

GEEKED Videogame reviews by Adam Diamond



MADDEN NFL 07

PUBLISHER | EA SPORTS
DEVELOPER | EA TIBURON
PLATFORM | PS2, XBOX, GC, 360, PSP, GBA, DS, PC (PS3, Wii)
PRICE | \$29.99-\$69.99 DEPEND-
 ING ON PLATFORM AND EDITION
ESRB RATING | E (EVERYONE)

As with everything in *Madden NFL '07*, this is the best block ever!

WHAT'S COOL: Just about everything here is amazing.

WHAT'S UNCOOL: The Hall of Fame features seem like a waste of space and money.

GAMEPLAY



GRAPHICS



SOUND



IT'S GOING TO come as a shock to absolutely no one that *Madden NFL 07* gets a positive review, from me or anyone else. It is, to be sure, the all-out best football game on the planet. The question every year is not whether the game is worth the money (it always is). Rather, what we must decide is whether the game has improved enough to warrant the purchase of this year's version over last year's. Well, if you're a 360 owner, the answer is an unreserved yes. All other platforms, sadly, are in somewhat of a gray area.

Playing the games is even better than in previous years. Controls are more fluid and easier to handle. The Highlight Stick, which is being called a new feature but really isn't, actually does something this year, and what it does depends on the type of player you're controlling. Got a big bruising back? That guy'll start pounding the defensive line and run 'em over. Got the ball in the hands of that nimble wide receiver? Use the Highlight Stick to dodge the defense as it dives after you.

What's really changed, however, is the kicking game. *Madden* hadn't really done much with kicking recently and the game was worse for it. Now, instead of rhythmically hitting buttons to kick, you've got to manipulate one of the joysticks in order to kick correctly. It adds a difficulty factor that wasn't there and is far less forgiving than the older kick meter. Sure, it's a minor change, but it's one that does add enjoyment to the playing experience.

Another thing that *could* add enjoyment is all the mini-games. Unfortunately, I only found two even remotely interesting—wide receiver and lineman training. The wide receiver training was truly fun. Running routes and trying to get open is a lot more difficult than it seems and it's something at which every *Madden* player should be better. Without a doubt, though, the most important mini game is the Lineman training. No, you're not going to have to down virtual milkshakes to put on pounds, but you will gain new appreciation for how difficult being a lineman is. Unfortunately, the other mini games involved things like QB or RB training, which are more fun to do in practice games, or weightlifting and the 40-yard dash, two boring real life tasks made more so by silly and repetitive controls.

Apart from a few silly mini-games, the only other serious disappointment in this year's *Madden* is the bonus materials. You see, this year some platforms come with the option of getting the "Hall of Fame Edition"—a load of bonus features that set you back an extra \$10. Unfortunately, none of them are worth it—not even a little bit. They're boring, a waste of space, and nothing that you couldn't find free On Demand on the NFL Network. So why are they here? Does it mean more game? Absolutely not.

Even so, this is certainly the year to buy *Madden*, no matter when your last purchase was. The game is that much more fun to play, and well worth the money. Just avoid the useless Hall of Fame Edition, and you'll be one happy geek.

DISC JUNKIE by Paul Gaita

A TIP SHEET FOR COMPULSIVE DVD BUYERS



MULTIPLEX

Hey, just in time for the new TV season—it's all of last season on DVD! Actually, I'm very pro about TV boxed sets. Not only does it allow you to enjoy a show without commercial interruptions, but you can indulge in a show at your own pace. For example, you can dive into *Gilmore Girls: The Complete Sixth Season* (WB) and consume every episode in one gluttonous session, or savor the whipsmart writing and performances (for God's sake, give Lauren Graham an Emmy) one at a time, like exotic chocolates. Your call. Same goes for *My Name is Earl: The Complete First Season* (Fox) and *Battlestar Galactica: Season 2.5* (Universal), both of which have exceeded initial skepticism with their savvy scripting. Or you can just go for the guilty pleasures and dig into *Hart to Hart: The Complete Second Season* (Sony) or *Footballer's Wives: The Complete Third Season* (Capital Ent. Inc.), both of which are positively lousy with top-notch cheese and sleaze. And if you want classic, you cannot beat *The Bob Newhart Show: The Complete Fourth Season* (Fox), which is rich with superior TV comedy (Bob wrangles with a tough TV host; Bob, Jerry, Howard, and Mr. Carlin celebrate Thanksgiving). The genius of Bob Newhart is also on display in *Button Down Concert* (Fox), an hour-long showcase of his stand-up brilliance.

On totally unrelated notes, Paramount has the undying *Grease* available in a Rockin' Rydell Edition, which offers deleted scenes and reminiscences by Messrs. Travolta and Newton-John, and Sanctuary has *Zoo TV: Live in Sydney*, a two-disc set of U2's *Zoo TV* tour, with a full disc of bonus performances and interviews.



ARTHOUSE

The Arthouse is supposed to be where you can find the most challenging films and documentaries, and this week's lot lives up to that reputation. *Hard Candy* (Lions Gate) is an unsettling psycho-thriller about a pedophile who meets his match in his latest pick-up (the great Ellen Page), while *The Devil and Daniel Johnston* (Sony) pro-

files the emotionally disturbed music legend, his influence on other artists, and his fragile day-to-day existence, which is dependent on his aging parents. And *Loverboy* (Universal) by director Kevin Bacon stars his wife Kyra Sedgwick in an uncomfortable story of a disturbed mother who must rely on her six-year-old son for stability.

On the reissue side, there's *The Spirit of the Beehive* (Criterion), Victor Erice's haunting 1973 film about childhood and fantasy in the shadow of the Spanish Civil War, with an interview with the elusive director chief among the disc's extras. Criterion also has 1960's eye-popping *Jingoku* from Japanese director Nobuo Nakagawa, which presents one of the most hair-raising visions of Hell ever shown on film. Oh, and check out *Sugar Cane Alley* (New Yorker), Euzhan Palcy's 1983 film about a young man struggling to succeed on Martinique in the '30s. And if you wanna rock (and you do, of course), you'll do no better than *Blind Faith: London Hyde Park 1969* (Sanctuary) and the electrifying *Bad Brains Live—CBGB's 1982* (MVD), both of which present these bands at the height of their performing powers.



GRINDHOUSE

'80s monster kids, take note: Shout! Factory is releasing three volumes of *Elvira's Movie Macabre*, each featuring double features of horror trash and hostess (with the mostest) Elvira's original wrap-arounds from her late-night TV show (which originated here in L.A. on KHJ-TV). Grr-oovy. On the classic side, Universal has *The Boris Karloff Collection*, which presents five lesser-known Karloff horror/suspense titles (the best of which is 1939's *The Tower of London*) and *The Inner Sanctum Mysteries: The Complete Collection*, with Lon Chaney Jr. in six delirious chillers inspired by the legendary radio series. And give a look-see at *Spirited Killer* (BCI), an early effort by the astounding Thai martial artist Tony Jaa (currently in theaters in *The Protector*). And for pure crass fun, seek out *The Virgin Witch* (Image), a scuzzy '70s UK grinder about Satanic covens and sexy witches, and *FEFU: The DVD* (MVD), which has the infamous Dwarves in concert with the Suicide Girls and lots and lots of blood.

MANGA by Lyn Jensen



TEXTBOOK MANGA

For years, people have been arguing that comics can educate as well as entertain, and the three-volume *1 World Manga* series that VIZ is currently marketing is a delightful example. And while it's not actually classified as an educational text, it is very different from what's commonly found in the manga section of bookstores. Teachers looking for something new this school year may want to order these volumes by the boxful for geography, health, science, social studies and reading courses.

In all three volumes, the teenage hero, Rei, sharpens his marital-arts skills as he battles global villains. His foes include poverty (in vol. 1), the AIDS epidemic (in vol. 2) and global warming (in vol. 3). His master is a mysterious spirit who commonly appears in animal forms ranging from a bird to a horse. But the master always concentrates far more on developing his student's heart, mind, and spirit than fighting skills.

While the stories borrow from the shonen (boys') style, they're nothing like standard martial arts manga, for such global foes require a

different kind of fight. In the AIDS volume, for example, Rei meets a girl and finds that AIDS has decimated her family and devastated her village. She'd like to marry her boyfriend, but she doesn't know if she can trust him when he says he's AIDS-free. The characters learn how fighting the AIDS foe requires education, prevention and medical tests, along with compassion and care for patients.

1 World Manga is the creation of Annette Roman, a VIZ employee who also writes and teaches at Berkeley City College. She teamed with Leandro Ng, an experienced comic artist whose credits include *Stargate: Rebellion* and *Cinder/Hellins*, who teaches at the Academy of Art University. The project was created in partnership with the World Bank, and all proceeds from sales go to the Reading Is Fundamental charity.

VIZ rates the entire series for all ages, but its slant is definitely adult-oriented. Parents and teachers would be well-advised to exercise some guidance, particularly regarding AIDS awareness. It's doubtful, even given today's attitudes, that many 'rents consider condoms and pre-marital sex as acceptable as Snoopy. Rather, adults and children can read and discuss these manga together, and adults may be surprised to find they learn something as well.