Written by Luke Hamilton
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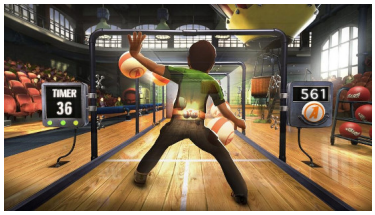

Microsoft’s Kinect sensor (released November 4 for the Xbox 360 system) is a different beast from the Wii and PlayStation Move. Employing a camera to create controller-free gaming, the Kinect sensor puts you into the game like none of its competitors. There are a few kinks in the system, but the overall product goes a long way toward making me a believer.

While Wii simply picks up the controller’s movements, your entire body and play space are utilized for Kinect games. For example, if a ball is flying at your left side, stepping to the right will dodge it, or if a hurdle is in your running path, you can physically jump over it. And unlike the Wii-too approach of PlayStation Move, Kinect is a genuine step forward for motion-controlled gaming.

Still, the games range from entertaining to frustrating. Out of the 14 launch titles for Kinect, I picked three that looked the most interesting: *Kinect Adventures*, bundled with the sensor; *Your Shape: Fitness Evolved*
, a new take on fitness games; and
Fighters Uncaged
, the only title aimed at a more adult audience.

Kinect Adventures features five entertaining games. It’s similar to *Wii Sports* in the sense that it gives you a great demonstration of how everything works with Kinect, but the games are different. Rallyball, Kinect’s take on dodgeball, involves hitting targets with balls, and it gets intense quickly when seven balls are flying at you as you flail your arms and legs to keep them in play.

There’s a split-second delay in response time, but not so bad that the games are ruined. A friend can jump into camera view at any time and make any of these games two-player excursions. The game is fun and wants you to have fun, taking snapshots of the silliest

moments that can be shared with friends.

Your Shape: Fitness Evolved presents a solid cardio-heavy workout, correcting you if you’re performing the workout improperly and monitoring your progress in ridiculous detail. Fitness games are popular on the Wii (with the Balance Board accessory), but Kinect moves the genre forward with increased monitoring and active critiquing, with the benefit that evaluation isn’t based on how you’re standing on a board.

The hand-to-hand fighting game *Fighters Uncaged*, unfortunately, is frustrating with poor response time and lackluster fighting. When I throw five punches and only two register in the game, there’s a definite problem. And how does swinging my left foot out result in a left jab? The only fight you’ll remember is battling with the terrible control.

Outside of gaming, Kinect’s user recognition and voice commands are really cool. Once the system is on, saying “Xbox Kinect” switches from the basic menu to a special one that can be navigated by either motion or voice. Added security for your Xbox profile can be set up, too, with facial identification and voice recognition so the system only listens to your commands.

The camera does a good job recognizing a face, and the built-in microphone understands your normal voice; there’s no need to yell at it. Kinect also allows you to chat on Xbox Live instead of wearing the cumbersome headset. All of that makes you feel like you’re in a wonderful futuristic world. The only disappointment with the vocal commands is that they don’t seem to work with DVDs or Netflix. It’s not a major problem, but hopefully it will be addressed with a software update.

Setup could be a major hurdle for some people with the room-space requirements of the camera. For optimal use, the camera needs to be set between two and six feet from the ground, and it requires six to eight feet of open space in front of it; otherwise, objects might interfere with the sensor, on top of being hazards in the play zone. I ended up rearranging my living room entirely just to suit the requirements. Microsoft suggests moving furniture when possible for play, but it’s a stretch to expect that people will be willing to move sofas and coffee tables every time they want to play a game.

Even though the launch games I tried were hit-and-miss, the successful ones get you off your butt and into the action. Kinect is far from perfect, but it works fairly well and feels like a different experience from the Wii.

Call of Duty: Black Ops

It might seem odd that *Call of Duty: Black Ops* – the biggest game release of the year – doesn’t merit a full review. But compared to its predecessors, it’s almost the same game from the past few years. The setting is different with Cold War operations, but seriously: It plays exactly the same and looks just as good as *World at War* and the *Modern Warfare* titles of the series. None of that is a bad thing, though, with great storytelling and the series’ standard-setting multiplayer. The only thing getting tiresome about the series is saying the same good things about it every year. (My review of 2009’s *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* can be found at RCReader.com/y/duty .)

The Kinect sensor is now available for Xbox 360 for $149.99 and includes the game Kinect Adventures *. For this review, the author tested the sensor functionality with videos and games.*

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