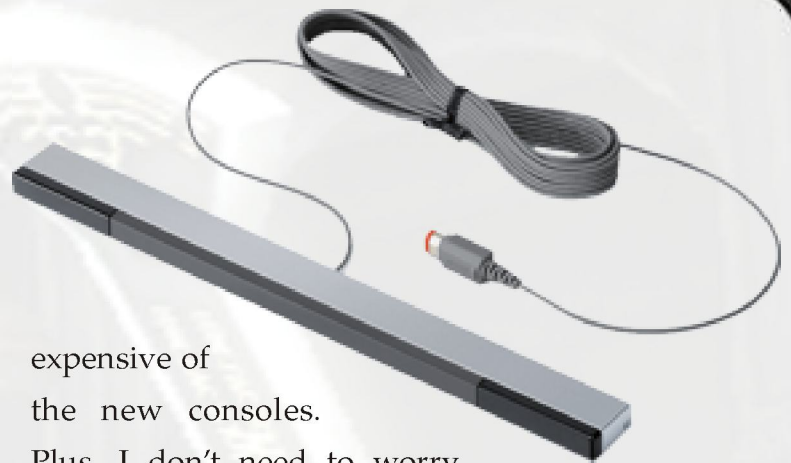
I read online that two candles could be used as a replacement to the sensor bar. Since Photics means the science of light, I felt that I should verify this claim. I carefully placed two "multi-purpose" tea light candles on the top of my TV. I separated them by the approximate width of the sensor bar. I lit the candles, then I waved my Wiimote at the screen. Like a mad scientist, I laughed. Ha ha... it worked! Kids, don't try this at home. I'm a trained professional. While the gothic ambiance was pleasing, I decided to stick with the sensor bar. I don't need to accidentally set my home on fire.

After setting up my Wii, I went through the Wii settings. I gave my console a nickname, I set the date, I entered the correct time and I told my Wii that the sensor bar was above the TV. Everything was going great, until I got to the "Screen" setting. That's when I started to fantasize - oooohhh 16:9 display. What would a widescreen Wii look like? Oh well, it was 4:3 for me.

My decision to buy a Wii wasn't all just hype. Money was also a huge factor. The Wii is the least



The Wii Sensor Bar can be placed above or below your TV. The Wiimote needs the sensor bar for orientation.



expensive of the new consoles.

Plus, I don't need to worry about high definition gaming. I don't have a high definition TV. The Wii supports 480i and 480p. That means my old TV is good enough. Quite frankly, it's all about the law of diminishing returns. Just because I buy a console that's three times more expensive, and a TV that's 10 times more expensive, that doesn't mean I'm going to have 30 times more fun.

I find that video games are more fun when they deliver new experiences. The Wii delivers just that - a new and fun experience. Sure, waving my arms around like some spastic monkey is not my idea of entertainment. Yet, the Wiimote is so sweet. It's like a computer mouse mated with a magic wand. I love having a pointer on my TV. The interface is bright and cheerful. I thought reading text on the TV would be weird, but the Wii uses highly readable fonts. The sense of control is truly entertaining. I didn't realize that the response would be so accurate - not on my ancient TV and not with such a relatively inexpensive console.

The core of the action happens from the Wii Menu, where Wii content is divided into TV shaped icons called Channels. Without Internet access, a lot of the channels are meaningless. Since I set up my Wii right next to my wireless router, I didn't think that would be too much of a problem. The Wii was able

to detect my router, but it couldn't connect. What was wrong? I spent 20 minutes trying to figure it out. Are the security setting correct? Yup! Is my cable modem working? Yup! Does my router need a firmware update? Nope! What could it be? Apparently, putting your Wii right next to the wireless router is a bad thing. I simply moved my Wii to the other side of my TV. The Wii has a small footprint, so relocating the console was easy.

With Internet connectivity, I could download the Wii updates. PC users are accustomed to a bit of preparation and user agreements. Console users might find this alien to them. If you're buying a Wii to give as a gift, is the recipient tech savvy? If not, you might want to help them out. Otherwise, they might be cursing you out. "Stupid... blasted... thing... what's a blasted MAC address?!"

Even with Internet access, some Wii channels were inoperable. Oh no, what will I do without the Wii Forecast Channel or the Wii News Channel? Even more disheartening, the Opera Web Browser wasn't ready. My Wii could go online, but what could it do online? The Forecast, News and Internet channels should be available soon. Until then, I can send email! Again, preparation is required. You can't just spam the world. In order for two Wiis to send messages, both need to trade Wii Console



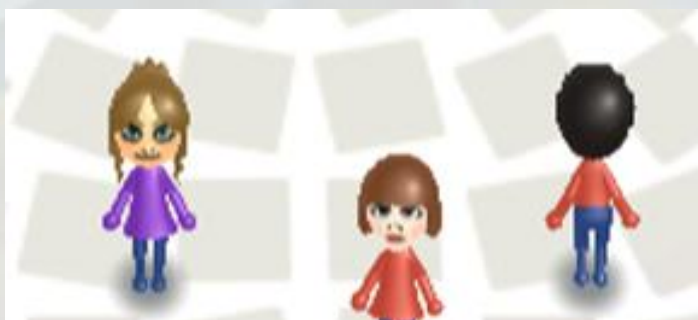
You can create the video game version of you in the Mii Channel.

Numbers. If they don't have your console number in their address book, and their console number in your address book, you won't be able to send messages. The Wii can send/receive email messages to/from conventional email addresses, once a similar authorization process has been completed.

How the Wii handles messaging is rather adorable. A keyboard pops up on-screen, then you simply click out the letters with the Wiimote. Cute clicky sounds let you know that you're typing. Don't expect to write any novels. There is a severe character limit. Outgoing Wii messages can only be 256 characters long. You can send and receive pictures too, as the Wii has a Photo Channel.

Be warned, the new message notification is not subtle. I woke up in the middle of the night to a bright blue light. The disc slot illuminated my room with a techno glow.

You can attach a Mii to your messages. A Mii is your virtual persona that lives inside your Wii. This cartoon version of yourself can be created at the Mii Channel. I was surprisingly entertained by this feature. Good... good... Nintendo understands me. Feed my ego. I like that! Naturally, I spent a great



amount of attention to ensure that my Mii was a proper representation of me. Adjust those eyebrows, change the color of those eyes, make him taller, make him thinner and give him spiky hair! Ah, he even smirks like I do!

With my Mii created, I was ready to play Wii Sports - the game included with my Wii. I wasn't too excited about the game, but I figured that I'd give it a chance. Wow, was I wrong about this one. Wii Sports is great fun!

Wii Boxing is my personal favorite, as I enjoy the immersion. There's a character in the ring that looks just like me. He moves his hands the way that I do. If I scratch my head while holding the Wiimote, my Mii does the exact same thing. Ding - the bells sounds. I proceeded to pummel my opponent... blam, blam, blam. The dual wielding controller action was so satisfying... dodge, 1, 2, 1, 2.

The graphics are consistent through all five sports games - Tennis, Baseball, Bowling, Golf and of course Boxing. Grass looks like grass. Pins look like pins. This isn't cutting edge stuff, which is the basis behind the Wii. The emphasis is on playability, not the number of polygons per second. If you're all about the latest hardware, then you might not be happy with the Wii. What makes the Wii unique is the Wiimote.

That's what makes Wii Sports entertaining. It's the fact that you are more involved in the game. You have to move around a bit. Nintendo has tried to do this in the past - with the Power Glove and the Power Pad. History does not remember those products fondly, but the Wiimote is different. People really seem to enjoy it... maybe too much.

Apparently, some players are ripping through their Wiimote wrist straps, injuring themselves and causing damage. One of the things I noticed about the Wii was

the number of warning messages. My Wii tells me to take regular breaks, to hold onto the Wiimote, to clear the area of things that I might bump into and to use the wrist strap. I really wasn't sure what all the fuss was about. I guess I play dangerously, as I don't even use the wrist strap. Yet, it seems pretty obvious that sweaty hands and thin straps can lead to

problems. Fortunately, Nintendo is offering replacement straps. If your Wii was shipped with the thinner straps, you can call 1-800-859-4519 (or visit support.nintendo.com) to get up to four replacement wrist straps.

It also helps to better understand the Wiimote. For one, you don't have to kill it. Slight movements are generally enough. When playing Wii Baseball, you don't have to move your arm 90+ MPH to throw a pitch that fast. Sometimes, the immersion is so



intense that I can see players forgetting what they're holding. The Wiimote's built-in speaker should keep people grounded in reality. I don't

often hear my fists say, "Knock Out!"

The echo from the Wiimote is fairly neat, but the effect can be annoying with other games. The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess

is a game where you will want to familiarize yourself

with the Wiimote's volume controls. In addition to repetitive sounds blasting from the Wiimote, I found other frustrating elements to Twilight Princess. Things started off great. I was in the middle of a beautiful world to explore. I had a horse, a sword and girl. That's sweet medieval living. Then, things took an awful turn. I lost my sword, I lost my horse and I lost my girl. To make matters worse, I was turned into a wolf. "Oh, so that's why there's a wolf on the cover of the box." I could tolerate all of this, but I could not tolerate Midna. This sinister looking sprite has the nerve

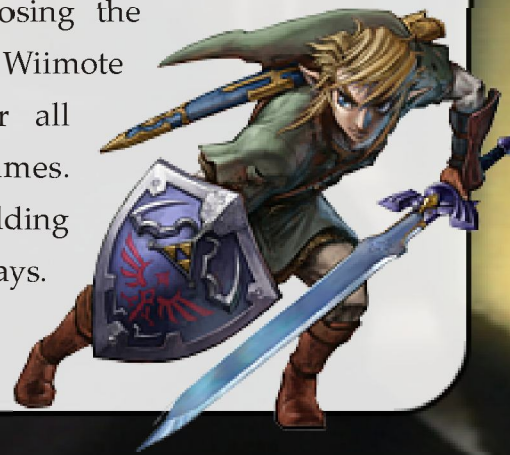
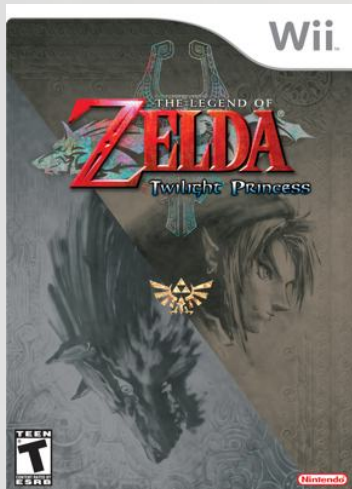
to tell me what to do? Bah, you're not the boss of me! Yet, she's an intricate part of the game. You cannot avoid her, and she teases you about it. The game is unusually dark - especially for a

Zelda game. Maybe you'll enjoy the new theme, as Twilight Princess is one of the most popular games for the Wii. Me, I like the classic Zelda games better.

Fortunately, the Wii can play the original Legend of Zelda. I couldn't believe it. I found myself enjoying the old 8-Bit version more than the new version. I was surprised that I remembered a lot of the old secrets too. Burn that tree, blow up that wall and push that rock! For 500 Wii Points, the equivalent of \$5, you can buy The Legend of Zelda in the Wii Store. Other console games are available too. NES games are 500 Wii Points, Turbo Grafx 16 games are 600 points, Super NES games are 800 points, Sega Genesis games are 800 points and Nintendo 64 games are 1000 points.

An old saying plays heavily here, "nostalgia ain't what it used to be." Most of these games have not aged well. It was almost painful to play Sonic The Hedgehog. From the second I heard the word "Sega", I knew I was in for trouble. The sounds were scratchy and the colors hurt my eyes. It was hard to imagine that this was one of the best games around. I felt somewhat cheated after my trip to the Wii Store. These games should cost a lot less. Yet, it's hard to deny the appeal of a single console that can span so many generations. The Wii even plays GameCube games.

The confusing part with all of this backward compatibility is choosing the right controller. The Wiimote cannot be used for all Virtual Console games. Besides, it's weird holding the Wiimote sideways. That means you



might need to choose between a GameCube controller or a Wii Classic Controller. For now, I'm going with a GameCube controller. According to the Nintendo site, the GameCube controller might not support some TurboGrafx 16 games or some Sega Genesis games. But so far, I haven't seen any issues. The Wii has four GameCube controller ports, neatly hidden behind a panel. I figured, "Why not take advantage of that?" Meanwhile, the Wii Classic Controller connects to the Wiimote like the nunchuck. That's just a weird design - it's like wireless, but not wireless. The Nintendo store says, "The Classic Controller can only be used with (and may be required for some) Virtual Console games." What about GameCube games?!

I'm cool with Nintendo's vision. I don't need bleeding edge technology to enjoy video games. Yet, I'm hungry for more games. Where are they? While there were a lot of Wii games at launch, none of them excited me. Where's the Wii version of Guitar Hero or Phantasy Star Universe? Where's the killer online game, a Wii version of Halo? I don't want to think of my Wii as a \$250 TV based web browser, especially when the web browser isn't available yet.

The problem is that game developers will need to treat the Wii differently. They can't simply port a PC or XBOX 360 game over to the Wii. The Wii



doesn't have the processing power to be competitive in that way. Instead, Wii games need to play on the strengths of the system - especially the Wiimote. Why would I buy Call of Duty 3 for the



Games like Battalion Wars 2 and Super Mario Galaxy are on the way for the Wii.

Wii when I can play a ton of WWII games on my PC? It has always been about the games. That's what makes a system great. Nintendo has well positioned themselves in this generation's console war. Yet, for Nintendo to win it, plenty of hit games are going to be needed.

Overall - The Wii is a cute and stylish console. What it lacks in hardware power, it makes up in fun and affordability. Games are immersive and inviting to casual gamers. Yet, good games are lacking. If you're not into Zelda or Wii Sports, it's difficult to find a better game - for now. The Wii is a space saving device, as it can play GameCube games and Virtual Console games. The small footprint also helps, just remember to leave room for the attached Sensor Bar. Thanks to built-in Wi-Fi, the Wii has great Internet features. This will only get better, once Nintendo turns on the News, Forecast and Internet channels. Some players have injured themselves and damaged objects with their Wii. Using caution with your Wii is advised. The Wii is one of the must have items for this holiday season. Good luck finding one!