Several great games hit the shelves just in time for holiday gift-giving

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With the holidays closing in, many people need to search for that one present to buy for their loved one or friend. Well, if that friend of yours happens to be a geek, then please consider the following items as presents for the cherished Video Game Geek in your life.

Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King – Published by Square Enix. – PS2

This is the eighth game in the long running series of role-playing games called Dragon Quest, which was previously known here in the States as the "Dragon Warrior" series. This series has its roots on the NES and has grown right alongside the consoles as each generation comes and goes. This game features beautifully detailed environments, lovely in-game graphics, a robust soundtrack, an epic story, and plenty of diversions that will keep you playing the game for hours on end, even after you beat it.

There have been over four million copies of this game sold in Japan alone. In fact, the launch of this game in Japan was so massive that the Japanese government asked Square Enix to release the game on a weekend, so as to not interfere with the usual weekday work. This one game sold three million copies in three days in Japan, making it, perhaps, the biggest game release in the history of the world.

Part of the appeal of this game is the lush environments and seemingly boundless world that is ripe for exploration. In fact, it's been documented in Japan that people have invested well over 100 hours on this game. The environment, coupled with the storyline, side quests, and fun combat system makes this RPG a must-own for any fan of the genre or for game enthusiasts in general.

It also comes with a small demo of Final Fantasy XII, the next big RPG that Square Enix plans to release in 2006.

This game is rated T for Teen.

Mario Kart DS: - Published by Nintendo – Only on the Nintendo DS

Honestly, is there any gamer that has yet to experience the pure fun that is Mario Kart on either the Super Nintendo, Nintendo 64, or the Gamecube? If so, then do that special geek in your life a favor and pick him up a copy of Mario Kart DS for the Nintendo DS.

The Mario Kart series has always been one of the best racing games available, and the series makes a very smooth transition to the DS. Players can compete in cart races against the computer, or they can hook up with other racers via Nintendo's WiFi connection and race to the finish or fight each other for supremacy in Battle Mode. Unlockables coupled with addictive gameplay make this the perfect present this holiday season.

This game is rated E for everyone, so even if your special geek is a youngster, he or she can still enjoy this wonderful game that really transcends age.

Call of Duty 2 – Published by Activision – For the PC and Xbox 360

World WarIIshooters are usually a dime a dozen. There are almost too many WW II games, but in an over-saturated market, there are always a few games that stand out and are noted as truly special. Call of Duty was one of those games. Released back in 2003 for the PC, the original Call of Duty was an awesome, addictive shooter with a great story mode and awesome multiplayer that was fun, addictive, and a part of the Cyberathlete Amateur and Professional League's yearly roster for competitive games.

Now, it's back, and it's better than ever. With improved visuals, a slightly retooled interface, new weapons, and new online multiplayer modes, Call of Duty 2 will entice that special gamer in your life. And if that person bought a new Xbox 360, then this game is a sure fire winner for them this Christmas.

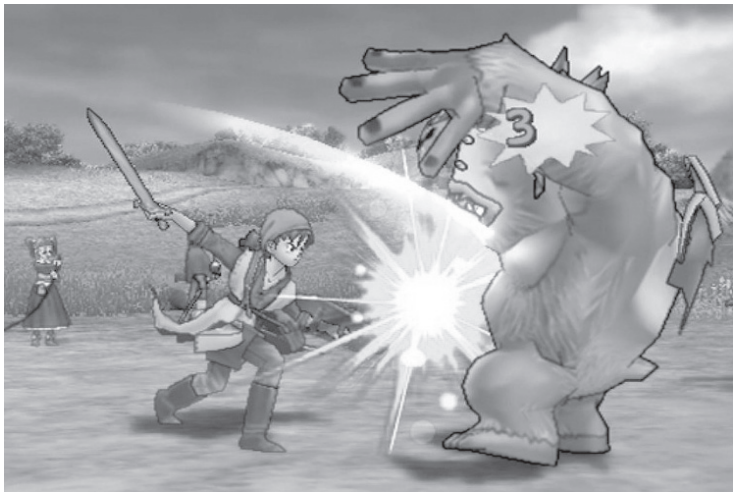
Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories – Published by Rockstar Games – PSP

Does that special gamer in your life idolize Scarface? Does he or she love the idea of a classic gangster lifestyle? Does he or she like to make offers that you can't refuse? Also, is that lovable gangster-wannabe gamer of yours always on the move?

Then this game is perfect for a present.

GTA: LCS takes the revolutionary Grand Theft Auto III gameplay design, builds a new story centered around essentially the same thing as all the GTA games are, and ports all of this over to the PSP very well. In this all new Grand Theft Auto game, players can fight the law and become the greatest gangster in this virtual city. The game perfoms well, considering the platform it's on, the controls are a bit touchy, and the graphics aren't near the polish of the home console versions, but for a portable game, it works just fine.

And since the PSP is portable, they can take their virtual crime spree anywhere they go. Just make sure that they're 18 or older, as this is a mature title.



The highly anticipated DragonQuest VIII features interactive battles and rich landscapes of which to explore.
PHOTO COURTESY SQUARE ENIX

Dead or Alive 4 – Published by Techmo – Xbox 360

Did that special gamer in your life recently drop over $400 for an Xbox 360? If so, then they are probably a little bit strapped for cash, which might have prevented them from purchasing a game or two. If that's the case, then why not pick him or her up a copy of Dead or Alive 4?

The Dead or Alive series is one of the best and most complex fighting game series to have ever graced a console. The fighting mechanics that made DoA 3 wonderful have return with a few tweaks to the counter system that makes countering your opponents move more essential to defeating them. Also, the destructible and interactive environments have returned, and they look spectacular.

DoA 4 features some absolutely gorgeous visuals that easily rate up there as some of the best ever seen on a console. Not only are the environmental visuals fantastic, but all of the character models are stunning and provide a lot of, well, let's just say interesting details.

The "interesting details" coupled with a large amount of fighting and violence gives this game a mature rating.

Guitar Hero – Published by RedOctane, Developed by Harmonix – PS2

Guitar Hero has what can only be defined as a game that has probably the coolest peripheral available right now: A guitar. That's right, this game comes packaged with a mini-guitar modeled after a Gibson SG that you plug into the PS2 controller port and play with. Naturally, it doesn't have strings, but rather it has buttons on the neck of the guitar along with a strummer and a whammy bar.

The game itself is a rhythm game in the same vein as Dance Dance Revolution and Karaoke Revolution, except for the fact that, instead of using your feet or your voice to get the correct rhythm, you have to press the correct buttons on the mini-Gibson SG's neck and strum the guitar in rhythm with the song. Songs range from various artists like Ozzy Osbourne, Jimmy Hendrix, and even Pantera.

With this title, you come for the game, but it's the axe that makes you stay and play this game with a bunch of your friends.