

# Games: 'Marvel Nemesis' was decidedly un-super

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## 'Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas'

It's a sad state of affairs when the best game released for the Xbox this year was a game that was released on the PS2 last year. "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" on the Xbox is the best "GTA" knockoff we're going to see on this generation of consoles. It is packed with so much content that it would take the average gamer months to fully complete it. Although the game's graphics are weak when compared to LucasArts' "Mercenaries," another decent title, the game's solid art direction makes the most of the game's aging engine. "GTA: San Andreas" makes almost every other free-rom game obsolete.

## 2005 GAMING DUDS

### 'Marvel Nemesis'/'Fantastic 4'

Historically, superhero games have sucked, which is odd because superheroes seem to be a perfect fit for games. The past few years have seen a few decent comic-inspired releases including "Spider-Man 2" and "Hulk: Ultimate Destruction," but for every quality title that hits consoles there is an equally disappointing release.

"Marvel Nemesis" and "The Fantastic 4" are each great examples of licensing gone awry. "Marvel Nemesis" is half-baked brawler that is nowhere near as good as its potential. "Fantastic 4," which was released at the same time as the movie, is a sub-par brawler that isn't even a four-player game.

### 'NARC'

Midway got its name all over the news in the '90s when controversy made "Mortal Kombat" a household name. "NARC" reeks of a similar marketing scheme. This controversial "GTA" knockoff allows its players to use street drugs as power-ups. So if you smoke pot, the world slows down and if you take LSD you hallucinate. The gameplay was boring and the drug gimmick didn't add anything to the game. "NARC" was only \$20 when it debuted in March, and I have no doubt

Midway was hoping that controversy would sell their shoddy game. Midway, if you're going to release a game that ticks off parents, at least make it one a kid's going to want to play.

### 'Castelvania: Curse of Darkness'

I've always loved "Castelvania" games. The Game Boy Advance and Nintendo DS titles have seen the 18-year-old series maturing. The 2D game's history and style could fit perfectly in a well-developed 3D world. Unfortunately, "Castelvania: Curse of Darkness" sees all the series' potential squandered on a lukewarm bore. The combat is monotonous and uninspired. The same goes for the game's boring enemies and lackluster environments.

### Tony Hawk's American Wasteland'/'SSX On Tour'

The "Tony Hawk" series has been showing signs of age over the past few years. "American Wasteland" is the sixth sequel since the series' debut in 1999. The past few iterations have been more about style than they have been about substantial changes to the game's core gameplay. "American Wasteland" nixes load times and adds a BMX element to the game, but that can't hide the fact that this is the same game we have been playing for the past six years.

The animated-middle school notebook menus of "SSX On Tour" were the most interesting things about the game. EA is notorious for its sequels and the gaming giant thrives on its successful sports titles. I hope that the next generation of systems will see more original titles, because the sequel-driven game industry is getting a little stale.

### The PlayStation Portable

As a gaming device, the PSP is a rip-off. It's been nine months since its half-decent launch and all PSP owners get is a bunch of stripped down ports. Sure "GTA: Liberty City Stories" is a good game, but is it worth \$300? As a music player, it's expensive, bulky and fragile. And who wants to pay \$30 for a copy of "Sin City" that they can only watch on their PSP?

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## Book review

# 'An Idiot Girl's Christmas' is a jovial lump of coal in the stocking

Laurie Notaro's latest foray in the 'Idiot Girl' series is a hilarious jaunt through the ho ho holiday season

BY AMY LIGHTY  
PULSE EDITOR

The Christmas season can easily be the most stressful time of the year (it doesn't help that finals are mixed right in there with the gift-buying and decorating that damn spiky pine tree), but it can also be one of the most humorous times of

the year, as illustrated by author Laurie Notaro in her latest book, "An Idiot Girl's Christmas: True Tales from the Top of the Naughty List."

In true Notaro fashion, "An Idiot Girl's Christmas" is hilarious and cringe-inducing at the same time. Notaro is not one to censor her

words, saying exactly what's on her mind, but she manages to do so without being overly crude or obnoxious. She puts humor into everyday situations (like that annoying neighbor who goes way too far in decorating his lawn or spending that first Christmas with the in-laws and managing to tag all of the gifts incorrectly), with wit, sassiness and occasional exaggeration.

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