How a Salad Bowl Can Improve Transmedia Storytelling:
Integration and Convergence in Film and Game Development.

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On November 5, 2003, Warner Brothers accomplished a first in entertainment history: a simultaneous global movie release. By distributing *The Matrix Revolutions* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 2003) on over 18,000 prints to over 109 regional markets spanning fifty countries, the studio was able to stagger times such that every theatre showed the film at the same moment across the globe. The studio reported gross receipts of over $83 million in the film's first five days, a slight decrease from the previous film, *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), which grossed $134 million in its first four days. According to a press release from Warner Brothers dated September 29, 2003,

> '…the Wachowski Brothers wanted to give our fans the chance to experience the final piece of the Matrix puzzle at the same time in every major city worldwide,' said Joel Silver, producer of the phenomenal Matrix trilogy. 'It's an incredibly complex and exciting venture that furthers the Wachowskis' vision and underscores the trilogy's theme of integration. (Warner Bros.)

The use of the term "integration" is perhaps ironic, as despite studio claims, the global release strategy of the final *Matrix* films were more likely a response to a different global audience: video pirates and their customers. Eliminating black market demand by making movies immediately available is just one way to stay ahead of pirate competition, effectively integrating national markets into global distribution networks. And it has been a successful campaign. As Toby Miller, et al, note in *Global Hollywood*, "Hollywood owns between 40 per cent and 90 per cent of the movies shown in most parts of the world" (Miller 3).

The *Matrix* films illustrate an additional contemporary entertainment industry trend, specifically the tendency toward film/game adaptations and the growing popularity of what media theorist Henry Jenkins labels "transmedia storytelling." The opening of *Matrix Reloaded*, the second *Matrix* film, was accompanied by *Enter the Matrix*, a videogame developed by Newport Beach-based game developer Shiny Entertainment. Rather than offering a typical retread of the film plots, with players taking on the roles of the film characters, *Enter the Matrix* instead fills in the background of the movies, as players pursue missions with secondary characters and explore tangential aspects of the overall film narrative. This strategy was bolstered by a host of ancillary products including the short-film DVD *The Animatrix* (2003, Chung, et al), comic books, and eventually, an on-line game. Rather than serving as incidental ancillaries like action figures or soundtrack albums, these texts are part of the overall story, such that audience members who have played the game and watched the video will have further insight into film, and vice versa. Jenkins sees this as part of a larger entertainment trend toward "media convergence" and argues that increasingly, entertainment developers look to create not films, games, or texts, but to design and explore worlds which by their very nature "can not be fully explored or exhausted within a single work or even a single medium" (Jenkins 22).

The *Matrix* project arrives at a logical moment in the history of the entertainment industry. Following the media reform measures contained in the Telecommunications Act of 1996, media mergers have increased dramatically. By 2002, ten transnational conglomerates dominated the United States' media landscape: Disney, Time Warner, News Corporation, Viacom, Vivendi Universal, Sony, Liberty, Bertelsmann, AT&T-Comcast, and General Electric. Within these ten corporations are housed all of the US commercial television networks, all of the major studios in Hollywood, four of the five firms selling 90% of all music in the US, a majority of cable TV systems, and almost all successful cable TV channels. (McChesney 48-49). Whether directly or

via their various film and television interests, all have direct investment in videogame development, publishing, or franchise licensing; in some cases, such as Sony, Disney, and Vivendi Universal, they have interests in all three. The potential for cross-pollinating projects and producing multiple media texts around one intellectual property is clear. Moreover, this unparalleled era of integration in the entertainment industry at large is mirrored by a period of consolidation with the game industry. As was noted in a recent industry survey conducted by Dan Lee Rogers for game development website Gamasutra:

> [A]cquisitions in 2004 appear to reflect a more strategic view of their competitive environment and their anticipated ability to compete in a Next-Generation-console world … Publishers continue to select development partners that they perceive as having strategically superior technology, valuable intellectual property, and reputations as being best-of-class. Publishers have continued the trend of building their internal studio capability in order to maximize control and quality, and lower costs. Whether they will achieve these goals is yet to be determined. Nevertheless, this too has affected the independent development community.
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> In a consolidation trend similar to what we have experienced on the publisher side, larger independents are consuming more of the open, available projects, making it difficult for smaller developers to compete, both technologically and financially. As profits tighten for all developers, a greater number are interested in finding shelter beneath the roof of a stable purchasing partner. (Rogers)

As game studios continue to merge into larger pools of capital in order to accommodate the increasing cost of game development, they necessarily come closer to film industry behavior, with major studios banking on larger, more conservative titles aimed at the mainstream consumer and leveraged across numerous license tie-ins in order to maximize profits, leaving risky or experimental titles to smaller independent studios. This conservative tendency is coupled with an increasing reliance on licensed IP; with film studios looking to maximize the number of products connected to one film project, and large videogame developers looking to minimize risk by working on known and marketable licenses, film-to-game adaptations become an attractive, seemingly low-risk solution. These trends will likely continue with the coming Next-Gen platforms and their increased cost of development. In her recent talk at the 2005 Game Developers Conference, Kathy Schoback predicted that Next-Gen development cost for an original AAA title will raise to approximately $20 million, with the break-even sales line just over one million copies at current prices. Interestingly, Schoback argues that given these numbers and based on current licensed-title sales, the influence of licensed IP, that is the added market appeal of titles associated with films, TV programs or other licenses, will likely prove to be insignificant unless developers can reliably predict that their game would not sell one million copies on its own (Schoback). Moreover, whatever marginal advantage licensed IP may offer has to be balanced against licensing fees, royalties, and potential design limitations commonly associated with licensed games. Nevertheless, when faced with the choice between trying to sell that many games based on original versus licensed intellectual property, licensed franchises remain an attractive option, particularly when that licensed IP comes backed by the juggernaut of Hollywood marketing.

There is, however, a fly in the ointment. While *Enter the Matrix* sold well, the game itself received lukewarm and even hostile reviews from videogame critics, who felt that the game's over-reliance on cinematic conventions interfered with gameplay. This critique is common to videogames based on film and television licenses, often seen by critics as cynical attempts to generate easy money by exploiting marketing hype around a particular license, without regard to quality. This presents a problem: consolidation within the media, and specifically within the videogame industry, leads to more conservative adaptations of film and television franchise licenses, while at the same time, the results are commonly rejected as inferior

to original content. As with *Enter the Matrix*, critics point to film-to-game adaptations' tendency to rely upon cinematic techniques over interactive elements. This paper will argue that these types of design features, commonly critiqued in licensed adaptations, are due less to developer cynicism than to demonstrable, pragmatic conflicts between film production and videogame development practices. Licensed videogame adaptations are generally developed according the needs of the film production design and schedule, a perceived necessity based in part on the economic gap between the film and videogame industries and in part on the mainstream conception of videogames as a less legitimate or less important medium.

In light of these conflicts, it is useful to think in terms of what film scholar Mette Hjort, in a different context, has referred to as self-defeating productions (Hjort 191). Hjort advances the idea of transnational co-productions as being prone to self-defeating status, in that they risk antagonizing their various audiences by attempting a hybrid design that serves too many masters and none too well. For the purposes of this paper, I would like to adapt her concept to a more general application, in which products created to appeal to more than one segment of consumers can conceivably fail to appeal to any by including elements that please one audience and actively antagonize another, such that no audience is satisfied. In this light, licensed productions that operate across media and involve the creative processes of more than one team or company often find themselves working at cross-purposes because of creative differences, different design needs, conflicting production processes, and mixed or contradictory audience reception. Reconciling these conflicts is a fine line bordered by a host of potential failures. Consequently, game developers often adopt conservative design strategies that, while less innovative and generally displeasing to critics, minimize risk by closely mirroring the film, resulting in a "melting pot" design in which the film and the game converge upon one form. In this paper, I outline the problems facing film-to-game[1] adaptations, specifically focusing on licensed, narrative-based games as a clear segment of media convergence. In doing so, I am faced with three tasks. One, identifying the problem by reviewing critical response to the licensed adaptation genre. Two, isolating the potential process-based reasons why licensed adaptations continue to adopt designs that have proven to be unpopular with critics and consumers. Three, offering, by way of conclusion, a potential strategy for negotiating these challenges and improving content. Game developers minimize risk by embracing conservative design elements that are unappealing to critics and game buyers. In particular, developers engage in a "melting pot" approach that pushes games and films more closely together in content and form, resulting in self-defeating products that antagonise multiple market segments while wholly satisfying none. I argue that a central-management approach would offer film and game developers a solution to design traps commonly found in licensed adaptations. Central to this solution is the goal of avoiding self-defeating projects by minimizing production conflicts and rejecting the common "melting pot" approach in favor of a "salad bowl" approach, in which each media product maintains its own particular advantages while respecting the practical differences between film and videogames. Crucial to this approach is a frank evaluation of the gap in perceived financial viability and social legitimacy between the film and videogame industries.

Identifying the Problem: Meet the Critics

It is worth asking at the outset, how serious is the problem, really? Licensed games with narrative components continue to represent a sizeable portion of the videogame market, which would seem to attest their potential success, at least in financial terms. If these games are so unpopular, why would companies continue to make them? Wouldn't sales reflect the problem and thus discourage this kind of design? Clearly, successes do occur, and videogame sales charts are filled with games based on the most recent blockbuster films. However, the market demand for

[1] For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to videogames of this type as "film-to-game" or "licensed" adaptations, with the understanding that the terms also apply to adaptations based on television licenses.

this type of game is difficult to separate from the film industry's general level of market saturation. Regardless of their actual quality, videogames based on major film licenses often benefit from the "marketing blitz" strategy pursued by film studios for the last two decades: film studios look to recoup their investment on large-budget films in the initial days of release as a way of offsetting short box-office lifespan and potentially negative word of mouth (Epstein "Big Picture").[2] Where the problem of licensed adaptations is most clearly pronounced is in their reception by critics and game-playing audiences. Indeed, while critical response often bears little relation to sales success, compiling a broad sample of product reviews provides a useful index of how critical audiences, and potential consumers, are reacting to a particular game or a particular genre. Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment took this logic to its extreme when it announced in May, 2004, that it would begin charging game publishers a fluctuating royalty rate based on critical response from review sites like GameRankings (www.gamerankings.com) and Metacritic (www.metacritic.com). The policy, devised by the division's chief Jason Hall as an attempt to hold publishers responsible for damaging its intellectual property with inferior products, proved to be very unpopular among game developers, who argued that sales do not equal quality and that game reviews are far from objective (Fahey). Attempting to pin an objective royalty scheme to such a subjective index presented game developers with a seemingly impossible standard.

So why use critical response as an index of industry status at all? Unlike Hall's plan, I am not using the reviews as an indication of game quality, per se. Rather, game reviews offer a sense of the *perceived* quality of particular games and specific genres. As Ernest Adams recently pointed out, most videogame critics are also videogame buyers and fall within the average gameplayer demographic (Adams). As such, videogame critics provide insight into consumer reception beyond sales figures. Moreover, reviewing critical response can provide a useful taxonomy by identifying consensus about perceived flaws.

In this light, analyzing the review statistics compiled on Metacritic proves a useful point in case. The site collects reviews from stable game sites and compiles these results into aggregate statistics for each game reviewed, with separate rankings for critic reviews and fan reviews, resulting in a meta-review that gives a broad sense of what people are saying about a particular game. Of the hundreds of games reviewed on the site, over one hundred[3] are games developed directly from a film or television license, whether part of a major release like Activision's 2004 *Spiderman 2* or a retroactive attempt to realize more profit from an older license, such as the quickly forgotten *Miami Vice* game (Davilex, 2004). Of the over one-hundred licensed adaptations tabulated, the average aggregate review score was 61 out of 100; according to the Metacritic FAQ, this number places the film-to-game average within the lower half of the "Mixed or Average Reviews" category. Moreover, these numbers do not immediately reveal that nearly one quarter of the games reviewed, twenty-two out of 106, fell on or below 49 or the "Generally Unfavorable Reviews" category. (See Figure 1) By comparison, the average review score for all PS2 games contained in the Metacritic archive is 69. The top rated games of the past sixty days, as accessed on September 7, 2005 averaged 84, (See Figure 2), and the lowest rated games of

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[2] Hollywood's profit strategy is in fact far more complex than tabulating box-office profits, as Jay Epstein convincingly demonstrates in *The Big Picture: The New Logic of Money and Power in Hollywood* (2005). Most Hollywood films are considered a box-office success if they break even on theatrical sales balanced against the cost of distribution and marketing. Studios depend upon home video sales, global television rights, and ancillary sales, including game licenses, to push the title into a profit. The role played by game sales in this complicated scenario is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper.

[3] To eliminate data reflecting differences in consoles, all data selection was limited to reviews for the PS2 console. For additional statistical methodology, see Figure 1.

those sixty days averaged just under 61. (See Figure 3)[4] The conclusion is clear: among the games tracked by Metacritic, licensed adaptations consistently averaged among the lowest scores given. Indeed, in the middle of the summer blockbuster season on July 22, 2005, four of the twelve games listed in GameTab's "Lowest Rated, Past 60 days" were licensed adaptations: *Batman Begins* (EA, 2005), *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent* (EA, 2005)[5], *Fantastic 4* (Activision, 2005), and *ER* (Warner Brothers/Legacy, 2005).

Moving beyond aggregate statistics, it is useful to look at a handful of case studies to identify how licensed games can fall into the trap of self-defeating design. However, not all film-licensed games are equal; distinct categories exist within the larger category of licensed adaptations. The most common variety is the direct film adaptation, in which a videogame closely follows the film narrative by directly converting film events into interactive gameplay. This is also the largest category, yielding recent examples like the *Spiderman 2*, *Fantastic Four*, and *Harry Potter* games (EA)[6]. While exceptions occur, they are also among the most commonly criticized games on the market, seen as attempts to quickly cash in on the hype of a particular film release. A title that exemplifies this trend as well as the common problems in film-to-game adaptation is Vivendi Universal's *Van Helsing* adaptation from 2004. Metacritic shows *Van Helsing* receiving 64 based on forty-one reviews. Comments on the game ranged from lukewarm to savage, with one reviewer concluding, "*Van Helsing* is a shining example of what's wrong with games based on movies" (Dodson). So what went wrong? Critics pointed to shallow, unchallenging gameplay, mediocre graphics, and a predictable narrative based directly on the film. But more significantly, critics point to limited camera locations within the game space, presumably designed to offer a sense of the film's cinematography, that limit the ability to see important objects in the game or maneuver effectively during combat. Opponents attack from off screen, depth of field becomes impaired to the point that players have difficulty gauging their attacks, and in general, the camera often hides more than it reveals (Lewis; GamesRadar). The limited camera movement reduces players to a set path, similar to an actor hitting his marks, shuttling players along a linear level design in order to work through events mandated by the film. In effect, the game becomes similar to laser-disc based games like *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace*, in which game play becomes a process of memorizing which move to make at what time, thus severely hampering any notion of interactive or emergent gameplay. And finally, critics point to perhaps the most common complaint about film-to-game adaptations: an over-reliance upon cutscenes. Players are not rewarded with events within the interactive game space, but instead play up to a climactic point, after which the game engine takes over and delivers a canned cinematic. Not only does the design choice rupture the sense of immersion in an interactive space, it also undoes the basic idea of games, which is that they are subject to player control. The game defeats itself by trying to be too much like the film, or embracing a melting pot approach. As one critic summarizes, "Unfortunately, all the cool stuff happens during the cut-scenes" (Dodson). It is a flaw seen repeatedly in the games of this genre.

A second type of licensed adaptation can be found in what Henry Jenkins calls "transmedia storytelling," where each media product contributes to an overall narrative world. The most notable example of this genre are the various products associated with *The Matrix*

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[4] Metacritic does not provide a distinct time frame for recently released and reviewed games; "60 day" statistics are based on charts from GameTab (www.gametab.com), then cross-referenced against Metacritic statistics.

[5] While the first of the *GoldenEye* series was developed directly for the James Bond film, *GoldenEye* (Martin Campbell, 1995), the subsequent *GoldenEye* games are developed as original games and not directly licensed from film projects, and as such, are less directly related to the James Bond films.

[6] Including *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002), *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2003), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Scheduled for release, October, 2005), and *Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup* (2003).

films. For the purposes of this paper, it is most accurate to discuss the two Matrix sequels and the game as separate from the original *Matrix* film, in that the larger transmedia project was released in connection with *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions*, and the reception of these films was significantly different from the original film. Despite collectively earning over $800 million at the box-office,[7] revenue fell markedly from the second to the third film, and both films saw significant drop in revenue after the opening week. Both facts suggest a word of mouth effect that cooled interest from the first film. Critical reception of the films focused on the tangled narrative, apparent plot holes, and undeveloped tangents. Roger Ebert, professing to like the films, writes that his admiration for *Revolutions* is tempered by "the awkward fact that I don't much give a damn what happens to any of the characters" before concluding with a significant wink that "finally I measure my concern for him not in affection but more like the score in a video game" (Ebert). Likewise, game critics emphasized the unfinished feeling of the game, shallow and repetitious gameplay, confusing narrative, and a general lack of polish (Turner; Liu). Not surprisingly, then, *Enter the Matrix* receives a 62 across thirty reviews on Metacritic. Jeff Gerstmann reflects a common complaint when writing "the game serves as little more than an advertisement for the film – it doesn't have a story that stands on its own, and the gameplay doesn't really offer anything that we haven't seen in better games" (Gerstmann). He notes the game's tendency to sacrifice game play for special effects and cut scenes, such that players are asked to play up to a critical moment only to have the game engine take over and deliver a canned animation. Part of critical response to the game is clearly motivated by the game's unusual design strategy. Unlike *Van Helsing* and other, more straightforward adaptations, *Enter the Matrix* chooses to develop narrative lines that are often in the background of the film narrative. Not only does this require that gameplayers see the film in order to fully understand game events, it constantly points to the existence of other products that will complete the whole narrative of the project. What Gerstmann interprets as advertising for the film may be in fact seen as an unusual attempt to tell a story across media. However, seen from a gameplay perspective, the design strategy leads the game too much in the direction of a film. In other words, the critics of the game and film argue that in trying to be more like each other, each text manages to sacrifice the strength of its own medium without realizing the strengths of the other. As such, the *Matrix* project employs a melting pot strategy that, while financially successful, resulted in a self-defeating design that met with growing fan resistance leading to diminishing financial returns. Furthermore, as I will discuss below, the criticism received for feeling unpolished suggests the possibility that the project did not receive adequate production time.

In contrast to *Van Helsing* and similar to *Enter the Matrix*, EA's *The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age* attempts something near transmedia storytelling by allowing players to direct original characters through their own adventures in the larger world of Middle Earth. While the initial games based on *The Lord of the Rings* film license are typical interactive walkthroughs of the corresponding film events, *The Third Age* is first of the series not based directly on a film. In *The Third Age*, characters pursue an original storyline which at times intersects with film events, providing the larger picture of what happened before, during, or after the heroes of the movies pursue their quest; however, it is not necessary to play the game in order to understand film events or vice versa, as critics suggest is the case with *The Matrix* project. Reactions to the game were generally favorable, and the title receives 73 across thirty-four reviews on Metacritic. What criticism that is offered focuses specifically on the common flaw of relying on cinematic form over interactivity. In her review for GameSpot, Bethany Massimilla notes the game's tendency to communicate narrative exposition through cutscenes; Gandalf (Ian McKellen), a major character from the books and films, reveals story information directly, rather than characters interacting with each other or the game world in order to reveal narrative. She argues that "you are explicitly told what has happened and what will happen instead of actually seeing it happen, and it serves to

[7] Source: Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com), 16 September 2005.

somewhat distance the player from the whole experience" (Massimilla). In this, the game recreates some of the faults of *Enter the Matrix*, in that its narrative strategy relies too heavily upon the reception model offered by film, rather than the interaction model that people desire from games.[8] However, in general, this critic concludes that the game play is strong enough to offer a compelling experience, and more importantly, fans of the books and films will enjoy the chance to explore Middle Earth and interact with the major characters while augmenting the clear narrative lines set by Tolkien. There is an attempt to let the game maintain its own specific strengths and purpose within the larger project, as well as explore the larger canvas of this fictional world without being too greatly impeded by the events of the films. Clearly, *The Lord of the Rings* project has an advantage in that its fanbase was pregenerated by the popularity of Tolkien's fiction and the numerous products already developed in connection to the license, ranging from art calendars and role-playing games to fan conventions. But the point remains that where *The Third Age* is critiqued, it is for the moments where it fails to be a game in its attempt to be more like a film; where it succeeds is where it plays upon the strengths of the game medium and offers players the chance to fully explore a larger fictional world. While not self-defeating to the degree of the previous two games discussed, *The Third Age* does run the risk of converging upon a melting pot form in that it occasionally relies on film conventions to advance a videogame narrative.

Escape from Butcher Bay offers a third category of film/game convergence. While drawing upon the "Chronicles of Riddick" world seen in *Pitch Black* (2000, David Twohy) and its sequel, *The Chronicles of Riddick* (2004, David Twohy), the game explores a separate and distinct narrative not directly reliant upon film events. As such, the game is unlike direct adaptations like *Van Helsing*, with their directly imitative narratives, or transmedia projects like *Enter the Matrix* or *The Third Age*, which while containing separate narratives, are nevertheless reliant on film elements to complete the entire storyline. *Escape from Butcher Bay* was enthusiastically received by critics, receiving an aggregate score of 89 across eighty-one reviews.[9] GameSpot reviewer Greg Kasavin notes,

> *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay* is one of those exceedingly rare types of games that delivers exceptionally high quality through and through and single-handedly ups the ante for all similar games. The fact that it also happens to be based on a movie franchise – something that's usually a bad sign for a game – makes it all the more incredible. (Kasavin)

Escape from Butcher Bay overcomes the stigma attached to film franchise games and becomes that rarest of products, the critically successful film-to-game adaptation. Unlike the previous three games discussed, *Escape* pursues its own distinct narrative with a minimum of overtly cinematic elements. Players guide Riddick as he escapes from maximum-security prison Butcher Bay, a prequel event to the film narratives. The advantage here is that, while remaining within the same story world and revealing details directly related to the films, the game is not hemmed in by the

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[8] Ironically, while critics like Massimila argue that interactivity is the key to game immersion, since the early seventies film scholars have drawn on psychoanalytic models to argue that it is exactly the *passivity* of the film experience that allows film audiences to "identify" with film narratives and achieve film immersion. Simplified, the argument asserts that filmgoers enter into a passive, even womblike, space in which they forget about their own lives and begin to identify with the characters and their fictional worlds, or become figuratively sutured into the film diegesis through narrative, cinematography, editing, and other filmic tools. See Jean-Pierre Oudart, "Cinema and Suture," Stephen Heath, "Notes on Suture," and Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," among others. More recently, however, film theorists have argued for film reception as a perceptually and physically active experience. See Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street," and Thomas J. Slater, "Considering the Active Viewer: The Basis for Seeing Film's Liberating Impact on Language," among others.

[9] This title is unavailable on the PS2 console; score reflects reviews on the Xbox console.

film narrative. Developers can more easily avoid the temptation to make the game like a film, as in this case, there are no specific film events that need to be related within the game narrative and there are no film scenes to be used as cutscenes. The game offers developers, and therefore players, the best of both worlds; it explores a common narrative world and enhances the depth of the story while not becoming a paler imitation of what is already available in the films. The project pleases fans of the films without alienating players more interested in the game.

The theme that emerges from the critical response to these four games presents a challenge to multimedia franchising as well as the idea of transmedia storytelling. For a straightforward adaptation like *Van Helsing*, which does not attempt to diverge from the film narrative to any significant degree, the connection to a mainstream film becomes more of a deficit than an asset in terms of gameplay. Already skeptical about licensed film franchise adaptations, critics find little original content to praise and too many cinematic-based handicaps to criticize. Likewise, much of the critique of *The Matrix* texts, films and otherwise, is that they do not stand on their own merits; the game feels to much like a film, to the point that gameplay agency is sacrificed to its narrative needs and the general attempt to capture a cinematic sense, whereas the films contain large holes that only make sense when filled by the games, short films, and comic books. *The Third Age* seems to be at its strongest in the moments it is least dependent upon the films, and yet it attempts to maintain a strong connection to cinematic conventions. Certainly, some of this is mandated by the fan scrutiny under which the *Lord of the Rings* products were created. Nevertheless, for both *Enter the Matrix* and *The Third Age*, it is clear that the films set the project agenda and the game developers have designed accordingly. The reasons why this approach usually leads to inferior games will be discussed below. For the moment, suffice it to say that developers moving toward film form end up defeating their own ends by alienating gameplayers. *Escape from Butcher Bay*, by pursuing a design based on a prequel to film events and not the film events themselves, is free to explore a more interesting alternative. The game capitalizes upon the strengths explored by *Enter the Matrix* and *The Lord of the Rings* games without duplicating their weaknesses, specifically meaning that the film agenda does not take over the game agenda. Unlike *Enter the Matrix* or the *Lord of the Rings* games, there are no pre-existing scenes from the film that the player is working toward or set events that must happen within the game design. The game developers, and thus players, are free to explore the common transmedia narrative.

Critics repeatedly point to the problem of games working at cross-purposes to themselves. Narrative structure is not the issue[10]; as *Escape from Butcher Bay* demonstrates, it is possible to have narrative structure within a game and still preserve satisfying gameplay. However, in attempting to be more specifically cinematic via a reliance on film convention, videogames run the risk of giving up their own unique strengths. While Henry Jenkins is likely correct in suggesting that transmedia storytelling is the way of the future for a large section of the entertainment industry (Jenkins), in transmedia storytelling, each text must be able to stand alone and perform efficiently and effectively according to the merits and demands of its own medium. Despite media convergence, a game is not a film is not a comic book. So why do game

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[10] In recent years, videogame scholars have engaged in a vigorous exchange over narratives in games. Theorists falling roughly into two camps, ludologists and narratologists. Ludologists see games as their own medium with their own dynamics and constraints. While this position leads some theorists to extreme positions, such as Greg Costikyan's argument that narrative content leads to inferior game design (Costikyan), other theorists such as Espen Aarseth (Aarseth) and Gonzalo Frasca (Frasca), call for a conceptual framework separate from traditional theoretical approaches in which concepts loaned from narrative theory are examined for the specificity of how they apply to an interactive medium. Narratologists, on the other hand, generally proceed from the idea that games are a form of narrative structure and are therefore accessible to traditional narrative theories (Murray). The purpose of this paper is not to enter into this debate; as demonstrated, games with narrative elements have met commercial and critical success and will likely continue to be developed regardless of scholarly debate. The question at stake here is not the problem of narrative elements but the problem of *cinematic* elements.

developers largely maintain a directly imitative or cinematic approach when designing these kinds of games? The problem is two-fold. One, there is a procedural conflict between how games and films are developed, which leads to conservative melting pot designs. Driving this problem is a second and larger issue of economic and cultural legitimacy. The videogame industry imitates the film industry because films generate more money and have achieved greater cultural acceptability.

The Root of the Problem: Developing Videogames According to Film Dictates

It is predictable that game adaptations of popular films usually proceed according to the demands of the film production. The films most likely to be adapted into videogames, summer blockbusters and action films, routinely have budgets ranging above $100 million; by comparison, the cost to develop AAA-titles, even if reaching the $20 million predicted by Kathy Schoback for the next generation of console games, is roughly the cost of a small scale genre film or ambitious independent film. The project with the highest financial risk logically dictates the agenda for its associated licenses. Moreover, despite the common claim among game developers that the game industry has become larger than the film industry in sales, in truth the film industry at large dwarfs the game industry. According to Douglas Lowenstein, president of the Entertainment Software Association (ESA), annual global film box office revenue is approximately $45 billion, whereas annual video game unit sales revenue is approximately $28 billion (Lowenstein). Lowenstein's numbers are in fact based on box-office revenue versus software revenue, leaving out the majority of Hollywood's current revenue sources such as home video, international television rights, and product licensing. Profit calculations based on these factors would in fact project Hollywood's annual revenue at a much higher number. As such, the film industry, Hollywood or otherwise, has both greater financial stake and greater financial power. Moreover, the distinct delineation between film and game industries as reflected in Lowenstein's comparative figures may not exist in reality. All major film studios are also game companies to some degree; their projects are going to behave accordingly.

On a practical level, the tendency for film projects to dictate the development plans for their license-sharers presents significant challenges to developers trying to create engaging licensed adaptations. Johan Kristiansson, CEO of Starbreeze Studios, the studio behind *Escape from Butcher Bay* and *The Darkness*,[11] offers insight into the challenges of licensed-game production cycles. Specifically, he identifies two issues that compromise the quality of licensed adaptations: one, conflicts between film and game development schedules, and two, conflicts within the design approval process (Kristiansson). The average Hollywood film takes roughly twelve to eighteen months to move from pre-production to completed post-production, depending upon a myriad of complex factors including pre-production factors like necessary script revisions, production factors like set-building and special effects engineering, and post-production elements such as digital effects and processing. The average AAA-title game averages twenty-four months to move from the design stage to a release-ready gold disc. Immediately, one can see the direct conflict in schedules. A developer would normally need a six month lead in order to release a game simultaneously with a film. Given that film licenses are not announced until after a script, or at least a concept, has been greenlighted, there is simply no license to work with until the film schedule starts. This leaves most game developers with two options: maintain the film production schedule and shorten their own development cycle, or ship a game potentially months after the marketing campaign for the film is over. Moreover, depending upon the status of the script, securing a license for a greenlighted project is no guarantee that the film concept is firmly in place. Film studios routinely revise scripts, sometimes almost completely, up to and through the production phase. Game development is much less flexible in its design phase, as game development can require months of multiple employees working to design, create, and encode

[11] Based on the comic book series published by Top Cow and scheduled for release in 2006.

elements mandated by the film narrative. Changes to scripts that might require only a few added days of film production can potentially mean additional weeks or months for game developers. Despite whatever precautions a studio might undertake, change is inevitable, and if the film changes, then the game must change accordingly. Publishers look to capitalize upon film marketing by maintaining the film's release schedule, and development studios attempt to accommodate the shortened production cycle in a variety of ways, by either hiring more employees, working extra hours, underdeveloping parts of the game, or more closely and conservatively imitating the film, up to including cinematic elements in their design. The last two factors in particular often result in inferior game quality according to game critics. As noted above, the game elements most commonly critiqued are also the elements most likely due to tight scheduling, such as *Van Helsing*'s reliance upon limited camera positions and a linear narrative, or *Enter the Matrix*'s unfinished feeling and inferior graphics.

Kristiansson provides an example from the game development cycle for *Escape from Butcher Bay*. Starbreeze Studios secured the license to make games based on *The Chronicles of Riddick* universe in the summer of 2002; not having seen the script for the film, the team based its game pitch on what it knew of the Riddick character from the original film, *Pitch Black*. Once the license was secured, the studio was presented with a twenty-month cycle based on the film's production schedule. While unusually long for a film due to its special-effects requirements, this schedule still shaved four months off the usual game development cycle. Initially, the development team debated setting its game as a sequel or a prequel to the films; given that the film script was still undergoing development, they opted to avoid additional scheduling setbacks by developing a prequel to film events, leaving them a greater degree of design freedom. However, conflicts were not completely eliminated. As one example, game designers created a backstory explaining Riddick's night vision that did not correspond to the explanation ultimately reflected in the script. Fortunately, developers were able to change their design accordingly (Kristiansson). However, the potential for significant problems increases the further along in the development process conflicts take place. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that basing game development on film production schedules leaves game developers little extra time for revision.

The second issue Kristiansson identifies as problematic for developing licensed adaptations is the increased complexity of the approval process. Unlike a traditional game or film, in which approval generally follows a hierarchy limited to within the production company and the publisher/studio, licensed games, film-based or otherwise, must gain approval from parties outside the direct line of game development. In the case of a game based on a film or television license, the approval process usually has three major steps: the studio/publisher, the license holder/film production team, and the star or director.[12] In addition to the internal approval process, which usually entails several levels of designers and executives within the studio and the publisher, the game design must also be approved by the license holder, in this case the studio and film production team. Additionally, most films that generate game adaptations include a star of some sort, whether actor or director, who is often contractually entitled to their own creative

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[12] Any game based on a license undergoes a similar process. For example, games based on popular sport franchises have multiple approval processes, such as NFL-licensed football games, which must receive approval from both the NFL and the NFL Players' Association. Each organization has its own specific interests to protect, which may or may not be in accordance with the developer's vision. Evidence of this is seen in the increasingly conservative behavior by the NFL after the scandal surrounding Janet Jackson's exposed nipple during the 2004 Superbowl half-time show. Within the game industry, the NFL's desire to maintain a family-friendly reputation was felt through an increased diligence about the levels of violence and sexual content in NFL-licensed football simulations. After the NFL announced its exclusive five year licensing deal with EA Sports, Midway gave vent to its frustration at the NFL's conservative nature, labeling it "the No Fun League" ("*Blitz*").

approval. In the case of *Escape from Butcher Bay*, the approval process outside the studio included the publisher, Vivendi Universal Games, and the film production team managed through Vivendi Universal Films. Vin Diesel was also entitled to his own approval; fortunately in this case, Diesel has a well documented interest in games, so much so that he created his own company, Tigon Studios, to oversee his involvement in this and future game projects (*GMR*). An increased approval process, with elements of creative control falling to parties outside the studio, not only slows down the already time-sensitive design process, it also increases the chance that any innovation in game design will be modified or eliminated by parties more interested in the film's creative and financial potential than in the game's design. Each step in the approval process increases the probability of suggested changes, which as already stressed, presents a time-sensitive set of problems for game development. Simply stated, the licensed approval process subjects game development to outside interference during a time when it can least afford it.

The approval process is particularly thorny when dealing with independently owned corporations co-developing different aspects of a common IP license, as in the case of *Escape from Butcher Bay*, for which Starbreeze Studios contracted with Vivendi Universal to produce a game. In attempting to work together, the resolution path for inevitable conflicts over interests and final authority must be spelled out clearly in the original licensing agreements, or the potential for project killing stagnation is very real. In this aspect, multimedia entertainment corporations with divisions devoted to the various aspects of contemporary entertainment would seem to have a clear advantage. Sony, as one example, has divisions devoted entirely to film, television, music, and games, and as such, would seem ideally positioned to streamline the design and approval process. However, even here, the possibility of conflicting creative visions exists. In a recent interview for the game development site Gamasutra, Rodney Greenblat, the artist and developer who helped shape the groundbreaking *PaRappa the Rapper* for Sony's PSOne platform in 1994, discussed the franchise's development over titles and across media. The game's unanticipated success in Japan spawned a Japanese animated program for children, and for Greenblat, the results were messy. Conflicts over design vision and copyright among different branches of the franchise owner, Sony, led to continuity errors, narrative inconsistencies, and a sacrifice of the original game's design vision. As Greenblat notes,

> Sony Creative owned the copyright, and Sony Computer had ownership of just the game... they didn't care, because it was raking in all this money for Sony even if it was just two different divisions... but when the animation people came in, and then Fuji TV... it just got [to be] this whole mess. Just too many people... (Hawkins)

When the series appeared on Japanese television, it became clear that significant differences between the game audience, comprised largely of teenagers and above, and the animated series, which was targeted at children, made it difficult to realize any cross-media synergy. Fans of the game were not interested in a children's television show, and children who liked the series found it difficult to master a game designed for post-adolescent developmental skills. This clear example of a "self-defeating" project, in which the different goals of the game and animated series stood in direct conflict, even contradiction, to each other, effectively achieves the inverse of synergy as each product antagonizes the contrasting fanbase.

The challenges discussed above are largely issues of process and management, caused by the film industry's proportionately larger influence on design due to its larger financial presence. However, the problems faced by film-to-game developers have another, essentially social, cause in common: the current "illegitimate" status of the videogame industry. Despite healthy profits, explosive growth, and significant future market potential, games are not yet seen as a legitimate or respectable part of mainstream culture. Many people still envision the typical gameplayer as an antisocial seventeen-year old sitting on the living room sofa. This perception of lesser social presence pervades the entertainment industry, including the videogame industry itself. In her address at the 2005 Game Developers Conference, Kathy Schoback anticipates that the cost of

AAA-title development for next-gen consoles could go above $20 million and would require a million copies sold to break even; despite the financial and social significance of these numbers, Schoback quipped "we're still not as cool as Hollywood" (Schoback). Likewise, in his opening state of the industry address at E3 Expo 2005, Entertainment Software Association President Douglas Lowenstein made a point of dispelling the urban myth that the game industry is larger than the film industry, noting "it never has been true." He pointedly stresses the economic stakes, asking, "what will it take for the game industry to be as big or bigger than the film industry at some point in the future?" (Lowenstein) Lowenstein identifies the need to expand the marketbase for games, and his six-point agenda calls for increasing appeal to female and casual gamers through better and different game design, arguing that more variety in what is offered gamebuyers will increase the variety of people who will buy games. But what remains significant about Lowenstein's remarks is the pointed assumption that games are currently seen as a less socially acceptable or legitimate form of entertainment media. As he states the case,

> Acceptance in the culture is the key to legitimacy. None of us were alive when film first came on the scene but historians will tell you it was not regarded with great and instant acclaim. Our industry is just thirty years old and has produced more than its fair share of classics. No doubt, many more will come. But if we as an industry aspire to the same cultural and artistic credibility and stature achieved by other major forms of entertainment, our creative community and our publishers will have to eschew some of the historically easy and successful formulas for commercial success and draw consumers into some new kinds of interactive entertainment experiences that more often ennoble our industry. (Lowenstein)

Remarks like those of Schoback and Lowenstein reflect the reality of the contemporary videogame industry, assigned the role of little brother to the older, larger, and wiser film industry. While making such clear-cut distinctions between the two industries is problematic given the sizeable investment of companies like Sony, Vivendi Universal, and Disney in both industries, nevertheless, when it comes to transmedia projects or licensed adaptations, videogames clearly take a backseat to film. It is standard procedure that a game studio developing a licensed franchise gives some level of creative control to the licensor; paradoxically, the reverse is hardly ever true. Even Bungie, creators of the enormously successful *Halo* franchise and with all of Microsoft's business acumen behind it, gave up creative control of the *Halo* film license to Universal and Fox, though reports assured that Microsoft executives and designers would be guaranteed "'extensive' consultation" (Steel). Developers like Kristiansson and Greenblat describe in clear terms the challenges presented to game development when their game design agenda is subject to the approval of a party whose agenda is set by film, a entirely different medium with different production and audience demands.

Moreover, process-basd conflicts like those described by Kristiansson do not entirely account for game like Davilex's *Miami Vice*, Activision's *American Chopper* (2004), or Take 2's *The Great Escape* (2003). While all three are based on successful and potentially valuable film and television licenses, they are not entirely subject to the same production or marketing pressures as the usual film-to-game adaptation. *Miami Vice* was published years after the television show ended, presumably leaving the development team free to dictate its own schedule with ample time for developing a polished game, and yet the game receives an abysmal 27 rating on Metacritic. *American Chopper*, though based on a very successful television series in production during the same time the game was in development, does not present the same scenario as adapting a summer blockbuster. The cost of producing a reality-television series is substantially less than that of producing, for example, the *Van Helsing* film, and as such, the argument for greater financial stakes dictating design approval does not necessarily apply to the *American Chopper* television license. One could imagine that the game developers would be on a more level playing field with their television counterparts, consequently able to negotiate a

favorable design and schedule. And yet, the game receives a 44 rating on Metacritic. Likewise, *The Great Escape*, based on a popular film classic with an established cult following, is nevertheless an older license that has long since recouped its investment based on theatrical release, video sales, and other licenses. It would seem a prime opportunity to invest the time and care necessary to develop a high-quality game capable of reviving the license's appeal. The game receives a 57 on Metacritic. Individually, these games have their specific flaws; collectively, they suggest that the game industry is still seen by the larger entertainment industry as a place to realize easy money by developing quick products that attempt to exploit license appeal without providing game quality. As Lowenstein and Schoback argue, in the end this is an issue of the videogame industry's perceived lack of legitimacy or social respectability.

A Suggested Solution: Central Management and the Salad Bowl Approach

So how is this problem to be resolved? How can game studios avoid self-defeating or melting pot approaches so commonly rejected by game critics? The general solution lies in two directions. First, in the coming age of transmedia storytelling, design will have to be a centrally managed process, and designers will need to develop interdisciplinary skills and experience. Transmedia storytellers will need to be equally fluent in the demands of film, game, music, and print media while respecting each medium for its particularities. Moreover, they will have to be able to think in terms of worlds as well as narrative unities; they will need to be able to think historically, culturally, politically, economically, and sociologically. These skills are not always found among traditionally trained screenwriters, level designers, visual artists, or game and film producers, as these kinds of creators are often trained in the specifics of their trade and focus upon developing singular, effective texts that behave according to their medium's specific internal needs. However, the skills necessary to develop an entire, believable entertainment world require a detailed, multiperspective awareness of how societies operate in reality and beyond the constraints of one text or one medium. What are needed are developers capable of drawing upon a wider range of knowledge than traditional film and game design. As Kathy Schoback argues in an interview with *Game Zone*, the incoming generation of developers should "get the highest-quality general education you can in your field of interest. There's plenty of time to specialize. We can teach artists to use Maya, but can't teach Maya experts classical art" (Schoback). For designers, the field of interest is humanities in general: literature, history, economics, politics, sociology, and the like.

Second, transmedia development has and will continue to call for central project management. Current industry practice resists this kind of central planning by allowing the initial or most costly IP commodity to set the agenda for the rest of the associated products. The film or TV script is written, the production schedule is planned, and it is up to the other developers to find a way to work around or within that frame. However, to successfully develop a project across media, the various development parties must necessarily coordinate from the ground up in order to create a world in which there are equal opportunities for high quality products across media. If these projects are not centrally managed, they quickly degenerate into situations where what is good for the film or television series is not good for the game and vice versa, pitting the interests of each medium and each license-holder against the central concept of the intellectual property. Rodney Greenblat's experience with *PaRappa* provides further illustration of this point:

> When *PaRappa 2* came out, the animated series came out in Japan, and [there were] too many people involved for me… [The show's producers] decided that they wouldn't let anyone from the game team side work on the TV side, they didn't want to pull anyone from the game development for the TV show development. And then they wanted to slate the show for little kids, 5 year olds or something, mostly to sell toys.
>
> And I wasn't into that, because I was like "Everyone knew teenagers loved

> *PaRappa*, so let's do a teen show." But [Sony] wanted to sell toys, so [the show's producers] made a little kids version of *PaRappa*. (Hawkins)

Greenblat goes on to note how, because of the lack of central design and franchise management, the various parties quickly pursued design decisions that best fit their medium and market needs, regardless of how these development decisions fit into the larger franchise.

> I would get rushes for each episode and make corrections, and they wouldn't even do anything about it! Characters kept on changing and messing up... in the game PaRappa could drive a car so you figure he's 16 or 17, but in the show he's sitting in the third grade and his antics were based on what 8 or 9 year old are doing? It just got all nutty... and then I think [all the various parties] all fell apart… [A]ll those companies just scattered and did their own things. (Hawkins)

The problems created by a lack of central project management are more than simple issues of continuity. When the various products within a franchise pursue different goals and, in this case, different market demographics, the result is a self-defeating project in which any original audience is actively alienated by the new products, while a new, cohesive audience is difficult to achieve, as the products no longer make sense with regard to each other. What appeals in the game is contradicted by the television show, and vice versa. Again, what is realized is the worst of both worlds with the advantages of neither; the sacrifice culminates in a loss of franchise synergy.

This kind of central project management calls for central roles for the design and production teams. One recently suggested solution is the New Studio Model offered by Stuart Roch on *Gamasutra* in October of 2004. Roch's model revolves around a core team of developers that build the game technology, allowing the studio to bring in guest designers to lead the game design. The goal in his model is to allow creators like Peter Jackson or J.K. Rowling to direct games based upon their fictional universe and accentuate their narrative strengths without falling into the traps discussed previously in this paper. The New Studio Model also places the administrative hassles on the shoulders of the publishers and producers, who are best suited for these kinds tasks, rather than the artists creating the game. It is perhaps no coincidence that Roch is an executive producer at Shiny Entertainment, the developers of *Enter the Matrix*, as this model would serve well for a Matrix-like project. However, this model is designed specifically as a solution for developing a multiple number of games. It does not take into account the demands of transmedia or multimedia development. A more radical solution is required: a central design and production team that develops the core narrative world including game and film scripts, characters, art design, game play, and other elements in order to insure that each element logically fits into the larger whole without sacrificing one text's needs for the demands of another. The implementation of these designs can then be managed by the individual studios. Projects like *Enter the Matrix*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Chronicles of Riddick* have already moved definitively in this direction.

The challenges to this model are in part predictably financial and pragmatic. Who provides the capital and assumes the risk for a transmedia project of this nature? How are the profits shared? Who has final say over the inevitable conflicts? To date, these risks have largely been shouldered by the film studio, as the majority of licensed adaptations or transmedia projects are generated by film narratives. Moreover, most transmedia projects to date are based on preexisting franchises in an attempt to minimize risk, the logic being that if an audience for this narrative world already exists, then sales for new commodities within that world are more likely than for original IP. Working from existing narrative worlds also allows film and game developers to capitalize upon works already created and essentially "market tested" by fans. Tolkien's Middle Earth, the Star Wars universe, J.K. Rowling's Hogwarts Academy, and Roddenberry's Star Trek universe are just a few examples of that provide complete visions of a comprehensive narrative world, with background events, secondary characters, side plots, and other details ripe for exploration. Working from a pre-existing world reduces the time and money

required to develop comparable material and by appealing to an established fanbase likewise reduces the risk of developing original IP that consumers may ultimately find uninteresting or unconvincing. As such, it seems likely that licensed franchise development will continue hand-in-hand with media convergence for the foreseeable future.

The larger issue at stake is the necessity of changing the perception of the videogame industry as a lower stakes, less legitimate offshoot of the entertainment industry in general. As Douglas Lowenstein summarizes the issue, "acceptance in the culture is the key to legitimacy" (Lowenstein). Acceptance will come in part as the videogame market expands beyond its current demographics and encompasses older, gender-balanced, and ethnically diverse audiences. This kind of acceptance largely comes with time, as successive generations embrace videogames and developers emerge to address different market demands. Moreover, the continuing success of the game industry will be in part its own solution to the problem of legitimacy. As the cost of developing videogames increases at the same time that the video-game buying market is expanding, studios will necessarily have larger financial stakes in co-developing licensed franchises and will be better positioned to demand better terms for development, potentially leading to higher quality games.

The term "media convergence" carries with it the idea that all media are moving toward the same spot, a central ground in which texts begin to behave similarly, thus mandating a similar approach to developing a film, a game, or any other related product. However, not only are the narrative and design demands different between a successful game, a successful film, or any other medium, each medium likewise offers different strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, the successful management of a film, a game, or any other entertainment commodity presents its own practical production challenges. It requires different skills, resources, and schedules to develop different media commodities. Rather than thinking of film-to-game adaptations as a pale, interactive imitation of the original film, they should be conceived of as their own legitimate products requiring their own forms and deserving quality development. Rather than thinking of transmedia production as a melting pot in which each all texts tend toward a homogenous stew, we should be working toward projects that are like the proverbial salad bowl, where each ingredient maintains its own flavor while adding to the overall success of the dish.

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Figure 1: Aggregate Review Scores -- Film & TV to Game Adaptations, 7 Sept. 2005[13]

Game Title	Metacritic Aggregate Rating	Metacritic Number of Reviews	GameTab Aggregate Rating	GameTab Number of Reviews
Alias	64	31	62,00	26
American Idol	41	14	50,00	9
Antz Extreme Racing	31	5		
Astro Boy	54	28	50,00	16
Bad Boys II: Miami Takedown	36	15	34,00	10
Batman Begins	63	38	67,00	22
Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	63	21	65,00	20
Batman: Vengeance	68	19		
Battlestar Galactica	66	22	72,00	21
Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	72	27	72,00	23
Carmen Sandiego: The Secret of the Stolen Drums	53	8	50,00	6
Catwoman	46	35	44,00	21
Constantine	57	28	56,00	14
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	48	26	53,00	23
Dr. Seuss' The Cat in the Hat	56	6		
Dragon Ball Z Budokai	67	28	64,00	16
Dragon Ball Z Budokai 2	66	28	71,00	21
Dragon Ball Z Budokai 3	77	31	77,00	22
Dragon Ball Z Sagas	49	13	52,00	7
Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee	52	17	52,00	11
Enter the Matrix	62	30	70,00	30
Evil Dead: A Fistful of Boomstick	54	24	64,00	26
Fantastic Four	64	39	66,00	30
Fight Club	36	27	34,00	21
Finding Nemo	64	13	66,00	11
Futurama	59	22	64,00	17
Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex	66	31	69,00	14
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	60	38	58,00	27
Great Escape, The	57	19	59,00	17
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets	71	16	75,00	8
Harry Potter and the Prisone of Azkaban	70	29	71,00	17
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	56	14	58,00	12
Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	68	21	71,00	18
Hulk, The	71	28	72,00	18
Incredibles, The	63	35	61,00	25
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	65	17	65,00	14
Italian Job, The	55	18	55,00	18
James Bond 007: Agent Under Fire	72	27	80,00	1
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	84	42	85,00	36
James Bond 007: Nightfire	77	20	80,00	12
Jimmy Neutron: Attack of the Twonkies	65	8	65,00	3
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	75	13	73,00	8
Knight Rider 2	26	7		

[13] In the interest of scope, statistics are based on reviews for the PS2 platform. Scores from the GameTab review site are provided for comparative purposes.

Lego Star Wars	77	45	82,00	32
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	63	24	70,00	18
Looney Tunes: Back in Action	58	8	69,00	4
Looney Tunes: Space Race	62	14		
Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring	59	19	62,00	10
Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King	85	31	86,00	27
Lord of the Rings: The Third Age	73	34	79,00	23
Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers	82	32	80,00	12
Madagascar	69	24	76,00	13
Miami Vice	27	5	30,00	4
Mission: Impossible - Operation Surma	64	30	66,00	23
Monsters, Inc.	52	15		
Mummy Returns, The	44	13		
Polar Express	39	10	39,00	5
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	49	6	50,00	3
Powerpuff Girls: Relish Rampage	46	5	43,00	3
Predator: Concrete Jungle	47	14	52,00	3
Robots	49	5	50,00	1
Rocky	74	14		
Rocky Legends	65	24	70,00	17
Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku	59	21	58,00	12
Scooby Doo! Night of 100 Frights	69	20		
Scooby Doo: Mystery Mayhem	55	17	60,00	15
Scorpion King: Rise of the Akkadian, The	47	12		
Shark Tale	69	29	70,00	19
Shrek 2: The Game	71	32	73,00	30
Shrek: Super Party	30	4	36,00	3
Simpsons: Hit & Run	78	35	79,00	37
Simpsons: Road Rage	64	23	63,00	18
Simpsons Skateboarding, The	38	21		
Spider-Man: The Movie	76	25		
Spider-Man 2	80	50	84,00	47
SpongeBob SquarePants Movie	71	17	70,00	10
SpongeBob SquarePants: Battle for Bikini Bottom	71	9	72,00	3
Star Trek: Shattered Universe	42	19	50,00	22
Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force	52	12		
Star Wars Battlefront	82	36	80,00	23
Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith	59	33	68,00	24
Star Wars: Bounty Hunter	65	32	69,00	20
Star Wars: The Clone Wars	72	20	73,00	11
Star Wars Starfighter	84	24		
Star Wars: Jedi Starfighter	81	22		
Star Wars Racer Revenge	73	34		
Star Wars Super Bombad Racing	71	21		
Starsky & Hutch	60	15	69,00	10
Superman: Shadow of Apokolips	64	22		
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	59	29	64,00	20
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle	47	25	50,00	13

Nexus				
Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines	38	21	35,00	22
Terminator 3: Redemption	68	29	69,00	21
Terminator: Dawn of Fate	58	17		
Thing, The	78	27	83,00	3
Tom and Jerry: War of the Whiskers	63	4	68,00	3
Top Gun: Combat Zones	63	17		
Transformers	75	51	79,00	39
Transformers Tataki	31	5		
Van Helsing	64	41	67,00	28
Wallace & Gromit in Project Zoo	67	15	66,00	15
Woody Woodpecker: Escape from Buzz Buzzard Park	64	5		
X-Files: Resist or Serve	67	31	68,00	30
X2: Wolverine's Revenge	58	24	60,00	16
Yu-Gi-Oh! Capsule Monster Coliseum	62	9	65,00	5
Yu-Gi-Oh! Duelists of the Roses	59	14	56,00	11
Averages	**61**	**22**	**63,81**	**17**
Standard Deviation	**13,33**	**10,58**	**12,77**	**9,626**

Figure 2: Aggregate Review Scores – Top Rated Games, Past 60 Days, 7 Sept. 2005[14]

Game Title	**Metacritic Aggregate Rating**	**Metacritic Number of Reviews**	**GameTab Aggregate Rating**	**GameTab Number of Reviews**
NCAA Football 06 (PS2)	87	25	91	20
Advance Wars: Dual Strike (Nintendo DS)	91	31	91	17
NCAA Football 06 (Xbox)	87	38	90	29
Madden NFL 06 (PS2)	89	24	87	17
Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction, The (Xbox)	83	26	87	8
Madden NFL 06 (Xbox)	86	18	86	21
Nintendogs: Chihuahua and Friends (Nintendo DS)	83	27	85	15
Madden NFL 06 (Gamecube)	87	34	85	13
Nintendogs: Dachshund and Friends (Nintendo DS)	82	27	85	14
Nintendogs: Labrador and Friends (Nintendo DS)	83	27	85	14
Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction, The (PS2)	82	23	85	9
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2: Summit Strike (Xbox)	80	51	84	17
Codename: Panzers, Phase 2 (PC)	80	29	84	15
Sid Meier's Pirates (Xbox)	80	42	84	30
Dungeon Siege 2 (PC)	80	27	82	25
Averages	**84**	**29,93**	**86,07**	**18**
Standard Deviation	**3,586**	**8,336**	**2,685**	**6,456**

[14]Metacritic does not stipulate the timeframe for its most recently reviewed games or provide statistics for lowest ranked games. Statistics for reviews from the last sixty days are compiled based on charts from GameTab, then cross-referenced against the individual score for each game as reported on Metacritic. "Top" and "Lowest" ratings are reported across platforms.

Figure 3: Aggregate Review Scores – Lowest Rated Games, Past 60 Days, 7 Sept. 2005

Game Title	Metacritic Aggregate Rating	Metacritic Number of Reviews	GameTab Aggregate Rating	GameTab Number of Reviews
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (PS2)	36	19	39	18
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (GameCube)	39	16	43	13
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (Xbox)	39	16	44	11
Colosseum: Road to Freedom (PS2)	57	24	56	16
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down (PS2)	57	22	57	8
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down (Xbox)	63	32	63	15
Flipnic: Ultimate Pinball (PS2)	64	28	63	12
Sigma Star Saga (GBA)	69	20	66	9
Outlaw Tennis (Xbox)	66	37	67	23
Sonic Gems Collection (GameCube)	69	16	67	13
Graffiti Kingdom (PS2)	72	25	70	17
Nanostray (Nintendo DS)	72	34	72	24
Harvest Moon: Another Wonderful Life (GameCube)	69	10	72	8
Geist (GameCube)	68	29	72	21
Fullmetal Alchemist 2: Curse of the Crimson Elixir (PS2)	68	20	73	17
Averages	**60,53**	**23,2**	**61,60**	**15**
Standard Deviation	**12,51**	**7,627**	**11,42**	**5,113**