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If you don't have a video game console in your home right now, chances are you'll soon-especially given the latest round of competitive price cutting and the new online gaming phenomenon that has taken the world by storm. Just last November, investment banking company Bear Stearns reported that games as a category would grow significantly faster than television, radio, movies, music and newspapers, and they seem to have been on something: Americans' spending on video games last year reached an incredible \$4.6 billion, more than the total amount spent on movies (rentals and theater combined). Today's games are a long way from the classic 1970s Atari, which most contemporary game gurus created. Three-dimensional characters move in all directions in amazingly detailed cartoon worlds, using complex movements that would put Bruce Lee to shame. So this may explain why more than 90 percent of today's games are purchased by someone over 18 years of age (for themselves or for other members of the household). Three systems are currently rocking the gaming world: Sony's PlayStation 2, Nintendo's GameCube and Microsoft's Xbox. They're all hits for different reasons, so you just have to choose which features appeal to you. And rest easy: Your purchase will not be out of date by the time you get home: dramatically different systems are not expected for about two years, although nice new accessories are hitting the market every day. PlayStation 2 PlayStation 2: The Leader of the Pack Sony's PlayStation 2 (PS 2) (\$199) is the overwhelming leader with over 11 million systems sold in North America alone. It can play titles developed specifically for it, in addition to those made for its predecessor. (That model has now been repackaged and sold as the PS One for \$49.) The combination means that PS 2 players can choose from more than 1,200 games, four times the number available for GameCube. Many of those games, of course, were written long ago and do not meet today's standards. PS 2 is a bargain because it can play DVDs and CDs and features Dolby 5.1 surround-sound support. GameCube GameCube: The smallest Nintendo's GameCube (\$150) is the cutest of the bunch, measuring about 6 inches on each side, and includes a built-in handle. It uses its own mini CD, so it can't play standard CDs or DVDs. It doesn't have a hard drive, so it uses a memory card like the PS 2 to record settings and scores. And although it has the least number of games, available excluding offerings such as Pokemon, Zelda, and Mario titles (such as Super Mario Sunshine, which sold more than 350,000 copies in the first 10 days it was available in stores). Xbox Xbox: The most powerful Microsoft's (\$199) has an internal hard drive, a built-in network connection, and claims to have the most powerful processor and the best graphics processing of the three systems. It uses standard-size CDs; To play DVDs, you'll need to buy a \$30 adapter. It's compatible with high-definition TVs, and some new TVs now even complete with built-in Xbox support. Three's Company: What They Have in Common You find similarities between the three systems. All the boxes just plug in to the wall and into your TV. Each box has a specially designed 128-bit processor chip. So if you shop around and see the PS 2 box boast that it has a 128-bit processor with a 295-megahertz (MHz) clock speed, that means the chip can handle 128 yes-or-no decisions 295 million times per second. The faster the machine can make decisions, the faster the games tend to run—and the more detailed they can be. The chip that runs each box is unique, which is one reason why games written for one box won't run on the others. (All three systems have games that are exclusive to their respective platforms, although many titles are available in all three flavors.) Each box comes with a single game controller, a cross between a game pad and a joystick, but up to four people can play at once as the game title and system support. Additional or improved controllers are available from different companies. Xbox and GameCube come with four controller ports; PS 2 has two. Most current models look like an arch, with two short arms on either side and triggers on the front where your index finger rests. Many controllers can now vibrate so you can feel the experience, and wireless models for all three systems are in stores (a must-have if the couch is a long way from the TV). Of the three, PS 2 controller (included) has the most outdated design with flat buttons instead of full triggers. Web Wars: Online Gaming The biggest news this season? Online gaming, giving you the chance to compete against other players around the world. Microsoft's Xbox, which has built-in online gaming support, was scheduled to launch its Xbox Live gaming portal in November. Sony released the \$40 network adapter for the PS 2 in August to play the game over analog and broadband Internet connections. Nintendo was expected to release its \$35 modem and broadband adapters before the holidays. A broadband Internet connection (such as a cable modem or DSL phone line) is encouraged for the online connections of all three systems and is required for the Xbox Live service. Microsoft said the company will charge \$50 for the Live package, which will include a year of access with headphones and microphone for voice chat. The other two companies said they did not charge consumers for online gaming access, but their game developers could. Good news for the Gals Although there are still plenty of video games where the ladies are nothing but bouncy, strong female characters have become surprisingly popular in games marketed to both women and men. The headliners names like Lara Croft and Primal's Jennifer Tate (PS 2), but even games where women don't play a starring role (like GameCube's Eternal Darkness, which features women in the time-traveling lineup of heroes) are starting to give female characters a backbone. Backbone. may be why 43 percent of game players are now women, according to the Interactive Digital Software Association, and why movie spin-offs like Tomb Raider are a hit at the box office with both sexes. Top 5 Games by System * PlayStation2: NCAA Football 2003 Grand Theft Auto III Medal of Honor Frontline Stuntman Gran Turismo 3: A-spec New this season: Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4, Star Wars Bounty Hunter , hack, and Hitman 2 GameCube: Super Smash Bros. Melee Eternal Darkness WWE WrestleMania X8 Sonic Adventure 2 Battle Spider-Man: The Movie New this season: NBA 2K3, NHL 2K3 , Scorpion King: Rise of the Akkadian, and Scooby-Doo! Night of 100 Frights Xbox: Halo NCAA Football 2003 Bruce Lee: Quest of the Dragon Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind Spider-Man: The Movie New this season: NHL Hitz 20-03, Brute Force, Shenmue II and Quantum Redshift * Ranked by U.S. copies sold, this is the most recent list (July 2002) compiled by NP Funworld. This content is created and maintained by a third party and imported onto this page to help users provide their email addresses. You can find more information about this and similar content at piano.io the disk-free \$250 PSP Go games handheld from Sony today in retail, and as expected, the company has nearly doubled the amount of PlayStation Store games content. Sony's digital shelves now include Polyphony Digital's fresh PSP-exclusive Gran Turismo racer, dozens of newly downloadable PSP games, and a few of the company's debut PSP 'Minis' – bite-sized titles priced in the range of \$5 to \$10. The Store's refilled larders coincide with PSP firmware update 6.10, which launched overnight and adds full compatibility with Sony's Windows-based MediaGo mobile sync utility, a new music application called SensMe that automatically organizes your music based on its own Sony algorithm, and a tethering option that allows you to select a Bluetooth mobile phone (or similar device) to link your PSP to the Internet.Conspicuously? MediaGo Mac support. Sony's PSP sync software works in Boot Camp mode, of course, but - speaking from personal experience - the software won't detect the PSP running Windows in emulation software like Parallels.What's in store? Gran Turismo PSP (\$40), God of War: Chains of Olympus (\$16), Dexter (\$16), Resistance Retribution (\$32), MLB 09 The Show (\$32), and that's only half of SCEA's titles. Browse around and you'll find items from Activision, Atari, Capcom, Codemasters, EA, LucasArts, Rockstar, Sega, Square Enix, THQ, Ubisoft. If I count accurately, it all comes down to 95 new PSP games, 7 debut PSP minis, and four new PSome classics. Check out the official PlayStation Blog format for the list in full. Movies and TV shows aside, it's the biggest content overhaul Sony's made to the games section since the service debuted. The Many things are missing, such as the PSP version of Final Fantasy Tactics, the remakes of Final Fantasy's 1 and 2, Final Fantasy VII: VII: Core, and Metal Gear Solid Portable Ops. I still play that on disc, which means I'll fix dual-wielding handhelds until Sony works out what licensing, retail, or scheduling problems they're on. Comments on Sony's Blog are generally positive this morning, although they range from This is Pure Win and Best Update Ever... There is so much that I like, to snippier comments as These prices are comical ... PSP Minis are extremely expensive and Wow look at the price of those PSP games... you buy them cheaper on UMD. More PSP coverage: The ups and downs of Sony's PSP GoSony's PSP Go Unboxed and ExposedGame On: Apple iPhone and Sony PSP Fight to the Death Follow me on Twitter @game_on Note: When you buy something after clicking on links in our articles, we can earn a small commission. Read our affiliate link policy for more details. Details.