

TITLE	GENRE	SUITABLE FOR	UNSUITABLE FOR	THE BIG WHOOP
10 Mass Effect (Micro soft, \$59.99) FOR: Xbox 360.	Sci-Fi Role-Playing 'Star Wars'-Influenced Epic.	Older gamers; 12-steppers coming down off a World of Warcraft buzz; Science fiction junkies.	Fans of breathless action games; anyone with a life.	Not being a fan of role-playing games — being physically unable to sit still and wait my turn or carry on “conversations” with characters — I drugged my way to the 360. Three hours later, though still unable to stomach RPGs, this inched me closer to an appreciation. Since RPGs are more like interactive fiction than games, the story needs to work, and this one has that intriguing feel of smart speculative fiction: mankind is learning to live with the ramifications of space travel and colonization. A classic sci-fi set-up, with lots of politics. Throw in a little run-and-shoot, heady visuals — just enough to make me forget this has the longest elevator rides in gaming history.
9 Scene It? Lights, Camera, Action (Microsoft) FOR: Xbox 360.	Party Game.	Families; casual movie buffs; fans of the original DVD version; Xbox 360 owners harboring Wii envy.	Shut-ins; the friendless; obsessive movie buffs.	You and up to three friends hold wireless controllers with big colorful buttons. Movie clips (in HD, no less) fly past. You guess the film. Simple, as close to a living-room game show as you can get. With 1,800 questions (and more to download from Xbox Live), it gets around the inevitable stink of repetition that dooms trivia by tracking which questions have been asked, and not repeating. Especially like Child's Play mode — you guess the title of a film based on a child's drawing. Oh, and batteries are included.
8 God of War II (Sony, \$39.99). FOR: PlayStation2.	Limb-Ripping, Head-Lobbing Greek Mythological Action.	Fans of well-paced action and giant boss battles; gamers who can't yet afford a next-next generation console.	The squeamish; anyone under 15; Greek scholars.	An epic (and spectacularly bloody) send-off for the beloved, outmoded PS2, with sprawling, ingenious levels that force careful consideration without frustrating. Then, it's off to more head-lobbing! As the fallen god Kratos, it's tasty self-righteousness to the extreme. Over-the-top, prurient, and impossible not to giggle at.
7 Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga (LucasArts, \$49.99). FOR: PS3, PS2, Xbox 360, Nintendo DS).	Charming Old-School Gaming.	Kids; worried parents; 'Star Wars' aficionados; those in the market for an easily relatable, quick-to-master casual game.	Owners of previous incarnations of the Lego Star Wars franchise.	It's not profound, or even challenging, but (egads!) is it silly and oddly hypnotic — a six film, entire retelling of 'Star Wars' as performed by Legos. This new version (joining old and new trilogies, previously sold separately) contains little fresh material, but the candy-colored HD sets seal it. <i>(Note to parents: Rather than bleed, characters break apart into pieces.)</i>
6 Super Mario Galaxy (Nintendo, \$49.99) FOR: Wii.	The Mother of all Platform Superstars.	Puzzle solvers; new Wii owners; inexperienced console owners; experienced console owners raised on all things Mario.	Those uncomfortable with the concept of cute; anyone burned out on all things Mario.	Goal-wise, it's not much of a stretch — Mario sets out to rescue Princess Peach (and this time, break up with her, hopefully). Visually, it's expected — bright, cheerful, dazzling. What's new, however, is not to be taken lightly — Mario in deep space, without worry for gravity, up or down. The planets are more like contraptions to solve, the game play accessible, with a clever touch of nostalgia. <i>(The soundtrack is a Mario best-of package, as sweetly irritating as a 21st-Century music box.)</i>
5 BioShock (2K Games, \$59.99). FOR: Xbox 360, PC.	Ayn Rand-Influenced Choose-Your-Own-Adventure Thingee.	Intellectual gamers; anyone curious about how novelistic games may get.	Children; those with a weak constitution for moral quandaries.	Even if you discount his opening — a harrowing escape from a doomed plane, as evocative as any put to film — star game developer/producer Ken Levine's dystopian mystery set in a crumbling underwater experimental colony is unquestionably a probing and evolutionary leap. Toward what — finer storytelling, shades of gray — is the question you're left to wonder about. Any game that gives you a choice between your own survival or shooting a rabid child is poking at the edge of what's possible and permissible.
4 A La Carte Gaming (roughly \$5 to \$12). FOR: All major gaming consoles	Old-School.	Casual gamers; the sentimental	Players needing state-of-the-art graphics.	A blast whose time has come. Think iTunes for gamers. Think 30 years of memorable console games and arcade machines, available at a download. Xbox Live led the way, but with the addition of the PS3 and the Wii, a gaming canon is developing. Punch-Out for Wii, Wipeout for PS3, Paperboy for the 360 — and dozens more. Makes a gift card for these systems a decent buy.
3 Rock Band (MTV Games, \$169.99). FOR: Xbox 360, PS3, PS2.	Simon Says.	Guitar Hero obsessives; someone who doesn't understand video games.	The easily frustrated; the budget-conscious; the rhythm deficient.	If Guitar Hero is the new karaoke — no drunken office party is complete without it — Rock Band is your own reality series, minus the cameras. But you do get drums, a guitar, a microphone; the game (also included) provides 58 well-chosen songs to play along with, from Metallica and the New Pornographers, to the Who (“Won't Get Fooled Again,” killer) and the Pixies. When your fellow players are clicking, the experience is so immersive you seriously wonder if you could form a real band. But is it a game or theater? (More importantly, can you find one?)
2 The Orange Box (Valve, \$59.99) FOR: Xbox 360, PS3, PC.	Thinking-Man's Shooter.	The budget conscious; players who only spring for one game a year.	Immersion junkies.	What sounds too good to be true — five A-list games on one disc, no filler — is indeed, as promised, a generous helping of classics (the Half-Life series, worth the price alone, with a bonus episode) and fresh twists on old ideas. (Who knew you could get more than your money's worth?) Portal, the coolest addition, has a relatively obvious premise (players shoot holes in walls) and the ingenuity of a Rube Goldberg puzzle. Add Team Fortress 2 (a fun, addicting poor-man's multi-player Halo), and you can't go wrong. (An actual orange box not included.)
1 Ratchet and Clank Future: Tools of Destruction (Insomniac, \$59.99) FOR: PS3.	Colorful Platform Problem-Solving Action.	Families; those willing to allow their free time to be sucked away; anyone looking for a decent game for their dormant PS3.	Bores; gamers who take their gaming too seriously.	At last you can see what the PS3 is capable of. Arguably the best-looking game in existence — a near Pixar experience that's controllable, with characters just as nuanced. The franchise hasn't changed much: You still fly planet to planet, fight assorted villains. But the weapons remain goofy and inspired (a ray that turns enemies into penguins, for instance), the game-play clever without being frustrating, and the worlds vibrant and teeming. Even nicer: it meets you halfway, scaling its challenge to you. Generous, entertaining, perfect.