



Your Saturday Magazine



**Game Invader**

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## Do videogames really need a narrative?

Yeah, I know, it's a really old argument. But I found myself thinking about it again, thanks to a typically ignorant review by that pompous snob, Roger Ebert, which reviews Frank Miller's *The Spirit* with practically no mention of Will Eisner's source material, except for a sarcastic and condescending quip that comes almost as an afterthought.

Ebert called *The Spirit* a crappy movie, and rightly so. But in choosing to ignore the aspects of Miller's self-indulgent stylistic treatment of the material that almost insults Eisner's vision, he demonstrates an alarming ignorance and disregard for the comics that the film is based on. You're reviewing a comic book movie, and you completely ignore comparisons with the comic book? WTF?

Sadly, if an established and evolved medium like comics, which is actually older than the cinema, can be perceived as irrelevant by Ebert and his ilk, what chance do videogames stand? The venerable Rashid Irani recently reviewed an Uwe Boll Movie, for crying out loud, in the same vein, also managing to slip in something to the tune of "apparently this game is based on a videogame, and it, like any videogame, is all fluff and no substance." Hello?

No substance? Really, Mr Irani? On what parameters are you evaluating? I'd wager that Tetris or Super Mario Galaxy or Braid or World of Goo have way more 'substance' than much of the tripe that Bollywood (or Hollywood, for that matter) turn out every year.

The problem is that most of these people compare games to movies or books using parameters that they're comfortable with. They set the rules, and then claim victory on their terms. Movies are better than games because they have stronger narratives, better stories, more emotional connect.

Er... that's like saying that *Halo* is better than *Taare Zameen Par* because it has a better checkpointing system. Or that *Slumdog Millionaire* isn't as good as *Tetris* because it doesn't have any gameplay or level design at all. Ridiculous? Of course. It can't be apples to apples. Because games need not be about narrative at all.

Sure, there are many games which intend to tell stories, and many that do it extremely well. Grim Fandango, Indigo Prophecy, Knights of The Old Republic, Bioshock and their ilk told stories that would sit shoulder-to-shoulder with the best narratives in any medium, and were better games for it.

But to suggest every game needs a story, and to cite lack of it as a weakness of gaming as a medium, is absurd. They're called games for a reason — because you're meant to play them. If it wasn't about playing, they'd be interactive movies, and we all know what happened to that dumb idea.

Would Tetris or Bejewelled be better games if they were presented in the context of some silly story about saving the universe? Did the wafer-thin stories of Serious Sam or Doom make them any less fun? Do you really need a narrative context when causing a spectacular pile-up in Burnout? No, no and no.

They're fun to play, and being games, that's the bottom line. If you don't understand gameplay, you aren't equipped to criticise the form. Period.

Legendary designer and creator of Mario, Shigeru Miyamoto once said, "At Nintendo, we don't believe that games should be like movies at all. We try and make games that people can enjoy in the proper way, as games." There's a reason that Nintendo sells more games than any other company. Because they get it.

Historically, the Pro Evolution Soccer series of games have been the ones to beat when it comes to football simulation. That's right, "simulation". Unlike FIFA, Pro Evo has always been about delivering a realistic football experience, with matches playing out very much like their real-life counterparts. Developers and publishers Konami even promised gamers some years back that "every goal scored will be entirely different from the other". Well, they didn't break their promise — until now.

This is the year when FIFA finally beats PES. Yes, you better believe it. The worst part is that it wasn't even a close tie. It's been a comprehensive thrashing — akin to the one Manchester United gave AS Roma a couple of years back in the Champions League. FIFA 7, PES 1. I'm not the biggest fan of EA's "strategy" and "don't-care-about-the-gamers" attitude, but it's quite obvious that the folks there are making an effort to improve their franchise, even if year-on-year improvements aren't substantial or significant. Yes, they make you shell out for four different versions of the same game in a year, and yes, all goals scored in the game look identical. But the fact of the matter is that their game is just better than the closest competitor's this year.

## UEFA Champions — what?

Problem: Licensing. EA has always won this battle, and has won it this time around as well. Konami "successfully" landed the licenses for the UEFA Champions League competition, but missed out on the licences for all English Premier League teams other than Manchester United and Liverpool. I'm not sure if this was "strategic", since these two clubs are the most popular of all English teams, or if they had exhausted their budgets/PR efforts on securing the UCL rights. But as an Arsenal fan, this was upsetting, to say the least, particularly since clubs like Brondby, Standard Liege, Red Star Belgrade and FC Basel have been fully licensed. On the bright side, there are a decent amount of licensed international sides, but with the popularity of the EPL in our country, it's a real shame that there aren't many licensed teams. There are disappointments in store for fans of the Bundesliga (I'm sure there are millions in India) as well.

The game features a variety of stadiums, some of them real, and some fictional. But there are no complaints on this front because the stadiums and their turfs look quite nice. Speaking of which, let's talk about the game's graphics. The positive is that the PS3, Xbox360 and PC versions are identical in terms of appearance, with the PC version looking the best, thanks to ultra-high resolutions. The game runs smoothly even at the highest settings with everything max-ed out. Now, this isn't necessarily a good thing because the game's graphics aren't great. In fact, they're just barely "good". Comparing PES 2009 to last year's version, I was shocked to see that the newer version looked worse! Everything from player faces, pitch and even the goal. The only graphical improvement in PES 2009 is the player jerseys, which seem to bend, fold and alter appearance based on player movement — quite cool. But the rest of the graphics are not cool, not by any means.

The gameplay is now too fast, arcade-like and unrealistic, says **Videep Vijay Kumar**

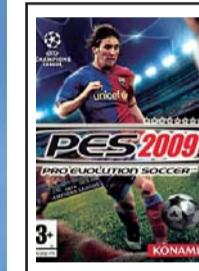
# Off the crossbar



## Speedy Gonzalez

Now let us get to the most important aspect of PES 2009: the gameplay. The game has taken a regressive step backward in terms of, well, everything. Other than streamlined online play and better menu design, there's nothing new. The worst part is that PES 2008 actually did a lot of things better than 2009. The gameplay is now too fast, arcade-like and unrealistic. The goals no longer look unique either. The AI is slightly smarter now, but player movement is very unrealistic, and you'll often find yourself in acres of space, and when you're defending, one through pass from the opposition will slice through your defence like a knife through butter. Long range shots are now a lot more accurate, and if you're not able to score directly from one, you'll at least win yourself a corner because the keeper will parry it behind the goal.

Getting to the controls, the game is still best played on a Playstation controller in spite of Microsoft's hardcore lobbying. The PC version is still a part of the console versions, so you'll still have to endure the agony of remapping your controls with the brilliant diagram of the Xbox360 controller which serves as your reference. The keyboard controls are reasonably precise, but it's virtually impossible to pull off a lot of the skill moves without the right-analogue stick. Player control is an area where PES 2009 redeems itself — you really feel like you're in control of the player when you have the ball. It's anything but floaty, and the game really gives you freedom to manipulate the



**Pro Evolution Soccer 2009**  
Platform: Xbox360, PS3  
PC, PS2, PSP, Wii  
Genre: Sport (Football)  
Developer: Konami CE Tokyo  
Publisher: Konami  
MRP: N/A

football. The only problem is that the game is a little too fast-paced, so it looks pretty ridiculous when one player hogs the ball when the game is just moving so fast. But if you're an exploit-based gamer, than you'll find this tremendously satisfying.

Konami also offers downloadable roster, kit and gameplay updates, so that your copy of the game will have updated squads after transfers. This is an attempt to emulate FIFA, but isn't nearly as cool as the form updates and widgets that FIFA sports. A few more additions include the ability to play as one player in the game's Master League mode and the 'Become A Legend' mode, which is very similar to the 'Be A Pro' mode in FIFA.

## Verdict

PES 2009 is hard to recommend to anyone other than fans of the series who have a credit card and own a PS3, purely because of some good online deals for the game. For everyone else, it's FIFA09 all the way — just make sure you pick it up for one of the next-gen consoles.

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## Ugliest videogame heroes of the year



### Urdnot Wrex (Mass Effect)

There are plenty of ugly creatures in Bioware's epic Xbox 360 adventure, but Urdnot Wrex is by far the most hideous. This ugly-as-sin bounty hunter knows how to finish the job, but has a face that even his mother would have a tough time loving. He probably doesn't attract the ladies either, which is probably why they turn to Commander Shepard.

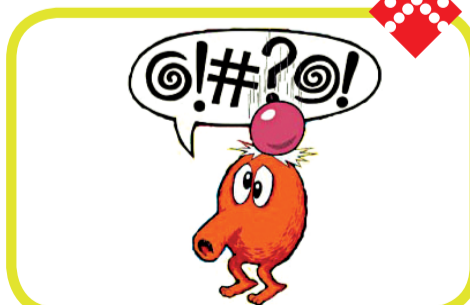
### Slippy Toad (StarFox series)

Slippy Toad irritates us to no end. Sure, he doesn't mean any harm, but he jeopardises enough of Fox McCloud's missions to make us wonder why he's still on the payroll. Along with his incredibly whiny voice ("FOOOOOOX!"), his strange-looking face features beady eyes and a great big mouth. Surprisingly, however, he does attract a female companion along the way. Yes, she's as ugly as he is.



### Q\*Bert

Seriously, we can't figure out what Q\*Bert is. He's orange, he's got huge eyes and, instead of a mouth or a nose, he has a big suction tube. Oh yeah, and if he gets beaned on the head, he curses like a drunken sailor. Worst of all, he doesn't have any arms. How's he supposed to open doors, with his nose? Or is that his mouth? Never mind, we're confused enough as it is.



### Tingle (The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask)

We still can't figure out what Tingle's story is. He plays a key part in the classic N64 follow-up to Ocarina of Time, but just look at his nose. It looks like he's trying to copy Wario. Plus he runs around in a green leotard, thinking that he's at a college football game or something. For some reason, the big N was even compelled to give him his own game in Japan, along with a special edition of Balloon Fight. It should've left him on the drawing board.



### Wario

Speaking of ugly Nintendo characters, Wario doesn't just take the cake — he steals the bakery. His large, unavoidable schnozz, combined with his dastardly moustache and poor choice of clothing make him someone the ladies are sure to avoid. The fact that he farts in Super Smash Bros. Brawl doesn't help the cause either. Never pull his finger.

— Source: gamedaily.com

