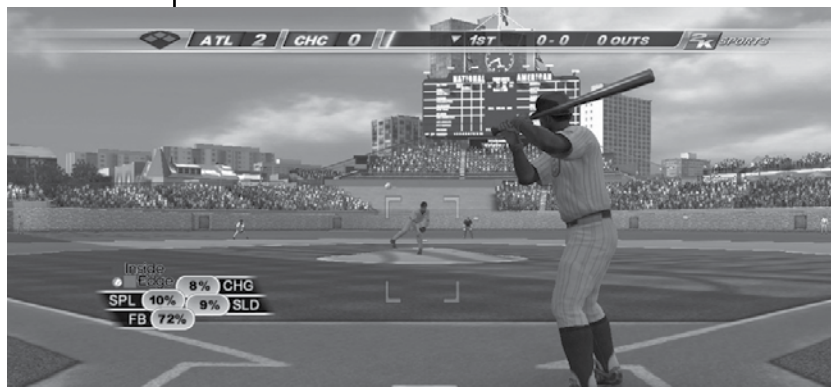


GEEKED Videogame reviews by Adam Diamond



Check out the player's new hit stick; please ignore his face falling off.

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2K6

PUBLISHER | 2K SPORTS
PLATFORM | PS2, XBOX, 360, GC, PSP
PRICE | \$39.99, \$59.99 360
ESRB RATING | E (EVERYBODY)

WHAT'S COOL: Addictive and fun gameplay; lots of fun, small touches; new pitching meter and hit stick.

WHAT'S UNCOOL: Fielders who look like they're throwing home no matter what base they throw to; cheats that have nothing to do with baseball; the manual is awful.

GAMEPLAY ★★★★★
GRAPHICS ★★★★★
SOUND ★★★★★

UNTIL NOW, all sports games for the Xbox 360 have just plain sucked. They were all shallow titles with few, if any, extras. So it was with great anticipation that baseball geeks awaited *Major League Baseball 2K6*—the first sports title created for the 360 and then ported over to other consoles (although, interestingly, not onto the PC). The effort seems worthwhile, as what 2K has given us is the first truly deep sports title for the hottest console on the market.

It's hard to say in words how fun this game is to play. So addictive you'll forget your favorite TV shows? Check. Eating? Check. Sleeping? Double Check. Yep, the first time you're playing this game and you decide to play one more time, then look up and realize it's 4 a.m. and instead of stopping, you say, "Well, I wouldn't get that much sleep anyway..." and play on, then you'll understand how addictive *Major League Baseball 2K6* is.

The new batting hit stick, though a bald-faced gank from EA's college baseball title, is less complex to use and therefore all that much more fun. You can still use the classic button interface if you like, but the hit stick is the closest thing you'll get to swinging a bat while holding a gamepad. But as good as this is, it's not what wowed me about the interface—it was the pitching. Too often in other baseball video games, control problems and wild pitches seem to happen largely at random. In *Major League Baseball 2K6*, they all stem from being able to throw the pitch correctly. Mess up your timing and you'll hit a batter. And having the CPU retaliate is actually kind of funny: the umpire might even warn the benches or throw the pitchers out of the game.

The umpires, in fact, are a really nice touch. Unlike most other games, they're fully animated and they even suspended a couple of games for rain delays while I was playing.

Despite all the positives, this title isn't all wine and roses, though. The old time teams they give you to unlock don't have the real players' names, so forget about playing with Ted Williams, Jackie Robinson, or Babe Ruth. What's worse, the cheats offered for you to earn are things like "get an extra run for every stolen base"—something that actually makes the game more cartoony rather than more interesting. And while Opening day rosters are available for download, loading them isn't exactly intuitive.

Don't get me wrong: the game is fun and all. In fact, it's a blast. But despite the fun I'm having playing it, I do wish they'd waited a little longer to release it because it could have been better. For instance, they could have worked on the graphics a little longer so that players' faces wouldn't occasionally fall off revealing the bright red, crash-test-dummy-like base model underneath. Still, for many consoles, it's the only game in town. So in order to say batter up with real MLB players and team logos, you'll have to buy this one and just stay focused on the positives.

DISC JUNKIE by Paul Gaita

A TIP SHEET FOR COMPULSIVE DVD BUYERS



MULTIPLEX

Match Point (DreamWorks) is Woody Allen's umpteenth "comeback" movie (see also *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, etc.), but the difference this time around is the tone. *Match Point* is more of a drama, with a decidedly noirish bent and an English cast, save for Scarlett Johansson as the femme fatale who seduces former tennis pro Jonathan Rhys-Meyers into betraying his marriage, and quite possibly much worse. No extras are featured on the disc, but the film is strong enough to not require bells and whistles. Speaking of killer couples, Warner Bros. has *Bogie and Bacall—The Signature Collection*, a four-disc set of real-life marrieds Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall's best features, including *To Have and Have Not* (the film which sparked their love affair), *The Big Sleep*, *Key Largo*, and *Dark Passage*. The first three are required viewing for fans of classic American cinema (directed by Howard Hawks and John Huston, respectively); the last is a gimmicky but fun thriller buoyed by their natural chemistry. They don't make 'em as classy as that anymore. Also from the Warner vaults this week: Classic Musicals from the Dream Factory, a five-disc set featuring two great Gene Kelly films, *Summer Stock* (with Judy Garland) and *It's Always Fair Weather*, as well as Kelly and Fred Astaire in *Ziegfeld Follies*, Astaire in *Three Little Words*, and Garland and Lena Horne in *Till the Clouds Roll By*. Each disc features outtakes, trailers and other extras. Decidedly less buoyant is Steve Martin's adaptation of his novella *Shop Girl* (Touchstone), about a melancholy romance between a clerk (Claire Danes, excellent) and an emotionally bereft businessman (Martin). It's moody but cold, and saved by Jason Schwartzman as Danes' manic suitor.



ARTHOUSE

24 Hours on Craigslist (Heretic) is an irreverent and very likable documentary about the people behind the personal ads on the sprawling web site, including an Ethel Merman impersonator seeking a metal band to back him/her. If you're a fan of Errol Morris' early features, you'll want to see this. Extras include commentary, four whopping hours of deleted scenes, and

several making-of featurettes. *Betty Blowtorch and Her Amazing True Life Adventures* (Cinema Libre) chronicles the incendiary rock band and the tragic death of its frontwoman, Bianca Halstead (who will be honored with a screening at Hollywood Forever Cemetery this Saturday); the new expanded DVD includes interviews with all surviving BB members and previously unseen footage. *The Crumb Special Edition* (Sony) adds commentary by director Terry (Bad Santa) Zwigoff and Roger Ebert, as well as a widescreen print (all the better to get an eyeful of legendary cartoonist Robert Crumb's astonishing life and family). Novelist James Ellroy does his best Rod Serling as host of the squirm-inducing *Bazaar Bizarre* (Pathfinder), which presents the horrific crimes of serial killer Robert Berdella, who preyed exclusively on young men. On a lighter note are two music documentaries in the *Under Review* series from MVD: *Captain Beefheart* and *The Velvet Underground*, both of which feature rare performance clips, interviews, and commentary on these two can't-be-covered-enough bands.



GRINDHOUSE

Get your own Italian horror/thriller action figure by picking up *The Emilio Miraglia Killer Queen Box Set* (No Shame), a limited edition set featuring two atmosphere- and blood-soaked '70s thrillers (*The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave* and *The Red Queen Kills Seven Times*, both looking just gaw-guss), plus interviews, deleted scenes—and the box comes with a Red Queen figure! Meanwhile, Blue Underground has a trio of two-fisted Italian crime pictures from Enzo G. Castellari: *Street Law* (with Franco Nero), *The Big Racket* (with Fabio Testi) and *Heroin Busters* (also with Testi); each disc has commentary by this underrated action specialist. And Dark Sky has the loony '80s no-budget gore flick *Don't Go Near the Park*, with cannibalism, immortality, and Linnea Quigley, and a double-bill of '60s Japanese sci-fi costume action with *Prince of Space* and *Invasion of the Neptune Men*, with Sonny Chiba, while Shriek Show pits Leslie Nielsen and other '70s B-listers against crazed critters in the nature-gone-wild chiller *Day of the Animals*.

MANGA by Lyn Jensen



HE'S AN ABSOLUTE DOLL

WITH ALL THE manga and movies about a guy and a sexy robo-female, it's about time somebody came up with a story that's the other way around. CLAMP gave us the international hit manga *Chobits*, Hollywood's given us gimmicks ranging from *Weird Science* to *The Stepford Wives*, and Duran Duran gave us their "Electric Barbarella" video. And now, Yuu Watase is giving us *Absolute Boyfriend*, in which girl meets robo-dream-guy, for a change.

As a romantic comedy, *Absolute Boyfriend* may be a gimmick, but what sets it apart from the often insipid shojo (girls') manga is that it's actually funny. Riiko's a flop with guys until she meets a salesman who's not your average suit-and-tie type. He's some kind of cosplayer or fetishist, and he persuades the socially inept schoolgirl to try a three-day trial of his company's "Nightly Lover" model.

"I had this vision in my head, a naked guy tumbling out of a box. Weird, huh?" Watase writes in her sidebar to the first episode. (As shojo fans know, this genre's artists always in-

clude a gossipy sidebar for their fans.) "Normally I'd just laugh it off as the wild fantasies of a single woman, but I'm a manga artist."

Once the (ahem) "action" figure puts his clothes on, it turns out the return policy has a catch and Riiko's stuck with the bill unless she can negotiate something. Further complications include the cheeky boy next door who has unreciprocated love for Riiko, and a treacherous best friend. Plus, Riiko's parents are away, and what's left unsaid is how they may react to what she's done!

Watase has been one of the most popular shojo manga artists for more than a decade. Her debut came in 1989 with *Pajama De Ojama* in the *Shojo Comics* manga anthology. Since then she has drawn such long-running hits as *Fushigi Yugi*, *Alice 19th*, *Ceres*, *Celestial Legend*, and *Madoki*. Her works have spawned two Japanese TV series, novels and anime.

Absolute Boyfriend is rated for "older teen," with a "parental advisory" for "suggestive themes." Vol. 1 is a common find on store shelves right now. Amazon.com lists vol. 2 as available, but VIZ's site doesn't, so buyers may be in for a wait. Six volumes are apparently available in Japan.