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Because money doesn't grow on trees – and good games sure don't, either – I'm breaking down my top-five video games of 2010 based on the 35 new ones I played.

You'll notice that all of these games are sequels, and there's a reason for that: The originals were good, too.

But it's more than that. All these sequels feel and play superior to their predecessors, and that speaks volumes about the commitment of development teams. They not only provide us with entertainment for today, but give us hope that bigger and better things are coming in the future, and for that I thank them.

5) *Super Mario Galaxy 2* (Wii)

I've made no secret that Mario's story bores me these days, but when push comes to shove against Nintendo's other titles for the year, this is the big N's premier title. Yes, *Metroid: Other M* delivered the more mature Nintendo tale I've been wanting forever and was a fun experience, but there's such an unbelievable charm about the portly plumber skyrocketing through the stars. With its top-tier pick-up-and-play action without needing to focus on a story, Mario's galactic

adventures on Wii are amazing fun that only improve on the best platforming gameplay. (Original review:
RCReader.com/y/galaxy
.)

4) *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow* (Xbox 360/PlayStation 3)

God of War better not let the door hit it on the way out, because *Lords of Shadow* beat it at its own mythic-adventure game. Battling darkness while being consumed by it sounds tricky to express, but
Castlevania
nails it with strong character development in Gabriel Belmont. While it's by no means perfect, the fresh and mysterious narrative combined with the fast-paced combat makes it more memorable than the third
God of War
. With a sequel in the works and upcoming downloadable content to explore beyond the shocking epilogue, Gabriel's tale is far from over, and I can only hope the old dog continues learning its new tricks. (Original review:
RCReader.com/y/shadow
.)

3) *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (Xbox 360/PlayStation 3/Wii/PC)

I didn't give the game a full review, but only because it would've been a repeat of last year's praise, and I'm pretty sure I don't get paid for copying and pasting previous opinions. The story is clever, and the return of Zombies Mode (in which you and friends fight off hordes of creatures) is a welcome trip into undead madness. Multiplayer once again delivers a genre-defining experience with its variety and new game modes based on what fans asked for. If you haven't tried it yet, I recommend seeing what all the fuss is about. (Original review: RCR
eader.com/y/ops
.)

2) *Red Dead Redemption* (Xbox 360/PlayStation 3)

With the majority of games I play, I'm done after about two weeks. *Red Dead Redemption* kept me coming back for more than six months because of the numerous, interesting challenges in its world and the grown-up version of cowboys and Indians in the online multiplayer.

I should get tired of riding to the same cities and having shootouts in the same outlaw hidey holes, but there's a certain allure to being a gunslinger in the Old West. With lots of downloadable content – cooperative missions, new weapons, dozens of new maps and game modes such as poker and horse racing, and an absurd yet entertaining zombie outbreak – it's a potent combination and almost had me convinced that it was the best game of the year. Unfortunately for *Red Dead*, there was another jaw-dropper that stayed on my mind all year long. (Original review: RCReader.com/y/red .)

1) *Mass Effect 2* (Xbox 360/PC)

It was released in January, but it was impossible for me to forget about this gem. *Halo: Reach* had some interesting hooks to keep my attention for a time, but *Mass Effect 2* by far has the best storytelling in any game I've seen, this year and beyond. You integrate your own story from the first game (or fashion a new one at the beginning), and each crew member's personal motivations and histories (and the hero or anti-hero you choose to be) create a dynamic and gripping tale that keeps you on the edge of your seat from beginning to end.

I said last year that *Uncharted 2* was like your own personal movie experience, but *Mass Effect 2* trumps it. Everyone's experience is truly unique to their style. With hours of new stories available as downloadable content, an upcoming release on PlayStation 3, and the grand finale of your

Commander Shepard's story coming in 2011, it's safe to say I'm not alone in loving this supreme sci-fi story. (Original review:
RCReader.com/y/effect
.)

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