

## Video Game Review: ‘NCIS’ For Hardcore Fans of CBS Hit Only

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on November 19, 2011 - 5:46pm

- [Brian Tallerico](#) [2]
- [CBS](#) [3]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [4]
- [Mark Harmon](#) [5]
- [NCIS](#) [6]
- [Television](#) [7]
- [Ubisoft](#) [8]
- [Video Game Review](#) [9]

CHICAGO – Everything immensely popular eventually falls victim to an awkward tie-in. There are graveyards of fast food toys related to blockbuster hits that never should have existed (a fact brilliantly parodied in the upcoming “Toy Story” short in front of “The Muppets”). Not unrelated is the particularly unusual subgenre of video games tie-ins for hit TV shows, including poorly-received ones for “Lost” and “The Simpsons.” Don’t get me started on the Nintendo Wii tie-in for “The Bachelor.” Add to this bizarre subgenre, the general failure that is “NCIS,” a title that somehow reduces crime investigation into some of the most dull mini-games released this year. Overly simple, remarkably easy, and poorly paced, “NCIS” is a decent idea turned into nothing but a pure cash grab.



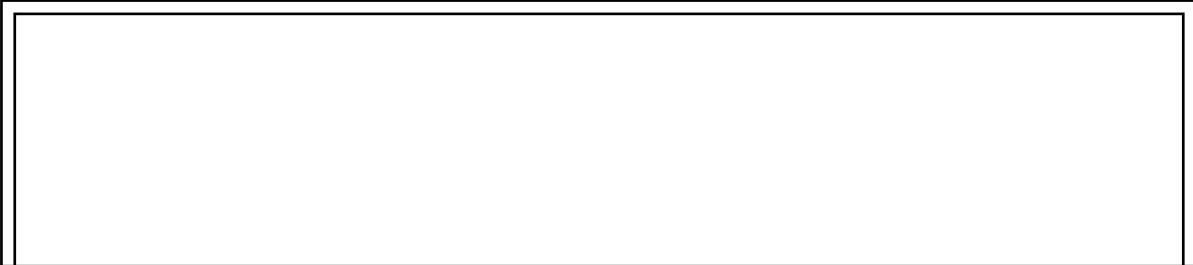
Video Game Rating: **1.5/5.0**

If you’re wondering how a program like “NCIS” gets a video game in the first place, it’s this simple — the show is HUGE. Currently in its ninth season, “NCIS” (which stands for Navy Criminal Investigative Service) is the #1 program on TV right now with over 20 million viewers a week and it’s often followed in the ratings by its offspring, “NCIS: Los Angeles.” “NCIS” is one of the few shows to not only NOT be impacted by the general erosion facing the major networks but to be increasing as the years go by. It has finished in the top five for the last four seasons and while it may not get the headlines, it gets what matters — the viewers.



NCIS  
*Photo credit: Ubisoft*

But, and this is a big but, it doesn’t necessarily get a lot of viewers who crossover with the gaming audience. CBS has the highest average age when it comes to its viewership and I wonder how many fifty-somethings are interested in a video game tie-in. I suspect that the conflict over how to appeal to the generally-older audience of the series and the generally-younger market of video games led to some of the development problems with this outdated title, a release that might have been acceptable when the show premiered in 2003 but doesn’t cut it in 2011.





NCIS

Photo credit: Ubisoft

While the program does occasionally feature some action and some shoot-outs, the developers of the game chose to focus on the “I” — Investigative. You don’t fire a weapon in “NCIS” and the entirety of the experience is built around crime-solving, and often the most tedious elements of it like crime-scene photography, fingerprint-lifting, and the most repetitive interrogations in the history of the committed crime. The game is shockingly boring, offering little to no actual deduction on the part of the player. Finish a mini-game, be given an obvious clue, put the clues together — episode over. Yawn. The mini-game/investigation structure is spread out over four episodes, none of which should take much time at all for a player to complete.

The oddity of “NCIS” starts with the interface, which uses a mouse arrow to allow you to move and highlight actions and options. Yes, this is one of those games where you have to move an arrow to click on a ground to have your character awkwardly walk to that spot like a robot. And as if those interactions weren’t embarrassing enough, the game is filled with little controller motions that make no sense. Why am I constantly forced to hack into my own computer to access evidence? Why on Earth did they make a mini-game around lifting fingerprints that requires nothing more than a button click and a lift? Come to think of it, I’m not sure that qualifies as an actual game. And the interrogation system that basically just forces the player to hit X at the right moment in the conversation — to get more information — is essentially just an attempt to turn a game that’s primarily cut scenes into something that feels interactive when it’s not.

The game only remotely comes to life when it’s time to solve the crimes or put the clues together on the “Deduction Board,” an interface that finally forces a little brain power from the player, although I do stress LITTLE. It’s a multiple choice system in which you’re forced to answer as to why you put certain clues together and even a toddler could rule out a few choices immediately. Come to think of it, the game often plays like something aimed at children, but unless you want your kid shooting pictures of victims and doing autopsies, that might not be the best idea.

It might not be so painful if the cut-scene heavy title was more expertly made. The graphics are mediocre at best. While it’s nice that a few members of the cast offered their talents for the voice work to add some authenticity, their likenesses look stiff and fall DEEP into the uncanny valley. This Mark Harmon is dead behind the eyes. They all are. It’s like zombie “NCIS.” Actually, that sounds like more fun.

*“NCIS” was released and developed by Ubisoft on November 1st, 2011. The version reviewed was for the PS3 but the title is also available for the Xbox 360, Nintendo Wii, and PC.*



[10]

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