

OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER



MARIO KART WORLD + ZELDA REVIEWED

ARE SWITCH 2'S DEBUT GAMES
WORTH SHELLING OUT FOR?

THE MAKING OF OSU! TATAKAE! OUENDAN

DISCOVER HOW INIS CRAFTED ITS
BRILLIANT DS RHYTHM GAME

WORLD EXCLUSIVE TERMINATOR™ 2D NO FATE

HANDS-ON AND BEHIND THE SCENES WITH AN EXPLOSIVE
MOVIE TIE-IN THAT FEELS LIKE A LOST '90S TREASURE

ALSO INSIDE

THE ORANGE BOX
SLEEPWALKER
MORTAL KOMBAT
SWANCRYSTAL
GHOSTBUSTERS
COVERMOUNT
CORNER
ADVANCED
PINBALL
SIMULATOR
KATAMARI
DAMACY
HOMEBREW



MAGAZINE CRAFT:
NICK ROBERTS
FROM CRASH TOWERS
TO MOBILE GAMES

THE MAKING OF
JUNGLE STRIKE
INSIDE ELECTRONIC ARTS'
HIT HELICOPTER SEQUEL

ULTIMATE GUIDE:
SUIKODEN
WHY IT'S THE PERFECT TIME
TO DISCOVER THE EPIC RPG

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE
TERMINATOR GAME?

DARRAN JONES

I'm going to be 'that guy' and pick *Mortal Kombat 11* because you can play as Arnie's T800 and it's bloody awesome fun.

Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof.

Currently playing:

Mario Kart World

Favourite game of all time:

OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast



TIM EMPEY

I'm pretty sure I reviewed *Terminator Salvation*, but I didn't really get on with it very much. So it has to be *T2: The Arcade Game* for all of its fast-paced shooty goodness.

Currently playing:

Monster Train 2

Favourite game of all time:

God Hand



NICK THORPE

I've got fond memories of teaming up with my dad to protect that annoyingly fragile truck in *T2: The Arcade Game* on Mega Drive, so that's my pick.

Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III

Currently playing: *Duck Detective: The Secret Salami*

Favourite game of all time:

Sonic The Hedgehog

LOADING



This month marks something of a departure for us, as it's the first time we're showcasing a brand-new game. Worry not though, for

even though *Terminator 2D: No Fate* is a slick new adaptation of the hit 1991 movie, it plays and feels like a lost Nineties shooter, with a gorgeous pixel-art style that wouldn't have looked out of place on a Neo Geo or PlayStation. Nick was fortunate enough to be the first person outside of the development process to have a proper hands-on experience with Bitmap Bureau's new game and his conclusion is that this is a release to be excited about.

It's a watershed moment, not just for the magazine, but the developers, who have been slowly building up a reputation for creating fast-paced arcade-like games (that typically end up being ported to old-school consoles) and have been rewarded with access to a huge IP. Our exclusive ten-page feature covers the fascinating journey of the studio's new game and why it's on track to be an essential play later this year.

Other highlights of our new issue include an interview with Keita Takahashi about *Katamari Damacy* and his latest game *To A T*, a catch up with the Oliver twins to discuss *Advanced Pinball Simulator*, why *Suikoden* is one of the finest PlayStation RPGs you'll ever play and how iNiS made its exceptional DS rhythm game *Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan*.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.



ANDY SALTER

The only *Terminator* game I remember is *The Terminator* on the Mega Drive, it looked and sounded great but other than the opening level it tried to stay too close to the movie which hurt its gameplay.

Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!

Currently modding:

RTR: Imperium Surrectum

Favourite game of all time:

Rome: Total War although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now



PAUL ROSE

I'm going to have to go with *The Terminator Vs RoboCop*.

Expertise: Winging it

Currently playing:

What The Clash

Favourite game of all time:

Half-Life 2



STUART HUNT

Like the underrated movie, I do have a soft spot for *Terminator Salvation*. It's a *Gears Of War*-like with enemy AI that would please Skynet.

Expertise: Games with flying bits in them

Currently playing: *Indiana Jones And The Great Circle*

Favourite game of all time:

Donkey Kong



MARTYN CARROLL

I love *Terminator 2* for the Game Boy by Jas Austin and Bits Studio. It completely shames Ocean's similar effort for home computers.

Expertise: Sinclair stuff

Currently playing:

Mario Kart World

Favourite game of all time:

Jet Set Willy



ANDREW FISHER

Terminator 2 on the C64, great graphics and music, and instant loading thanks to being on cartridge.

Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch

Currently playing:

Platypus Reclayed

Favourite game of all time:

Wizball



RORY MILNE

As shooter/platformers go, *The Terminator* for the Mega-CD is compelling enough, but its FMV scenes and Tommy Tallarico soundtrack really elevate it.

Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing

Currently playing: *Jak And Daxter: The Precursor Legacy*

Favourite game of all time:

Tempest



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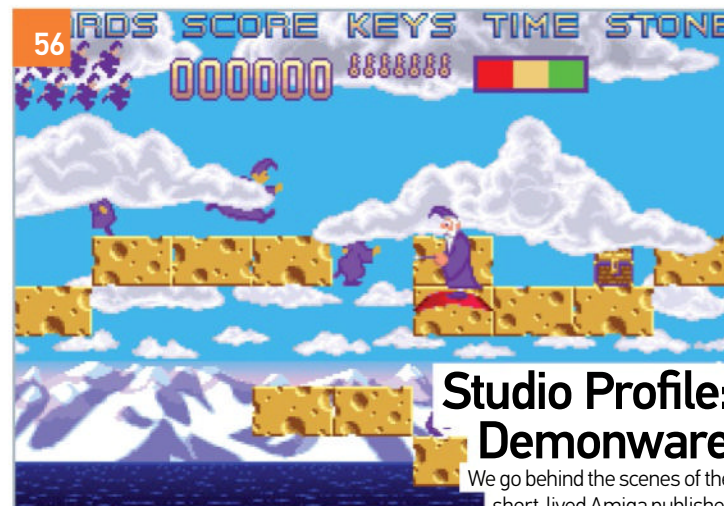
Discover how iNiS made its entertaining DS rhythm action game



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Fixing The Timeline: The Making Of Terminator 2D: No Fate

Nick gets treated to a hands-on session of Bitmap Bureau's hot new game and how it's planning to be the ultimate adaptation of the hit movie



Studio Profile: Demonware

We go behind the scenes of the short-lived Amiga publisher

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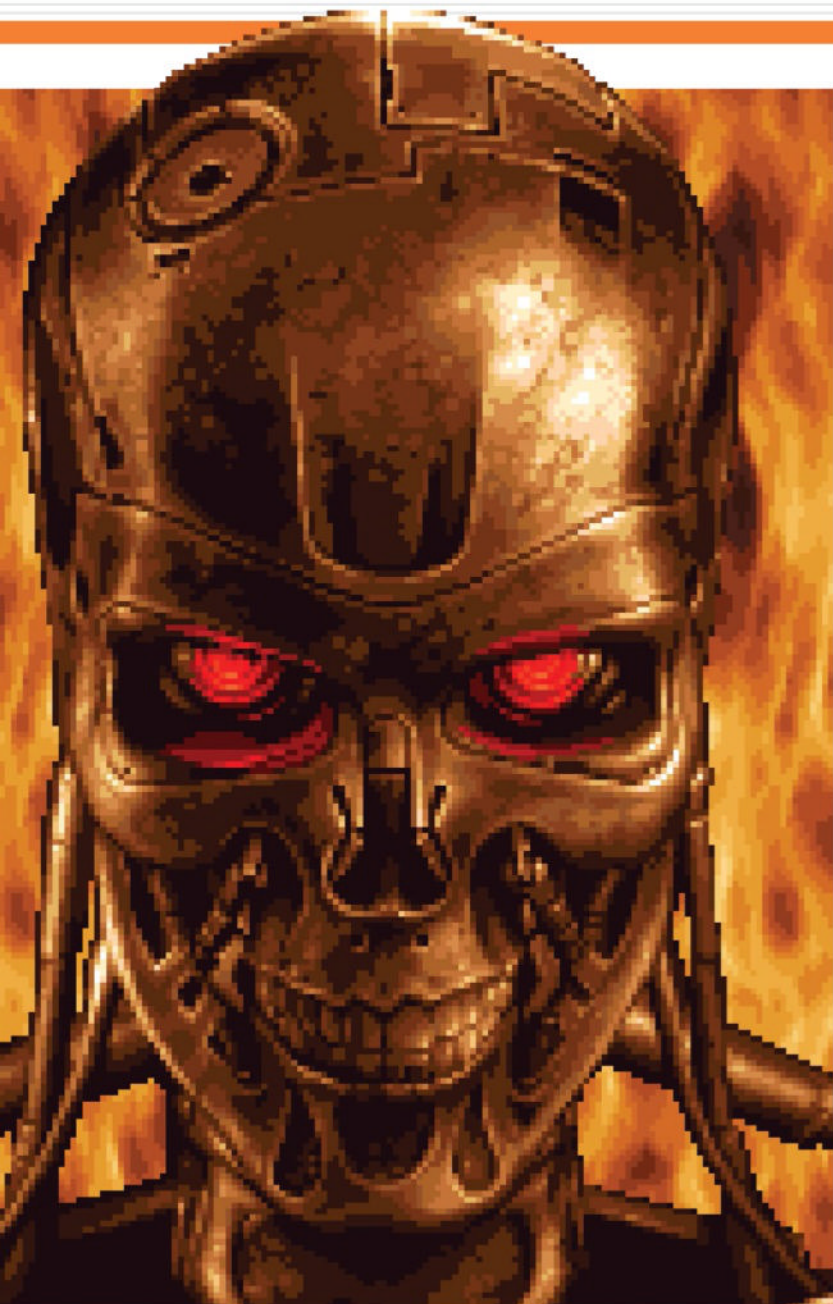
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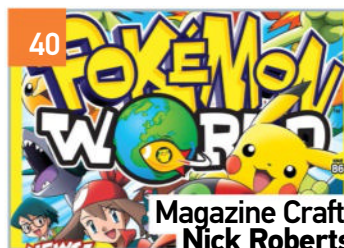


retrogamer@futurenet.com



Ultimate Guide: Splatterhouse

Martyn Carroll returns to Namco's outrageously violent horror hit



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The Making Of: Katamari Damacy

Keita Takahashi on his iconic roll-'em-up and his latest quirky adventure, *To A T*





» Scan the code for more information about *Hyper Sentinel Fusion*.

A TRULY HYPER SEQUEL

Jonathan Port on his follow-up game that crosses *Uridium* with *Paradroid*

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Our intrepid time traveller crash-lands in a brand-new year, but what will he find there?

Hyper *Sentinel* from Huey Games and Four5Six Pixel originally debuted in 2018 and proved to be

a slick spiritual reimagining of Hewson's *Uridium*. That makes sense because Huey Games is cofounded by Rob Hewson, the son of Hewson's Andrew Hewson. It also makes sense that in creating a sequel, Huey Games and Four5Six Pixel have turned to another classic Hewson game for inspiration, Andrew Braybrook's *Paradroid*.

While the opening sections of *Hyper Sentinel Fusion* will be familiar to anyone that's played the original, things change significantly once your craft lands. Upon landing you can now investigate the Dreadnought, plundering it for goodies against a strict time limit. Interestingly, this new addition to the game wasn't planned. "The original view was to revisit the original game but expand its size and visual elements while retaining a similar gameplay style to the original," explains Jonathan Port, *Hyper Sentinel Fusion*'s lead developer.

Jonathan tells us that the original demo simply allowed you to

recharge your ship, but a meeting with Huey Games in the HQ of Four5SixPixel (Jonathan's living room) saw things evolve. "Pete [Gomer of Huey Games] said that as a kid he had always wanted to land and go inside the ship when playing shoot-'em-ups," we're told. "Then I think it was Rob who suggested, 'Wouldn't it be cool if those indoor sections played out in a *Paradroid* or *Quazatron* kind of way. Our community would love it!'"

Jonathan liked the idea and began work on "a second game" which was then fed into the original gameplay loop that had made *Hyper Sentinel* so much fun to play. The changes led to four months of work, but they arguably add to *Hyper Sentinel*'s core gameplay. This change in gameplay mechanics has partly



» Jonathan Port is the lead developer of *Hyper Sentinel Fusion* and has ambitious plans for the incoming sequel.

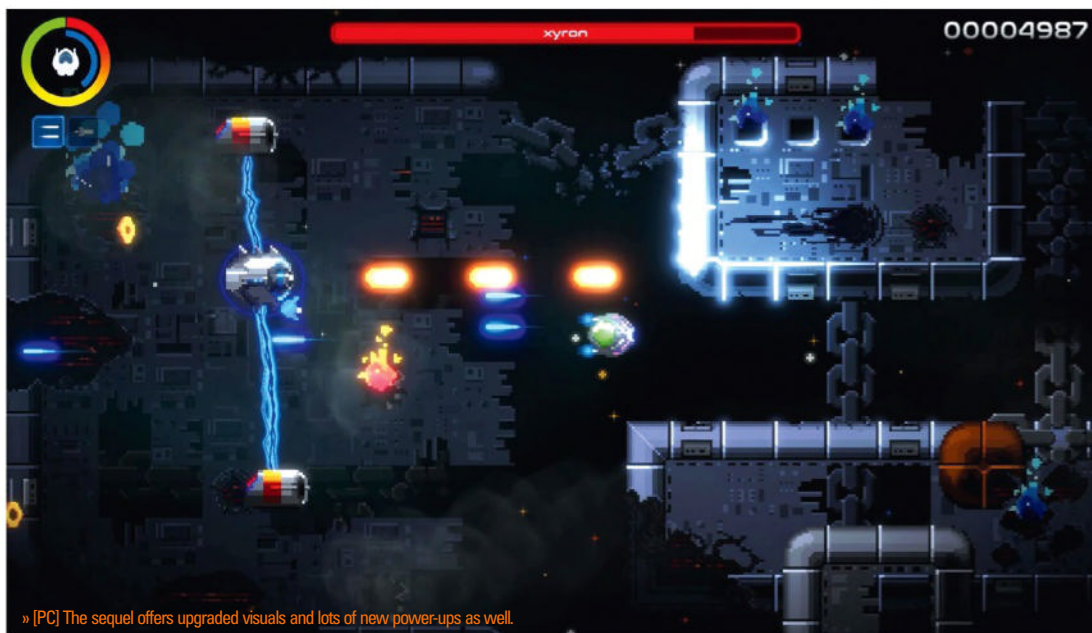
come about because both studios wanted to create a sequel that was far more ambitious than its predecessor. "For *Hyper Sentinel Fusion*, our natural instinct was a sequel which would move us along to the next era of gaming, to produce a game which felt like it came from 16-bit computers like the Amiga and Atari ST or some of the earlier

consoles like the Mega Drive and SNES," Jonathan continues. "The game was codenamed *Hyper Sentinel Radiance* initially, which was a nod to improving the visuals, expanding the scrolling area of the levels and implementing procedurally generated levels. But as development moved on, we began to see an opportunity to do something spectacular."

There's no denying from our early hands-on play of *Hyper*

“We think we have an offering here that people are going to love”

JONATHAN PORT

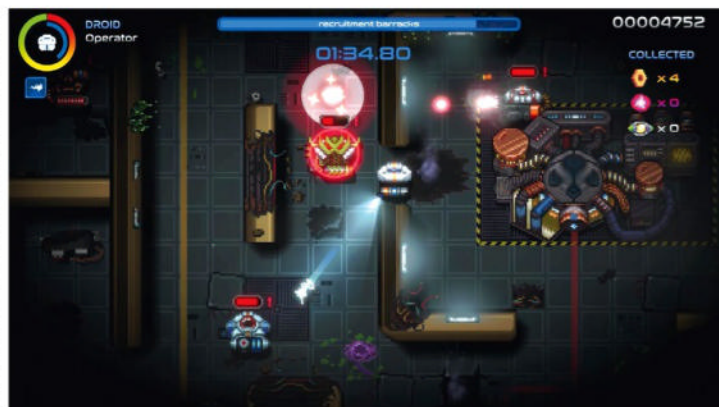


» [PC] The sequel offers upgraded visuals and lots of new power-ups as well.



» [PC] Any money you retrieve from plundered Dreadnoughts can be turned into useful upgrades.

Sentinel Fusion that it improves on the original and that the new *Paradroid*-inspired sections work really well too. It's not been easy for the team to get these two distinct elements of the game to blend together though, as Jonathan points out. "For *Hyper Sentinel Fusion* the tricky part was blending (or fusing – hence the name) the outdoor spaceship shoot-'em-up game with a slightly slower-paced indoor shooter, and a lot of work has been done to get the feel right. The two needed to be designed carefully to complement one another, with interconnectivity so that your actions in one section affect the other in interesting ways. We've built a custom AI system for the Hyperdroids including behaviour systems and different personalities, so it's really quite a unique experience with a lot to discover in terms of strategies. So while it's not a standalone game in-itself we think we have many elements that people are going to love when they get their hands on this part of the game." While *Hyper Sentinel Fusion* largely draws inspiration from older



» [PC] You can take over any of the enemy droids you come into contact with, just like *Paradroid*.

games, it has also been inspired by the distinctly newer *Hades*.

Jonathan says he's been inspired by Supergiant Games' roguelike in a number of different ways.

"One of the main ones is the meta-progression – the idea that if you die that's OK because you'll have earned currency that you can then spend to make yourself more powerful. Also the narrative elements and how that is tied into progression," we're told. "Then there is the Moonbase – which is our equivalent of the *Hades* hub area – you can explore, talk to characters and upgrade your Sentinel and Hyperdroid here. The Moonbase enriches the whole experience so it feels like a living, breathing universe."

If you're interested in preordering *Hyper Sentinel Fusion*, it's currently available on Kickstarter and will come in a 3.5-inch Mega Floppy

Micro Drive physical edition. "We think we have an offering here that people are going to love," explains Jonathan. "Kickstarter is a great route to funding the vision we have for the game, given the small size of the team, and we really wanted to involve the community in the process, which Kickstarter helps to facilitate."

While *Hyper Sentinel Fusion* will make its debut on Steam, that's not to say other versions won't also appear. "Hyper Sentinel Fusion will also be coming to consoles – just like the original – and Kickstarter backers will be able to choose their platform of choice," confirms Jonathan. "Huey Games are console-porting specialists, and throughout development we've been baking in the systems needed to support all current and future consoles and platforms, with the view to having them all running the game at exceptional levels of smoothness and performance." ✨

HEART EXPOSED

Fans of Jeff Minter will be pleased to hear that Paul Docherty's *Heart Of Neon* documentary has easily smashed its Kickstarter goal. Short extracts of the film can already be seen on Digital Eclipse's *Llamasoft: The Jeff Minter Story*, but now you can own the full documentary either digitally or on Blu-Ray disc. Paul is hoping the documentary will be available from August and with any luck, non-Kickstarter backers will also be able to access it.



ZZAP! LIVE LEVELS UP

The annual Zzap! Live was so popular this year it took place across two days. Many guests were at the event, including the likes of Jeff Minter, Andy Davidson and various Ocean devs, while interviews with the likes of Andrew Braybrook and members of DMA Design were hosted by **Retro Gamer** regulars, Andrew Fisher, Paul Drury and Iain Lee. It's great to see retro-focussed events like these continuing to attract plenty of fans.



Photo credit: Paul Davies (Femaki)

Who is Mike Mika?

Mike Mika's official videogame career began in the Nineties, working on Game Boy Color titles like *Klax* and *Alice In Wonderland*. He's now the studio head of Digital Eclipse, a studio acclaimed for its reverential treatment of classic games.

The American crash diet

It was 1983 and the country was gorging on videogames. Sales were exploding. Games begat books, begat cartoons, begat top 40 singles. Everything short of a breakfast cereal. (Wait. Never mind. That happened too.)

The industry had grown nearly fourfold from the year before. It was so lucrative that everyone wanted in. Quaker Oats – the oatmeal people – launched a videogame division called US Games. One of its releases was literally called *Name This Game*, as if it couldn't be bothered to name it. Purina, a dog food company, produced *Chase The Chuck Wagon*, based on its TV commercials. For every porn company dipping a toe – and other parts – into the games business, there was a Christian real-estate developer with a similar kind of blind faith. You were hard-pressed to find a company not making videogames. That's when America proved once again that no one ruins a good thing faster or with more enthusiasm.

The market became oversaturated – an overflowing pipeline of uninspired gaming cartridges. Speed to shelf replaced quality. Later we'd call it The Crash, with the kind of reverence reserved for a great war or a stock market collapse. In truth, it was more of a local tragedy – an American mess the rest of the world barely noticed.

Retailers were blindsided. Hot-ticket inventory became bargain-bin ballast. Prices tumbled: \$9.99, \$4.99, \$2.99... eventually, they were giving games away with any purchase. To a ten-year-old with a modest allowance, it was heaven.

From my vantage point, I couldn't see that the industry was dying. As far as I could tell, it was thriving. Every store of every kind had closeout software at bargain-bin prices: grocery stores, pharmacies, restaurants. It was a utopia of cursed abundance.

Meanwhile, across the globe, it was business as usual in Japan. Nintendo was quietly polishing what would become the Famicom and finishing the next sequel to *Donkey Kong* – a game that would introduce our industry messiah, Mario.

Europe, as always, carried on – busy with their Commodores, ZX Spectrums, BBC Micros, and a charming



indifference to whatever disaster America was engineering for itself.

Back home, things continued to be bleak. I read about Atari dumping millions of *ET* game cartridges in a New Mexico desert. It was the beginning of a lifelong obsession with locating the landfill and making a pilgrimage to where they allegedly buried the game. In 2014 I had the privilege to actually dig up the games for a documentary called *Atari: Game Over*. As we pried open the earth to peek inside, we discovered the legend was wrong: *ET* didn't kill the US games industry. The US games industry killed itself. Remnants of an entire industry were buried in that gaming latrine.

But just when the US games industry seemingly imploded, Nintendo moved in. In the end, Nintendo pitched the Famicom as a toy – not a games system – to bypass wary retailers still shaken by the crash, “Look, it even comes with a robot!” The truth is: gamers never stopped playing – we just had indigestion. We had too many games in one sitting. Nintendo knew this and arrived like a nutritionist. Out went the empty-calorie gaming glut; in came portion control, quality ingredients, and the now-iconic Seal Of Quality, assuring buyers that this crop of games was fresh and inspected for quality. It took a couple years, and a lot of work, but the games industry got healthy again.

As we reflect on the wounds inflicted by today's marketplace, the layoffs, oversaturation of games, and the discourse on game pricing, I look back at the scars left by 1983. We've healed before – by slowing down and having restraint. And also... Mario. ★

“ET didn't kill the US games industry. The US games industry killed itself”



Do you agree with Mike's thoughts? Contact us at:

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A PLAN FOR MORE TOAPLAN

TWO MORE TOAPLAN COLLECTIONS ARE ON THE WAY

Once upon a time you had to resort to the murky seas of emulation if you fancied a Toaplan fix, as the company was long dead and its games were legally inaccessible. Thankfully, that's all changed in recent years with new owners Tatsujin intent on making Toaplan's many great shooters as accessible as possible. Brilliant blasters like *Batsugun*, *Truxton* and *Zero Wing* are readily available on platforms as diverse as the PC and Evercade, and now the studio has announced two new collections.

Published by Clear River Games, the two collections essentially contain all the great PC ports that were developed by Bitwave Games across four digital collections. *Toaplan Arcade Collection Vol 1* features *Flying Shark*, *Fire Shark*, *Batsugun*, *FixEight*, *Tiger-Heli*, *Dogyuun*, *Twin Cobra* and *Out Zone*, while *Toaplan Arcade Collection Vol 2* contains *Grind Stormer*, *Truxton I* and *II*, *Zero Wing*, *Twin Hawk*, *Hellfire*, *Vimana* and *Slap Fight*.



» [Switch] The release of these Toaplan collections does mean that MZ's own takes on the studio's games are likely to stay in Japan.

Additionally, each collection will feature numerous extras like visual tweaks, rewind options and autosaves. Currently, the two collections will be available digitally for the PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X and Switch and physically for PS5 and Switch.



» [Switch] We were big fans of Bitwave Games' ports, so it's great to see them moving over to consoles.



» The two Evercade carts will include everything from *Space Invaders*, *Rastan* and *Bubble Bobble*, to *Growl*, *Volfied* and *Elevator Action*.



» [Evercade] *Roguecraft DX* looks superb and should offer much more longevity compared to *Full Void*.

EASTERN DELIGHTS

BLAZE ANNOUNCES A HUGE NUMBER OF NEW JAPANESE CARTRIDGES

To celebrate the Evercade's fifth anniversary, Blaze Entertainment had a killer line-up of carts and a new piece of hardware to show off. A Taito-themed Evercade Alpha was announced which will feature ten games, including *Space Invaders*, *Bubble Bobble* and *The NewZealand Story*, and two nine-game Taito cartridges were also revealed. Interestingly, *Cadash*, *The Fairyland Story* and *Puzzle Bobble* are exclusive to the new Alpha, while the remaining seven games will be spread across the two carts, which will feature

the likes of *Operation Wolf*, *Liquid Kids* and *Don Doko Don*. Two more SNK six-game arcade cartridges were revealed as well, featuring the likes of *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*, *Metal Slug 3* and *Twinkle Star Sprites*.

A new single-game cart also made its debut. *Roguecraft DX* is an enhanced upgrade of the hit Amiga homebrew game and will feature new levels, monsters and music. While we'd still like to see more games on some of these arcade carts, it's amazing to see more Japanese cartridges on the way. Here's hoping Konami, Capcom and Sega get on board soon.

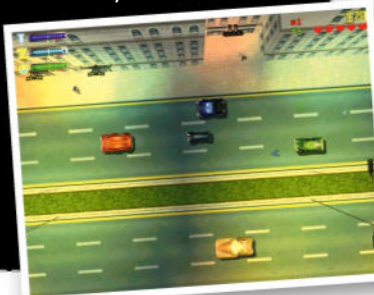
PATAPON REIMAGINED

After a hugely successful Kickstarter in 2023, where it raised over ¥219 million, the rhythm action game *Ratatan* is preparing for release later this year. Essentially a spiritual successor to *Patapon* (which will get its own reissue this year) *Ratatan*'s development team consists of numerous PSP veterans, including Hiroyuki Kotani, *Patapon*'s original game designer, and the game's musician Kemmei Adachi. Needless to say, you can expect more coverage of the game closer to release.



EMEL AKIAH PASSES

Shaun McClure recently notified us that his friend Emel Akiah passed away in April. Emel worked on a number of games during his career, from *Actua Soccer: Club Edition* on Sony's PlayStation, to the 2010 release *Isoball* for Apple's iPhone. He was also part of the *Grand Theft Auto 2* team and worked on both the PlayStation and PC versions. Our thoughts go out to Emel's friends and family.



Who is Iain Lee?

Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Do you like Worms?



haven't been on the telly for about six years and the radio for five. I am very much what some people might call a 'has been'. But to quote Shakespeare, "Better to be a has been than a never was." I still have tiny bits of *I'm A Celebrity* magic dust in my hair and every now

and then I give my head a wobble and get really sweet gigs. One of them happened a couple of weeks ago when Chris Wilkins invited me to host a Q&A at his ZZAP!64 event in Kenilworth.

I've written before about the lovely vibe at these meets. Loads of middle-aged neurodivergent men all trying not to make eye contact. Most of them are bald while at 52 I have a very fine head of hair and can stride through the rooms like a king with a full mane. I always enjoy going to retro days and I dig almost all of the chats I have with people... except the guy who just wanted to leech about Daisy Donovan. Not cool man.

This time I was invited to interview Andy Davidson and Stuart Cook – two programming heroes from the good ol' days. Stuart was responsible for *Chopper Commander*, *Circus Circus* and loads more. Really lovely chap and fun to chat with.

Andy was the person behind *Worms*. Imagine that was your contribution to gaming and pop culture. *Worms*. What an absolute legend. That game has seeped into the mainstream and people who aren't nerds like us have heard of it. Even my personal trainer (mid-life crisis and middle-aged spread have prompted me to get fit) who is a young man and not a gamer had heard of it and spoke enthusiastically about the game.

I was a little starstruck, sat up there next to him. Now I may look like a gobshite when I've been on TV but in reality I am as socially awkward and shy as everyone else at the event. Andy is a nervous boy and uncomfortable speaking on stage. This could have gone horribly wrong but it was a joy and I was enthralled by his every word.

In fact, Andy reminded me we had met a couple of years before and had an incredibly uncomfortable and brief exchange. Holly from the Retro Collective introduced us and then walked away. What we said went like this:

Me, "So you made *Worms*?"

Andy, "Yeah."

Me, "That's so cool."

Andy, "Thanks."

Me, "OK, I better be off now."

Andy, "Sure."

It turns out that when nudged properly with the right questions he is a fascinating listen and had the audience in the palm of his hand. The highlight for me was when I asked if he'd made the right decision taking a percentage instead of a flat fee. His eyes lit up and a wide grin came over his face. "Definitely," was his reply. You can find the interview on YouTube and I highly recommend it. ★

"I still have tiny bits of *I'm A Celebrity* magic dust in my hair and every now and then I give my head a wobble and get really sweet gigs"



Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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Who is Paul Rose?

Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

21 years later



Getting older, time feels increasingly erratic. Things that happened in the past couple of years feel like a lifetime ago, whereas the Nineties feel like last week.

I'm sure I've documented before how *Half-Life 2* is my favourite game of all time. If I had to play one game for the rest of my life, that'd be the one. It's the only game I've played through – from beginning to end – more than twice. Probably four times, at least. Its production design, its physics, the way it delivers its narrative and character – it's all still up there. You could sit a 14 year old in front of it and they'd still have a good time.

There have been rumours recently – I mean, when aren't there? – that a *Half-Life 3* is in development. And then... I realised that *Half-Life 2* was released a ridiculous 21 years ago.

I say again: 21 YEARS!!! There are 21 year olds alive now who didn't exist when *Half-Life 2* was released.

Twenty-one years before I was born, Britain was still under rationing! Most homes still had coal fires; the NHS was a mere two years old, for pity's sake! Not every home had a television. My grandparents still had an outside toilet. I can scarcely wrap my head around there being as much time between 1950 and my birth as there is between 2025 and the release of *Half-Life 2*.

It's not so much that I'm feeling old – more that so much of my life was defined and marked by the games released in any given year, and the various generations of hardware. There's been less and less differentiation between generations of gaming technology, to the point that I'm not rushing out to buy a Switch 2 because I can't really see what's new. I mean, besides magnetic Joy-Cons. See how I shrug so. I never thought the day would come when I wasn't moved to grab a new Nintendo console on day one.

Bottom line: this all adds weight to my theory that gaming technology hasn't moved as fast in the past couple of decades as it did in the decades before. We seem to have kind of flatlined. To me, *Half-Life 2* is still a modern game – which is testament to how ahead of its time it was when released. If – and it's a big, meaty IF – *Half-Life 3* does ever get released, what hope is there of it having the same sort of impact? Will it just be a better-looking *Half-Life 2*?

Look at some of the other games released in 2004: *Far Cry*, *Doom 3*, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, *Halo 2*, *Fable*. Again, these all feel like recent games. We're moving forward in increments, and it's making it harder to make sense of the passing years.

Twenty-one years before the above games came out, we were playing *Manic Miner*, *Mario Bros* and *Atic Atac*. Twenty-one years before that, nobody was playing games – apart from a few computer nerds who had access to an oscilloscope and a copy of *Spacewar!*. It's nuts. ✨

“Twenty-one years before I was born, Britain was still under rationing!”



Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK



retrogamermag.bsky.social



@RetroGamer_Mag



retrogamer@futurenet.com



WANT TO KNOW HOW A GAME THAT LOOKS LIKE THIS HAS SOLD OVER 100K COPIES ON STEAM?

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-----[ Created By Huw Millward ]-----
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-----[ Welcome to Warsim: The Realm of Aslona (Full Release 1.2.6) ]-----
1) Start a New Game
2) Load a Savegame
3) Quickstart (Instant new game)
4) Options and Settings
5) Start a new Challenge Mode Game
6) Extras and Generators
7) Report a bug/Suggest a feature
8) Community Links
9) View your scores
10) Help the text is too small on the screen
11) Quit to Desktop
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```

- Over 150 free updates, adding more than 10,000 new features.
- Rated Overwhelmingly Positive by players.
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- An evolving arena that can be owned, ruled, and used to host tournaments of all kinds.
- Mountains of mini-games and hidden features waiting to be explored.
- And so much more – even I can’t remember it all (it’s been a long 9 years, folks!)

I reply to nearly every comment across our community, so don’t be a stranger!

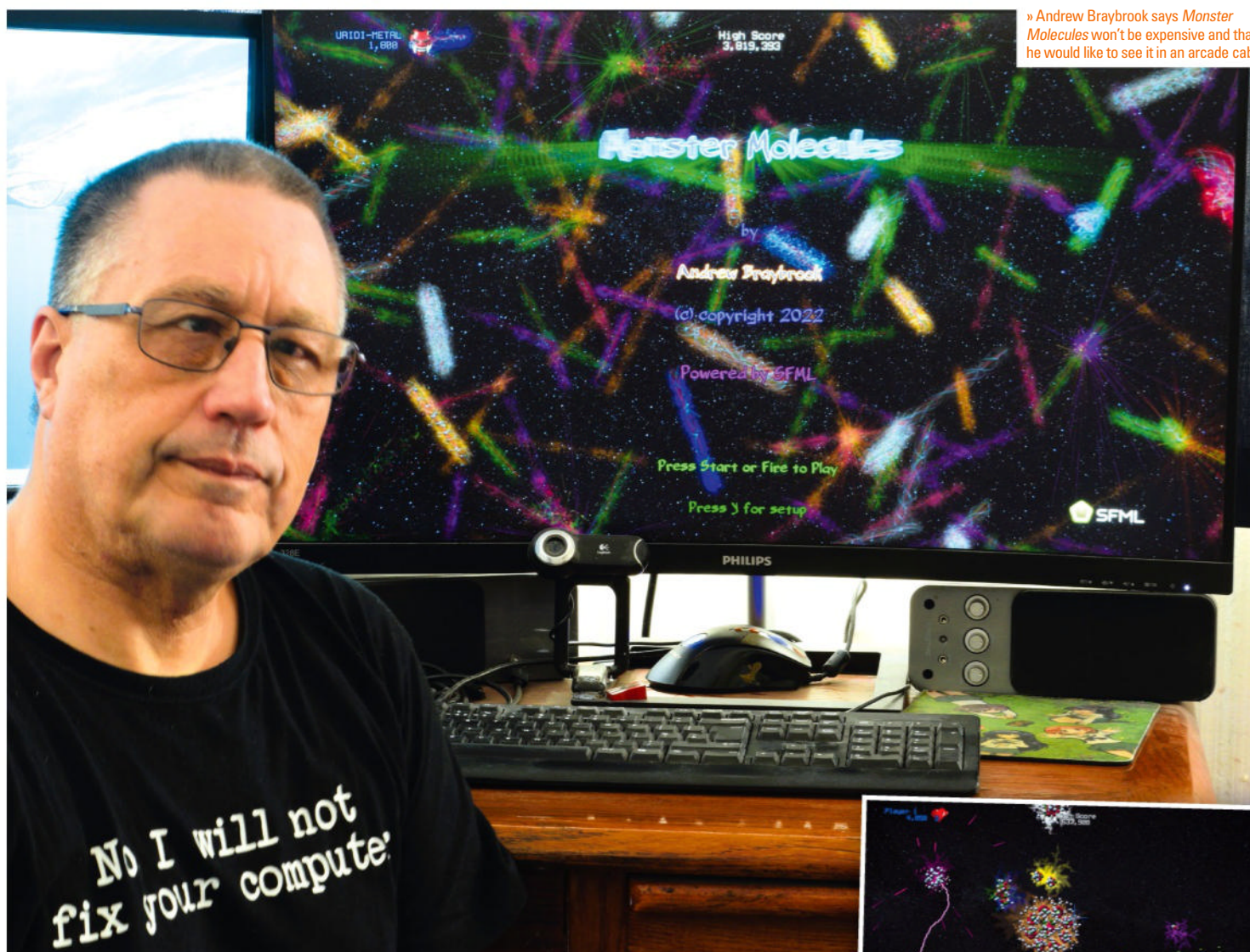
Warsim: The Realm of Aslona, 9 years in solo development!
Available on Steam, Itch.io and GOG

Scan this with your phone, or
search Warsim in google!



Also out now our physical Collector’s
Edition on Warsimstore.com





» Andrew Braybrook says *Monster Molecules* won't be expensive and that he would like to see it in an arcade cab.

Andrew Braybrook

The creator of *Paradroid* and *Uridium* tells Rory Milne about his new games

Given that Andrew Braybrook helped define 8-bit and 16-bit gaming by pushing the C64 and Amiga to their limits he could be forgiven for relaxing during his well-earned retirement. Instead, he's been spending his time working on a series of new games: *Asteroids*, *Rock Stars*, *Monster Molecules* and *Wreckie*.

Why did you develop *Asteroids* after retiring, Andrew?

I had moved mainly into quality control and activities relating to releasing software, and I wanted

to get back to programming. So I created a new version of our 16-bit game system in C. Someone helpfully suggested I look at SFML, and it was just what I needed. I thought it would be easy to write an *Asteroids* tribute, and a few weeks of setup and a couple of all-nighter sessions later I had some rocks traversing the screen.

How did Jeff Minter help out?

I let Jeff take a look and he thought it was a bit easy, as one could accumulate tens of lives in the early stages. Jeff then put me in contact with Atari US, and I let

them have a look at the game. But they were planning a new version of *Asteroids* themselves, so that was that. The only way the game will come out is with their blessing.

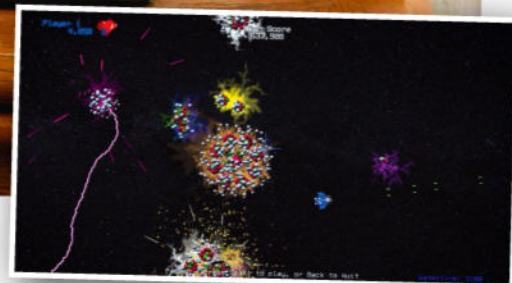
How did *Astierods* morph into *Rock Stars*?

Realising that it might be cheeky even just misspelling *Asteroids* as *Astierods*, I renamed it *Rock Stars*, as it had a star-field background. It only took a couple of days to get the Sun in the middle, then the eight planets, Pluto, the Asteroid Belt and the Kuiper Belt. All this

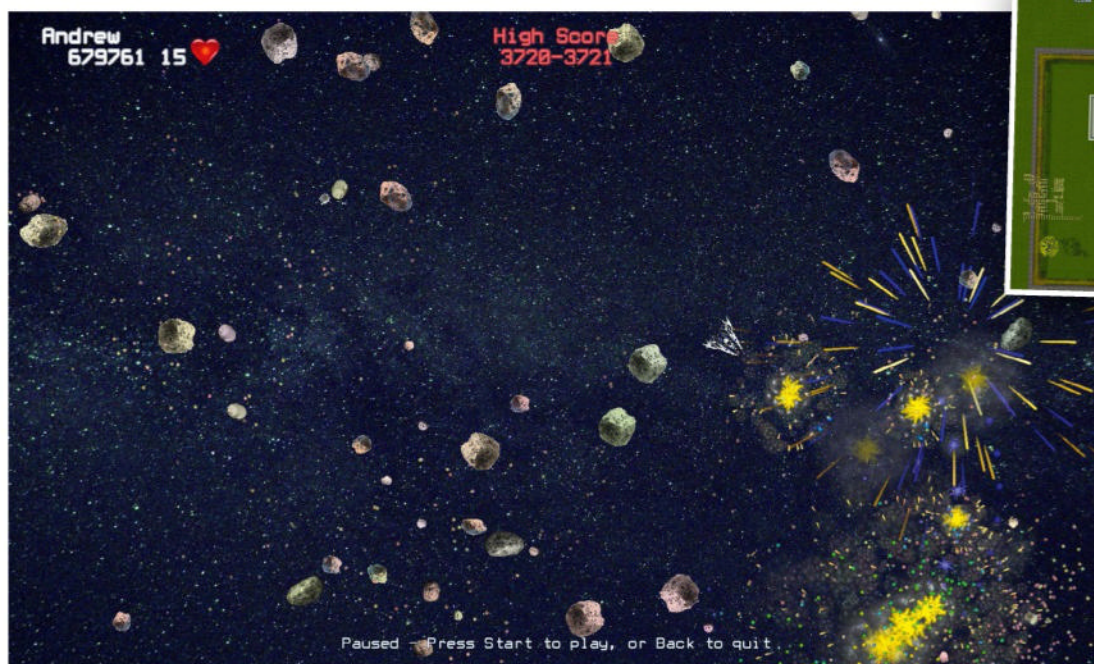
makes no difference to the game other than you might try to shoot Jupiter as it passes by.

How did your next game *Monster Molecules* come about?

I wanted to make more cosmetic changes to allow me to create a game that I could release. My solar system orbiting code reminded me of my old-school chemistry lessons, so what if I changed the rocks into molecules, atoms, nuclei and particles? Then I could get more patterns and movements into the game. I added some bigger metal atoms, so we



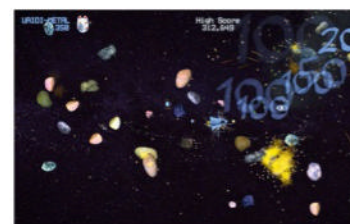
» [PC] In *Monster Molecules* you blast particles and atoms instead of turning space rocks into space dust.



» [PC] The question of whether *Asteroids* ever gets released or not is in the hands of Atari.



» [PC] Once you get discovered by an enemy squadron in *Wreckie* you settle your differences in a firefight.



» [PC] It might play similarly to *Asteroids*, but in terms of aesthetics *Rock Stars* is a different beast.

“Realising that it might be cheeky even just misspelling Asteroids as Astierods, I renamed it Rock Stars, as it had a star-field background”

ANDREW BRAYBROOK



» [PC] Environments with buildings and trees to hide behind give *Wreckie* an element of stealth.

had gold and silver, and where would we be without iridium?

How complete is *Monster Molecules* at the moment?

The code is pretty much done. It's turned out to be easier than I would normally have it, but maybe our early games were too tough. I'm happy with it but nervous about the free sounds I found on the interweb. What if they weren't so free as I had understood? So I feel that I have to swap in sounds that I create with SFXR. It's safer that way; I don't want to get sued.

How's your latest project *Wreckie* progressing?

I have implemented a tiled background playfield so we can have smooth scrolling at any speed, and a multi-sprite player

with five different weapons. I want to have the Meanies try to find the player and generally wreck the place. I want the player to have to find out what's going on without being detected for a while before a firefight, ie a recce, so I came up with the name *Wreckie*. It's just a working title.

What do you think makes *Wreckie* stand out?

As my library of code increases I can do more different things. I have a pseudo 3D display looking down on a map, I can have objects to block the view of the Meanies and I have mechanisms for them to try to see the player. There will need to be a big battle on every level, but I have to regulate the Meanies so they don't all arrive at the same time.

Tell us how your new games have evolved.

I improved some firing mechanisms in *Monster Molecules* over *Rock Stars*, and then upgraded *Wreckie* as they are separate code bases. *Wreckie* was a cut of the *Rock Stars* code from a similar time as I took a cut for *Monster Molecules*, which changed the rocks aspect. I needed *Wreckie* to develop the playfield tile system. It is slowly transforming from *Rock Stars* into a new game as I remove old features that don't work for a scrolling background.

How are you releasing your new titles?

I've been cautioned against giving away games for free as legally it's equivalent to saying

the copyright is meaningless. I get that. *Rock Stars* will remain in the vault. I do often have it with me at retro shows if anyone wants to play it. *Monster Molecules* is good to go, and it won't be expensive. I'd also love to see it in an arcade box.

What has working on these new projects been like?

It's not so different from the 8-bit era. There's only me here, but I talk to Steve Turner about things occasionally. It would be nice to have access to a graphics artist and a sound engineer on an occasional basis. I've been doing these games for nigh-on nine years now, and I've only got one game nearly ready to go! It's a slow business, but it's fun, just like it used to be. ★

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

JANUARY 2009 – Valve wants to kill you, Prince Of Persia wants to ensure that you never die, and Sonic Unleashed might just make you homicidal. Who says the silly season is over? Not Nick, whose time travel allergy hasn't been this bad since 2012

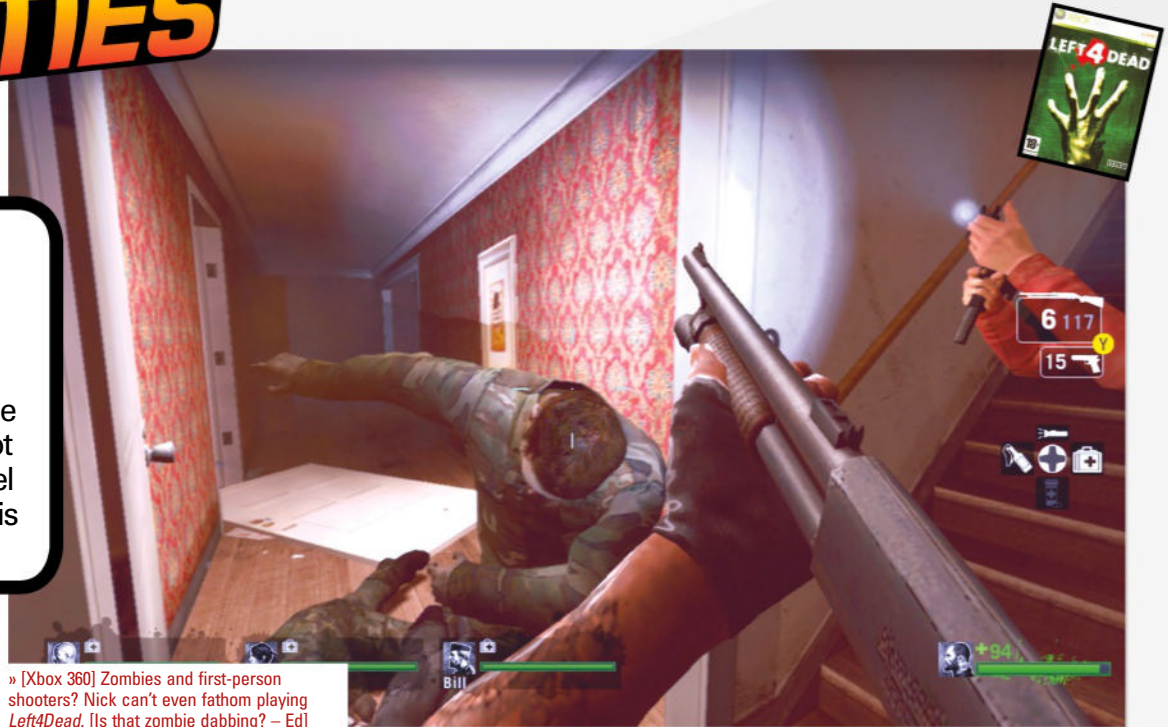


NEWS JANUARY 2009

The UK officially entered recession for the first time since 1991, with a notably severe economic contraction of 1.8% in the last quarter of 2008. 1.9 million people were unemployed, the highest figure since late-1996. In an attempt to improve the situation, the government announced a £20 billion loan guarantee scheme for small and medium businesses, and the Bank Of England cut its base interest rate to 1.5% – the lowest since its founding in 1694.

On 15 January, a US Airways plane taking off from LaGuardia Airport in New York lost all engine power after striking a flock of birds. With no reasonable chance of returning to a nearby airport, pilots Chesley Sullenberger and Jeffrey Skiles guided the plane to an emergency landing on the Hudson River in under four minutes. All 155 people onboard survived the incident, though 100 were injured, five seriously.

TV presenter Tony Hart passed away on 18 January at the age of 83. He was a mainstay on children's shows dealing with art, including *Take Hart* and *Hartbeat*, earning BAFTA awards in 1984 and 1998. Hart also created the stop-motion animated character Morph, as well as the original design for the *Blue Peter* badge.



» [Xbox 360] Zombies and first-person shooters? Nick can't even fathom playing *Left4Dead*. [Is that zombie dabbing? – Ed]

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JANUARY 2009

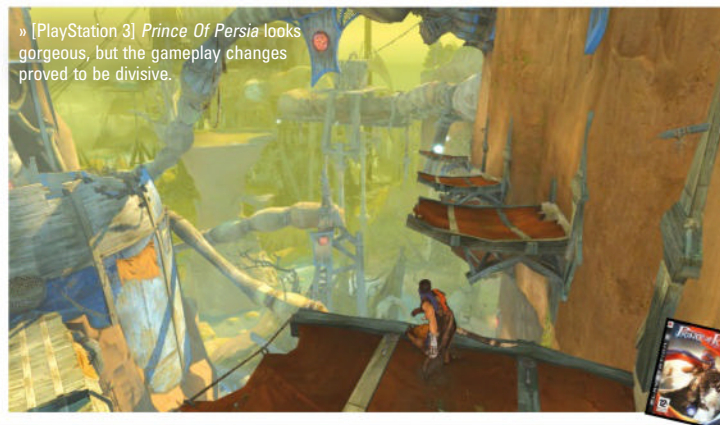
Zombies might be cold, dead things, but Valve's co-op shooter *Left4Dead* was full of them and happened to be the hot new thing in town. The game received universal acclaim, gaining scores of 5/5 from 360 and 9/10 each from *Total PC Gaming*, *games™* and X360, adding to last month's haul of 93% in *PC Gamer*, 9/10 in *Edge* and 8/10 in *Official Xbox 360 Magazine*. 360 felt that it was "almost certainly the best co-op shooter ever made", praising the decision to split the

campaign into short sections and saying that there was "just as much joy in witnessing the game punish the single-minded as there is in exploding any number of zombie crania".

The rebooted *Prince Of Persia* generally received a warm welcome this month, earning 83% from *Play*, 8/10 from both *games™* and X360 and 7/10 from *Total PC Gaming*, in addition to 8/10 scores in *OXM* and *Official PlayStation Magazine* last month. *Play* felt that the "visually arresting" game offered "a brilliant way of

keeping the pace up and avoiding monotonous backtracking" by having the princess Elika rescue you from fatal falls. Other magazines were less impressed, with scores of 3/5 in 360 and 49% in *PC Gamer*. *Edge* gave the game 5/10, feeling that combat was "something of a disaster" and that the open world "offers too few distractions to qualify as a sandbox" and felt "a little shallow and repetitious".

The other big multiplatform game of the month was *Sonic Unleashed*, which generally got a kicking, scoring 7/10 in *OXM*, 6/10 in *Edge*, 5/10 in *games™*, 4/10 from *OPM* and X360 and 2/5 from 360. X360 lamented that "the flowing, roller-coaster levels Sega paraded before gamers worldwide at preview stage have sadly turned out to comprise only about a tenth of what's on offer", and that the Werehog beat-'em stages and overall structure provided too many "barriers between gamer and fun". The more focussed Wii version earned 8/10 from *nRevolution* and 79% from *Official Nintendo Magazine*,



» [PlayStation 3] *Prince Of Persia* looks gorgeous, but the gameplay changes proved to be divisive.

with the latter commenting that “the Sonic stages are the best we’ve played since the Mega Drive days”, but criticising the “boring” Werehog levels.

Wii owners also got a great port of *Call Of Duty: World At War*. The game scored 9/10 in *nRevolution*, which called it “the best online multiplayer game for the Wii”, and similar praise was given in *ONM*’s 92% review. Over on the DS, *Prince Of Persia: The Fallen King* earned 8/10 from *nRevolution*, which praised the touch-controlled platforming as being, “Innovative enough to amuse without becoming overly complex.” *ONM* gave it 80%, also praising the control scheme but noting its difficulty, saying, “You’ll need a great deal of patience and perseverance to get the best out of it and in this day and age, we’re not sure how many people will be prepared to put up with it.”

Over on Sony’s platforms, PSP owners could enjoy the platform sequel *LocoRoco 2*, with scores of 7/10 in *Edge*, 8/10 in *games™* and *OPM*, as well as 82% in *Play* last month. *OPM* noted that there was “not much change to the original *LocoRoco* formula, but when it comes to something as original as this, there doesn’t need to be”. PS2 importers could

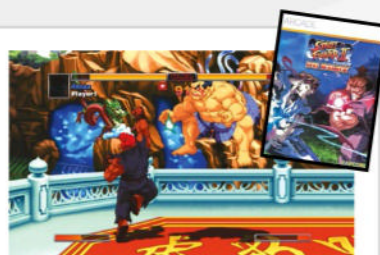
» [PSP] *LocoRoco 2* might not have been as fresh as the original, but managed to stand out all the same.



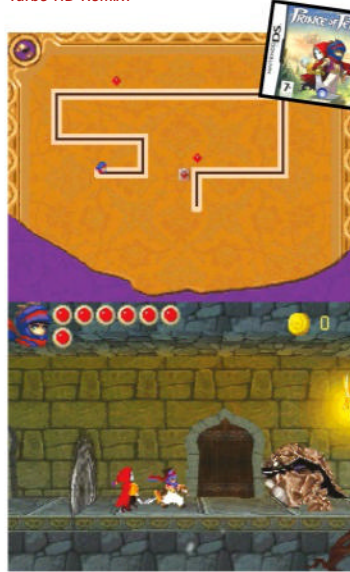
pick up *Thunder Force VI*, which *Edge* felt “gets its obstacles and enemy placement almost bang-on”, earning it 7/10. Scoring the game 6/10, *games™* commented that the game “isn’t really worthy of the series’ name” and that its bosses “suffer due to inherently dull design and are mostly underwhelming, displaying limited attack patterns and failing to make any impact”.

For those perusing the downloadable game stores, *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* stood out not only for its ridiculous title, but also its high quality. The game earned 9/10 from *OPM*, *OXM* and *X360*, while *games™* gave it 8/10. *OXM* praised the rebalanced gameplay, noting that, “Duds amongst the cast such as Cammy and T Hawk can now compete, while the overpowered Dhalsim and Balrog have been reined in – every character is now a viable choice. It could prove to be the case that it’s still not perfectly balanced, but it’ll be a lot of fun finding out.”

Join us next month, when *Skate 2* proves to be the best defence against the new year lull. ★



» [Xbox 360] What did you make of the new art style for *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix*?



» [DS] It’s the mini-prince! Which is good, as Nintendo consoles don’t get the main reboot.



» [Xbox 360] “Seconds of brilliance wrapped in minutes of adequacy wrapped in hours of boredom,” said *X360*.

CHARTS

JANUARY 2009

XBOX 360

- 1 – **Call Of Duty: World At War** (Activision)
- 2 – **Gears Of War 2** (Microsoft)
- 3 – **Need For Speed: Undercover** (EA)
- 4 – **FIFA 09** (EA)
- 5 – **Left4Dead** (EA)



WII

- 1 – **Mario Kart Wii** (Nintendo)
- 2 – **Wii Play** (Nintendo)
- 3 – **Wii Music** (Nintendo)
- 4 – **Wii Fit** (Nintendo)
- 5 – **Carnival: Funfair Games** (Take Two)



PSP

- 1 – **FIFA 09** (EA)
- 2 – **Lego Batman** (Warner Bros)
- 3 – **WWE Smackdown! vs Raw 2009** (THQ)
- 4 – **Pro Evolution Soccer 2009** (Konami)
- 5 – **Midnight Club: LA Remix** (Rockstar)



MUSIC

- 1 – **Just Dance** (Lady Gaga)
- 2 – **Broken Strings** (James Morrison)
- 3 – **Hallelujah** (Alexandra Burke)
- 4 – **Run** (Leona Lewis)
- 5 – **Use Somebody** (Kings Of Leon)



THIS MONTH IN...



nRevolution

The news section asks, “Has Nintendo gone too far in its quest for casual?” Imagine Publishing believes so, citing Nintendo’s move “increasingly away from the hardcore gaming community” as a reason to close the mag.



Edge

“In 1954, the introduction of colour TV heralded the dawn of a new era in entertainment. On Nov 19 [...] a new era in home entertainment begins with the New Xbox Experience,” quotes the Sound Bytes column.



Official PlayStation Magazine

What’s looking “considerably tighter, pacier and enjoyable than” *Haze*, *Legendary*, *Turok*, *Army Of Two*, *Conflict: Denied Ops* and others? *50 Cent: Blood On The Sand*, says *OPM*. “Hey, nobody’s more surprised than us...”

PLAYER: 1

Tutankham

ANCIENT ARCADE TREASURE

» RETROREVIVAL



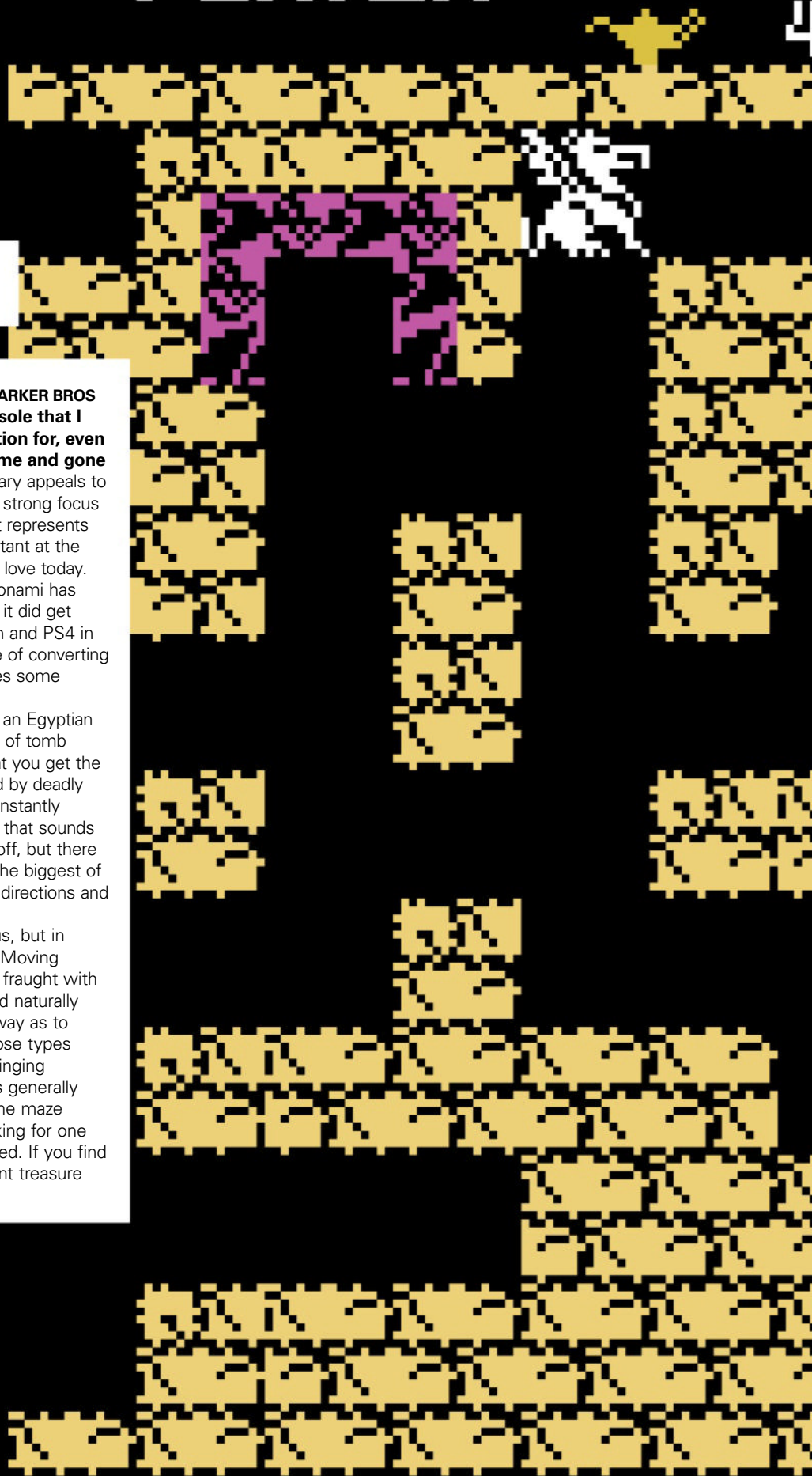
» COLECOVISION » 1984 » PARKER BROS

The ColecoVision is a console that I have a great deal of affection for, even though its heyday had come and gone before I was born. The library appeals to

me not only because of the strong focus on arcade conversions, but the fact that it represents some games that were considered important at the time but don't necessarily receive a lot of love today. *Tutankham* is a great example of that – Konami has rarely reissued it over the years, although it did get an Arcade Archives release for the Switch and PS4 in 2024, but Parker Bros went to the trouble of converting it to a variety of home formats. It deserves some attention too, because it's a cool game.

You play an explorer wandering around an Egyptian burial site and grabbing treasures – a kind of tomb raider, you might say – while ensuring that you get the keys to the exits. That task is complicated by deadly creatures like bats and dragons, which constantly spawn from certain points in the maze. If that sounds a lot like *Gauntlet* then you're not too far off, but there are some key differences in *Tutankham*, the biggest of which are that you can only move in four directions and you're restricted to firing left and right.

Those restrictions may sound egregious, but in practice they create some great tension. Moving vertically through the maze is particularly fraught with danger, especially in narrow corridors, and naturally plenty of treasures are placed in such a way as to encourage you to venture into exactly those types of areas. The coders did a great job of bringing *Tutankham* home too, as the gameplay is generally faithful to the coin-op version and even the maze layouts have been carefully adapted, making for one of the best ColecoVision games I've played. If you find yourself with the chance, this is an ancient treasure that's well worth digging up. ★



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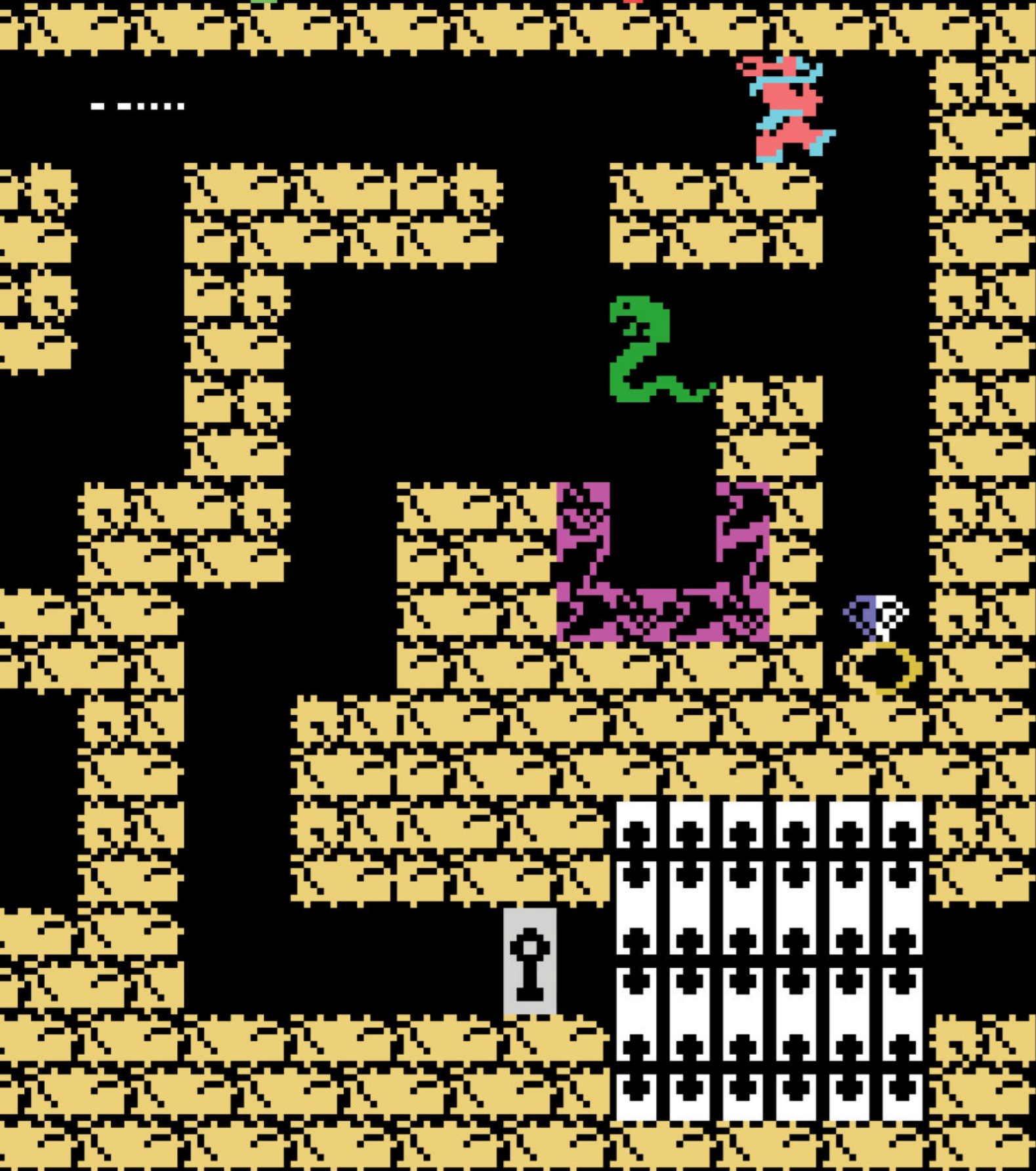
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FIXING THE TIMELINE - THE MAKING OF TERMINATOR™ NO FATE

TARGET: TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY. **MISSION PARAMETERS:** CREATE THE VIDEOGAME TIE-IN THIS DEFINING ACTION MOVIE TRULY DESERVES, IN AUTHENTIC NINETIES FASHION. **DEVELOPER:** BITMAP BUREAU. WE SPEAK TO THE TEAM TO FIND OUT HOW THEY HAVE TACKLED A MISSION WORTHY OF A TERMINATOR
WORDS BY NICK THORPE



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** REEF ENTERTAINMENT
- » **DEVELOPER:** BITMAP BUREAU
- » **PLATFORM:** PS4, PS5, XBOX ONE, XBOX SERIES X/S, SWITCH, PC, (RETRO SYSTEMS TBC)
- » **RELEASED:** 5 SEPTEMBER 2025
- » **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

In the hit-and-miss business of movie sequels, few hit harder than *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. It's a modern classic thanks to its combination of thrilling action scenes, revolutionary special effects and far more humanity than anyone should expect from a tale of killer robots, and it's been referenced in everything from *The Simpsons* to *Splatoon 2*. As a result, even readers who haven't seen it are probably aware of the plot – the shapeshifting liquid metal T-1000 Terminator is sent back in time to kill a young John Connor, the future leader of the human resistance against the machine intelligence Skynet, while a reprogrammed T-800 model is sent to protect him.

Unfortunately, while the arcade lightgun game is decent and the Game Boy game received a good reception, developers generally struggled to create worthy videogame adaptations of *Terminator 2*. Though we don't have the time-travel technology required to create the videogame adaptation that the movie has always deserved and send it back to the early Nineties, the next best thing is happening – Bitmap Bureau has taken on the challenge of creating a great *Terminator 2* game that *feels* like it could have been released in the Nineties. It's a challenging task, but the team has the skills to do it, with *Xeno Crisis* and *Final Vendetta* proving the studio's pedigree in both creating arcade action games and working with classic hardware.

At its heart, the game is a 2D run-and-gun that marries classic action gameplay to a classic action movie licence. "If you've grown up playing *Shinobi*, *Rolling Thunder*, *Elevator Action*, *Metal Slug*, *ESWAT*, then I think you'll feel right at home with the gameplay," says

Mike Tucker. "But I think we're giving the player a bit more agility than those games, you can actually slide and vault and jump. I'm really happy with the game feel, especially for Sarah – I think she's really fun to run through the level with." Getting Sarah Connor right was a hugely important task, as it turns out. "A temptation was to go 'future war'-centric. Certainly for me, it's like you wanted to see more of it out of that film, and there's actually very little in there," says Matt Cope. "But then what we realised is you're going to miss some key elements of the film, massively so, and certainly Sarah," Matt continues. "I think that we caught on to that quite early, that Sarah needed to be the focus, which I think was quite unique and different from other Terminator games to date."

"I THINK THAT WE CAUGHT ON TO THAT QUITE EARLY, THAT SARAH NEEDED TO BE THE FOCUS, WHICH I THINK WAS QUITE UNIQUE AND DIFFERENT FROM OTHER TERMINATOR GAMES TO DATE"

MATT COPE

However, to describe *Terminator 2D* purely as a run-and-gun is to sell it somewhat short. In fact, the game's first trailer showed us a good amount of gameplay variety, to the point that we were reminded of the scene-by-scene gameplay structure that Ocean's movie licences used to take. Mike tells us that any similarity to that old-school approach is more coincidental than anything else. "To squeeze all of those iconic scenes in, we had to take a sort of multi-genre approach. It was important that as many things carried over from one level to the next, in terms of the movement and shooting, jumping, general actions. But with the truck chase and the freeway chase, they're obviously driving sections, then we've got the beat-'em-up section," he explains. "Perhaps we could have made a purely run-and-gun title, but it felt necessary – to do the film justice, we had to take that sort of multi-discipline approach."

Choosing scenes turned out to be a rather tricky task. "There were bits where, on analysis, they might be key in the film, but ▶



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

XENO CRISIS
(PICTURED)

PLATFORM: MEGA DRIVE, VARIOUS

RELEASED: 2019

BATTLE AXE

PLATFORM: VARIOUS
RELEASED: 2021

FINAL VENDETTA

PLATFORM: VARIOUS
RELEASED: 2022

2D

THE MAKING OF: **TERMINATOR 2D: NO FATE**



HENK NIEBORG
PIXEL ARTIST,
BITMAP BUREAU



LEE MINTRAM
MUSIC COMPOSER AND SOUND
DESIGNER, BITMAP BUREAU



MATT COPE
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR,
BITMAP BUREAU



MIKE TUCKER
DESIGN DIRECTOR,
BITMAP BUREAU



QUANG DX
PROGRAMMER AND
DESIGNER, BITMAP BUREAU



WILL CURLEY
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
REEF ENTERTAINMENT

VISUAL TIME TRAVEL

• HOW BITMAP BUREAU DELIVERS AN AUTHENTIC RETRO LOOK •

While plenty of modern games adopt a pixel-art style, that's far from enough to make a game feel like a lost Nineties gem. "If you look at our back catalogue, the first couple of games we did like *88 Heroes* and *Ninja Showdown*, we were trying to create retro games," explains Matt. "Now we see it as a more naive approach, but we just had a slightly higher resolution than retro would have been, and didn't really limit things, and just kind of went with it. You can see how the community has embraced it, I would call them a more modern retro-type game – they've added in bump mapping and lighting, and coloured effects and glows and things."

So what sets a game like *Terminator 2D* apart? "I'm working with the Nintendo Switch's 16:9 aspect ratio which translates to a 398x224 pixel dimension, blown up to higher resolutions. Pretty close to old-school Nineties consoles, which had a 4:3 aspect ratio

with a 320x224/240 screen resolution," Henk explains. "I developed the habit when drawing modern pixel art to stick to a 15-bit colour depth palette when creating my artwork. It's actually 16-bit but one channel is reserved for the alpha channel's transparency," he continues. "When having only a number of tints per colour you're also forcing yourself to use a lot of shapes and clusters which also defines the style. Throwing my whimsical chunky style into the mix makes it work."

Using pre-rendered or digitised sprites was popular in the Nineties, but the team has avoided them here. "One thing I'm really proud of is that all the artwork and the hundreds of animation frames in-game were all handcrafted," says Henk, who praises the "several top-notch artists" who worked on the game. "Animating hundreds of frames for a single animation requires a special type of dedication and love for the job. Doing it for a cool licence like *Terminator 2* was just an extra inspiration."



» [PC] Astonishingly, less than 32 colours are used in this scene of the T-1000 from the game's intro.



» Here's a look at Robert Patrick as the T-1000 in the movie, for comparison. Image credit: Studio Canal.



» [PC] The naked T-800 takes on a bar full of burly bikers, *Final Vendetta*-style.

» you can't turn everything into gameplay that's going to be fun and actually make a level," says Matt. "One is obviously the key point where the two Terminators come together with the box of roses and the shotgun. That build up to that, and that whole scene seems like, 'Oh, you've got to have that.' But then you realise that it would be very difficult to get decent gameplay out of that segment." On the flip side, some scenes proved to have more potential than initially seemed to be the case. "The famous sequence of Arnie kicking the desk through the window and gunning down the cars and not killing anyone, for me, that's such an iconic part of the movie," says Quang DX. "Originally we didn't have that in the game, so we decided to put that in but we threw it in as a little minigame, rather than a whole level."

But with so many iconic scenes to choose from and various gameplay styles to incorporate, where is a team

supposed to start? "We started on the future war straight away so that we could get Henk [Nieborg] started on some wonderful background art, and just set the tone for the whole game," says Mike. "With the game being mostly run-and-gun, it made the most sense – although the focus is Sarah, we felt Henk's style was best suited to the future war levels, especially where he worked on *Contra 4* on the Nintendo DS before."

"I'm a fan of the franchise and an admirer of James Cameron the director since the first *Terminator* movie came out," says Henk. "I remember the very first teaser/trailer for *Terminator 2* which made quite an impression on me. The movie just blew my mind and it still holds up strong. Our game's introduction/attract mode is also based on this teaser." Henk was already working on games when *Terminator 2* originally hit cinemas, and his experience as a tenured pixel artist is a major reason that the game looks so authentic to the era. "We also started on the truck chase around the same time," Mike adds. "So that was Konstantin [Karpeniuk, artist] working on that level, because that had quite a different style. So we wanted to make sure we could put these two different styles in the game,



» [PC] Here's the Centurion boss, an imposing machine that never actually made it into the film. It did appear on the side of the official pinball table though (see image to the right).

have them sort of flow into each other and not feel too disjointed."

Lee Mintram, also known as Featurecast, has also been key to delivering a sense of authenticity via his work on the game's audio. "I lived and breathed that soundtrack for two years, like constantly studying it, working out how [Terminator 2 composer Brad Fiedel] made everything, with the sounds and all that," he explains. "I found out that he used this old Fairlight CMI keyboard for a lot of the sound. The drone that you have when the T-1000 appears, it's actually a trumpet sound, just pitched down really low and it plays slowly. So I've got a Fairlight emulator, and I was able to source all the original sounds and use them, all the trumpet sounds, all the kind of orchestral sounds that he would use and pitch them down – all the metal hits and everything I recreated, because I wanted the whole soundtrack to be very faithful to the original but expand on it a lot more."



We were able to licence seven tracks, so we could use elements from the original score like the main theme, and other bits from the score that aren't quite as

well known, but when you hear them in the game, they will bring back familiarity."

However, expansion was needed because the movie doesn't lend itself tremendously well to videogame background music. "It's a very dark sounding soundtrack. Apart from the main theme, there's not anything that's a melody that really sticks out in your mind," Lee continues. "Sound effects almost became the main kind of draw for the film – it was like, you couldn't tell where the music was and where the sound effects were. It became the same thing," he says, citing that iconic T-1000 drone as a prime example.

As a result, much of the music you'll hear in the game is new audio that draws upon the original compositions for inspiration. "I went through the soundtrack and found all



Photos Credit: Wayne Patrick Finn

"IT'S A VERY DARK SOUNDING SOUNDTRACK. APART FROM THE MAIN THEME, THERE'S NOT ANYTHING THAT'S A MELODY THAT REALLY STICKS OUT IN YOUR MIND"

LEE MINTRAM

the bits that did stick out to my mind, and used those as basis for expanding them, and that's where we went with it. And then we have the cutscene music, which is all original," Lee explains. "It has elements of the original score, then it also has the rock tracks, because obviously it's very ▶



» [PC] The adult John Connor battles a pair of Terminators in one of the game's future war stages.



» [PC] Linda Hamilton looks pretty amazing in pixel form, thanks to Bitmap Bureau's talented artists.



» [PC] The T-800 has gone a bit evil, and he's gunning down the SWAT guys.

► tied in with Guns N' Roses. I wanted to incorporate everything that was in the film, but then also make it very cohesive and work together. So a lot of the metal tracks also have orchestral strings in them, or stabby staccato-type strings, as well as all the other music that's not metal, so they all tie in together and work quite well." The resulting approach is spiritually faithful to the film, using familiar sounds and genres but within a new context.

"It's also the first game where we pushed ourselves a bit more in the music and sound effects, from our back-end technology – Lee pushed us a bit more. There was a lot more blending of tracks, where he'd made, say, a track that's amped up in different levels," says Matt. "With the future war level, when you first come to the tower section, you get a layer of rock music that comes in, and then when you destroy the tower, it then goes on to the second section of the level music," Lee says, by way of example. "So the music's always progressing – when you get to the boss, it amps up again."

Another area in which the game expands on the movie is in the scenes it depicts. "We tried to implement all iconic scenes from the movie into the game and even went beyond that. With that I mean adding bits and stages to the game that were only spoken of in the movie," says Henk. The opening stage starts off with Sarah training John in the desert, you'll see the Cyberdyne factory that Sarah was locked up for attempting to destroy, and of course there is plenty of the future war – something that Mike describes as "perfect videogame material". Henk spent plenty of time studying pictures and clips from



► [PC] Sarah tries to make her way out of the hospital, by clobbering one of the guards.



► [PC] Does Sarah murder Miles Dyson for what he hasn't done yet? That will be your call.

the movie for these scenes, but couldn't rely solely on adapting what made it to the silver screen. "The future war section in our game is quite elaborate so I had to come up with some original designs based on existing concept art, which had to be approved by the licence holder Studio Canal," he explains.

"A LOT OF THINGS ADDED TO THE FUTURE WAR LEVELS WERE EITHER ALREADY CONCEPT ART, OR TAKEN FROM REFERENCES OF SOME KIND. SO THEY DID EXIST SOMEWHERE IN THAT UNIVERSE"
QUANG DX

kind of areas that we would be able to go into and where we wouldn't. It was pretty flexible, I can't think of anything where it got vetoed, or they'd asked to change it."

"I think there were a couple of times where

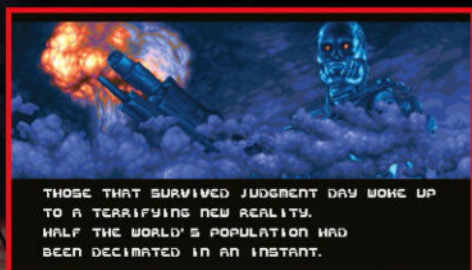
it was more internal," says Matt. "So for example, we had an artist adding in guns for different variations of the endoskeletons and ended up using a weapon from *Terminator Genisys*." Quang adds that, "A lot of things added to the future war levels were either already concept art, or taken from references of some kind. So they did exist somewhere in that universe." Other members of the team are quick to highlight them. "The Centurion is a good example of that, which appeared on the side of the pinball table," Mike points out. "The Skynet level is based off a lot of concept art and story stuff, in terms of how the TDE [Time Displacement Equipment] works," adds Matt. "When we were adding an element in, it was seeing, was there any existing source, or was there precedent in another

Given that the content of the game goes some way beyond what was shown in the film, even into the realm of alternative endings, we had wondered if the team had experienced any struggles in terms of getting concepts approved. "The way we work together with them is, we'd just send like monthly files and updates on the game through for them to approve," says Will Curley. "Everything was pretty smooth. We'd already made a *Terminator* game with *Resistance* and based on that experience, I think we already knew what

DELETED SCENES

1
2
3

• THE EDITOR'S SCISSORS WERE USED JUDICIOUSLY ON THE MOVIE, AND THE GAME IS NO DIFFERENT



■ Here's a screenshot from an unused cutscene, showing off a T-800 against a mushroom cloud of nuclear devastation. In the end, the team decided to go in a different direction for the intro, leaving this nice piece of art without a home in the final game, but we've preserved it here.



■ In the movie, the protagonists steal a cop car in order to escape from the Pescadero hospital, but the T-1000 isn't far behind and manages to keep up on foot. This parking garage was drawn for the game in order to represent that scene, but the scene ultimately ended up being cut.



■ "It almost looks like an FPS section there. I think it was Cam [Cameron Kerr, artist] trying out the Terminator's iconic red vision that you see in the film," says Mike. "We were toying around with that, but I think the licence restrictions meant we had to go strictly side on."



» [PC] 1991's top special effects, depicted in a way that 1991 gaming hardware could handle.



» [PC] John ducks into a doorway, avoiding fire from a non-humanoid SkyNet drone.

film or another thing? Every decision was quite considered. There's a lot of purpose behind it."

One key issue was actor likenesses. "Linda Hamilton, Edward Furlong, the T-1000 – Robert Patrick – we knew we had their likenesses nailed down from the start. Joe Morton, we've had a few more come in," says Mike. "So that was a big consideration, especially for the artists. They knew they could create sprites with those likenesses, and they had to be approved by Studio Canal. It was a different story for the T-800 and Arnie, obviously, we can't use his likeness. That was a separate thing altogether, but we've got as close as ►



■ Finally, not so much a deleted scene as a piece of concept art – a rarity for *Terminator 2D*, as much of the game's graphics were drawn directly as pixel art. Here's a look at Sarah in green and black variations of her combat gear, with and without the hat she sports during the raid on Miles Dyson's home in the movie.



» [PC] The aiming mechanic wasn't initially part of the chopper scene, but was added for gameplay depth.



» [PC] You'll also have to contend with a freeway full of drivers that are oblivious to your predicament.



» [PC] After the T-1000 hijacks the liquid nitrogen tanker, the T-800 takes decisive action to stop it.

CREW COMMENTARY: FREEWAY CHASE

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

• A CLOSER LOOK AT THE MOST CHALLENGING SCENE TO ADAPT •

A key scene leading up to the climax of the movie is a tense chase in which John, Sarah and the T-800 escape the Cyberdyne building in a stolen SWAT van, only for the T-1000 to hijack a helicopter and give chase, flying low over the freeway in pursuit of the protagonists' unhelpfully slow vehicle. It's a scene that has proven tough to adapt over the years – the arcade game made it into a fairly straightforward job of shooting the chopper to protect the van, but Ocean's computer game had a combined driving and shooting section that was somewhat awkward and the console games omitted it completely.

"We had so many different mechanics in there, trying to get it going," says Will, admitting that it was tough for the *Terminator 2D* team too. Mike says "We tried a reload mechanic very early on, because we wanted to give the player something else to think about other than just shooting, but actually it was probably a bit too much." Quang chimes in, saying "There was no targeting

originally, was there? Just dodging and shooting." Matt adds, "Dodge and shoot with the reload, yeah. The boss became more dynamic." Quang agrees, saying, "It was quite static before." Matt concludes, "That one probably took the most different iterations."

"That level is definitely an evolution of what would be best for the gameplay, because we've already done the dodging in the streets from the truck chase level," says Quang, beginning his summary of the final approach to the stage. "So we've taken elements of that from the other direction, but then we've added the shooting and dodging section afterwards, and it's giving the player enough agency and making it fun for the player to do that sequence, rather than just holding the dodge button and pressing the shoot button. So we've given them aiming. And then we changed it so there's different sections of the helicopter that you shoot, and you go through a sequence of the different weapons, and the progression is much nicer that way."



» [PC] How does this boss encounter play out? You'll have to play the game to find out.

NO FATE

• HOW TERMINATOR 2D LETS YOU PLAY OUT A DIFFERENT STORY •

One of the most intriguing aspects of *Terminator 2D: No Fate* is hinted at by its subtitle, as the story can take different paths to that shown in the movie. We were intrigued as to how this might happen – although we'd seen screenshots that show decisions that could clearly affect the story, we had to ask if that was the only method. Was there a chance that other aspects of gameplay could alter the story outcome, with success or failure in a stage changing your fate? "No, it's quite arcadey in that respect – if you die, you're going back to the last checkpoint, and you continue," says Mike, shooting down our speculation. "The story paths, they only diverge when you make a choice during some of the cutscenes."

Keen-eyed viewers spotted the T-800 mowing SWAT team members down with the minigun in the trailer, in contrast to his non-lethal actions in the film, and it turns out that this was no error. "That choice of smashing the chip or reprogramming the chip leads you onto that route," says Will. "In the game, you want to shoot people with the minigun. Actually, that probably was one of the biggest

debates that we ever had – whether you can just go around shooting people."

However, it turns out that gameplay-based story divergence was under consideration. "I think we had Sarah being arrested or something at the end of [the Cyberdyne lab stage]," says Matt. "You get in this weird dynamic of, to allow you to be able to have two different paths, how you have to have a successful way of finishing a level and a negative way of finishing, but also have a negative way of dying or having to repeat the level. It just got really complex, and you kind of couldn't cover all the angles. We spent a good while iterating on that, and it just didn't feel quite right."



IN THE END, CYBERDYNE SOMEHOW SURVIVED OUR ATTACK.

» [PC] With the original Terminator's arm and damaged CPU intact, humanity's future seems bleak.



» [PC] After escaping the hospital, this pivotal scene in the garage offers players a choice.



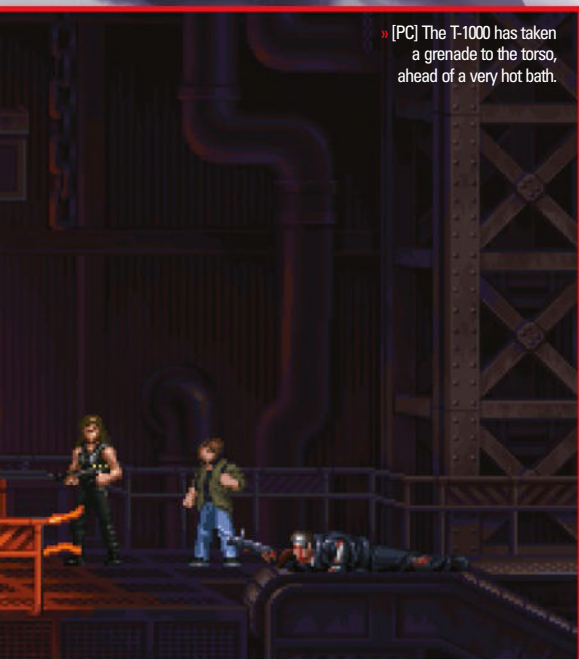
» we could without getting in trouble." Matt adds "Well, they came back at one point with changes to the pixel art, hair colour changes and things like that."

Another consideration of working on a licensed game has been the difficulty level. Where Bitmap Bureau's prior games have squarely targeted fans of classic games, it's fair to say that their difficulty level has been authentically retro – that is to say, pretty tough. "Previously, we'd not really had anyone playing our games, so it was just me on *Xeno Crisis*," says Mike. "I thought it was fun, but then you put it out there, and it was – well, not everyone, but people bitching and moaning about getting to the end of the game and getting told you have to clear it on one credit. The amount of hate mail I got!" The result has been that the team has had to adjust its usual approach for *Terminator 2D*. "We took the normal mode – the normal Bitmap mode, which is now the hard mode – and then used that as a starting point to make a normal and then make an easy," says Quang, who spearheaded the effort to shape the difficulty level.



» [PC] All things considered, the T-1000's favourite Disney film is probably not *Frozen*. [You're fired – Ed]

» [PC] The T-1000 has taken a grenade to the torso, ahead of a very hot bath.



» [PC] Amazingly, this highly detailed scene uses less than 256 colours, which will be handy on classic hardware.

"Modern gamers aren't built like how we were. Games are more accessible than they ever were," continues Quang. "To capture someone's attention, you have to meet them where they are." He explains that with a game like *Terminator 2D*, at the most extreme end that means "people who are fans of the franchise that aren't really gamers, but they want to still see through the game" for whom the Easy Money difficulty level has been specifically included. "We give them infinite continues, for example, and take a lot of enemies out so there's enough to keep you engaged, but not too many that you get overwhelmed," he explains.

"When you're looking at an easy mode, you're looking at cognitive load and how much you're asking of a player," Quang continues. "So if there's just one enemy, obviously that's easy to pick up. If you have an enemy there and an enemy above them, then they're looking at two things at once, so we're trying to work out how much load is on the player. So you go through the level and say, we've got three enemies there, one enemy there, and the laser there. That's too much for the player to focus on at once. So let's pare that down by either removing the laser or removing one of the enemies, just to get the balance right."



» [PC] Thankfully, protecting the SWAT van isn't the ordeal that protecting the truck was in the arcade game.

Terminator 2D: No Fate is clearly Bitmap Bureau's most ambitious project to date, and that meant that plenty of time was spent on development – which did lead to some fatigue before everything was said and done. "When you work on a game more than a year, things start dragging – more than two years, then very much so, and the less you want to work on it. But I hope that I managed to bring a new lease of life to the development," says Quang, who joined when development had already progressed significantly. "Yeah, it got me over the finish line. It's just good to have another pair of eyes on it," Mike replies. "It's because there were so many genres in there," Matt elaborates. "It just meant you were effectively writing three or four games, and each genre is going to come with its own unique set of bugs and QA scenario. So it just meant a lot of iteration."

"I hope the players and *Terminator 2* fans will appreciate all the details we added from the movie," says Henk. "I almost can't wait for the release of the game and am looking forward to what *Terminator 2* and retro fans have to say about the game." Matt feels similarly. "We could have tried to force the game out the door sooner, but actually that extra six, nine months, whatever it was, led to a lot of refinements and polish. From the feedback we've seen from people that have seen the trailer, actually they really appreciated the sort of effort we gave it," he concludes. "So I think that's probably the thing to get across – we're not trying to pixel perfectly recreate the film. It's trying to make a fun game out of the film, but with all the correct nods in the right places."

It's one thing to see the trailer, but we've played *Terminator 2D: No Fate* before anyone else, so turn the page for our first impressions to tide you over until you can experience the game for yourself.



» [PC] The defining message of the game, as carved into a bench by Sarah.



[PC] Fans of the *Metal Slug* series may find that this boss gives them a sense of déjà vu.

HANDS-ON

WE'VE HAD A WORLD EXCLUSIVE CHANCE TO TRY OUT
TERMINATOR 2D: NO FATE – HERE ARE OUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS

While nothing in life is certain, we were confident that *Terminator 2D: No Fate* was going to be worth keeping an eye on – Bitmap Bureau has an excellent pedigree as a developer and that announcement trailer was certainly enticing. However, we wouldn't put a brand-new game on the cover of *Retro Gamer* without something more concrete to go on, so we took the opportunity to play *Terminator 2D: No Fate* before anyone else outside of the development process.

Having spent a good chunk of time with the game, we're confident that it's going to be a treat not only for fans of the *Terminator* series, but also for fans of classic action games in general.

It was a safe bet that the beat-'em-up stage in the biker bar would be good fun

because of the team's experience with *Final Vendetta*, and we weren't disappointed. You play as the T-800 and because he's essentially unassailable, he doesn't have a health bar – seconds are instead deducted from your time limit when you take a hit. The Terminator feels appropriately weighty and it's fun to shoulder barge your way into enemies before starting up a striking combo. We got our first taste of the game's secrets here, and while we don't want to spoil the surprise, be sure to take out the jukebox as the results will definitely raise a smile. The truck chase is a test of reactions that slowly layers additional challenges on as the scene progresses. You start off dodging traffic as John Connor, but once the Terminator enters the scene you'll need to keep the stalking vehicle at bay, and eventually start shooting your way through obstructions. Playing through these stages,

it's immediately apparent that the high quality of the artwork doesn't just extend to the still images. There are plenty of memorable moments from the film that weren't strictly necessary inclusions, but they've been animated for the game as little visual touches that are just delightful to see in pixel form. Remember when the biker gets thrown over the bar and into the kitchen, landing on the hot grill? That's in there. Likewise, after the truck has reached its fiery demise, the lone tyre that rolls out from the burning wreckage puts in an appearance too.

The run-and-gun stages comprise the bulk of the action, and if you're a hardened veteran of the genre you'll be right at home. Both Sarah and the adult John Connor feel agile and respond in the way that you'd expect, and the two feel a little different to play as too. John has a dodge roll, can throw a limited supply of grenades and has a rapid-fire energy weapon. Sarah can slide along the ground and has a handgun as a primary weapon, but she can grab a few different power-ups along the way. She also sports a melee attack that can be used to bat away incoming grenades, which was a great surprise when we first saw it.



[PC] Sarah's attempt to escape the hospital fails, as she's skewered by the T-1000.



[PC] Rankings are based on a variety of factors, and you'll revisit stages to boost your score.



[PC] Could there really be any other choice for a continue screen in a *Terminator 2* game?



» [PC] This reminds us a little of a certain SNES game – Robo Protector or something like that?

One thing that was particularly enjoyable was spotting all of the influences of hit action games as we played. A short elevator sequence brought to mind a favourite bit from *Shinobi III*, one boss was reminiscent of a familiar foe from *Metal Slug 2*, and given how much *Contra III: The Alien Wars* borrowed from the Terminator series, it's no surprise to see the odd homage here. Bitmap Bureau's past games have included uncommon defensive options like the block button in *Final Vendetta*, and run-and-guns rarely offer the ability to take cover in doorways or behind background walls, but *Terminator 2D* offers that option and it comes across as a nice little nod to the likes of *Rolling Thunder*.

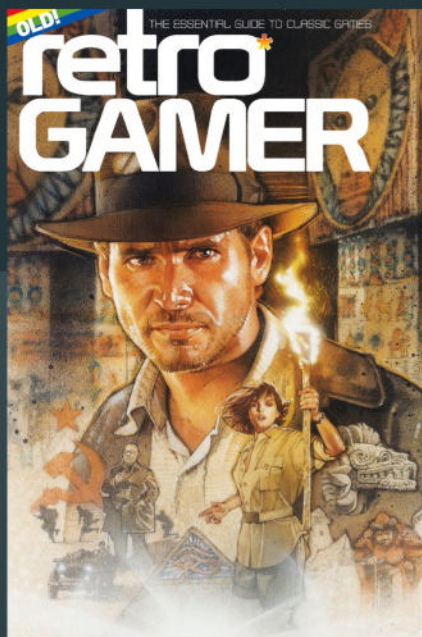
It's clear that the team has put a lot of work into making the controls feel just right here, and given that we have plenty of experience of run-and-gun games, we were able to get into the thick of the action without needing much time to adjust to the game. It really felt like second nature, and a side-effect of that is that we tore through the stages we played, gaining A ranks and S ranks at the first time of asking on the normal difficulty. If you know your way around the genre, you may wish to

skip straight to the game's hard mode as there's no shortage of challenge for those who relish it – and if that's not enough, the top difficulty level really ramps up enemy aggression and removes all checkpoints.

Of course, while we've been delighted by everything we've seen so far, we haven't experienced everything the game has to offer. One thing we're intrigued by is Sarah's escape from the Pescadero hospital, as stealth stages can be tricky to get right, but we weren't able to see or play that. Likewise, we're interested to see just how different the alternate futures are, but that's something that will have to wait until we get our hands on the finished game. Also, while versions for classic platforms are in the works, Bitmap Bureau has yet to confirm which ones or when we can expect them, and we're absolutely dying to know. *Terminator 2D: No Fate* will be released on 5 September 2025 for PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch and PC, and you can expect a full review in a future issue of **Retro Gamer**. ★



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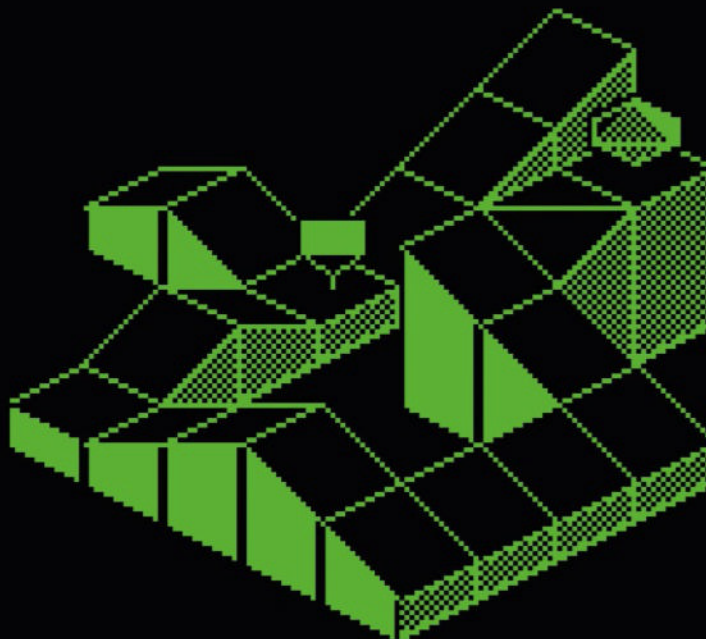
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» [ZX Spectrum]
Awkward routes
like this need
careful use of the
turbo and brake.



IN THE DARK DAYS BEFORE THE INTERNET WE GOT OUR GAME NEWS FROM MAGAZINES. COMPETITION WAS FIERCE, BUT A GOOD COVERTAPE COULD STAND OUT AND TEMPT READERS INTO A PURCHASE. IN THIS MONTH'S COVERMOUNT CORNER, WE LOOK AT YOUR SINCLAIR #64, WITH A TAPE MORE STUFFED THAN EVER

WORDS BY JAMES KONIK

YOUR SINCLAIR #64

THIS MONTH IN APRIL 1991

The covertape wars got more and more competitive over the years and in April 1991, *Your Sinclair* raised the bar with the Magnificent Seven. Crammed with seven things, the tape offered readers incredible value. The tape featured a stunning five full games. True, one was a reader game, but one was the fantastic *Spindizzy*, and another was the first (unofficial) sequel to *Street Fighter*. There were also two games from French publisher Loricels that were unreleased in the UK. Along with a demo of a doomed arcade conversion and a few POKes, April was a bumper month for Spectrum fans.

THE MAIN EVENT: SPINDIZZY:

Spindizzy was a banger of a freebie. A venerable classic, Phil Snout gave it 9 out of 10, and full marks for addictiveness in *Your Sinclair*'s July 1986 issue.

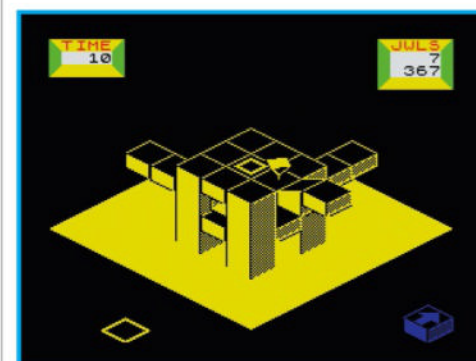
Developed by Paul Shirley and published by Electric Dreams, the game uses a clever scripting system to cram a huge world into the Spectrum's limited memory.

It's a physics-driven exploration game, in the *Marble Madness* vein, with you controlling GERALD, a kind of mapping drone sent to explore a new world. The isometric world is full of narrow paths and jumps, demanding tight control and use of GERALD's momentum to reach tricky spots. The aim is to explore the whole map of 386 screens and gather

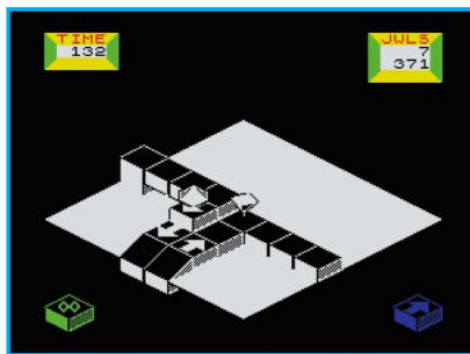
all the Energy Jewels. There's many a heartbreaking plunge as you misjudge your speed and hurtle over the sides into the abyss below, but you soon respawn, and can carry on right where you left off.

There are no lives, dying costs you time, but jewels add to it, so as you improve, you can give yourself longer to beat it.

There are nuances to *Spindizzy*'s physics-based control system. Mastering the turbo and the brake lets you pull off manoeuvres that seem impossible at first, giving you the tools to cross the game's tougher screens. Braking costs time though, particularly if you make the mistake of moving while doing so, adding a further layer of risk and tension.



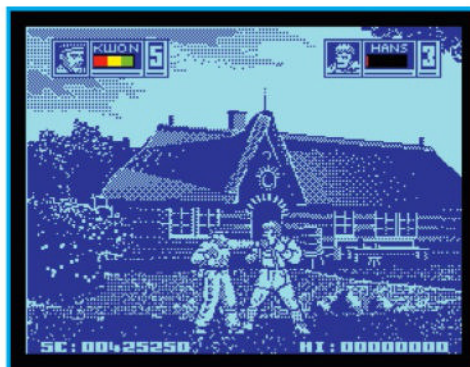
» [ZX Spectrum] If you didn't know, GERALD stands for Gyroscopic Environmental Reconnaissance And Land-Mapping.



» [ZX Spectrum] A one-way system here. You'll need to take a detour to grab this gem.



» [ZX Spectrum] Saint Basil's Cathedral makes a spectacular first stage backdrop.



» [ZX Spectrum] Opponents are an eclectic bunch – there's even a couple of animals to battle.

There are a few clever puzzles scattered about as well, and switches on the ground which control various lifts and pathways to help you progress. Though a large game, there's a handy in-game map to stop you getting too lost. *Spindizzy* is fiendish, but always possible to improve at, and hunting down its secrets is still a compelling challenge.

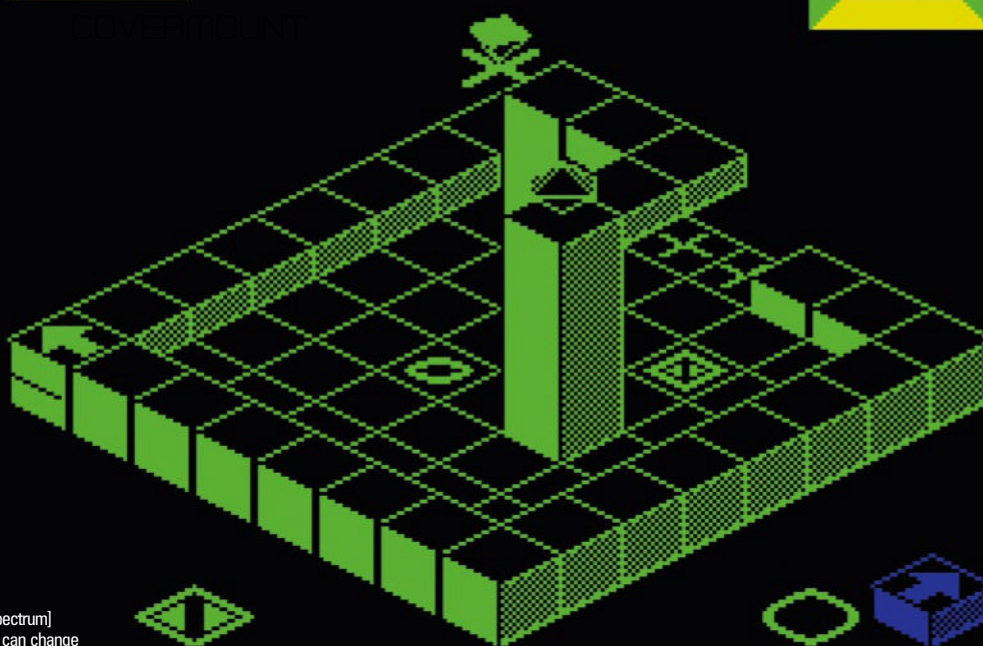
PLAY THIS NEXT: HKM: HUMAN KILLING MACHINE:

Between *Street Fighter* and its more celebrated sequel came *HKM: Human Killing Machine*, an unofficial follow-up to the original game. Created by Tiertex, the British team that handled *Street Fighter*'s home-computer conversions, it's a one-on-one fighting game. You tour the world taking on all-comers, including a dog and a bull. Sadly there's no two-player mode and controls are a little arcane, with the punches and kicks both activated by the Spectrum's single fire button. Enemy health recharges too, making progress tough. Still, it's the sequel (kind of) to *Street Fighter* and a fascinating bit of gaming history. The huge sprites and gorgeous backgrounds are also worth checking it out for. ★

TIME
132

JULS
6
377

COVERMOUNT



» [ZX Spectrum]
Buttons can change
paths, letting you reach
new places.

Covermount HIGHLIGHTS

THE BEST OF THE REST

ATOMIC ROBOKID DEMO

■ This *Atomic Robokid* demo is unusual as the full game was never released on the Spectrum, allegedly as Activision abandoned the system before it came out. It's a horizontal shooter, with you scrolling through its only level at your own pace, blasting your way to the exit. What's here is a glimpse of what might have been, and there are signs of potential, with big chunky sprites, a strong selection of weapons and a good variety of enemies to blast.



BUMPY

■ This complete game was unreleased in the UK. *Bumpy* is a single-screen puzzler, where you bounce around the screen avoiding hazards and gathering the collectibles needed to progress. This 100-level hidden gem is well worth a look.



MACH 3

■ Another UK debut. *Mach 3* sees you flying into the screen shooting as you go. It plays like a kind of endless *Space Harrier*, with arches to fly through and enemies to blast. It's certainly impressive looking, but also a bit repetitive.



DESTRUX

■ Your *Sinclair* reviewed games by readers in its cruelly named *Crap Game Corner* and *Destrux*, from David Alderson, scored 93% in October 1990, despite the reviewer, understandably, failing to beat the first level. A tank-based puzzler – it's baffling, but a great bit of community engagement.



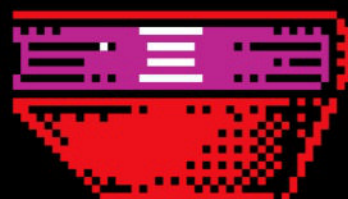
POKES

■ Rounding off the tape is a collection of POKES, offering infinite lives and other boons to help you through the rest of your gaming collection. There are cheats for ten games, including several *Dizzy* titles, and a smattering of others. Get those typing fingers back in action!



THE MAKING OF
ADVANCED

Pinball Simulator



» Philip (left) and Andrew (right) worked on *Advanced Pinball Simulator* and created the *Dizzy* series. They would go on to form Blitz Games and now run a new studio, where they're working on a new platform called RichCast.

IT PROMISED BUMPER-TO-BUMPER ACTION AND ALL THE THRILLS OF A REAL-LIFE TABLE BUT ADVANCED PINBALL SIMULATOR DIDN'T EXACTLY TILT IN THAT DIRECTION. EVEN SO, IF YOU GO WITH THE FLOW, THIS GAME BY THE OLIVER TWINS IS STILL WORTH A SHOT. LET'S DISCOVER HOW IT WAS DEVELOPED
WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS
- » **DEVELOPER:** PHILIP AND ANDREW OLIVER
- » **PLATFORM:** AMSTRAD CPC, VARIOUS
- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **GENRE:** PINBALL



» [Amstrad CPC] The game was quite difficult at times – avoiding the trapdoors proved particularly frustrating.

When the Oliver twins – Philip and Andrew Oliver – decided to create a pinball game, they had a dream. “The goal was to build a pinball engine in a month for the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC, then churn out new themed tables in about a week each – ideal for the £1.99 budget titles which still offered great value for players,” Philip tells us.

It was 1988 and the brothers had already made a name for themselves as accomplished developers capable of quickly turning around hits for publisher Codemasters. They had done so largely by coming up with winning concepts that had built upon an existing codebase so, with what would become *Advanced Pinball Simulator*, there was a chance to take this approach to another level.

“We’d done it before – created a platform engine and reused it across *Super Robin Hood*, *Ghost Hunters* and *Dizzy*,

and we’d built a racing engine for *Grand Prix Simulator*, *Jet Bike Simulator* and *BMX Simulator 2*,” Philip explains. Creating a pinball game with the promise of updated tables would present an opportunity to generate a regular income. It also allowed Philip and Andrew to explore a different genre.

“We absolutely loved pinball machines when we saw them – though it wasn’t very often,” Philip continues. “We didn’t live near arcades, and even when we did, we couldn’t afford to play for more than one or two plays. But they were mesmerising – all the lights, fast ball movement, and chaos. One big influence was *Night Mission Pinball*, which we played around 1982 on a friend’s dad’s Apple IIe. It really impressed us.”

The game was written for the Amstrad CPC and, following the same development pattern as their previous games, the brothers plotted the entire title on paper before so much as touching a key on either of the two 8086 PCs they were using to create this particular title. “We listed all the features a good pinball engine might need – things like configurable flipper positions, multiple triggers and table-changing mechanics, point scoring and even multiple balls,” Andrew says. “For the theme, the song *Pinball Wizard* was stuck in our heads but we didn’t want to cross into legal issues with Pete Townsend and The Who. So we shifted towards a magical fantasy setting, influenced a bit by *Dizzy*.”

To that end, Philip created the graphics using a commercially released utility created by the Olivers called Panda Sprites. This package, published by Interceptor Software (the name

representing the Olivers’ initials ‘P’ and ‘A’), allowed graphics artists to quickly and easily produce static and animated sprites. “I wasn’t too bad at graphics – I also did all the *Super Robin Hood* and *Ghost Hunters* graphics including the loading screens,” Philip says. “Our *Dizzy* games were very successful so magic felt like a natural creative direction. “We didn’t include *Dizzy* himself, but that world was a big influence.”

Panda Sprites enabled the speedy development of a castle, potion, forest, flippers, ball and more while even paving the way for a plot. For fans of *Dizzy*, it was familiar fare: an evil merciless pinball wizard was ruling over a mystical, drought-ridden land and he was hellbent on destroying villages that

CONVERSION CAPERS

FLIPPING MARVELLOUS – THIS GAME COULD BE WIDELY PLAYED

AMSTRAD CPC

The jaw-dropping *Pinball Dreams*, developed by The Batman Group in 2019, showed just what the CPC can achieve.

By comparison, this game feels far less visually impressive and a tad clunkier.

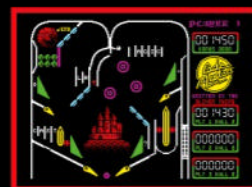
The ball physics aren’t quite right either. Yet it was still fun and challenging.

[I owned and enjoyed it – Ed]



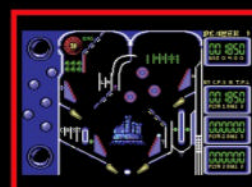
ZX SPECTRUM

The Spectrum port was near-identical to the CPC version and it played in a similar fashion. But while it boasted the same digitised speech at the start of the game and had cleaner-looking graphics, it dropped the large image of the wizard from the left-hand side of the screen.



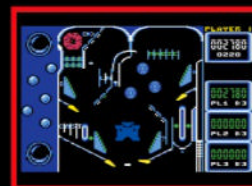
C64

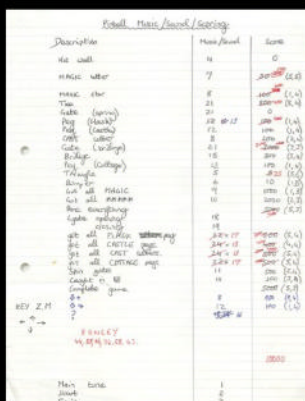
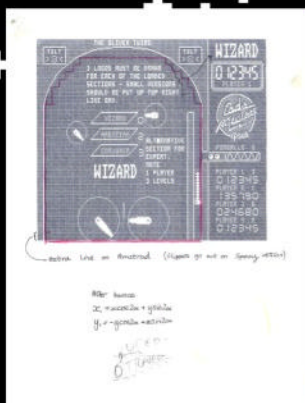
Although it retained the table layout of the CPC and Speccy versions, this port used the computer’s hardware sprites and it felt smoother and more polished with noticeably improved ball physics. There was no wizard image – it was replaced by a simple image of some pinballs instead.



ATARI 8-BIT

Looking and feeling more like the C64 version, the Atari 8-bit port was still visually unimpressive – the castle in particular looked dreadfully simple. The ball moved sluggishly yet, in some sense, that at least gave you more time to react and build a high score.





» The Oliver twins planned out all aspects of the game on a few sheets of lined paper.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SUPER ROBIN HOOD

PLATFORM: AMSTRAD CPC, VARIOUS

RELEASED: 1986

GRAND PRIX SIMULATOR

PLATFORM: AMSTRAD CPC, SPECTRUM, ATARI 8-BIT, COMMODORE 64

RELEASED: 1987

FANTASY WORLD DIZZY (PICTURED)

PLATFORM: AMSTRAD CPC, VARIOUS

RELEASED: 1989

► had poor harvests. To rid the world of such tyranny, it was necessary to not only try and demolish the castle by hitting it with balls but help rebuild a devastated cottage. Players also needed to look for a magic almanac containing a banishing spell.

All of this would be achieved by using the plunger to send the ball into the game before using the four flippers – two on the left and two on the right – to ensure the ball didn't drop out of play. Lose three and it was game over. But succeed in lighting up the letters MAGIC twice over and you'd not only see a spell book but activate it. All while trying to rack up the obligatory high score and negotiate rollover lanes, bonus-offering trapdoors and extra balls for every 10,000 points.

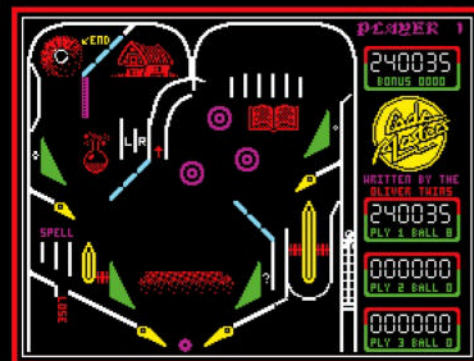
From the start, the Olivers felt they could only go so far with the game. "True physics weren't possible on 8-bit Z80 machines – we just didn't have the horsepower," Andrew says. "What mattered was that it looked right and felt fun. For motion, we chose Cartesian (component-based) motion – meaning we handled X and Y velocity and acceleration separately. This had worked fine for *Grand Prix Simulator*, so it felt like a safe bet."

All of the code was written in a text-based editor on the Olivers' PCs equipped with a 20MB hard drive and 5.25-inch disks – a far cry from

their earlier development of games when they would use just one Amstrad CPC 664 between them and operate in shifts.

The code was compiled into a Z80 machine code executable file that could be transferred via a hardware interface to the CPC using Andy Glaister's Programmer Development System (PDS). It made development easier, allowed for frequent testing and, with some tweaks to the code, enabled the speedy creation of a Spectrum version.

It soon became challenging, however, mainly because perfecting the ball's physics proved to be rather difficult. The Olivers have admitted that it was beyond their skills at the time given the limited hardware at their

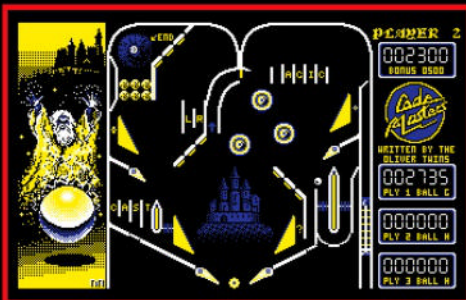


» [Amstrad CPC] To beat the game, you needed to break down a wall and ring the bell behind it.





» [Amstrad CPC] You wouldn't really expect a plot in a game as simple as *Advanced Pinball Simulator* but one was included anyway.



» [Amstrad CPC] With the multiplayer game, you could take turns after each ball loss to amass the most points.

disposal and even lessons learned in A-level maths about vectors, angles of reflection, inertia and collisions didn't prove helpful when trying to pick through it all in 8-bit assembler.

This was picked up by some reviewers – the magazine *CVG* said the game had “unrealistic ball control”. “It turns out, Cartesian (component-based) motion wasn't well suited for pinball,” Philip says. “We should have used Polar (or directional) motion, where movement is defined by an angle and a magnitude (speed). That's a far better fit for bouncing objects like pinballs.

“On top of that, our collision system used the visible graphics for detection rather than a separate invisible collision mesh. That led to moments where the ball passed through thin walls or moving flippers. We realised both issues too late to rewrite the engine, so we spent time optimising what we had to smooth out the rough edges. We limited the ball's top speed to reduce it passing through thin walls and the moving flippers.”

This was the cause of a lot of frustration with the game's development and it soon became clear that it wasn't going in the direction they had hoped for at the start. “Limiting the speed was disappointing,” Philip says. The plans to make multiple balls available to players was also dropped. “We were excited to include this feature and we had the basics working, but getting even one ball to behave well was

“WE ABSOLUTELY LOVED PINBALL MACHINES WHEN WE SAW THEM – THOUGH IT WASN'T VERY OFTEN”
PHILIP OLIVER

challenging enough,” Philip adds. “We had to abandon it and focus on core stability.”

Since the idea was to create the game in just four weeks, development threatened to go way over time but the Olivers were managing to fix most of the issues with the game by making a few tweaks to the mechanics. With extra pixels being read around the point of collision, the ball would move at improved angles while changes to the friction of the ball would make rolling feel more fluid. So rather than rewrite the game when they were three-quarters of the way through or abandon it entirely, they used the final week to make it as good as they possibly could so that it was up to the standard of a commercial release.

That's not to say further improvements couldn't have been made and another area that may have been better with more time and a different approach was audio: *Amstrad Action* said the sounds effects were “pingy and boingy” and it called the tunes “odd”.

“We always struggled with audio,” Philip admits. “We outsourced it, and pinball is all about sound – every bumper, wall, and bonus needed a distinctive audio cue. Working with a remote sound designer [Jon Paul Eldridge] made it hard to integrate everything properly.” And yet, for all of its faults, the game wasn't that actually bad despite *CVG* giving it 50% and *Amstrad Action* awarding it 51%. *Your Sinclair*

SHINE A LIGHT!

THE GAME WAS PLAYABLE USING A LIGHTGUN

■ In 1989, Cheetah created a lightgun for the Spectrum and struck a deal with Codemasters to provide a selection of compatible games for the new peripheral. “Richard and David Darling asked if we had anything that could be adapted quickly,” Philip Oliver recalls. “We looked at *Advanced Pinball Simulator* and a spark of inspiration hit: what if you could fire at the flippers to activate them? We figured it would only take a day or two to test it out.”

The tech behind lightguns turned out to be incredibly simple. “There was a light-sensitive detector on the front of the gun, and when the player pulled the trigger, the system would check whether the gun was pointed at a bright spot on the screen,” Philip explains. “There was no positional tracking or fancy calibration.” That didn't hinder the twins, however. “Our solution was a bit of creative trickery,” Philip continues. “The moment the player pulled the trigger, the game would momentarily turn the entire screen black except the areas around the flippers, which we rendered in solid white.”

The lightgun technique continued on the ZX Spectrum version as well. “On a Spectrum, we could do this by updating all the colour attributes for a single frame,” explains Philip. “The gun would check: could it see white or just black? If it saw white, the player was pointing at a flipper area. Since there was no way to tell which flipper was being targeted, we triggered all flippers at once. “It was crude, but it worked and it added a fun physical twist to the game. A quick turnaround, but a surprisingly satisfying result.”

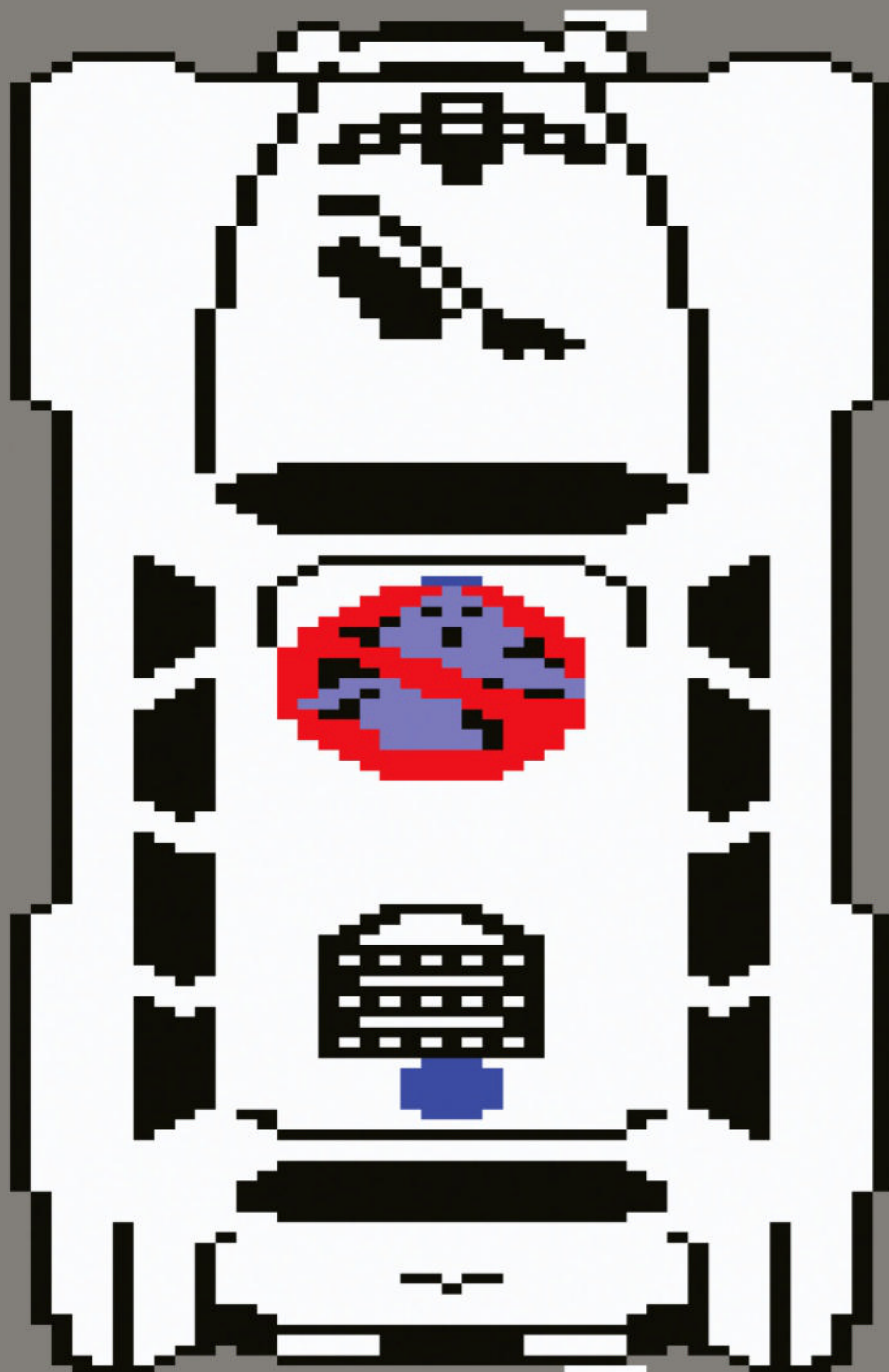
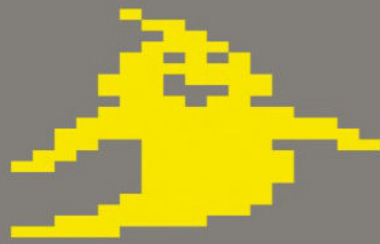


Although all hopes of re-skinning the game and creating new titles based on other themes had faded (there had been plans for

pinball titles based on *Ghost Hunters* and *Super Robin Hood*), the game ended up on a fair few compilations in 1991 including *Quattro Arcade*, *Quattro Coin-Ops*, *Mega Hot* and the *Christmas Megapack*. In 1989, it was one of 30 games bundled on *The CD Games Pack* – an innovative release by Codemasters that required players to connect their CD player to their computer.

Philip also insists that the game still captured the feel of pinball. “It had good progression, fun theming, and good gameplay,” he says. “Reviews at the time were mostly positive, and it's still remembered fondly by players. That tells us we got something right.”

Still, the twins look back and reflect at what could have been had they been able to make further improvements. “If Andrew and I had understood vector maths better from our A-level maths lessons we could've built a far better engine,” Philip says. “It would've led to more pinball games and been a huge help when we moved into 3D development in the mid-Nineties. We learned a lot, just not quite in time for this one!” ★



Ghostbusters

JUST DRIVE

» RETROREVIVAL



» AMSTRAD CPC » 1985 » JAMES SOFTWARE LTD
I was 11 years old when I first watched *Ghostbusters* and it left quite the impression on me.

I never had any toys or anything like that, but I watched the film continuously when it was eventually released on VHS and it's always been part of my film collection (I've owned it on DVD, Blu-Ray and 4K Blu-Ray, upgrading whenever a new version came out).

Although I was certainly aware of the videogame, I wouldn't actually get to experience it until I received an Amstrad CPC for my 14th birthday and by then, the game was already two years old, which is a lifetime when you consider the high-speed nature of the games industry.

Fortunately, *Ghostbusters* was re-released on Mastertronic's Ricochet label, so I was finally able to get busting ghosts at a price that my paper round money could easily afford. And what a fun game it turned out to be. Looking at it today, it's easy to see that it's not as polished as the Commodore 64 original but it's a perfectly acceptable conversion and I had a lot of fun with it on release.

Interestingly though, I was never much of a fan of the ghost-capturing sections where you have to position your busters to capture Slimer. I found them too fiddly to set up and I would take so much time messing around with positioning that I'd end up getting slimed more often than not.

No, it was the driving around to each new ghost haunt that pushed my buttons. Yes, these sections were incredibly basic with you simply driving along and hoovering up any roaming yellow ghosts (providing you had suitable equipment attached to your vehicle) but I loved how impressive ECTO-1 looked in these bits and I never missed an opportunity to drive to a new location. I don't think I ever successfully defeated the Marshmallow Man, but boy, I hoovered up a lot of yellow ghosts as I cruised around New York City. ✨



MAGAZINE CRAFT

NICK ROBERTS

A true unsung legend of the publishing industry, Nick Roberts started out poking around on *Crash* before launching, editing and even designing some of the UK's most iconic gaming mags. Given his clear plate-spinning talents, perhaps it's somewhat ironic then that the first videogame he ever played was Wacky Waiters!

Words by Stuart Hunt

THEN

Growing up in Ludlow, Nick began his career writing reviews and tips for *Crash* magazine. When Newsfield was sold to Europress, he worked on several of its *Force* titles. He later helped to launch *Play and games™* at Paragon Publishing and at one stage, was even the editor-in-chief of this very mag.



NOW

Nick has since swapped magazine creation for game making. Starting out as an executive producer at Amuzo Games in Bournemouth, he has worked on mobile titles for the likes of Lego, Netflix and Sony. He is now the studio director of Sporty Games – a new development studio headed up by industry legend Jon Hare.



So Nick, as a writer on *Crash*, we're guessing you soon switched from Commodore to Sinclair?

My friend Shane got a ZX81 and I was blown away when I saw it in 1981 – Sinclair was cooler than Commodore in my mind. So with the money I had saved up from DJing school discos, I bought myself a ZX Spectrum, a whole bunch of useless peripherals, like the Spectrum Light Pen, and loads of budget games. This must have been around 1984. I loved the Mastertronic range. *Chiller*, with its *Thriller*-inspired zombie cover, was a firm favourite of mine. That's when my interest in games took off and I started to really get into reading *Crash*.

So how did the opportunity to write for *Crash* come about?

One issue I happened to notice that the playing tips writer, Hannah Smith, was leaving. She had written a goodbye piece in one of the issues. I was 15 by this point and thought I'd apply. I wrote to Roger Kean, who was the editor at the time. He was a wonderful man and became one of my best friends. A few weeks passed and I got a phone call from his secretary who said, "Roger would like to invite you in for a writing test." I was so excited. I can remember the feeling now. It was like some *Wizard Of Oz* moment.

Can you remember that first time stepping into *Crash Towers*?

I remember the smell of the film planning fluid hitting you as you stepped through the door (I

can still smell it today) and being interviewed by Roger as he sat puffing on a cigarette at his desk. Behind him was a *Sinclair User* logo that someone had swiped from a PCW Show in London and had brought back on the bus. Anyway, I played *Stormbringer* and, in my review, mentioned that I knew that the author was David Jones, as I had played his earlier *Magic Knight* games *Finders Keepers* and *Spellbound*. I think that impressed Roger, so he offered me the job. Then, every day, after school, I would go into the *Crash* office – they

would allocate me two or three games to review for a fiver a pop. After a few months Roger asked if I would like to take over the tips section – and I'm still writing it 38 years later!

Tell us about the editorial process on *Crash*.

Crash was like walking

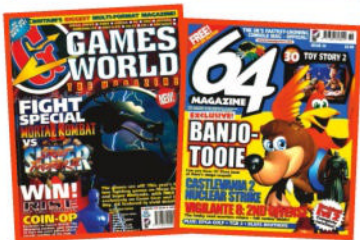
“Crash was like walking into an arcade, with all these people playing and reviewing games. There were banks of Spectrums, TVs and wires everywhere”

NICK ROBERTS

into an arcade, with all these people playing and reviewing games. There were banks of Spectrums, TVs and wires everywhere, and the *Zzap!64* lot next door making lots of noise. You'd be handed a pad and a pen to make notes on and there were these big Amstrad PCW 8256 green screen word processors to type up your review on. You would then hand your copy on a 3-inch disk to a sub-editor to proof. As editor, Roger would have final say and do any final edits on his Apricot computer.

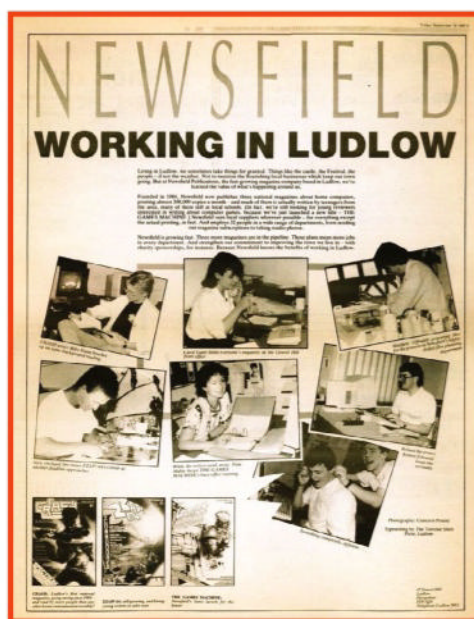
How was the magazine printed back then?

There was a typesetting company near the





» [Left to Right] Mark Kendrick, Nick and Robin Hogg. Photo shoots with photographer Cameron Pound around Ludlow were always fun!



» A flyer encouraging new staff to Ludlow – *Crash* editor Dominic Handy giving Nick's ears a tweak bottom right.



» Nick (third from right) appeared on a panel at Crash Live! with Roger Kean (fourth from left) and Oliver Frey third from left.

offices, Tortoiseshell Press I remember it was called. They would print out all the reviews on these long galleys (as we called them) – big, long strips of text that would get cut up by the art department and run through a waxing machine. A little roller would then stick everything down onto the art boards to build up the page of the magazine. It was a laborious process, and last-minute changes were difficult to make – if you spotted a spelling mistake, the art people would have to cut out the offending letter with a scalpel and then push everything over. It was literally 'cut and paste' back then!

And capturing screenshots of games, how was that achieved?

When it came to screenshots there was a back room that doubled up as a game archive. The walls were covered with every game that had ever been reviewed in *Crash*. There was this lovely guy called Cameron Pound, who was the photographer, and it was his job to put a black

blanket over the TV and take screenshots with the camera. He had a photographic dark room next door where he would process the photos himself and create the screenshots as four pieces of film for the four colours in printing – CMYK. So you can begin to see how complex all this stuff was back then. Sometimes the process went wrong and you ended up with a black-and-white screenshot in print!

Do you remember your last issue on *Crash*?

I do. I remember putting the issue to bed (as we say in the business) and hearing the news that it would be the very last *Crash*. I was devastated. The final pages had gone to the printers, but there was a poster in the centre and I was able to get those pages back, toss the page film in the bin and remake them, adding '1984-1992'. I snuck in a little caption that notified the readers that this would be the last issue. No one would have known otherwise. *Crash* would have just disappeared ▶



My FAVOURITE GAMING MAG

CRASH

"It'll probably sound self-indulgent, but I'd say *Crash*. I was a reader long before I worked on the magazine and remember the excitement of a new issue coming through my letterbox. Seeing Oli's covers for the first time, poring over those pages and all the amazing games – it still makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand up today. To get to work with those talented people was just incredible."



I REMEMBER WHEN

THE BROWN LOTUS

"I always remember the visit from the guy that was PRing Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge on the Spectrum. He came to Ludlow and took me for a ride in the actual car on the Ludlow bypass. I remember whizzing past three lorries thinking, 'I'm going to die!'"

BEST PRESS TRIP

XBOX LAUNCH GAMES

When Nick was managing editor of *XBM* magazine at Paragon he got invited on a very special, jet-lag-inducing press trip to see some of the biggest early games for the original Xbox. "I remember Microsoft flying me out to California to see *Oddworld Inhabitants* when they were finishing off *Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee*," shares Nick. "What was notable about that trip was that we did this crazy three-day around-the-world flight, starting from London to San Francisco, then a flight to the small city of San Luis Obispo where the *Oddworld* studio is based. I met the team, and they were absolutely spent as they were just coming to the end of the game's Xbox launch. From there we went to Microsoft's headquarters in Seattle and saw the guys from Bungie who were putting the finishing touches to a 16-player *Halo* – then back to London. If that all wasn't special enough, I put *Munch's Oddysee* on the cover of *XBM* and Lorne Lanning, the boss of *Oddworld*, was so pleased with it that he sent me a Harrod's hamper to say thank you! I gave it to my mum."



▶ without any explanation. Hindsight's a wonderful thing of course, but I do think the *Crash* brand could have survived had it evolved into a multiformat magazine – I think it would have done well against the likes of *CVG* and *Mean Machines*.

When Europress purchased Newsfield how did things change?

When Newsfield was bought by Europress – and became Europress Impact – we started releasing the *Force* magazines which covered Sega, Nintendo and Commodore. I got to become editor of *Amiga Force* but never *Crash*, which is one of my big career regrets. At that point, things changed quite dramatically – it was full-time teams working on the mags instead of school kids and, thanks to the arrival of desktop publishing, the process of putting them together was a lot easier. The Japanese scene was popular by that point so we would buy *Famitsu* and marvel over the screenshots. We even hired a translator to come in to read the magazine to us. It sounds funny now, but it was essential to understand what was going on.

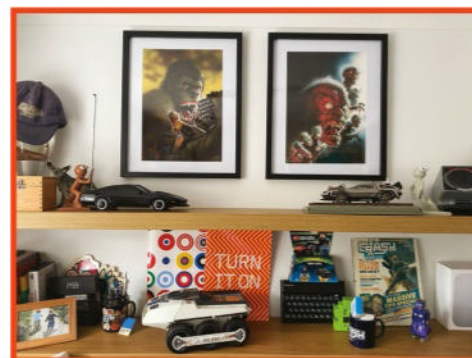
Is there anything else you want to add about Impact before we move on to your time at Paragon Publishing?

Well, towards the end of Impact we launched a multiformat gaming magazine called *Raze* and the person behind that was a guy called Richard Monteiro, who later launched Paragon Publishing – so there's a link connecting Newsfield to Impact and Paragon. Come to think of it, Chris Anderson, once editor of *Zzap!64* went on to launch Future Publishing, so really you can link 100s of games magazines back to Roger Kean, Oliver Frey and Franco Frey at Newsfield. Paragon was in Bournemouth, and I applied for the deputy editor position on *Sega Pro*. I got the job and ended up moving down south. That was an exciting time with all the 16-bit consoles. I worked on *Sega Pro* for a while, then we launched *Games World*, which was the official magazine for the Sky TV show.

I REMEMBER WHEN

GAMES WORLD UNAIRED

"I remember *Games World* shot an episode at Paragon. If I recall, it was about Dave Perry trying to get the magazine out and getting into a heated discussion with Big Boy Barry. We loved doing it, but sadly the episode didn't air for legal reasons. I think it's available on YouTube if you search."



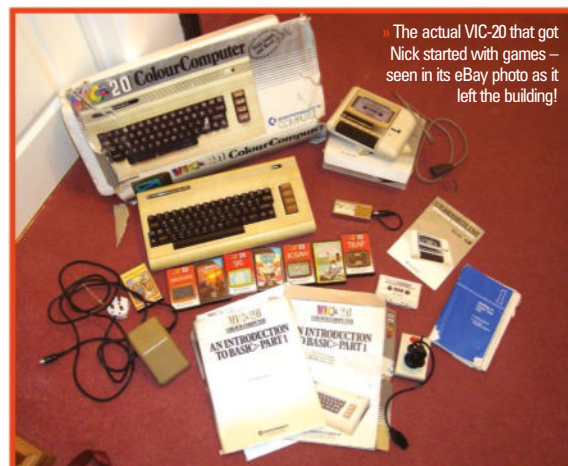
» The home office where Nick still writes the *Crash* tips – complete with signed Oli Frey art!

Tell us about *Games World: The Magazine* and its link to the show.

Dave 'The Games Animal' Perry was the editor, Nick Walkland was deputy, and you had my Newsfield friend Mark Kendrick as the art editor. There was then Adrian Price and myself as writers and Pete Wilton as the sub-editor. We had a really great team on that mag. I think we did a brilliant job of it. We were left alone by Hewland, who owned *Games World* and *GamesMaster*. The only link was Dave, who appeared in the magazine and on both TV shows. That was my other career regret – I was invited on to *GamesMaster* to do one of their pieces to camera and chickened out. Looking back, I wish I'd had the bravery to do it, as that would have been a cool thing to do. We did make an episode of *Games World* about the mag though – it's on YouTube!

What other gaming magazines did you work on at Paragon?

Well, the PlayStation came along and that's when I launched *Play* and *PowerStation* – which was a tips-only magazine. I was immensely proud of launching *Play* and working on that team – that magazine endured for a very long time, 269 issues. Dave Perry was the managing editor, and the *Games World* team essentially launched those two mags. We did a third magazine called *Ultimate Player*, which I think only ran for three issues. It was a multiformat tips mag. There's an



» The actual VIC-20 that got Nick started with games – seen in its eBay photo as it left the building!



» Nick's first ever review for *Crash* was for *Stormbringer* – the third game in David Jones' *Magic Knight* series – and it scored highly in issue 42.

interesting link there too, because for the second issue of *Ultimate Player* we got Oliver Frey to paint an awesome *Aliens Vs Predator* cover.

At one stage didn't you also work at Prima Games creating strategy guides?

That's right. I left Paragon to work at Prima Games, and Damian Butt took over as editor of *Play*, he did a great job on the magazine. At Prima I got to write official strategy guides. The first one I did was for Sega's *NIGHTS Into Dreams* on the Saturn, then the official *Tomb Raider* book. It was tough as you'd get no help from the developers – just, "Here's the game, now complete it!" Like a rubber band, that job took me back to Ludlow. Prima's UK office was there and run by Newsfield pioneers Roger, Oli and Franco. So, I became managing editor of Prima in the UK.

So what brought you back into magazines?

It was Dave Perry. He left Paragon to become the publishing director of Rapide Publishing in Exeter. They were launching new magazines for all formats. We were in the PS2 era by this point, and they were about to launch *Station* magazine with a demo CD on the cover. They needed management of it all, so Dave called me up one day and said, "Look, I could really do with you down here." So I moved to Exeter and became the managing editor of their games magazines *Total 64*, *Total PlayStation*, *Station* and some tips titles. To cut a long story short, Damian Butt invited me back to Paragon to be managing editor there, as he was now the publishing director. This was around 2001, the following year we launched *games™*.

For many, *games™* was seen as the videogame magazine to finally rival *Edge*.

I'm incredibly proud of that magazine. We worked hard on the launch issue. The cover



was pretty much my design – a character render of Sam Fisher from *Splinter Cell* against a white background with console typography. It looked so cool. *Edge* was a fantastic magazine, and heavily read by the industry, so we wanted *games™* to feel like a magazine for players, offering great insight into games with in-depth features and exclusive developer interviews. It's one of the magazines I'm most proud of, and it won multiple awards.

What happened next? We must be nearing the Imagine Publishing era.

When Paragon was sold to Highbury, I worked on the official magazine for the Game shop. That experience introduced me to more marketing and PR people, which helped me later when I was working in sales. Eventually, Highbury closed and we lost our jobs. Prior to that happening, Damian had set up Imagine Publishing with Mark Kendrick and Steve Boyd. They had already launched a few magazines and then purchased some of the popular Highbury titles, including *games™*, *Play*, *PowerStation* and *Pokémon World*. The latter was a big success for Highbury and was the magazine that got me a foot in the door at Imagine.

Sounds interesting, tell us more.

At its height, I believe *Pokémon World* was selling close to 50,000 copies a month. I was a bit of a one-man band on the mag – writing, designing and sourcing the cover gifts. At the same time, I was also creating the DVDs that

My PROUDEST MOMENT

"Getting to work on a *Minecraft* advent calendar of 24 books with my boys Bennett and Lucas has kind of brought it full circle for me, because they are at the age that I was at when I was working back on *Crash*. It's great to see the next generation coming through, and collaborating with your family is always quite special. Bennett, has just completed all the graphics for two mobile games that will be out on the App Store in the next month or so. He did it as a freelance project for me at Amuzo. So yeah, I think my proudest moment is bringing my family into this world of games and publishing, something that has always been my passion."

— I REMEMBER WHEN —

MUNCH QUIETLY OR THERE WILL BE TROUBLE!

"Through Ocean Software, the *Crash* team got taken to see an obscure new sci-fi film that was coming out. We went to the Rank private cinema in London and got to watch an early screening of *RoboCop*. I think that may have even been my very first press trip."

“I was invited on to GamesMaster to do one of their pieces to camera and chickened out. Looking back, I wish I'd had the bravery to do it”

NICK ROBERTS

BEST INTERVIEW

BOB MONKHOUSE

"Nick admits that this isn't really an interview per se, but it remains the one telephone conversation he had as a games journalist that he will never forget. "I was working as deputy editor of *N-Force* and one day the phone rings," recounts Nick. "I answered it and the voice at the end of the phone said, 'Hello, this is Bob Monkhouse. I do all my own research and I'm working on *The \$64,000 Question* quiz show and need ten questions about Mario, do you think you could put them together for me?' Naturally, I said yes, so he gave me his home phone number so I could phone him back the next day. I put the questions together, called the number back, and was put through to him in his study. He was lovely and thanked me for the questions. The rest of the office were laughing their heads off – I was starstruck. So somewhere out there is an episode of that show with Bob quizzing someone about Mario using my ten questions!"

I REMEMBER WHEN

THE HOUSE OF LEGO

"As a producer on the *Lego City: My City 2* game, I got to visit Lego in Billund, Denmark many times. They still have the original house where Lego was first created, and in the basement are concertinaed shelves with all the Lego sets they've ever produced. You can turn the shelves back to your childhood Christmases."

MARIO 001750 x02 WORLD 1-1 TIME 342



► were being covermounted by *Play* and other magazines, interviewing developers and editing the video. I had my own business, working from home. Then eventually I worked for Imagine full time, running the e-commerce side of things as well as *Pokémon World* – they never let me loose from that mag – we did 264 issues! I did that for about six years and then became editor-in-chief of Imagine's gaming division – overseeing *games™*, *Play*, *X360*, *Retro Gamer* and... yes still *Pokémon World*. I eventually moved across to the creative side with magazines such as *iCreate*, *Web Designer* and *Android Magazine*.

So when did you make your move into game development?

I have my wife to thank for that. One Sunday morning as I was scouring the job ads she said, "Do you realise there's a game developer in Bournemouth?" It was 2014, and I was looking for a new challenge. I left Imagine Publishing to work for Amuzo – a developer specialising in games for kids. I became business development manager and did that for six months. They were developing *Lego* games at the time, and I started building out the toy industry contacts I had made at *Pokémon World* to create more licensed games. I wasn't getting results fast enough, so we agreed I would continue as a contractor instead. A month as a contractor and I landed Playmobil

“Edge was a fantastic magazine, and heavily read by the industry, so we wanted games™ to feel like a magazine for players”
NICK ROBERTS

for them – Amuzo went on to make five great *Playmobil* games, adding to their *Lego* portfolio. I went back to magazines, the opportunity came along to write, edit and design *Geeky Monkey*.

Tell us more about *Geeky Monkey*. How did that opportunity come about?

I knew the publisher Darren Herridge as we had worked together at Rapide in Exeter. He was at Uncooked Media now and was looking for an editor

and designer for the magazine and knew that I could do both. *Geeky Monkey* was a brilliant magazine, and I could see it would give me the chance to write about things I had never done before – pop culture, TV, toys, movies, as well as games. I came in on issue four I think, it had *Batman V Superman* on the cover. I loved that the magazine was doing something different. I got to interview some interesting people, including actor Michael Beck about his role in the film *The Warriors*, and meet Danny John-Jules from *Red Dwarf* for a chat.

Have you worked on any other magazines?

Too many to count! *Zombie!* (with an Oliver Frey glow-in-the-dark zombie cover!), *Planet PlayStation*, *Total Game Boy*, *DVD Review*, *Digimon World*... I also edited and designed a TV magazine called *BingeBox*, and *Minecraft Mayhem* for Future Publishing – writing, designing and sourcing cover gifts again, my forte. At one

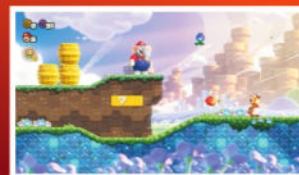


NE CRAFT: NICH ROBERTS

FUTURE CLASSIC

SUPER MARIO BROS WONDER

"Towards the end of last year, I was asked to create a *Mario Christmas Annual*, and started playing *Super Mario Bros Wonder* to write about it – what a fantastic game! It's proper traditional 2D *Mario* gameplay in a stunningly designed 3D world. I'd love to work on a Nintendo game one day – I came close with a Switch demo of *Rival Pirates* for Netflix!"



» Nick was one of the key people behind the launch of *games™* at Paragon Publishing. This understated *Splinter Cell* cover for its first issue was his idea.

I REMEMBER WHEN

NICK'S NOT SO BIG BREAK-FAST

"While working on *N-Force*, *The Big Breakfast* had a character on the show called Ben The Boffin. I would write the game content that was covered in his segment with Zig and Zag. I was invited onto the show, but sadly my train to London got cancelled."

» From a fresh-faced 15 year old, through Nick's synth pop phase, to still writing for Fusion Retro Books' *Crash* today.

stage, I was working on three magazines at the same time, as well as two Christmas annuals for Little Brother Books. That was a crazy time. I created over 250 pages in a month!

You eventually found yourself back at Amuzo, this time in a producer role. Tell us about that.

There's not a great deal of difference between producing a game and producing a magazine. It's coordinating content with a team of people, usually bearded and wearing headphones. You're going to do some brainstorming, and it's all about task management and making sure you get things done to a deadline. Amuzo offered me the job of executive producer and my first project was a Christmas update for *Lego City: My City 2*. I loved sourcing Santa, reindeer and Christmas trees from the Lego catalogue, then getting them into the game. I went on to produce many licensed games at Amuzo, including the official *Charlie's Angels: The Movie* mobile game.

You also worked on *WipEout Rush*. Tell us about that experience.

I'm a huge fan of the franchise so it was a dream project for me. Sony provided us with all the assets from the PlayStation games – ships, power-ups, tracks – and we got to handpick which ones went into the game – giving them a comic-book aesthetic. However, the brief was it couldn't be a racing game on mobile, it had to have "mobile game mechanics". So instead, we created a merge game – whereby you merge two ships together to create a new ship and then send it out to be tested on a track. You could shoot your opponents but not directly influence the racing – that was automatic. Many *WipEout* fans were left disappointed, but I still feel it's a fun game if you can accept that it's not typical *WipEout*.

You've recently started a new role at Sporty Games – the new game studio led by Jon Hare. Tell us more.

Jon had been working on a game called *Sociable Soccer*, which saw great success on Apple Arcade. He was looking for a UK-based developer to support with the testing and bug fixing, so that's what we did at Amuzo. Jon's Tower Studios was then purchased by Sporty Group – a massive sports media company – and from that Sporty Games UK was formed and my Amuzo team transferred over. I'm now working as studio director with Jon, supporting him to establish and manage a team in Bournemouth and create some exciting new sports titles. As you might expect, given Jon's love of the sport, we're working on a new arcade football game in the style of his previous footy games. It's a culmination of all of Jon's experience of working in that genre. We're on track to soft launch it on mobile in the next few months. The aim is to get it globally launched by autumn this year. It's a circle of life moment being at Sporty Games. Our publishing director is Ciaran Brennan, who was deputy editor of *Crash* when I started there in 1987! All we need is some Elton John music to finish on... *



» Nick went on to create games at Amuzo Games in Bournemouth. There, he worked on mobile titles for Lego, Playmobil, Netflix and Sony.

HI. 578060
SC. 578060



BIO

Technosoft's sequel was the third and final *Thunder Force* game to be released on Sega's Mega Drive. Critically acclaimed on release and filled with stunning-looking visuals and over-the-top bosses it remains one of the most respected shmups on the console. It was followed by two later games, the 32-bit *Thunder Force V* and *Thunder Force VI* for the PS2. You can currently buy *Thunder Force IV* as part of the Sega Ages digital range.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Thunder Force IV

» PLATFORM: MEGA DRIVE » RELEASED: 1992 » DEVELOPER: TECHNOSOFT

As great as shmups are, playing them can be a pretty lonely experience due to many of them catering to a single player. This makes sense, because there's something truly satisfying about taking down an entire enemy force by yourself and *Thunder Force IV* is no different. There's no friend to help you take on the Orn Empire, but you're a veteran gamer and you're more than happy to shoot down the Orn scum on your own – because let's face it, it's more points for you at the end of the day.

The first few stages of *Thunder Force IV* follow this solitary approach, with you shooting down anything that's foolish enough to stray into your gunsights. But then something happens. As you gawk at the colossal ship you're expected to bring down on stage five many other friendly ships rush to your aid, drawing fire and generally being incredibly helpful. While many of them end up getting destroyed in the final firefight, enough remain to significantly upgrade your ship, allowing you to continue your deadly fight against the Orn Empire. ★

SHOT

LEFT X 8

50x

MORE CLASSIC THUNDER FORCE IV MOMENTS

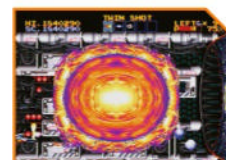
Desert Storm

One of the most visually impressive stages in *Thunder Force IV*'s early game is *Daser*, a desert planet filled with swirling sands and dangerous foes. The sandstorm you encounter at the level's start still looks outrageously good.



A Fiery Death

As you enter the game's final stage you'll not only have to tackle an incredibly tough boss, but also screen-filling fireballs that are tremendously tough to avoid. For all their deadliness, they certainly look spectacular.



Stay On Target

Air-Raid is an exciting stage with giant ships to dodge, a tough final boss and plenty of enemy fire to avoid. It's made even harder by numerous floating crosshairs which send deadly fire at you if you stray into them.



Getting The Point

Thunder Force IV is filled with troublesome mayors, but one of our favourites resides at the end of *Volbados*' icy stage. It's a huge ship that not only spits out numerous plasma balls but will also routinely ram you. The cad!



ULTIMATE GUIDE

SPLATTERHOUSE

IN A GAME FILLED WITH HORROR CLICHÉS, THIS ONE NATURALLY BEGINS ON A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT, WHEN A COUPLE OF KIDS ENTER AN ABANDONED MANSION. JOIN US AS WE TOO STEP INSIDE THE SPLATTERHOUSE – AND IF YOU'RE FEELING FAINT, JUST KEEP REPEATING, "IT'S ONLY A VIDEOGAME... ONLY A VIDEOGAME..."

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

1 988 was a great year for horror cinema. The franchises dominated, with the releases of *Hellraiser 2*, *Halloween 4*, *A Nightmare On Elm Street 4* and *Friday The 13th Part 7*. And if you were of the opinion that all those numbers didn't add up to much, there were some great original releases too, including *Child's Play*, *Pumpkinhead*, *Night Of The Demons* and *Killer Klowns From Outer Space*.

The Eighties horror resurgence was on the roll and this naturally influenced the games that popped up in the arcades.

Chief amongst these was *Splatterhouse*, Namco's love letter to the decade's grisly successes.

The team behind the game professed a deep love for the genre when interviewed in the Jan/Feb 1989 issue of *Namco Community Magazine NG*. Notably,

the game's chief planner, Kazumi Mizuno, mentioned two specific scenes that inspired him: in Dario Argento's *Phenomena* (1985), where the heroine falls into a pool brimming with bodies and maggots, and the shock ending of Brian De Palma's *Carrie* (1976), where young Miss White literally reaches out from beyond the grave. Mizuno also referenced the *Friday The 13th* series, and specifically the sixth part from 1986, where Jason Voorhees came back to life

"BY MAKING THE GAME MORE FANTASTICAL, THEY ACTUALLY MADE IT MORE EXCESSIVE"

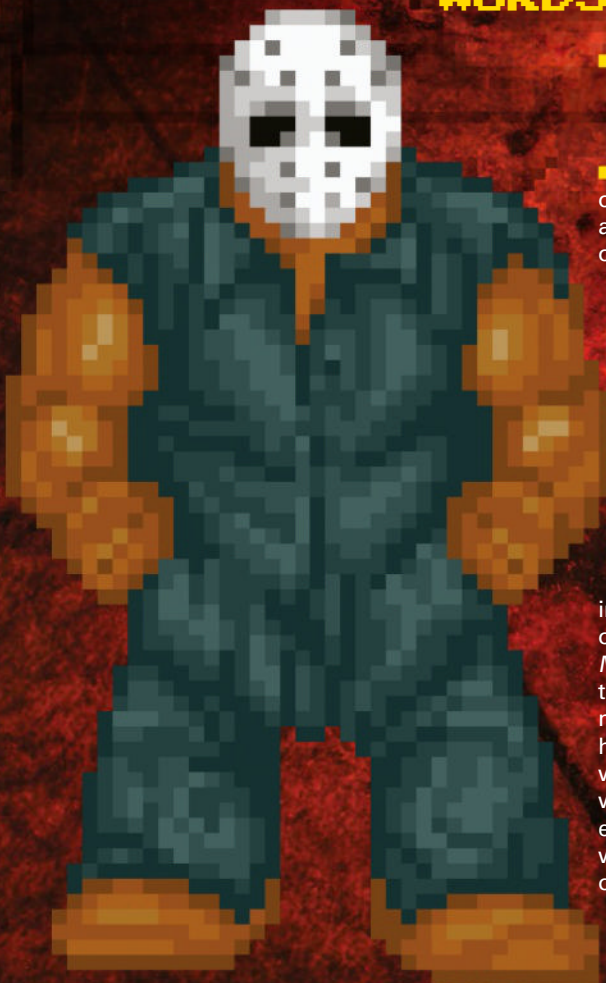


» [Arcade] The opening scene sees teenage couple Rick and Jennifer sneak inside the sinister West Mansion. Those darn kids!

(again), only this time as a hulking super zombie capable of snapping people's spines like twigs. This unstoppable version of Jason was the inspiration for Rick

Taylor, the game's hero in a hockey mask who has to rescue his girlfriend Jennifer from the cursed West Mansion. The setup borrows heavily from *The Evil Dead* (1981), and the scene where Ash confronts his girlfriend Linda (who's the girl-next-door one moment, a laughing demon the next), is brilliantly replicated in one of the game's boss battles.

The gameplay was conventional, being a scrolling 2D beat-'em-up where enemies





» [Arcade] The slide kick is crucial – but tricky to pull off. You have to jump and then press down, forward and attack just before you land.



» [Arcade] Some scenes, like this one in the flooded basement, use push-scrolling to keep Rick moving along.



» [Arcade] You can only carry one weapon at a time, but if you're clever, you can juggle two shotguns to the battle with the Biggyman.

CONVERSION CAPERS

WE HANG THE FOUR VERSIONS ON A MEAT HOOK FOR CLOSER INSPECTION



PC ENGINE

■ The first conversion is generally excellent. The graphics have been downgraded and the house is a bit sparse in places, but the gore score remains admirably high for a 1990 home release. Note: the TG-16 version has been slightly sanitised, so stick with the original Japanese release.



FM TOWNS PC

■ Released for Fujitsu's Marty console in 1992, this is almost arcade perfect. We say almost, because the display is narrower, which means single rooms like the first two boss battles actually scroll a little. Not a deal breaker. On the plus side, the CD audio is fantastic.



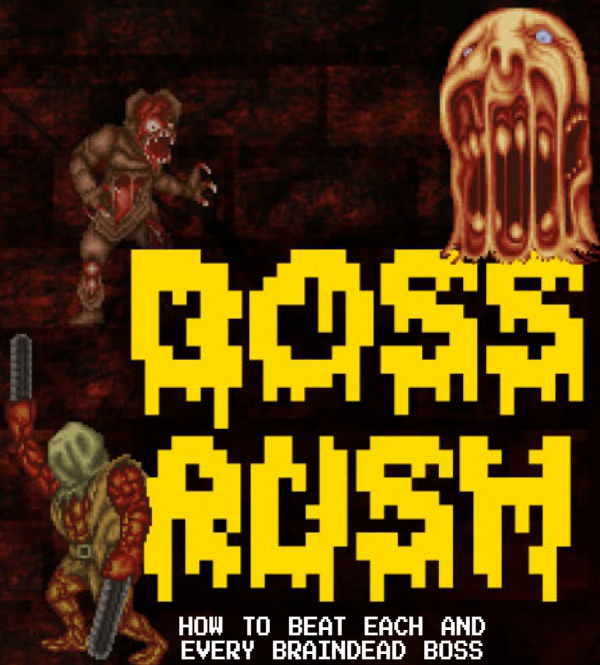
PC

■ A belated release for the PC, arrived in 2003, and only in Japan. As you'd expect, this one really is arcade perfect. Everything is here, including the consecutive two-player option. There's a bunch of display options too, including one which emulates the coin-op's bezel.



SWITCH

■ Released in 2017, as part of the *Namco Museum* collection, this is the arcade game plus a bunch of extras. All of the dip switch settings are available, plus a new stage select, and there's also a Challenge Mode, where you have to haul points on the tricky fifth stage.



STAGE 1

BODY EATERS

■ The first 'boss' is basically a room full of bloodsucking Body Eaters. Nice. They will leap from either side of the room and try to gnaw you alive.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: From your starting position, just crouch and keep spamming low kicks to the left and right. There are 20 Body Eaters, plus one hiding inside the corpse.



STAGE 2

POLTERGEIST

■ It's another room of revulsion, where an angry spirit resides. It will hurl bric-a-brac at you, including a chair, a painting, candles, bottles and daggers.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Head to the right of the room and crouch. Move to avoid falling objects and kick away projectiles. Heed the falling chandelier as it's a one-hit kill.



STAGE 4

EVIL CROSS

■ Inside the chapel you'll encounter a floating upside-down cross being circled by six severed heads that will peel off and attack you. Get thee behind me, Satan!

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Keep walking to the right, fending off the heads until you reach the axe. Use this to smash each head, then let loose on the cross. Six hits should do it.



STAGE 5

JENNIFER

■ Your girlfriend clearly can't handle her spirits. She changes into a snarling, clawed demon, then reverts back and pleads for mercy. She transforms three times.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: When it changes, quickly punch it and then retreat to avoid its claw attack. Repeat this tactic several times through each of the transformations Jennifer goes through.



STAGE 6

MOTHER

■ Mother's going to make all of your nightmares come true. She lies at the end of the 'womb', and protects herself by spawning her bubbly offspring.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: You need to get up close and punch her, er, mass repeatedly (at least 30 times). However, don't ignore the Obas as they will continue to spawn.



» [Arcade] Welcome to the funhouse. Rick gets attacked by his own savage reflection in the Hall Of Mirrors.



» [Arcade] In one of several nods to *Evil Dead II*, the severed arm flips Rick the finger.



» [Arcade] Beware the Blob! If you dawdle, a pulsating purple wall of death will swallow your soul.





STAGE 3

BIGGYMAN

■ We all dread sundown when the Biggyman's around. Wearing a sack over his head and having chainsaws for forearms, he's lively and deadly.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Hopefully you brought your boomstick to the party, otherwise you'll struggle. Using slide kicks is a viable strategy, if you can master the timing.



STAGE 7

HELL CHAOS

■ The final boss materialises as a melted head with two horribly extended arms. He pops out of the ground several times, flinging rocks into the air.

HOW TO BEAT THEM: Dodge the rocks then go medieaval on that giant noodle. When the arms appear, stay central and jump to avoid them. Repeat until the curtain falls.



"SOME REVIEWERS ASSUMED SPLATTERHOUSE WAS AN OFFICIAL FRIDAY THE 13TH GAME..."

► swarm at Rick from either side – a bit like *Kung-Fu Master*, only rated 18, and set in a haunted house. Yet in the *NG* interview, Mizuno revealed that the team wanted to break new ground with the horror elements. "To be blunt, the project's concept was serious. This was totally different from my previous title, *Yokai Douchuuki*, where even scary characters moved in a cute way. This time we wanted to make the scary characters actually scary. That was tough."

Tougher still, Namco's management wasn't totally on board with the 'serious' tone. "We were forced to make a lot of changes," Mizuno concedes. "Originally the blood was red and the zombies were realistic. But since the whole premise involved killing, realism became a problem. In the end, the blood was changed to fluorescent green and the zombies became more like aliens."

The irony here is that by making the game more fantastical, the team actually made it more excessive, more extreme. On the very first screen there's an oversized meat cleaver you can use to behead your enemies – and their heads don't just pop off, they fly into the air on a geyser of green blood. A bit further on you can grab a piece of 2x4 and smack enemies aside, decorating the walls with their innards. And all this glorious, Grand-Guignol theatre is soundtracked by a series of thuds, thwacks, screams and shouts.

The name *Splatterhouse* was perfect, referencing the splatter film subgenre that so inspired the game. According to

John McCarty's 1981 book on the subject, *Splatter Movies*, these films, "Aim not to scare their audiences, nor to drive them to the edges of their seats in suspense, but to mortify them with scenes of explicit gore. In splatter movies, mutilation is indeed the message – many times the only one." With *Splatterhouse*, was mutilation the only message? Most critics at the time seemed to think so. "[It's] a mundane enough beat-'em-up made bearable by some spectacularly gory hackabilia," wrote *Commodore User* in March 1989. "Take away the gore however and the basic game is really rather humdrum, unvarying and generally naff." *The Games Machine* concurred, "Simple gameplay, devoid of anything new, but worth a look for the 'interesting' graphics." *CVG* was also dismissive, "There's nothing subtle or nice about *Splatterhouse*. If coin-ops could give out smells, this one would reek of an abattoir." Now there's a quote Namco should have used in its marketing.

Interestingly, some reviewers assumed it was an official *Friday The 13th* game, and that Rick was actually Jason. Perhaps to avoid confusion (and a lawsuit from Paramount Pictures), changes to Rick's mask were required. The 1990 PC Engine conversion released in Japan retained the familiar hockey mask, but for the Western TurboGrafx-16 release it was swapped for a weird purple-coloured alternative. Some 'religious' elements were also censored, such as the fourth stage's inverted cross boss and altar scene. Cuts aside, the home release did raise some questions about the game's violent content, which resulted in a warning on the box, "The horrifying



► theme of this game may be inappropriate for young children... and cowards." Nicely done, Namco Of America.

In 1992 the game was released for the FM Towns Marty console, exclusively in Japan. A Mega Drive conversion was widely anticipated, but instead the system received a direct sequel. Forgoing the arcades, *Splatterhouse 2* invited Rick inside a new house of horrors in a bid to resurrect Jennifer. The purple mask from the TG-16 version was ditched, but the new one was subtly redesigned to become more skull-like. *Splatterhouse 3* arrived in 1993, again only on the Mega Drive (and not in Europe this time). Set five years later, the third game saw our hero, who could now transform into Super Rick, having to rescue Jennifer and their son David from yet more cellar dwellers.

Aside from a brief Rick cameo in *Point Blank 3*, the series lay dormant until 2010, when not one but two new releases arrived. The first was an update of the coin-op for iOS devices, which suffered from the usual iffy touch-screen controls, but did add a Rush mode where you had to survive an onslaught for two minutes. The second was a full reboot for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. The new game, which was pretty full-on throughout, in-line with the horror cinema of the period, received a mixed reception but has since been reappraised more positively.

In a nice touch, the original coin-op and two Mega Drive sequels were included as unlockable bonuses. The only title missing



"A MEGA DRIVE CONVERSION WAS WIDELY ANTICIPATED, BUT INSTEAD THE SYSTEM RECEIVED A DIRECT SEQUEL"

from this *Splatterhouse* reunion party was the cutesy 1989 Famicom spin-off *Wanpaku Graffiti*, which was only released in Japan. Happily, this overlooked entry finally received a Western release in 2020 as part of the *Namco Museum Archives Vol 1* collection for PC and console. The coin-op was also included on the Switch compilation *Namco Museum* in 2017, and later released as a stand-alone download on Switch and PS4.

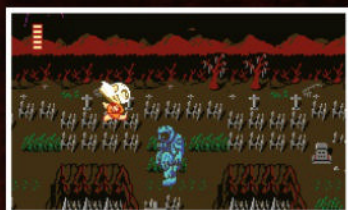
Beyond the various re-releases, the series is now kept alive by various fan projects. These include a number of PC reimaginings and a fantastic-looking WIP conversion of the coin-op for the Mega Drive, so the original trilogy will be playable on the Sega system. It seems unlikely at this point that Namco will bring back the series, but then horror icons never really die, do they? Just like Jason Voorhees and Michael Myers, we imagine Rick Taylor is skulking in the shadows, just waiting to return. ★



» Move over Freddy and Jason. Rick takes centre stage on the August 2010 issue of *Fangoria* to promote Namco's remake.

THE ANNALS OF SPLATTER

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN RICK CRAVED NEW BLOOD



SPLATTERHOUSE: WANPAKU GRAFFITI

■ This Famicom parody of the coin-op substitutes brawling for platforming and gory graphics for cartoon caricatures. It's sometimes silly, often hilarious, and features two lovely endings – one smashes the fourth wall, the other positions this as a prequel to the coin-op.



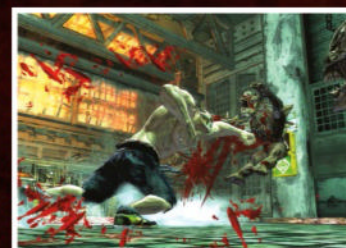
SPLATTERHOUSE 2

■ Although billed as a sequel, and featuring a continuation of the storyline, this is best viewed as the Mega Drive conversion of the coin-op. The gameplay is almost identical, with just enough new content to keep fans entertained. And you do get to wield your own chainsaw.



SPLATTERHOUSE 3

■ The third game is what the second should have been – an excellent spin on the formula and a fresh challenge, with refined beat-'em-up gameplay (you can now move freely around the screen, not just on one plane). It also adds non-linear progression and multiple endings.



SPLATTERHOUSE

■ This imaginative (and incendiary) 2010 remake blends gore galore and jet-black humour to winning effect. It's technically a little rough, but it's hard to care when it's so much fun. It also features a delightful turn from Jim Cummings as the razor-sharp voice of the mask.

PRODUCER Q&A

DAN TOVAR RECALLS THE DIFFICULT BIRTH OF THE 2010 REMAKE



What was your role in *Splatterhouse's* remake and what did it involve?

My role in the remake was pretty pervasive. The original pitch was written in 2007 by myself and my co-worker Mark Brown. Our boss at the time

collaborated with one of the *Splatterhouse* fan groups in order to get their thoughts on how the modern game tied back.

The final game is super gory. Was there any internal debate that the game might have been too extreme?

The gore was core for us. *Splatterhouse* was always ultra violent and pushed the limits of videogame blood and guts. I don't recall there being concerns about it being too extreme. We basically used the ESRB's M-rating as a checklist to make sure we were pushing things to their limit. We had teams dedicated to blood FX and gore physics. It was a very fun process. The reviews usually wanted things to go further, not pulled back.

***Splatterhouse's* development had a few hurdles. Looking back now, how close to your original vision was the released game?**

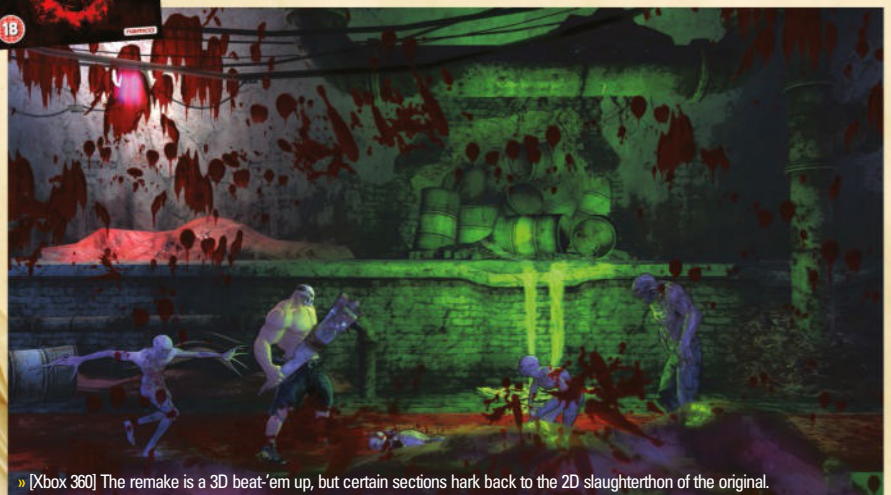
The development did go through some significant and difficult challenges. The vision of the game changed a lot even in the early stages of working with BottleRocket. There was a shared vision in what was key to the franchise but the execution just didn't come into focus. The drift between where we started and where we needed to be at those later stages wound up being the undoing of that relationship. But there were a lot of folks that still believed in the game and wanted to see it through. In the end, it wound up much more in line with my original thinking than the midpoint progress, but reflecting on it now, it is still very different from the original pitch. We had to cut so much in order to get it over the finish line and there were elements that didn't get the level of polish we would have preferred. But I'm still incredibly proud of how it turned out and it's still, despite its controversial reception, one of my favourite games that I've produced.

How much inspiration did you draw from the original games?

The original games were a huge inspiration, from the characters and story elements, to the monster design and soundtrack. We would go back and reference the games all the time. We spent so much time going through those games that it became important to me to be able to share them with the next generation, which is why I fought to have them ported and included as unlocks in the 2010 version. We even



"THE GORE WAS CORE FOR US"



» [Xbox 360] The remake is a 3D beat-'em up, but certain sections hark back to the 2D slaughterthon of the original.



» [TurboGrafx-16] Rick dons a purple mask in the conversion, presumably to avoid the wrath of Jason Voorhees (and his legal representatives).



» [Mega Drive] Currently in development, *Mega Splatterhouse* is an impressive fan port from sceners DMM069 and Cyberdeous.

Sleepwalker

JUST WAKE HIM

» RETROREVIVAL



» AMIGA » 1993 » CTA DEVELOPMENTS

Back in the Nineties, school holidays typically meant at least one trip to the local play scheme – a council-owned service in a dedicated building with a pool

table, plenty of board games, computers, outdoor play equipment, even a pottery wheel.

Of course, the most important thing it offered was adult supervision, and therefore respite for parents. This was where I had 99% of my childhood Amiga experiences, and by far the most popular game when I was there was *Sleepwalker*, a visually appealing platformer that some of you may remember for its role as a fundraiser for Comic Relief.

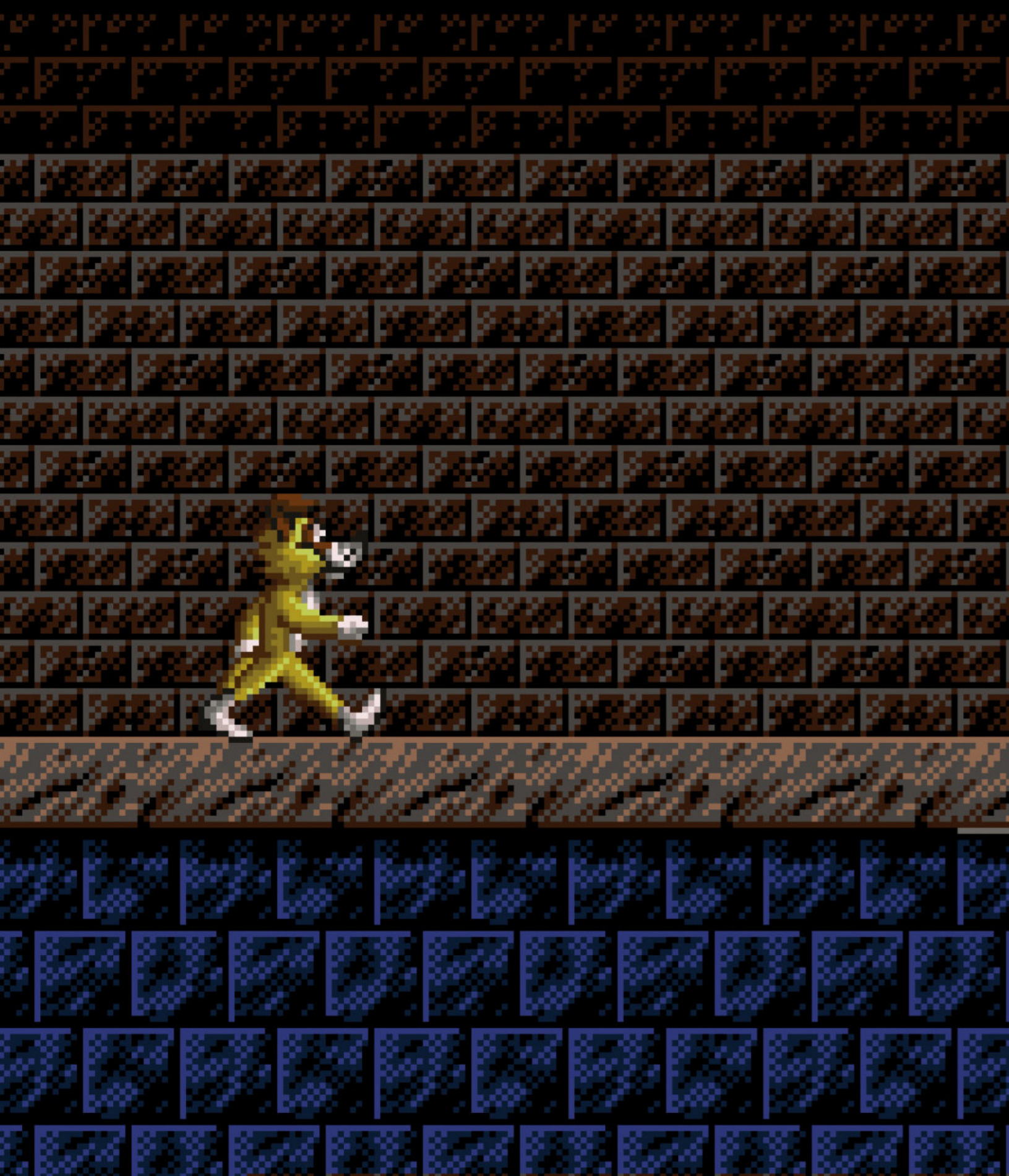
You play as Ralph, a dog whose owner Lee happens to be a somnambulist, and your job is to keep the sleeping stroller from getting himself drowned, incinerated or run over. It's a really creative idea for a game, adding a more direct action element to the protect-'em-up premise of games like *Lemmings*, and that conceptual freshness really appeals to me. But to put it another way, as far as I can remember *Sleepwalker* was my first experience of a videogame escort mission – and it's one that lasts for the whole game.

Sleepwalker has a one-button control scheme that requires a bit of getting used to, as your actions depend on Ralph's position relative to Lee. Generally speaking, the only way to stop Lee is for Ralph to stop and hold him in place, which means you really have to be on top of his constant walking. This wouldn't be so bad if it weren't for *Sleepwalker*'s very unforgiving learning curve. Even the first stage is fairly large and has some instant death hazards in it, as well as the odd leap of faith. Between my nostalgic attachment to *Sleepwalker* and my fondness for the concept, it's the kind of game I desperately want to champion, but I'll have to leave that to players with more patience than I possess. ★





B O N U S





ACTION & EURODANCE: LOOKING BACK AT

DEMONWARE

The late-Eighties and early Nineties were a golden age for European home-computer development. One of the most unique studios in these days was a German company called Demonware. And this is its story

WORDS BY THOMAS NICKEL



» [Amiga] While the horizontal shooter *Carcharodon: White Sharks* is a little twitchy, it offers nice graphics and satisfying explosions.



» [Amiga] *Exodus 3010* is a complex, menu-driven affair. In this screen, a pilot is thawed from cryo-sleep.

Compared to places like France or the United Kingdom, the German developer scene in the late-Eighties and early Nineties always felt a bit subdued. Apart from standouts like the *Turrican* series, many German studios specialised in simulations and generally more menu-driven, business-like titles, leaving action and arcade games to their colleagues in other territories. Yet, there were exceptions – and one of these is a company called Demonware. Founded in the late-Eighties, this developer and publisher from the Frankfurt area set its eyes and focus on action games for the Commodore Amiga, but also the C64 and other home computers.

Demonware was started by Peter Uhlich and Alexander Koppisch, its first release in 1988 was a game called *Evil-Garden*. This Amiga shooter took some obvious cues from Dona Bailey's and Ed Logg's arcade-classic *Centipede*, but at the same time, doesn't shy away from utilising the rich colour palette of the popular 16-bit home computer. In the same year, a 3D rail shooter in the vein of Sega's *Space Harrier* called *Mission Andromeda* saw the light of day – both were released under the Demonware label. However,

Peter and Alexander were not too invested in their whole Demonware endeavour and soon after, Will Weber and Boris Kunkel joined the project. Boris and Will would prove to be the driving force of Demonware and with Peter and Alexander placing their focus elsewhere, the project was soon handed over to Boris and Will.

Both men had worked somehow game-adjacent before: while Will Weber was mainly active in the music business, Boris Kunkel had a safe banking job; but his real passion were computer games, which he already coded during his school days. *Zingel Zangel*, a *Snake*-like game that was released as a code listing, was the first game he ever wrote. "I met Will at a gaming event, and he knew Peter Uhlich and Alexander Koppisch," recalls Boris. "They had this company, but they weren't really passionate about it. We then agreed with them that the two of us inject our skill and knowledge into the project and set it up more professionally. Will and I didn't have that much to do with *Evil-Garden* yet, but we knew the programmers. The name Demonware was already there and we thought it was quite good, so we took it as well."

Boris goes on to say that it wasn't long before the original founders moved on.

GAMES TO DISCOVER



EVIL-GARDEN AMIGA, 1988

■ The first game released under the Demonware label is modelled closely after the Atari classic *Centipede*.



MISSION ANDROMEDA AMIGA, 1988

■ With fast action and nice 3D graphics, *Mission Andromeda* showed off the power of the Amiga.



FINAL COUNTDOWN AMIGA, 1990

■ Inspired by *Impossible Mission*, *Final Countdown* has Commander Laura Tyrik explore an abandoned space station.



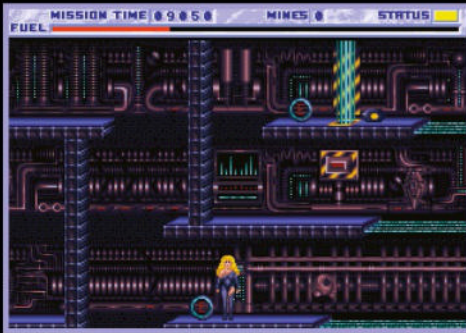
OOPS UP AMIGA, 1990

■ *Ooops Up* shares its name and music with a Nineties dance hit, while its gameplay borrows from *Pang*.



CARCHARODON: WHITE SHARKS AMIGA, 1991

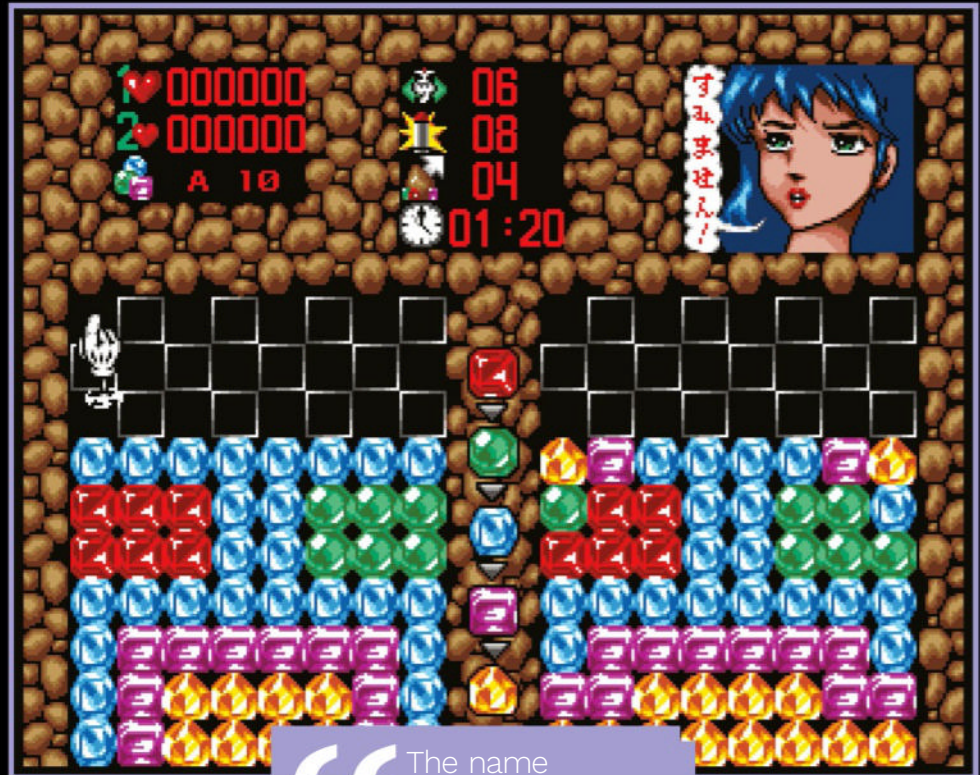
■ This is a fun shooter with nice animation, but sadly lacks music during its stages.



» [Amiga] With an asymmetrical sprite and a steep challenge level, *Final Countdown* is a rather ambitious sci-fi adventure.

"Peter and Alexander were still on board, but settled into more passive [roles] before leaving entirely, so basically Will and I soon ran the show," he continues. "That was between 1988 and 1989; I was in my early 20s, Will was about 27." And so in 1989, Demonware became a real company. "It was a bit crazy," continues Boris. "Before, I had a well-paid job in a bank, but then I turned my passion into a career. I already had some experience, having worked on *Street Gang* for the C64 at Rainbow Arts, for example. So I was hooked and decided to give it a go – I had nothing to lose, I guess!"

With their next project, the team went all in: *Final Countdown*, again released for the Commodore Amiga, takes inspiration from Jordan Mechner's *Prince Of Persia* and Epyx's *Impossible Mission*. Heroine Laura Tyrik has to explore a forsaken space station and the interesting puzzles, complex controls, detailed graphics and an actual asymmetric sprite for the main character are a clear indicator of the team's passion. Still, Demonware remained a small company. Instead of hiring a huge workforce, Demonware became a sort of publisher/developer hybrid, as Boris explains. "We always put together teams consisting of different programmers and



“The name Demonware was already there and we thought it was quite good, so we took it as well”
Boris Kunkel

developers. Sometimes we had applicants, sometimes we were sent entire games or game demos. Often we were simply sent a project on a disk. Then we looked at it and contacted the people that made it. Sometimes we said yes, this has potential, but we would like to develop the project in one direction or another. I then often created additional assets, we improved animations, made the graphics prettier or sometimes also tweaked the game design. That's how many of our games were created. But the core team was just Will and me.”

» [Amiga] *Gem'x* is the first game by Kaiko, the game is presented like the port of a Japanese arcade puzzler.

Two Demonware games especially stand out: *Oops Up* and *The Power*. The former is an action game that closely resembles the Mitchell/Capcom game *Pang*, while *The Power* is a fun, simple little puzzler about collecting hearts. And both games share the names of two hits of the Eurodance project Snap! for a reason! After moving the Demonware offices to neighbouring Offenbach, Will and Boris were working in the same building as the producers of Snap! – and this close connection led to unexpected synergies. ▶



THE POWER AMIGA, 1991

■ After finding success with *Oops Up*, Demonware went for another Snap! collaboration with this decent puzzler.



P.P. HAMMER AND HIS PNEUMATIC WEAPON AMIGA, 1991

■ This looks a bit like *Rick Dangerous*, but offers unique, fun mechanics.



GEM'X AMIGA, 1991

■ The first game by studio Kaiko goes after the look and feel of a classic Taito arcade puzzler.



LITTLE WIZARDS AMIGA, UNRELEASED

■ This has nice animation, but was never released. Fortunately, a prototype can be found online.



EXODUS 3010: THE FIRST CHAPTER AMIGA, 1993

■ A 3D sci-fi simulator, was produced together with the founders of studio Neon.



» [Amiga] The unreleased *Little Wizards* shares some ideas with *Lemmings* and impresses with its nicely animated sprites.



» [Amiga] Fast 3D and a punishing difficulty level are the main characteristics of *Mission Andromeda*.



» [Amiga] Eurodance meets arcade: *Ooops Up* is inspired by Capcom's and Mitchell's *Pang*.



» [Amiga] As Demonware and the producers of Snap! were neighbours, *Ooops Up* sports the music track of the same name.

“Our games were very popular among software pirates because they were so arcadey and action-heavy, especially compared to other German titles”

Boris Kunkel

► “Will knew Michael Münzing and Luca Anzilotti, the two producers of Snap!,” Boris explains. “Every now and then, we helped them with the editing of their music videos or developed some graphics – that’s how this co-operation came about. We simply asked them if we could use *Ooops Up* and *The Power* for our games and they just said sure, you can have them. And *The Power* in particular was a huge deal back then. We were happy about the music and they were happy that their music could be heard in a computer game – it was also a nice promotional opportunity for them. Well, maybe it didn’t quite fit the games in terms of world building, but back then people were much more relaxed about these things.”

The early Nineties were a busy time for Demonware, as Boris recalls, “Will was the one who made external contacts, he was active in sales and marketing, but also in game design. Will was huge on ideas – but not necessarily the one who implemented these ideas, we had our teams for that. I, on the other hand, was more the game producer who supervised the projects.” One of the most fascinating aspects of these days were the creative solutions a company like Demonware had to come up with on the fly, with Boris recounting one especially hair-raising story. “We had an imminent gold master, the handover of the final version of a

game to the factory for the production of the sales disks. And, as always, it was all done at the last minute,” he recalls. “Our programmer was working almost 200 kilometres

away in Saarbrücken and had to get the disk to us as quickly as possible, but by mail, it would have taken too long. So he went to the railway station and just kept an eye out for someone getting on the next train to Frankfurt. He then gave the disk to them. After that, he called us – on a landline of course, mobile phones weren’t a thing back then – and described the person’s jacket to us so that we could recognise and intercept them at the station. And it worked, we got the disk and were able to hand it in on time.”

But as with many developers on the Amiga, Demonware also suffered from the widespread piracy the system was infamous for. “Our games were very popular among software pirates because they were so arcadey and action-heavy, especially compared to other German titles,” laments Boris. “Many of the popular business sims of the day were not that heavily pirated, but our games were. It was extreme in the cases of *Ooops Up* and especially *PP Hammer And His Pneumatic Weapon*. *PP Hammer* was a great game that people loved to play – but nobody was willing to pay money for it. But the arcade and action focus was always important to us. We were arcade players and regularly visited arcades ourselves. We were

DNA OF DEMONWARE THE KEY INGREDIENTS OF SUCCESS



LIVING IN FRANKFURT

■ Starting out in Frankfurt left its mark on Demonware’s line-up. The city is Germany’s banking capital, has a large, vibrant music scene and was one of the few places with actual, well-stocked videogame arcades – all of which influenced Demonware’s owners and the publisher’s projects.



A EURODANCE CONNECTION

■ After moving to nearby Offenbach, Demonware shared an office building with various music producers. This not only gave it close contact to many creatives and access to roaring parties, but also led to co-operations with big music acts, leading to releases like *Ooops Up* and *The Power*.

enthusiastic about them and the machines and games really inspired us. That's our genre, that's what we want to do."

During their Demonware years, Will and Boris also worked with numerous people and companies that are still active today. Demonware published *Gem'x*, the first project by developer Kaiko, which would go on to make the amazing Amiga shooter *Apidya* and together with Anthony Christoulakis and Jan Jöckel (who would both go on to found the development studios Neon and later Keen Games) they produced the rather complex space sim *Exodus 3010* that was released in 1993. "With *Exodus 3010*, we also tried our hand at a somewhat more simulation-heavy kind of game," Boris explains. "I drew the graphics back then." And indeed, befitting the name, *Exodus 3010* was the last game released by Demonware. "We didn't make the jump to PC and I decided for myself to close this chapter in my life and try something different," Boris tells us. "Demonware was a lot of fun, but I had an offer from Bomico who started Sunflowers, an internal development story. I wanted to experience a really big company. And while Demonware ran well, it wasn't successful enough to last us for the rest of our lives. So I went to Sunflowers while Will sold the company."

One thing Boris still vividly remembers is the first time seeing a game he made on actual store shelves. "You go into the shop and think wow! This is your game. How cool is that? That's a very, very exciting



» [Amiga] *PP Hammer And His Pneumatic Weapon* might be Demonware's best and most accomplished release.

moment. You think wow, you made that and you're really proud of it. Especially because we even packaged some of our games ourselves back then. I also still have all our games, they're all in their original packaging in my basement. I even still have the original artwork for *PP Hammer*. I think that was also one of our best games. The animation was really great."

Although Demonware only lasted for a few years, Boris has no regrets. "The biggest lesson was basically: just believe in your dream. If you really want to do something, then do it. In Germany in particular, game development was completely underdeveloped. Everyone I told about my plans said I was crazy and that nobody could make money with games. But the lesson I learned was to keep going, to learn from these things. That's always driven me and Will, that always pushed us forward. Will and I had no idea how to develop games at first - we just did it. And I must say: back then, there were some really great games." ✨

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?



BORIS KUNKEL

After getting a tempting offer from publisher Bomico, Boris decided to leave Demonware and became the first producer at the newly founded developer Sunflowers. Since then he has worked as a production supervisor on games like *Arx Fatalis*, *Gothic II* and *Spellforce II*. Nowadays, he's sharing his production knowledge with the next generation of game developers as a professor at Hochschule Darmstadt.



WILL WEBER

After deciding to shutter Demonware, Will was involved in various projects for Nintendo's Game Boy and used his contacts in different entertainment industries to connect developers with interested IP holders. Today, Will has shifted his focus towards eSports and serious games. Just like his old friend and colleague Boris Kunkel, Will is also teaching in the animation and game department of Hochschule Darmstadt.



AN ARCADE FOCUS

■ While most German developers in the Nineties preferred working on business sims and other 'serious' genres, Demonware mostly went for arcade-style action, bringing many concepts from the coin-op space to the Amiga - usually while the Amiga audience was still waiting or hoping for official ports.



LOST TREASURES

■ Before shutting down, Demonware had some unreleased projects in development. Aside from a sequel to *Ooops Up*, *Super Daryna* was a mix of *Zelda* and *Ys*. *The Gateway* appeared to be a sequel to *Mission Andromeda*, while *The Mind Possessing Aliens From Outer Space* was an adventure.

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SECRET SERVICE

THE CHEATS, GLITCHES AND HIDDEN BITS OF THE CLASSICS



MORTAL KOMBAT

» PLATFORM: ARCADE » RELEASED: 1992 » CHEAT TYPE: SECRET STAGE » CHEAT COMPLEXITY: VERY HIGH

Every so often, *Mortal Kombat's* hidden fighter Reptile will show up to taunt you, but he isn't an easy fellow to find.

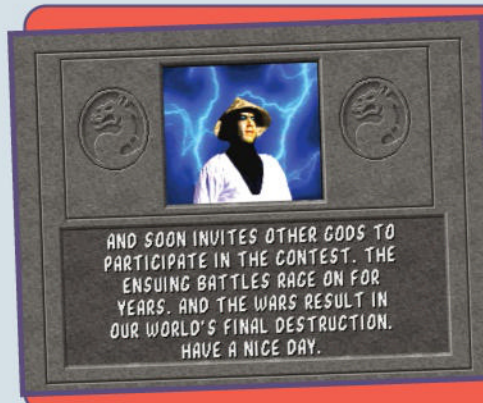
For a start, you can only even try to fight him if you see shadowy figures flying across the moon in The Pit, the infamous stage with the spiked bottom. Once they appear, all you have to do is beat your CPU opponent with a double flawless victory, without using the block button, and perform your character's Fatality move. Piece of cake, right? You'll need to be playing version 4.0 of the game or later if you're playing as Scorpion or Sonya too, as the update accounts for the fact that their Fatality moves require the block button.

If you can manage all of this, your reward is a fight against Reptile at the bottom of The Pit. He's a formidably fast secret fighter who draws his special moves from fellow ninjas Scorpion and Sub-Zero, and combines their colour schemes for his green garb. If you manage to beat him, you'll earn a whopping 10 million points for your trouble. *





MORE CHEATS TO TRY OUT



QUICK KOMPLETION

During the attract mode of the arcade version, quickly press the block buttons in the following sequence: **P1 x5, P2 x10, P1 x2, P2 x1, P1 x2, P2 x3, P1 x4**. You'll access a secret menu that lets you check stats and even skip to any character's ending.

HIDDEN MENU

In the Mega Drive version, press **down, up, left, left, A, right, down** at the main menu. You'll access a secret menu full of useful options, from bonus stage practice to debug flags and, most notably, the ability to turn on blood for full authenticity.



BLOOD CODE

Sega's relaxed attitude to gore extended to the Master System and Game Gear too. Press **2, 1, 2, down, up** at the intro screen starting with 'The word CODE...' and you'll have the opportunity to open up the ketchup bottle in glorious 8-bit style.

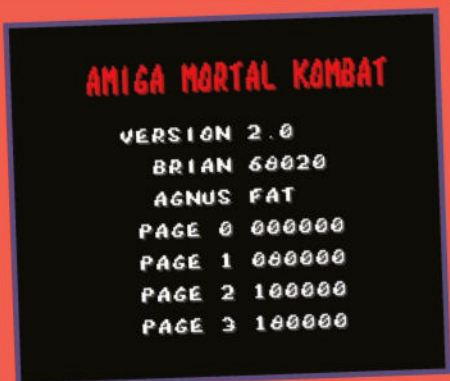


BE GORO

The one cheat everyone wanted was actually real, if you had the Game Boy version. To play as the four-armed monster, you'll need to beat the game, then press **up, left, Select and A** when 'The End' appears and hold them until the title screen appears.

KOMPUTER INFO

If you're playing the Amiga conversion, typing **CATHULU** at the main menu screen will unlock a cheat menu exactly like the one in the Mega Drive version. Type **RJC** on this screen, and you'll also get some diagnostic info about the game and your Amiga.



EXTRA KREDITS

Sadly, SNES owners really don't get much in the way of cheats. The best we can offer is only in the Japanese version – press **left, up, right, up, left, up** at the Acclaim logo screen to get ten credits rather than the standard four.

THE MAKING OF JUNGLE STRIKE

THE SEQUEL TO DESERT STRIKE

When free-roaming helicopter shooter *Desert Strike* became Electronic Arts' biggest non-sports hit in 1992, thoughts inevitably turned to a sequel.

The core team would remain the same: on the technical side, Mike Posehn handled programming and engine refinements with Tim Calvin once more contributing the excellent 3D models. Meanwhile, John Manley would continue to be the driving force for the budding franchise, acting as lead director and designer, encompassing mission design, storyline and the implementation of new features; assisting him again was Tony Barnes. *Jungle Strike* was cleared for take-off. "Actually, even early in the development of *Desert Strike*, we considered that there might be a sequel," begins John, "and when it came to designing, we wanted to take what players liked about it and give them a wider variety of locations, missions and vehicles." Tony adds, "It was important to outdo *Desert Strike*, solidify the game as a franchise and not just a one-off. We also wanted to make sure that we



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- » **DEVELOPER:** HIGH SCORE PRODUCTIONS/GRANITE BAY SOFTWARE
- » **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE, VARIOUS
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **GENRE:** STRATEGY SHOOT-'EM-UP



» [Mega Drive] Anti-air weapons provided a constant threat to the Comanche.



» [Mega Drive] The deadly yet fragile stealth bomber.

IN 1993, ELECTRONIC ARTS RELEASED A SEQUEL TO ONE OF ITS MOST ICONIC 16-BIT GAMES. THE PREMISE WAS 'BIGGER, BETTER, MORE', AND IT DELIVERED IN SPADES. RETRO GAMER DONS ITS FLIGHT SUIT AND TAKES THE COMANCHE FOR A SPIN WITH JUNGLE STRIKE DESIGNERS JOHN MANLEY AND TONY BARNES...

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON



» [Mega Drive] Some co-pilots were locked until you rescued them.

gave the fans a worthy sequel and not just a green version of the first game."

Despite the team's ambitions, the basic template for *Jungle Strike* would remain similar. The player would pilot a Comanche helicopter with the controls again in first-person despite the third-person view, something Mike himself had originally felt was essential to the physics and 'feel' of the game. With the programmer busy tweaking the engine, John and Tony began to design the game's many missions and locations, as the former explains. "The way we created our levels was to print out large maps of the terrain for each one and then populate the world with individual pieces of paper that contained isometric images of buildings, roads, tanks, guard towers and so on. Then we would transcribe the X and Y co-ordinates for each object by hand into the level data."

As anyone who has played the game will have realised, there was a heavy Hollywood influence at play in *Jungle Strike*, even at this early point. "A lot of our inspiration for level designs came from our love of action

movies and wanting to deliver that edge-of-your-seat excitement," confirms John, "so things such as a night mission, where you needed to watch for the glow of an enemy's night vision goggles while navigating with the muzzle flash of your missiles, just added to that excitement."

Another crucial addition was the inclusion of more controllable vehicles. "We knew from the beginning that multiple vehicles would be one of the major enhancements for the *Strike* series," notes John, "as there were so many other cool military vehicles in our fiction that we wanted to give players the chance to operate." Tony recalls a technical reticence to this aspect. "We were dubious that they could

all be implemented, as each vehicle had to be 3D modelled, rendered out, converted to 16-colour sprites and then cleaned up." Nevertheless, the supplementary vehicles added greatly to the game, despite reservations from the designers. "I think the motorcycle was the hardest to get right, as it was initially too small to see on the road," winces John before Tony singles out the stealth bomber, "Landing that thing was a huge pain in the ass!" he laughs.

Fortunately, one of the main tenets that Mike had for the project was to create reusable systems: when it came to operating the stealth bomber, as its Z-axis operated on a similar level to ICBM missiles and parachuting soldiers, Mike was able to create a root code for covering all three. This, and other tricks, proved crucial as development proceeded. ►



» [Mega Drive] Keeping an eye out for fuel was vital.



» [Mega Drive] Taking off outside the White House.

**"A LOT OF OUR INSPIRATION
CAME FROM OUR LOVE OF
ACTION MOVIES"**
JOHN MANLEY



» [PC] Gremlin's PC port carried some visual enhancements, including FMV in the CD-ROM version.



» [Mega Drive] Each mission began with a briefing from operations.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DESERT STRIKE (PICTURED)

PLATFORM: MEGA DRIVE, VARIOUS

RELEASED: 1992

URBAN STRIKE

PLATFORM: MEGA DRIVE, SNES, GAME BOY, GAME GEAR

RELEASED: 1994

SOVIET STRIKE

PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION, SATURN

RELEASED: 1996

► “I actually really liked the F-117 bomber,” admits John, “as it did give us a whole new gameplay mechanic: the precision targeting of your projectiles while piloting a constantly moving craft.” And while Tony’s frustration with the landing procedure is understandable, John admires the skill required to line up the bomber correctly. “It was something the player had to master; when the game took control and it went into its automatic landing sequence, you knew you could exhale with relief!” Other alternate vehicles, such as a military truck laden with explosives, were considered and abandoned as the team attempted to streamline the levels.

With essential tuning to the physics and controls also required thanks to the added vehicles, *Jungle Strike* was already looking like a tight fit for the Mega Drive’s then-standard 8Mbit cartridge. When John and Tony began blueprinting the many levels, the team asked Electronic Arts’ marketing and sales department for an upgrade to the

16Mbit cartridge. “We wanted to deliver a richer experience,” says John, “so having twice the memory allowed us to produce better gameplay, graphics and more complex objects, while maintaining the level of quality in sound effects, music and cinematics.”

Diving the level design was a responsibility to which John retains much of the credit – although once an outline had been sketched, the whole team collaborated on each scenario and the plot twists that they would encompass. And while it wasn’t planned, it soon became clear that connecting the story to *Desert Strike* would make good sense if the series was to be seen as a franchise rather than individual games. “John was always the ‘plot guy’ while I am more mechanics-based,” remarks Tony, “so it was a perfect marriage. He could take the smallest of nuggets and turn it into the most amazing idea, and it would still be implementable.” Nevertheless,

one idea which didn’t make it into the game was finally being able to control yourself, the pilot. “While working on the game one night, EA’s chief creative officer said to me, ‘Hey kid, save it for the sequel!’” recalls Tony, a mantra that has stayed with him since. The ‘little man’, as the character was known, eventually debuted in the third chapter, *Urban Strike*.

The *Jungle Strike* team still had numerous issues to work around, not least translating their paper-based transcriptions into exact co-ordinates for the game’s engine to interpret. “Undoubtedly the hardest part of the job was capturing the exact X and Y co-ordinates of each object in the game from our paper maps,” says John, “and it was especially difficult to plot the paths of our moving objects.” To help solve this, he and Tony created a clear acetate grid that was placed over each tile of the paper world; one of them would call out the locations of every item while the other typed in the co-ordinates. It was still a time-consuming task – for the next sequel, Mike created a tool called Dynaflow, which made the process of creating and programming the levels and vehicle paths considerably easier.

Yet the two biggest obstacles to *Jungle Strike*’s development, time and space, remained until the very end. Tony recalls the latter, “We were down to the wire and about 30 bits over the cart’s capacity. I had gone through every tile I could eliminate, every piece of game code I could optimise, and there was nothing else I could do. Finally, our technical director told me the animation that played on boot up was taking up space.”

“MORE FUN [THAN] SHARING A SLEEPING BAG WITH CINDY CRAWFORD”

MEAN MACHINES SEGA’S EDITOR JULIAN RIGNALL RECALLS HIS PRAISE FOR JUNGLE STRIKE

■ “I was a huge fan of *Desert Strike*, and couldn’t wait to get my hands on the sequel,” remembers Julian Rignall, editor of *Mean Machines Sega*, “So when the first build arrived at our offices it was a major event.” The game scored 96% in the magazine’s May ‘93 issue – does Julian feel they were a bit, well, over the top? “No, not at all. The review scores reflected the excitement and enthusiasm we had for a game. It’s easy to get sniffy and compare the relative merits of scores and games years after, but the bottom line was that game was some seriously hot shit, and we loved it!” he laughs. “Plus, the fact we’re talking about it years later is a testament to the game, one of the Mega Drive’s finest.” Julian also defends one notorious extract from the review that stated, “Things don’t get much more fun this side of sharing a sleeping bag with Cindy Crawford.” “Ha, yeah I remember that,” beams Julian, “but we thought that humour and creativity were hugely important. It was all about getting across our excitement while also being entertaining.”



► [Mega Drive] The mission map was hugely vital in navigating your way around each level.



► [SNES] All ports were created by other developers – the belated SNES version was handled by Gremlin.

After extensive lobbying of Electronic Arts executives, the spinning EA logo at the start of *Jungle Strike* was replaced with a simple fade in and out to enable the game to ship. "It was done right as we had to go gold, so we were sweating bullets on that one!" adds Tony. And like most videogame development, time was a constant pressure, as John describes, "I remember working 36 hours straight to get a solid build to take to the CES show in Las Vegas. After this marathon debugging session with Tony and Mike, I left work, boarded a plane, walked up to our product manager at the EA booth in Vegas and handed him the oversized gold Genesis development cartridge before checking into my hotel." Unsurprisingly, John collapsed in his bed and was not seen again for several hours.

Upon release, *Jungle Strike* received almost unanimous praise, with only minor dissension concerning its difficulty and supposed jingoism. "I don't think we treated the subject any differently to other popular media of the time," comments John, "and our depiction of the villains in *Jungle Strike*

was in line with how Hollywood portrayed them, such as the drug lord in *Clear And Present Danger* or *Die Hard 2*'s rogue dictator." Nevertheless, with acclaim for the game greatly outweighing these criticisms, we ask John and Tony why they think *Jungle Strike* was such a hit with reviewers and gamers. "I think one of the things that made it so successful was the freedom to go anywhere in the world and choose your own way to complete the missions" says John, and Tony nods in agreement. "Most games back then shoved you down one path," he says, "and that's not what John and I wanted. We wanted people to feel empowered and not simply execute memorised patterns." Without doubt another facet of *Jungle Strike*'s success was the fine tuning and optimisation of each level, as well as the sharp control of the vehicles. "Like *Desert Strike*, without the responsiveness of the chopper," notes Tony pointedly, "the game would have been dead in the water."

"WE WERE DOWN TO THE WIRE AND ABOUT 30 BITS OVER THE CART'S CAPACITY"
TONY BARNES

gameplay and storytelling – and how we were able to seamlessly merge these together," says John. Tony credits the game with taking his career significantly upward as he became more involved with game direction and franchise-building. "And my favourite thing in life is not the fast cars, mansions or parties in Vegas," he grins mischievously, "but meeting people who have played the games I have worked on and hearing them say, 'I loved that game!' I get that an awful lot with *Jungle Strike* especially, and that makes it all worth it."

Our special thanks to John Manley, Tony Barnes and Mike Posehn. This article first appeared in *games™* issue 137. ★



[Game Boy] Piloting the F-117 is just as much fun on Nintendo's handheld as on other platforms.



» [Amiga CD32] You'll take on a few enemy choppers in the fourth mission, Night Strike.

Jungle Strike was destined to become another huge hit for Electronic Arts. Boasting sandbox-style gameplay (when it was relatively uncommon on consoles), varied missions and a neat mix of action and humour, there's no doubt as to John and Tony's pride looking back at the game today. "What I like most is how we pushed the boundaries of what could be done with tile-based graphics in terms of



» [Game Gear] *Jungle Strike* was well received on Sega's handheld, but didn't see a UK release.

JUNGLE STRIKE IN THE KNOW

■ John Manley was originally a member of a production group developing a PC flight simulation. When EA began supporting the Mega Drive instead, an early prototype was quickly retooled into what would become *Desert Strike*.

■ The enemy HARV units were a nod to a similar vehicle from the movie *Stripes*. On a related note, the blue VW buses from the Washington DC level were inspired by *Back To The Future*.

» [Mega Drive] Someone had it out for the taxman, given the reward for blowing up the IRS building.



■ While each square foot represented approximately 1.5 miles, that space contained the equivalent of ten square miles of 'real-life' targets, so there was always something to do around every corner.

■ Destroying the IRS building in either of the Washington levels netted you 400,000 bonus points.

■ All the co-pilots and characters in the cinematics were EA employees. For example, John played the captain with his feet on the desk, while Tony portrayed the commander in the war room.

■ John's involvement in the series would eventually lead to him being dubbed the 'Godfather Of Strike.'

1P-005770
TIME-0090

HI-0057
REST-1390



70 STAGE-02
km SPEED ■■■■■■

Konami Antiques MSX Collection Ultra Pack

SAVING A SMALL FORTUNE

» RETROREVIVAL



» SATURN » 1998 » KONAMI COMPUTER
ENTERTAINMENT YOKOHAMA

Ever since I first started buying games, I've always been aware of the MSX.

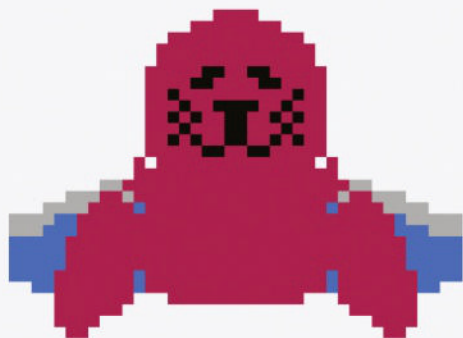
I would often see a small section of MSX games in Densham, an old computer shop that existed in Parkstone, but I never knew anyone who owned a MSX, so it's a system I never experienced as a youngster.

That all changed in the early Noughties when I bought a Japanese Saturn collection for £500 and out of the 30-odd shmups it was bundled with was a compilation of MSX games called *Konami Antiques MSX Collection Ultra Pack*. I had no idea that it was effectively a repackaged PlayStation collection (that had been issued across three separate discs) but I didn't care. I could finally play some MSX titles.

Quite a few of the games I'd already played on earlier home computers and consoles like *Konami's Ping Pong*, *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*, *Gradius* and *Parodius*, but a good half of the 30 included games were completely new to me and I particularly enjoyed *Antarctic Adventure* (pictured), *Knightmare*, *Penguin Adventure* and *Gradius 2*.

For some reason I never kept it though and before long I'd completely forgotten about it. The system popped up again on my radar a few years back when my friend Ashley Day started up a new gaming blog called *Games From The Black Hole*, which featured reviews of MSX games he'd been recently buying and other esoteric titles. I once again became fascinated by the system and started to investigate its library online.

To my dismay I realised that a lot of the games I was interested in would cost me a small fortune. It was then that I remembered that old Saturn collection. Although I ended up re-buying it for three times what I'd sold it for, and although it only represents a tiny slither of the MSX's vast library, it was a far cheaper alternative than diving into the MSX properly and once again allowed me to experience a machine I'll probably never own. ✨



ULTIMATE GUIDE Suikoden

幻想水滸伝

A VANGUARD FOR THE FIRST ERA OF 32-BIT RPGS, YOSHITAKA MURAYAMA AND JUNKO KAWANO'S SUIKODEN PROVED THE STRONG FOUNDATION ESTABLISHED BY POPULAR 16-BIT CONSOLE RPGS AND BOLSTERED IT WITH NEW METHODS OF COMBAT, A STRIKING POLITICALLY DRIVEN NARRATIVE, AND AN ARMY'S WORTH OF RECRUITABLE CHARACTERS

WORDS BY AIDAN MOHER

When young game designer Yoshitaka Murayama walked into his boss's office at Konami in the early Nineties, he planned to pitch a game inspired by popular football

manga, *Captain Tsubasa*. He loved the way that series used its huge, memorable cast of supporting characters to create depth and breadth beyond what a single character can accomplish. Murayama knew, however, that his boss disliked manga, so, instead, he conjured a more palatable comparable for the game he wanted to make: Shi Nai'an's classic Ming Dynasty novel *Water Margin*. Or, as it's known in Japanese, *Suikoden*.

Murayama charged into the meeting full of enthusiasm, but, to his chagrin, pitched the idea too well. "[My boss] asked me what kind of story it was going to be," Murayama explained in a 1999 interview featured in the *Gensou Suikoden II 108 Stars Character*

Guide. He explained that "it's going to have a lot of characters" and likened it to *Water Margin*. His boss replied, "Well, let's do that," to the concept of a *Suikoden* game, complete with a huge cast of outlaws and a rebellious storyline. It wasn't what Murayama had in mind, but his boss was convinced. "So we decided to make it," Murayama laughed. "It turned out to be a challenging task."

A couple years before *Suikoden*, Squaresoft's classic *Final Fantasy VI* wowed players with its 14 main party members, and a handful of other playable characters. Compared to contemporaries like *Chrono Trigger* (seven), *Final Fantasy V* (five), and *Lufia II: Rise Of The Sinistrals* (four), 14 was an impressive number that allowed for great player agency and unique multi-party dungeon designs. *Suikoden*, on the other hand, hit 14 recruitable characters before breakfast.

With a story grounded in themes of war and politics, *Suikoden* needed a vast space for its

narrative and the *Water Margin*'s 108 rebels offered the perfect canvas. While many game designers might have been inspired by that huge number of characters, Murayama took it literally, pulling no punches as he and character designer Junko Kawano filled *Suikoden* with an eye-watering 108 recruitable characters – all of whom played a role as combatants in battle or back at home at the expandable castle of protagonist Tir McDohl's Liberation Army. It's an army of soldiers, wizards, kobolds, cooks, shopkeepers and blacksmiths.

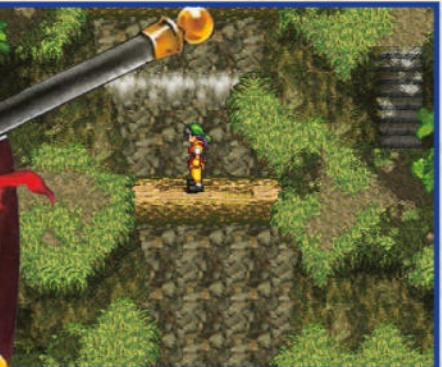
On the surface, *Suikoden* is a typical coming-of-age story about a young man who finds his destiny as rebellion sweeps the Scarlet Moon Empire. Born the rich son of a powerful general, Tir witnesses his country's fascist colonialism first hand, as soldiers beat children, despotic officials skim tax money from starving villagers, and elvish villages are razed. Under its surface, however, *Suikoden* ►



» [PlayStation] Tir and Flik lay the smackdown on Emperor Barbarossa baddies.



» [PlayStation] Tir explores his hometown of Gregminster. He doesn't get out much.



» [PlayStation] Tir passes over a babbling brook in a magical elvish forest.



» [PlayStation] Some magic attacks look very impressive.

"SUIKODEN EXPLORES THE WAY WAR IMPACTS ALL PEOPLE – FROM THE RICHEST TO THE POOREST – AND TRAILS TRAGEDY AND HARDSHIP IN ITS WAKE"

Fierce Fighting

UNLIKE MANY RPGS AT THE TIME, SUIKODEN HAD THREE MODES OF COMBAT



CLOSE COMBAT

■ War is wide and sweeping, but it's also intensely personal and sometimes it comes down to individual actions and victories. In these duels, Tir McDohl (and one other surprising fighter) faces off against his rivals in a rock-paper-scissors showdown. It looks like a turn-based fighting game, and requires the player to anticipate their opponent's actions.



GROUP COMBAT

■ These battles play out in typical console RPG fashion. With a party of up to six members facing off against a handful of baddies, *Suikoden's* group battles are fast-paced and all about juggling limited resources. This is the most common type of battle in the game, and where you'll face down *Suikoden's* bosses.



ALL OUT WARFARE

■ If *Suikoden's* duels require a portrait lens, you're going to have to drag out the wide-angle for its major army battles. With hundreds or thousands of combatants on each side, these battles use a similar rock-paper-scissors system as the duels: Cavalry beats Ranged, Ranged beats Magic, Magic beats Cavalry.

Meet the Cast

KEY MOVERS AND SHAKERS IN SUIKODEN'S EPIC CAST



TIR MCDOHL

■ With a silver spoon in hand, young Tir McDohl is the son of the famous General Teo McDohl. What starts off as a simple assignment to gather taxes from a nearby village soon launches Tir on a journey of rebellion as the leader of the Liberation Army.



TED

■ Tir's childhood friend, Ted harbours dark secrets and even darker magic. Kidnapped and assaulted by the Scarlet Moon Empire for the rune he bears on his hand, Ted sets into motion a series of events that will fan the flames of rebellion.



GREMIO

■ Tir McDohl's manservant and shadow, Gremio's loyalty to Teo McDohl and his family is undying. Though he bears a dramatic scar on his cheek sustained while saving a young Tir from kidnapping, Gremio's more comfortable in the kitchen than on the battlefield.



VIKTOR

■ Oafish Viktor may look like a shaved bear, and not smell much better, but Odessa's right-hand man is the heart and soul of the Liberation Army, and packs a mean punch in combat. What he lacks in couth, he more than makes up for in sheer determination.



» [PlayStation] Taking a moment of respite and quiet, Tir contemplates his plans from a high perch in his castle.



» [PlayStation] War is hard, but a warm bath with your best buds will ease all the tension out of your shoulders.

"THERE'S NO RIGHT WAY TO BUILD A PARTY IN SUIKODEN, AND THAT'S THE WHOLE POINT"

► explores the way war impacts all people – from the richest to the poorest – and trails tragedy and hardship in its wake.

With *Final Fantasy VII* and its cinematic visuals and narrative still a couple years away, *Suikoden* borrowed heavily from classic 16-bit-era RPG design. Players

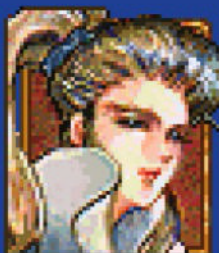
explore a pixel-art world from an overhead perspective, engage in random battles – though not only random battles (see the Fierce Fighting boxout) – and manage equipment, magic and a million other things through various menus. It's a tried-and-true structure, and *Suikoden* plays it safe, choosing instead to focus on finding new ways to explore the unique narrative potential of videogames with Murayama's heavy emphasis on player expression.

Suikoden's most memorable contribution to RPG combat is the way it embraces its large cast by loading the game with combos (called Unite attacks) available to the player when certain characters are in random battles. Tir and his martial arts trainer Kai have a particularly deadly Unite attack that hits all enemies, the Lepant Family Attack allows mother, father and son to lay the smackdown on unsuspecting enemies, and odd couple Pahn and Gremio can team up for the Talisman Attack. While these combos are



EMPEROR BARBAROSSA

■ A hero of the War Of Succession, Barbarossa came to power by reclaiming his father's throne after it was usurped by his uncle. His golden image faded over time as the influence of the sorceress Windy infiltrated his court and the Empire started clamping down on its citizens.



WINDY

■ A powerful sorceress, Windy gained influence in the court of Emperor Barbarossa due to her resemblance to the ruler's late wife. Always at his side, she pulls the strings behind the curtains, and has plans that extend far beyond the borders of the Empire.



ODESSA SILVERBERG

■ The anti-imperialist leader of the Toran Liberation Army and brother to master strategist Mathui Silverberg, Odessa is an idealistic and principled young woman determined to end the iron-fisted reign of Emperor Barbossa and return liberation to the Scarlet Moon Empire.



FLIK

■ Fiery and hungry, 'Blue Thunder' Flik followed Odessa to the Liberation Army's anti-imperialist cause after falling in love with her. Talented, but raw and edgy, Flik brings a level of unmatched passion to the fight. The only thing greater? His talent with a blade.



» [PlayStation] Gremio worries about a waterlogged elf who's washed up on the shores of Toran Castle.



» [PlayStation] The world is a big place, and we're just tiny people walking through it one step at a time.



» [PC] The HD remaster's bigger skirmishes don't look quite as nice as the original game's, but the dinky sprites still look great.



» [PC] Suikoden's Unite attacks not only inflict massive amounts of damage, they also look cool.

never essential, that they're not documented and are left to the player to discover speaks to *Suikoden's* explicit desire for experimentation. There's no right way to build a party in *Suikoden*, and that's the whole point Murayama's trying to make.

Joining Konami alongside Murayama, artist and writer Junko Kawano played a heavy role in *Suikoden's* development. Responsible for many of *Suikoden's* iconic character designs, Kawano eventually took over as director of *Suikoden IV*. From the story and worldbuilding to the series' unique visual design, Kawano's fingerprints overlap Murayama's everywhere.

While many of *Suikoden's* most impressive features – its large cast and politics-heavy plot – take a while to reveal themselves, the work of composer Miki Higashino is immediately apparent. Filled with beautiful samples of live instruments, it was a strong foil to the more typical synthetic samples used by most console games at the time, and even convinced *Final Fantasy* composer Nobuo Uematsu to up his game for *Final Fantasy VIII*.

Just like Tir McDohl, Murayama found success because he surrounded himself with great people. Key to his leadership style, it's no surprise to see themes of community and collaboration running through his videogames. ▶



» [PlayStation] Wanna get rich quick? Skip the pyramid schemes and play Chinchirorin, instead.



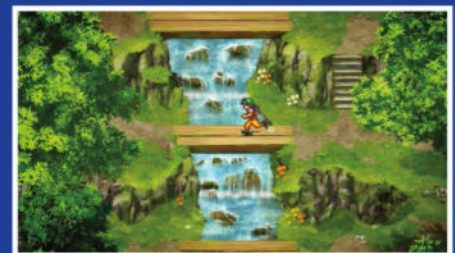
» [PlayStation] Those dwarfs sure are ahead of their time with wind-powered energy generation.

SUIKODEN, REMASTERED

KONAMI'S GAME RETURNED WITH A FRESH COAT OF PAINT IN 2025

■ After years of laying fallow, Konami surprised fans in September 2022 by announcing a remaster of the first two games in the series – a series many presumed dead and forgotten by the publisher. Finally releasing in 2025, *Suikoden I & II HD Remaster: Gate Rune And Dunan Unification Wars* impressed fans and critics with a visual update (that worked better for the second game's more complex environments compared to *Suikoden's* tile-based world), a touched-up translation and a bunch of quality-of-life improvements (although outside of the improved visuals, many of these were also in the earlier Japan-exclusive PSP remaster).

Not only is this new collection a great way to revisit old favourites – with series founder Junko Kawano returning to redraw new *Suikoden* character portraits – but it also made the series accessible to newcomers, as the original games are now extremely expensive to buy. Joining a wave of retro-inspired RPGs and remasters like *LUNAR Remastered Collection*, *Sea Of Stars* and *Chained Echoes*, *Suikoden I & II HD Remaster: Gate Rune And Dunan Unification Wars* is further proof that 2D pixel art RPGs will always have a home with genre fans and newcomers alike.



» [PlayStation 5] A magic spell drapes these forests, so if you don't want to get lost, you'd better have an elf in your party.



» [PlayStation 5] Cleo casts a fire spell during a showdown with the Queen Ant and her minions.



» [PlayStation] Tir McDohl performing a surprise inspection of Toran Castle's inn.



» [PlayStation] Toran Castle emerges from the waters of Lake Toran.



HOME SWEET HOME

EVERY ARMY NEEDS A CASTLE

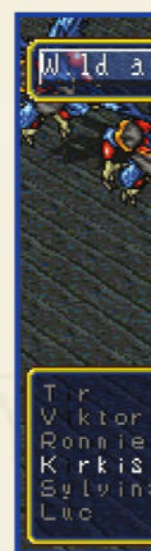
■ With 108 characters to recruit, you need somewhere to keep them housed and fed, and what better place to do that than a monster-infested dilapidated castle in the middle of Lake Toran? Midway through *Suikoden*, as your army grows, Tir and the Liberation Army capture and restore this defensible castle, and it remains their home base for the rest of the game. Small and simple at first, the castle grows and evolves as you recruit new characters — adding things like a blacksmith, shops and even a community bathhouse that you can decorate with art.

And while there are many optional recruits in *Suikoden*, a few stand out as must-haves: Viki, an airheaded mage who lets you travel to previously visited locations, Sergei, an inventor who builds an elevator and makes it much easier to travel between castle floors, and, of course, Gaspar, an eye-patched gambler who brings the dice game Chinchirorin (and access to unlimited Potch for savvy players) with him.

In addition to just being a fun and useful place to hangout, the castle also provides *Suikoden's* gameplay with an essential feeling of community. Unlike so many other RPGs at the time, the characters you're not actively using don't just disappear. They've got a home and purpose within the Liberation Army, and it's fun to see who they hang out with and how they spend their time off.



» [PC] The new remasters lets you speed up combat and move faster, which is something you couldn't do in the original PlayStation release.



SWEET SUIKODEN SEQUELS

SUIKODEN LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR AN EXPANSIVE SERIES



SUIKODEN II

■ Released a few years after *Suikoden*, its sequel took everything that was great about the first game — a huge cast, intriguing political story, castle building — and filed off the rough edges for an experience most fans consider the best in the series, which doesn't bode well for the rest of the entries...



SUIKODEN III

■ Swapping *Suikoden* and *Suikoden II's* sprite work for clunky 3D graphics, *Suikoden III* was an awkward step back for the series in the wake of creator Yoshitaka Murayama's departure mid-way through development. Its story, however, spread across three protagonists, is among the series' most compelling.



SUIKODEN IV

■ For the first time in the series, *Suikoden IV* looks backwards in time, taking place 150 years before the events in the original *Suikoden*. Swapping hills and plains for islands and the open sea, *Suikoden IV* is another rocky outing for a series stumbling after Murayama's departure.



» [PlayStation] A siren sings her dangerous song.



► Yoshitaka Murayama left Konami midway through development of *Suikoden III* in 2002, citing a longtime plan to leave the company after ten years of service. This led to major upheaval, from which it can be argued *Suikoden*

never fully recovered. Though *Suikoden III* was completed and set the stage for more adventures in the world, all the subsequent mainline sequels took place in the past, suggesting a hesitancy to move Murayama's ambitions for the series forward. Eventually, after a few mediocre spin-offs on the Nintendo DS and PlayStation Portable, *Suikoden* lay fallow and seemingly forgotten by Konami, although it did release a PSP collection of the first two games, which added numerous improvements that would be plundered at a later time.

In 2020, Murayama and Junko Kawano's Rabbit & Bear Studio announced a Kickstarter for a spiritual *Suikoden* successor called *Eiyuden Chronicle: Hundred Heroes* featuring many of that series' trademark gameplay systems and themes. It eventually raised over \$4.5 million, far outstripping its goal of \$500K, becoming one of the most successful videogame Kickstarters ever.

Despite the series' absence for almost a decade (the Japan-only PSP spin-off *Gensō Suikoden: Tsumugareshi Hyakunin no Toki* released in 2012), it was clear there was a hunger for *Suikoden*-style games, and Konami

"A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES BEGINS WITH A SINGLE STEP, BUT A REBELLION BEGINS WITH 108 OF YOUR BEST FRIENDS AT YOUR SIDE"

did not miss the success of Rabbit & Bear's Kickstarter. Deciding the time was right to revitalise the long-dead series, a modern remaster of the first two games in the series, *Suikoden I & II HD Remaster: Gate Rune*

And Dunan Unification Wars (itself based on the aforementioned PSP remakes), was announced later that year by Konami with some involvement of former staff like Junko Kawano.

Sadly, Murayama passed away just weeks before the release of *Eiyuden Chronicle: Hundred Heroes*. On 6 February 2024 Murayama's company Rabbit & Bear Studios announced he had passed due to complications with an ongoing illness.

"It was always the passion from his fans that continued to drive his creative vision and motivate him to put his all into the project," Rabbit & Bear Studios said in a letter signed by Kawano, Junichi Murakami, and Osamu Komuta. "But as his co-workers and friends, it saddens us to know that he won't get to see the reactions from his fans."

With a successful remaster of his original masterpieces recapturing the imaginations of longtime series fans and newcomers alike, and a brand-new mainline game called *Suikoden STAR LEAP* announced for mobile platforms, Yoshitaka Murayama's ambitious vision for the RPG genre are more relevant and popular than ever. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, but a rebellion begins with 108 of your best friends at your side. ✨



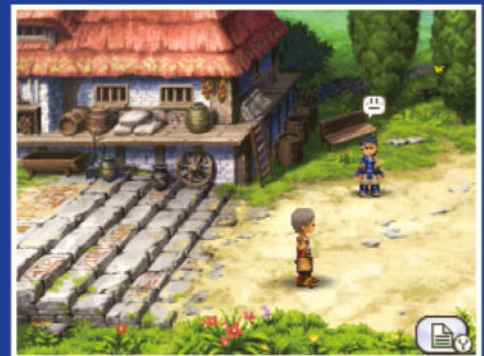
SUIKODEN TACTICS

■ Generally considered the worst of the mainline titles, it only made sense that *Suikoden IV* was the first, and only, *Suikoden* to get a direct sequel. Set before and after the events of *Suikoden IV*, *Suikoden Tactics* drops the usual role-playing for a *Final Fantasy Tactics*-style structure and combat system.



SUIKODEN V

■ The fifth *Suikoden* signified a grand return to form. Another prequel, this one is set a decade or so before *Suikoden* and features a vibrant world, great returning characters and some of the best castle building in the series. It's just too bad it didn't push the series forward chronologically.



SUIKODEN TIERKREIS

■ *Suikoden's* first handheld title was a non-canon spin-off set in an entirely different world. Retaining the series's trademark character collectathon, *Tierkreis* scaled combat back with just four party members. It might not have been what fans wanted, but even a bad *Suikoden* is pretty good.

BANJO-KAZOOIE

AS EARLY MASCOTS OF THE NINTENDO 64, BANJO THE FIST-SWINGING BEAR AND KAZOOIE THE EGG-SHOOTING BREEGULL WERE HERALDED AS BRITISH DEVELOPER RARE'S ANSWER TO SUPER MARIO 64. NEARLY 30 YEARS ON, WE SPEAK TO SERIES COMPOSER GRANT KIRKHOPE FOR HIS MEMORIES OF WORKING ON THE ACCLAIMED PLATFORMER

WORDS BY LIAM HEITMANN-RYCE-LEMERCIER



IN THE KNOW

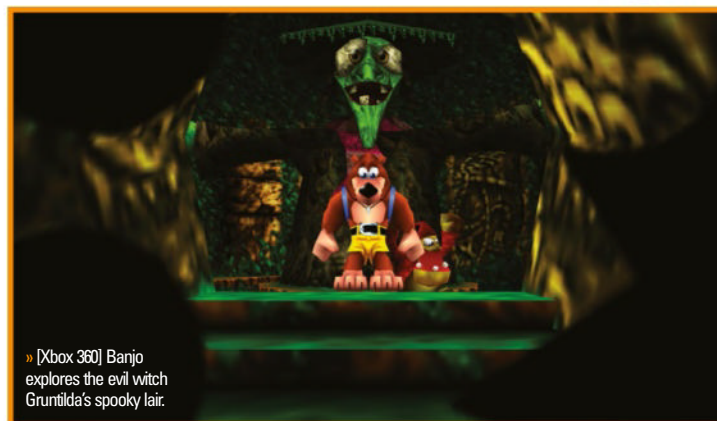
- » **SYSTEM:**
NINTENDO 64
- » **COMPOSER:**
GRANT KIRKHOPE
- » **DEVELOPER:**
RARE
- » **RELEASE:**
JUNE 1998
- » **BEST TRACK:**
CLICK CLOCK WOOD
(SPRING)

Shifting more than 3.6 million copies in its lifetime, *Banjo-Kazooie* has secured its place as one of the top-ten best-selling N64 titles of all time – and it's easy to see why. Teleporting between huge, colourful worlds, each with their own distinctive feel, the sense of adventure open to players made the first *Banjo-Kazooie* title an instant hit back in 1998.

Beyond the game's wonderfully sarcastic sense of humour, employed by developer Rare in the *Banjo* universe's roster of quirky characters, the player experience was also heightened significantly by the work of composer Grant Kirkhope.

Providing an insanely catchy soundtrack that serves just as well within the game itself as a standalone listening experience, the Scottish composer – now residing in the US, where he has been based since leaving Rare over 15 years ago – gave us one of gaming's most memorable theme tunes.

» [Xbox 360] Spend too long underwater and Banjo will float belly-up back to the surface.

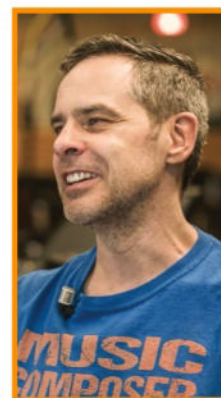


» [Xbox 360] Banjo explores the evil witch Gruntilda's spooky lair.

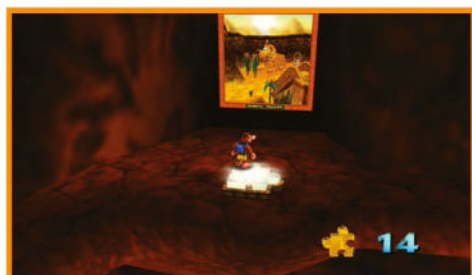
But making an earworm out of the unlikely fusion between banjo and kazoo is still a musical feat which, nearly three decades later, Grant can't quite say how he pulled off. He admits that he just closed his eyes and imagined what these instruments would have sounded like. "I thought it was a cool thing, to have to do it!" he says today, explaining that the N64's slim memory storage left little space for complex instrumentation. "You had to kind of make the best of it. It's nice to get those things that challenge you a little bit. I think it's good fun to do odd things, right?"

The peculiar musical pairing of the game's lead characters stemmed from an original design proposal that each character was going to be named after a musical instrument. It wasn't one which fully developed, but Banjo still remained, as did Kazooie – though she was supposed to have been affiliated with a flute and her original name was Tootie.

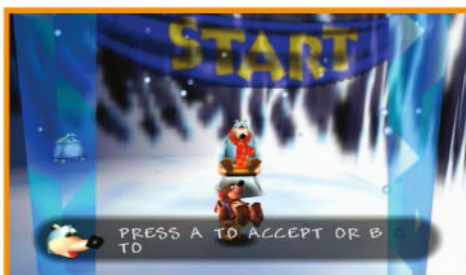
Creative guidance was largely left up to Grant to find his own inspirations, humming



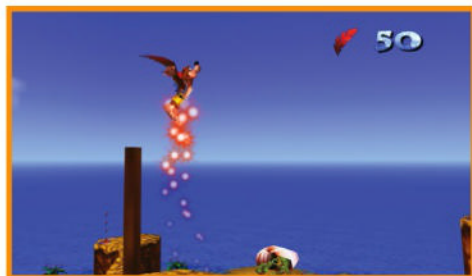
■ Grant Kirkhope wrote the music for three *Banjo-Kazooie* titles, with input from Robin Beanland and Dave Clynick for the final game *Nuts & Bolts*. He left developer Rare in 2008 and now lives in America.



» [Xbox 360] Collecting enough Jiggly pieces will unlock painting portals to different levels across the game.



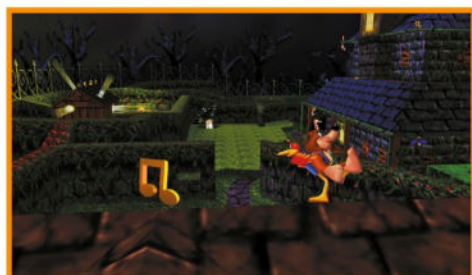
» [Xbox 360] Racing against Boggy The Polar Bear on sleds in Freezezy Peak



what he could in the shower while gaining some sense of the overall mood of each level from their playfully evocative names. However, he did occasionally engage the input of lead developer Gregg Mayles, who offered visual insights into the level design and how his music should complement the aesthetics of each distinct environment.

"He'd give me a brief description, and I'd go away and write it," Grant tells us about those exchanges. "You'd kinda close your eyes and think, what does Treasure Trove Cove sound like? What does Mumbo's Mountain sound like? I don't think there's much more to it than that! I could see the level a bit, if it was built; and if not, I'd just use my imagination."

One of the assets for Grant's creative process – which also enhanced the fun factor for players in the final product – was the wonderfully immersive, colourful settings of each level. Their bright palettes and clearly distinguished atmospheres made Grant's job as the composer reasonably straightforward in



"YOU KNOW, I WOULD ALWAYS TRY TO FIND MUSIC THAT WOULD FIT A DUMB BEAR AND A SARCASTIC BIRD! THEY'RE TOTAL OPPOSITES"
GRANT KIRKHOPE

the game's development period. A clear example, he recalls, is the aforementioned Treasure Trove Cove, a sprawling coastal map where players begin on the shore and navigate their way through a pirate ship, and all the way up to a lighthouse perched atop a cliff. "You know," he says, "it's a beachy thing, so you use steel drums, right? It's obvious so that's what I did, those kinds of things were what I had to compose."

There were many instances in which Grant composed his *Banjo* soundtrack based on the general vibes his internal antenna detected, even from within the development team. The playful, sprightly tone of Grant's soundtrack was a strong reflection of the Rare team's own cheeky sense of humour, which ultimately bled into the sass and sarcasm of the game's characters.

It's a credit to British humour, he says, that, "The team took the piss out of each other all day long, just like in the game, right? That's why I think people liked it, it just felt real, almost. You know, I would always try to find music that would fit a dumb bear and a sarcastic bird. I had to find some kind of quirky, oddball music to fit that."

It was the extremity of differences between a dopey, well-meaning bear and the sharp-tongued bird squeezed into his backpack that led Grant to veer away from the pop-infused, jazzy tones of classic Nintendo titles. The developers did, after all, have *Super Mario 64* in their sights as a mainline competitor, so it was not the goal to precisely replicate what had made that game so popular in 1996.

RARE'S STOP 'N' SWOP FEATURE

The ambitious, scrapped multi-game save system for the N64

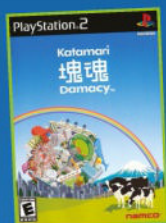
■ An unused mechanic linking *Banjo-Kazooie* and its sequel *Banjo-Tooie* was the mysterious Stop 'N' Swop feature, in which players had to collect items in the first game which would then unlock special features in the sequel. It required players to collect one of six coloured eggs, and a mysterious Ice Key, and then quickly pull out the *Banjo-Kazooie* N64 cartridge to then swop it for the *Banjo-Tooie* cartridge.

This mechanic utilised a glitch in early N64 consoles that enabled RAM to linger between boot-ups, effectively allowing memory storage to transfer from one game to another. However, the feature was scrapped after Nintendo warned Rare against potential damage to N64 consoles, and later revisions to the system made RAM clearances occur faster and render the swop impossible to achieve in time.

Stop 'N' Swop makes an odd reappearance as an Easter egg in Rare's 2003 beat-'em-up *Grabbed By The Ghoulies*, the developer's first Xbox title. A classroom whiteboard shows an equation of 'four eggs + key = ?'



Grant penned the score for the sequel *Banjo-Tooie*, released on N64 in 2000, and revisited the series for his final soundtrack with Rare, *Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts* in 2008. It's a series for which he continues to hold positive feelings, especially the original 1998 release. "It was the first game in my career where I got to do all the music and the sound effects," he says. "It was completely up to me how the whole game was going to sound. So that was special for me. And the fact it still has a place in people's hearts after all these years, I feel like I'm always going to think of *Banjo-Kazooie* very fondly." ✨



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:**
NAMCO
- » **DEVELOPER:**
NAMCO
- » **PLATFORM:**
PLAYSTATION 2
- » **RELEASED:**
2004
- » **GENRE:**
PUZZLE, ACTION

THE MAKING OF Katamari 塊魂 Damacy



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

WE LOVE KATAMARI

RELEASED: 2005

PLATFORM:
PLAYSTATION 2

NOBY NOBY BOY

RELEASED: 1993

PLATFORM:
PLAYSTATION 3, IOS

TO A T (PICTURED)

RELEASED: 2025

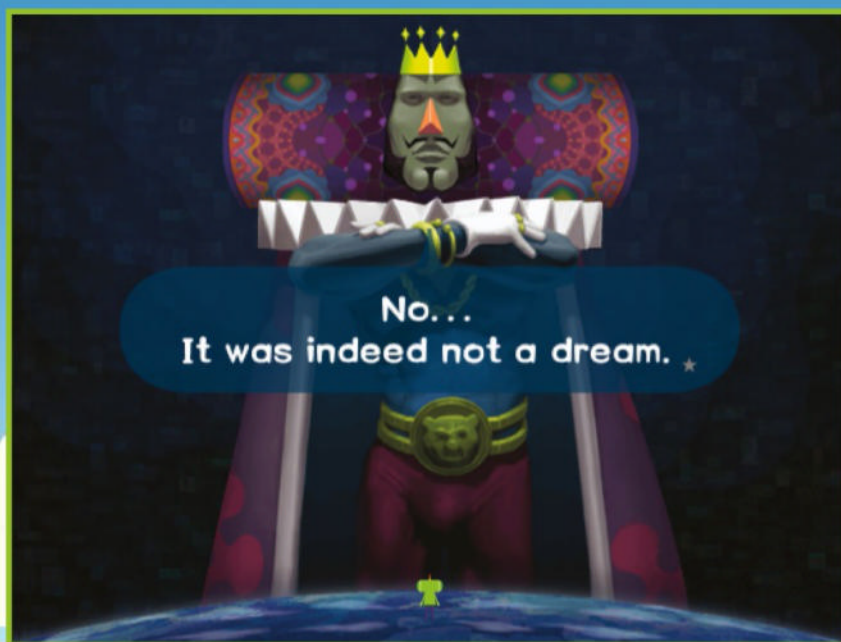
PLATFORM:
PLAYSTATION 5,
XBOX SERIES S/X

KEITA TAKAHASHI TALKS US THROUGH HIS JOURNEY FROM ART-SCHOOL ODDBALL TO WORLDWIDE ACCLAIM AS THE CREATOR OF THE PS2 CLASSIC KATAMARI DAMACY. ALONG THE WAY WE DISCUSS GOAT-SHAPED FLOWERPOTS, DESIGNING PLAYGROUNDS, HIS ENDLESS WISH TO MAKE PEOPLE SMILE AND HIS NEW GAME, TO A T

WORDS BY JAMES TOCCHIO



■ Keita Takahashi was a 3D artist at Namco when he created the iconic PS2 game *Katamari Damacy*. He now makes games at his own independent company, Uvula.



» [PlayStation 2] The King Of All Cosmos is quite an imposing (and irresponsible) figure.



» [PlayStation 2] Simple tutorials explaining how the game works are displayed as cute flashcards like this one.



» [PlayStation 2] Humans don't seem to notice the Katamari, until they're rolled up in one!

It's characteristic of Keita Takahashi to be humble.

In our hour-long conversation the creator of *Katamari Damacy* apologises no less than nine times for such criminal offences as: being tired, for being bad at interviews, for making "stupid games", for his "silly answers", for being a game designer instead of a doctor or a teacher or a musician, and for the fact that he must charge money for his games. For a creator whose work is beloved by millions and has been exhibited at the Museum Of Modern Art in New York City, he's almost pathologically understated. "I was just lucky," he says almost bashfully. "I still don't understand. I still don't believe that I have been working on videogames for 20 years. It's crazy."

But let's go back to the beginning and discover how *Katamari Damacy* came to be, because as an art student, Takahashi was unsure where his path would lead. "The art school was for four years," he says. "I thought this would be the last freedom for me before I go to a company. I have one big concern, which is, I like to make something, draw something, but I'm in the sculpture department, which is very unnecessary stuff. So, I had no idea how to earn money after I graduated school. I was not clear what I wanted to do."

He thinks for a long moment before speaking, another trait that's characteristic, and then with a grin, continues. "And the answer is super simple and stupid. It's still precious to me, even after I graduate, even after 20 or 30 years. What I want to do is make people smile." Takahashi pauses once again, as if deciding what to say next. Then suddenly he says, "I made a goat-shaped flowerpot. Do you know this story?"

Takahashi has told the story before. In art school, he was studying with people who were becoming artists, making things that were beautiful and serious. One requirement of the program was that completed work was to be presented in a sort of show and tell, but something about these presentations bothered Takahashi. "I wanted to make a tool rather than art," he says. "Because I saw the other students just throw away the stuff they made after the presentation, which I really hated. If I make a tool, then I



» [PlayStation 2] The sheer number and variety of objects in the game is astonishing – and hilarious.



» [PlayStation 2] Rolling up certain objects, like a cute couple, will elicit comments from the King.

can keep using this, and I like that idea. So, that's why I made things like a table that can transform into a robot, and a goat-shaped flowerpot, or planter.

"The big moment came when I made a presentation of my goat flowerpot. I

put the water in the watering can, and then added the water on the back of the goat, [and the excess] water drained from the... how do you say this... boobs? And I saw all the students and professors start laughing and smiling, and I thought, 'Oh, this is what I want to do. This is much nicer than [making] something beautiful.'"

After graduating, Takahashi was hired at Namco as a 3D artist, but after almost two years, the arcade prototype projects to which he'd been attached were cancelled. "But I was just the artist, so it was not my fault. Maybe," he laughs. "But my boss protected me. He knew what I wanted, and I was so picky. He asked if I wanted to join the other regular projects, but I couldn't decide, and I just asked him to give me more time. And

"EVEN AFTER 20 OR 30 YEARS. WHAT I WANT TO DO IS MAKE PEOPLE SMILE"
JAMES TOCCHIO

then the *Katamari* idea came to me. I just saw it. It was great timing. I presented a pitch of the idea to my boss, and he said, 'That may be cool.'"

But Takahashi was a 3D artist and had no training or experience in directing a game. He also had no team and no funding. His boss, the one who had protected him, once again came to the rescue. "My boss knew that it was going to be difficult to use the regular path to get the green light. But he was working to teach students how to make 3D models, and the curriculum was to have them create a game," Takahashi tells us. "So, my boss picked my [*Katamari*] idea as their prototype game. Then we hired an engineer who was almost fired from the company, I forget the reason, but the other department wanted to get rid of them and we rescued them. So [the whole team was] a student, an artist, an almost-fired engineer and then me, as a beginner, an amateur, a no-experience game designer."





» [PlayStation 2] You start out so small that even a gang of mice is a threat.



» [PlayStation 2] Soon you're big enough that human beings are about to get Katamari'd!



» [PlayStation 2] Certain tasks, like making the constellations, have special rules. For Pisces, you must roll up fish.

► Though the game would eventually release exclusively on PlayStation 2, the initial prototype was made for Nintendo's GameCube, as the project engineer was more comfortable with that system. After six months, the team's prototype was displayed in an art show as a student project, after which the team demonstrated *Katamari* to the executives at Namco. "Namco was making very similar types of games at that time, like racing games, shooting games, RPGs. But nothing new. They made more unique games in the Eighties and Nineties. I wanted to make a unique game that you can only play as a game. You know, if you have a car, you can drive a car, or you can play football. You don't need a football videogame, right?"

Despite coming up with an interesting concept, Takahashi faced pressure from Namco's higher ups. "They liked the prototype but were reluctant to spend money on such a different game. They wanted to use an outsourcing company

"I WANTED TO MAKE A UNIQUE GAME THAT YOU CAN ONLY PLAY AS A GAME"
KEITA TAKAHASHI

in Osaka, not Namco itself, which was in Yokohama. I wanted to work inside Namco, but it was better than nothing, so I said, 'OK, let me go to the outsourcing company.' And I moved to Osaka."

The plot of *Katamari Damacy* is absurd. After the King Of All Cosmos accidentally destroys the stars in the sky, he commands his son, the Prince, to go down to Earth to roll up everything he can into giant balls of stuff which the King can use to recreate the stars. The gameplay is simple. As the Prince, the player pushes a sticky ball called a Katamari. By moving the analog

sticks of the game controller, the player can roll the sticky ball to collect objects in the environment. As the ball collects more objects, it grows and is thus able to collect more and bigger objects.

You start the game in a typical Japanese home, collecting tiny thumbtacks, paperclips and batteries, and then you're in the yard collecting fruit and mice and potted plants. Then you're in the neighbourhood collecting scooters and vending machines and dogs and cats. Eventually, you roll up sumo wrestlers and giant squids, cities and islands, until a grand finale has you rolling up almost planet-sized balls of stuff.

Takahashi and his team decided early on that simplicity would be key. "My understanding was the GPU was not so strong in the PS2, but we wanted to show a lot of objects, so each object had to be simple, low-poly. Then this became the decision for the art style. If it's low-poly, then the texture should also be simple. I spoke to the art director, and he agreed,



TAKAHASHI HIGHLIGHTS

"THIS IS WHAT I WANT TO MAKE PEOPLE SMILE"



KATAMARI DAMACY

2004 • PS2

■ The game that launched Keita Takahashi's career, and one which has warmed the hearts of millions for over two decades, *Katamari Damacy* simply must be experienced by anyone who loves videogames. It's an all-timer from a game designer who wants nothing more than to make people smile.



WE LOVE KATAMARI

2005 • PS2

■ The sequel to Takahashi's breakout hit, *We Love Katamari* is just more of a very good thing. It adds several effective augments to the *Katamari* formula, and it's the game that gave us the infamous snorkelling low-poly cat. For that alone, we love it indeed.



NOBY NOBY BOY

2009 • PS3, iOS

■ The player can stretch to earn points, which when combined with all other online players' points unlock other planets (levels) throughout the solar system. The entire solar system was embraced in a stretching hug on 14 December 2015, triggering the official end of the game.



» [PlayStation 2] Eventually, not even monster trucks are safe from being rolled up.

and I know people love that simpleness.” With the concept, plot and art direction set, Takahashi modelled and animated the game’s main character. “I made the Prince model myself. Also, the animations. I like to do that. I like modelling and making pictures. I like art, but I wasn’t at an art company. I was at a videogame company, so I wanted to make [my own] videogame rather than be an artist.”

The broader team focussed their efforts on making each simple component as charming and whimsical as possible. Each of the hundreds of collectible objects is simply perfect. As you roll your Katamari through the landscape, each item you collect is temporarily displayed as a tiny, spinning model at the corner of the screen. This small addition to the experience creates an out-sized feeling of cosy anticipation. What will you collect next? And then you momentarily glimpse

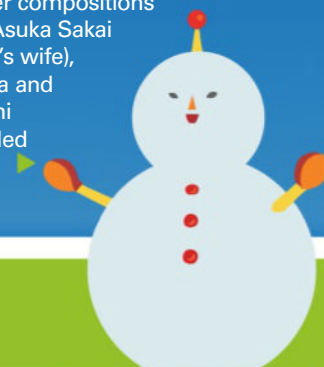


a low-poly sumo wrestler, a lovingly modelled videogame system, the cutest frog ever made from polygons.

Takahashi wished to keep the gameplay simple, too. Like so many great designers, he was always considering how to refine things to their purest form. “I didn’t know what the definition of a videogame should be,” he tells us. “I don’t care about genre or category. We don’t need to lose or win. [Often] videogames are about fighting, or solving a puzzle, or timing, like in a music game, but [I thought] there could be more.” Instead of filling the game with

extraneous controls, game modes and complications, Takahashi stuck to his core idea of rolling stuff up.

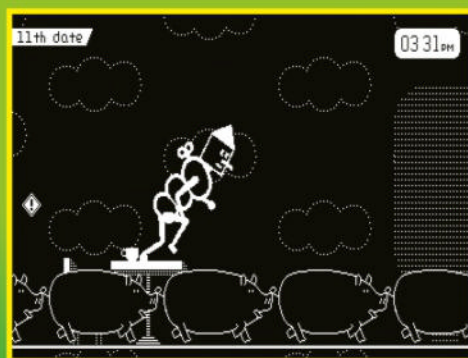
Katamari Damacy is held together by one of the most eclectic and gleeful musical scores in gaming. Sound direction was handled by Yuu Miyake, who also composed seven of the songs, with other compositions contributed by Asuka Sakai (Keita Takahashi’s wife), Akitaka Tohyama and others. Takahashi didn’t give detailed directions in



WATTAM

2019 • PS4, PC

■ A puzzle game, which Takahashi describes as “[being] about connection and exploring”, the object of *Wattam* is to befriend the inhabitants of the world by holding hands, uncovering secrets and solving puzzles. With *Wattam*, Takahashi wished to convey that “our ordinary life is great”.



CRANKIN'S TIME TRAVEL ADVENTURE

2022 • Playdate

■ An ingenious game for Panic’s Playdate handheld (the little yellow machine with the rotating crank), *CTTA* is about manipulating time by turning a crank. Takahashi made it in part “to prove I could make a difficult, like, FromSoftware game”. And yet it’s still a cutie.



TO A T

2025 • PS5, Xbox, PC

■ The newest game from Takahashi, *To A T* is a narrative coming-of-age story about a teenager who’s stuck in a T-pose, and the difficulty that comes with growing up as an oddball in a small, Japanese town. It’s an earnest, endearing and incredibly funny game.



► this area, instead allowing Miyake and his team to create whatever music they felt would work best for the game's unique style. The soundtrack bounces between electronic music, techno beats, jazz and samba-influenced tunes, and J-pop bops complete with effervescent vocals from well-known Japanese artists. The iconic title screen song was produced by Miyake by experimentally humming, "Na-na na-na-na-na-na-na-*Katamari Damacy*."

Katamari's soundtrack would win several Soundtrack Of The Year awards in 2004 and has gone on to be an ever-present favourite wherever people discuss game music. Despite its uncertain start, *Katamari Damacy* was completed in just over a year. Sales in Japan exceeded expectations, and when the game released worldwide later

that year, it became a surprise hit. Namco naturally wanted a sequel, which Takahashi refused. True to his type, he wanted to create something new. "I refused to make a sequel at first," he admitted. "But they still wanted to make it even without me, which I hated. So, I decided maybe just one sequel, then I'll leave." And that's what he did. Following *We Love Katamari* (2005), Takahashi soon went independent, charting an idiosyncratic course.

At the end of our hour together, we ask Takahashi what we think is an easy question, "What's the best part of your job?" The expectation is that we'll end the interview with some philosophical insight into the process of game creation presented by a real thinker. Instead, it goes the other way. "This is tiny stuff, but I really like the moment when we see stupid, super unexpected, but also super silly bugs," he laughs.

And how many times has Takahashi had the pleasure of finding bugs in his just-released game, *To A T?* "It's a lot. At least a thousand," he says. We point out to Takahashi that he must feel very lucky if discovering all these bugs in his new game is his favourite part of game development. Takahashi sighs a deep sigh, smiles enigmatically, then laughs. "It's not true, I

"I'M SORRY IT'S A STUPID ANSWER, BUT SOMETIMES I FEEL BAD BEING A GAME DEVELOPER"
KEITA TAKAHASHI

think." We ask Takahashi what he feels is the worst part of being a game developer, and he frowns, this time pausing for a full minute. Finally, he answers. "I don't want to be so serious about this, but... getting money by making videogames is itself amazing. It's a miracle for me. I'm not a teacher. I'm not a doctor. I'm not making any necessary product, but I can get money to live, which is great." He stops to think once again.

"I'm sorry it's a stupid answer, but sometimes I feel bad being a game developer because while I'm happy to see people be happy when they play my games, playing videogames requires so much." As we ponder this reply he goes on to say. "You need a TV, and you need hardware and internet, also a couch, and electricity, a place to play. So much stuff you need to buy, and then finally you get the game, which is tons of effort and financial requirement. It feels so bad," he continues. "But if I was a musician or something, I could just go to a public space and sing or play the guitar and people could pass by and listen to my voice and feel some impression which doesn't need any commitment from them."



► [PlayStation 2] By the last few levels, you have enough time to make that Katamari absolutely massive.

IT'S ALL KATAMARI-ESQUE

SIMILAR GAMES TO TAKAHASHI'S ROLL-'EM-UP



TASTY PLANET SERIES

2006-2018 • PC

■ In *Tasty Planet*, you start life as a sentient bathroom cleaner that absorbs any germs it meets. Unfortunately for the universe, you don't know when to stop growing. Eventually the grey goo is devouring whole cities, planets, even the fabric of space and time!



TORNADO OUTBREAK

2009 • PS3, Xbox 360, Wii

■ *Tornado Outbreak* has the player controlling an ever-growing tornado as it twists and tears through cities, absorbing everything in its path. The absurd premise and physics-based destruction echo *Katamari*'s playful hook. It released to little fanfare, but has since sucked in its fair share of fans.



THE MUNCHABLES

2009 • Wii

■ Developed by Now Production Co (the same company which worked with Keita Takahashi on *Katamari Damacy*), *The Munchables* is an action platformer in which the player must traverse cute environments and grow by chowing down on enemies and objects to complete missions.



DONUT COUNTRY

2018 • PS4, Various

■ As in *Katamari*, the core of *Donut Country* is an unusual concept. Here, you manoeuvre a hole in the ground to gobble everything up, solve puzzles and fix the blundering pranks of your best friend (who is a raccoon). This great game has an amazing soundtrack and beautiful art.



► [PlayStation 2] Hidden objects and Easter eggs are everywhere, including this one, the Loch Ness Monster.

The answer is unexpected, to say the least. We mention that it sounds like Takahashi would just be happy to give his games away. That he could make people happy without asking anything in return. "Yeah," he answers. "That's why I wanted to create the playground."

Keita Takahashi's 2009 playground design project stalled over difficulty in securing funding, and he has not yet realised his dream to build a playground. "I know it's not free, because it's based on a tax. But [unlike a videogame] it's there and anyone can enjoy it whenever, without paying." He gazes off somewhere, thinking again. "Maybe I need to be a billionaire and make my own playground, open to the public."

We joke that if his new game sells enough copies, he could spend all his money making endless, free public playgrounds. "Yes, please. And then I'll live at the playground that I made." He's joking too, but now it's our turn to think. "That's sort of beautiful in a way," we say. Takahashi smiles. "Yes, I think so." ★



TAKAHASHI'S LATEST

KEITA TELLS A MORE INTIMATE TALE

■ In many ways, Keita Takahashi's newest game, *To A T*, is very obviously a Takahashi game. It's dripping with cuteness and aesthetic simplicity, it has lovely, charming characters, it's a bit weird, and it has a phenomenally catchy and eclectic soundtrack. But unlike most of his previous work, the game's narrative takes centre stage.

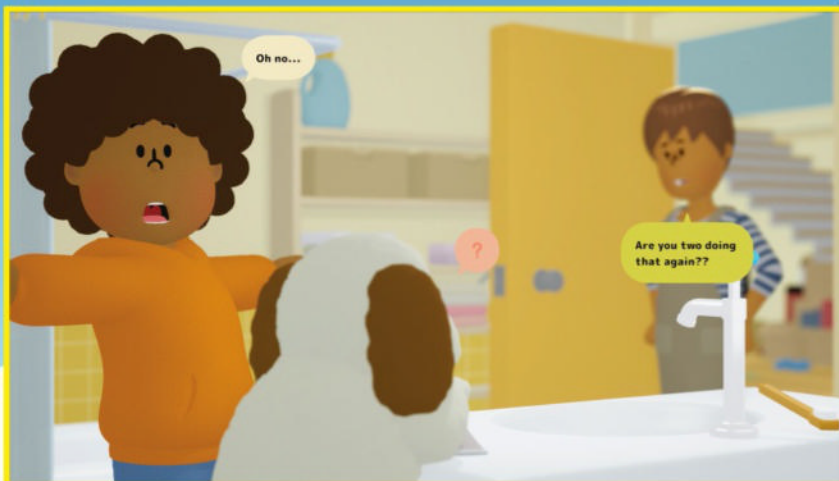
"I think I was cursed with interactivity. *Katamari* is about rolling. *Noby Noby Boy* is about stretching, and *Wattam* is about connection. With *To A T*, I didn't make interactivity the first priority," Takahashi says. "[I wanted] more mood and atmosphere, like a nice vibe. Because of the current situation, our real world is [not] so nice. I wanted to make something very positive to put the spotlight on our normal lives."

To A T is set in the microcosms of a small Japanese town and a middle-school classroom. You play as a student whose arms are inexplicably stuck in a T-pose. Bullied by classmates, the protagonist must navigate daily life despite their difference. Small emotional moments are explored in cosy, episodic vignettes, which are often populated

by unpredictable minigames and punctuated with an infectious soundtrack composed by Asuka Sakai, Keita's wife.

For this game, Takahashi drew from his own childhood. "Part of the reason I picked school time, is I was bullied," he confides. "But somehow, I survived through that time very nicely, which is also another lucky [thing] for me, and I learned a lot from that hard time. When I look back, that was a nice experience, but I know when I was younger that it was very tough. Maybe the reason I was bullied was because I was fat, but if there's a person in your class that's stuck in a T-pose, it's the same thing."

To A T is wholesome, hilarious, and fun, but it has something to say, too. Especially for those who feel bullied, isolated, or less abled than the people around them, *To A T* is remarkably poignant. Like *Katamari Damacy* before it, *To A T* feels like a game we'll still be talking about in twenty years. When asked about his ultimate hope for *To A T*, Takahashi thinks for a moment, then quietly speaks. "If it makes people smile or makes them happy, that's it." He shrugs and nods his head. "That's it."



Hardware Heaven



SwanCrystal fact

■ Tanita Corporation's Mama Mitte, a scale designed to track the health of pregnant mothers and their children, included a SwanCrystal for receiving and displaying data from the scale.

PROCESSOR: 16-BIT SPGY-1003 CPU (3.072MHZ, NEC V30-COMPATIBLE)

GRAPHICS: 224X144 RESOLUTION, 4,096 COLOURS AVAILABLE (UP TO 256 ON-SCREEN), TWO TILE MAPS, UP TO 128 SPRITES (32 PER LINE)

POWER: 1XAA BATTERY (UP TO 15 HOURS)

MEDIA: ROM CARTRIDGE (UP TO 16MB)

AUDIO: FOUR 4-BIT PCM CHANNELS

MEMORY: 64KB RAM

SUPPLIED BY
**EVAN
AMOS**

SwanCrystal

» MANUFACTURER: Bandai » YEAR: 2002

» COST: ¥7,800 (launch), £140+ (today, boxed), £110+ (today, unboxed)

Although the WonderSwan Color had enjoyed a brief window of appeal upon its release, the arrival of the Game Boy Advance trampled all over it – weekly sales of Bandai's machine more or less halved in the weeks approaching the launch of Nintendo's machine, and never recovered in a sustained way afterwards. To stimulate interest in its format, Bandai introduced the SwanCrystal in the summer of 2002. The primary improvement was replacing the FSTN LCD screen of the WonderSwan Color, which was dark and prone to motion blur, with a brighter and more responsive TFT display.

The hardware did its job well and provided a temporary sales bump. Unfortunately, the SwanCrystal's launch date was also the date of the final WonderSwan release from Square, the platform's most prominent third-party publisher. Bandai tried to appeal with games based on popular properties such as *Gundam*, *Digimon* and *One Piece*, but with the release schedule soon shrinking to just one or two games per month, the writing was on the wall. The WonderSwan family of consoles was discontinued by the end of 2003. ★



ESSENTIAL GAME

Guilty Gear Petit 2

If you want to put the improved screen of the SwanCrystal to the test, the fast action of a fighting game is a good way to do it, and this cutesy spin on the *Guilty Gear X* games is arguably the best the platform has to offer. The gameplay has been adjusted well to suit the reduced number of buttons and while the first *Guilty Gear Petit* had a disappointingly small roster, the sequel doubles it to a robust 14 characters – including Fanny, a nurse character exclusive to the *Petit* games.

THE MAKING OF

押忍! 闘え! 応援団

OSU! TATAKAE! OUENDAN



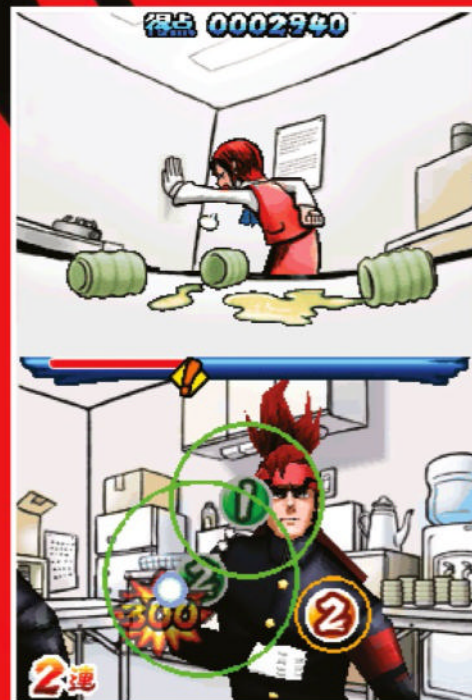
IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** INIS CORPORATION
- » **PLATFORM:** DS
- » **RELEASED:** 2005
- » **GENRE:** RHYTHM ACTION

» [Nintendo DS] The Cleopatra vignette is the only level not set in Japanese society, though its fat-shaming hasn't aged well.

OUENDAN WAS ONE OF THE EARLY IMPORT CULT HITS THAT SHOWCASED THE NINTENDO DS' TECH WITH ITS OWN DUAL FUNCTION OF RHYTHM GAMEPLAY AND STORYTELLING WITH HOT-BLOODED EMOTIONS. WE SPEAK WITH FORMER TEAM MEMBERS OF INIS ON HOW THEY MADE THIS UNIQUE MANGA-INSPIRED CHEERLEADING GAME

WORDS BY ALAN WEN



» [Nintendo DS] The camera zooms in on your ouendan's face under pressure when their Kiai is low from bad inputs.

The Noughties was a sensational time for music-based games. But while some of the bigger headline releases like *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* were about simulating playing music, some of the most memorable were about synchronising the rhythm gameplay with a story that had charming characters you could easily root for. This had started back with 1996's *PaRappa The Rapper* on Sony's PlayStation, and other story-driven rhythm games had also originated in Japan. But *Ose! Tatakae! Ouendan*, as you might guess from its exclamatory title, was uniquely and culturally Japanese.

For those unfamiliar with the concept, ouendan are basically cheerleaders, usually from Japanese high school or university sporting events rallying support for a team. However, they differ from the image we tend to have of acrobatic teenage girls waving pom-poms in skimpy outfits. Instead, these are usually male cheer squads making a lot of noise with taiko drums, yelling their support through megaphones with a distinctly hot-blooded macho passion. They also look a lot more serious dressed in long black coats. "It was strange and unique to me but I thought it was really interesting," David Ventura tells us, as one of two foreign staff members at iNiS at the time. For people in Japan however, the concept of ouendan is very common.

Main programmer Norihide Okada adds, "The bankara culture [defined by masculine strength and being unconcerned with outward appearances] in the Meiji-period has a deep connection in the roots of ouendan. In the development of our game, I think we embraced this kind of legacy."

Ouendan have also been depicted in anime and manga, a famous one that is also influential in the aesthetics of this game being Shonen manga *Sakigake!!*

Otokojuku, which both Okada and character designer Atsushi Saito were fans of. "In the initial concepts, the game was like a top-down view of a baseball stadium, and if the ouendans' cheering went well, your team would score more and more points, and if your team won, you won," Saito recalls of *Ouendan*'s original conception, which was designed and directed by iNiS cofounder Keiichi Yano. "Then our first internal proposal was for an immersive arcade game that would be played using the whole body. The game system was different, but the basic concept of the characters and the outline of the story that I came up with at this point were still used in the final product."

Despite approaching game companies with a reputation for music-based arcade games like Konami and Sega (David recalls a design involving holding up motion-detected flags, which doesn't sound too dissimilar from the mechanics of *Samba De Amigo*), the pitch unfortunately didn't go anywhere. In fact, iNiS was actually facing some difficulties, following the release of 2001's *Gitaroo Man*, which garnered critical acclaim but didn't meet sales expectations, and the company found itself working on different prototypes in the few years

"THE BANKARA CULTURE IN THE MEIJI-PERIOD HAS A DEEP CONNECTION IN THE ROOTS OF OUENDAN"
NORIHIDE OKADA

that followed. "iNiS tried to make genres other than rhythm, making prototypes of platform action games and action RPGs, but none of them worked out," says Saito.

What eventually made

Ouendan possible was after iNiS abandoned its action RPG prototype (two years in the making!) when some team members, including Saito, visited Los Angeles in 2004 for E3, which was where Nintendo revealed its new revolutionary handheld, the DS. This was also the same conference where Sony revealed its rival handheld the PSP. Yet despite the superior graphical capabilities and the studio's experience in developing for a Sony platform (iNiS would however make *Gitaroo Man Lives!* for the PSP later), it was the DS' innovations, from its dual screen to the stylus functionality, that proved more attractive. "We unanimously agreed that the DS was more exciting for us, so we decided to come up with a plan for the DS and go pitch it to Nintendo as soon as we returned to Japan," Saito explains.



David Ventura was the tools programmer for *Ouendan*. He continues developing music-based games at his own studio, 151A. He also kindly translated Saito and Okada's interviews.



Atsushi Saito was in charge of the original planning, character design and animation direction for *Ouendan*. He now runs an indie game company called Atelier Mimina.



Norihide Okada was the main programmer for *Ouendan* and continued working on iNiS's other titles, though he also has an engineering credit on the Wii game *Disaster: Day Of Crisis*.





DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

GITAROO MAN (PICTURED)

PLATFORM: PS2

RELEASED: 2001

ELITE BEAT AGENTS

PLATFORM: DS

RELEASED: 2006

LIPS

PLATFORM: XBOX 360

RELEASED: 2008

MORE OUENDAN

HOW OUENDAN 2 EXPANDS WITH A NEW RIVAL GROUP

■ To give its full title, *Moero! Nekketsu Rhythm Damashii Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan 2* released in Japan two years later, and while, as suggested in the name, it is essentially more *Ouendan*, it definitely feels improved over its predecessor, carrying over improvements already implemented in *Elite Beat Agents*. These included making Easy mode easier, while if you had to retry, you can skip cutscenes to the song much faster.

The biggest improvement was arguably in its storytelling, at least in the presentation rather than narrative if you don't understand Japanese. The visuals, both in the 3D models and the semi-animated manga panels, are more detailed, while you can navigate a full 3D world map when selecting levels. It also expands on the world of *Ouendan*, not only with a time jump (the first level is Hanada from the first level of the first game, now trying to get a job instead of studying for entrance exams), but by introducing a new set of rival ouendan, splitting the campaign up as you play as both squads helping out the people. Given that means new rival characters for each difficulty, as character designer, Saito recalls being against these new additions. "But it seems to have been well received by users, so it turned out to be a good thing in the end," he says.



» [Nintendo DS] You play as different ouendan based on the difficulty, with visual variety compensating for a limited number of songs.



» [Nintendo DS] A ghost wanting to reunite with his partner one last time is an exception to the otherwise comedic tone.

► Prior to the DS and smartphones, touch-screen technology wasn't really a concept, but it also meant that iNiS couldn't create a working demo as the company didn't have a dev kit for the DS hardware.

Saito nonetheless says that the idea of adapting the motion-control pitch for the arcade game to work for the stylus and touch-screen was straightforward. In any case, it was a novel change to rhythm action games where instead of tapping buttons on a controller in time with the beat, it was about doing this while tapping the notes displayed on the screen, which also made it more intuitive.

"IT IS VERY [MANGA], AND THEN WE'RE USING BOTH OF THE SCREENS TOGETHER TO BUILD A SINGLE PAGE."

DAVID VENTURA

in expressive over-the-top manga as everyday people work to overcome their struggles. They vary from the simple and relatable – a student cramming hard to pass his entrance exam, an overworked secretary trying

to get all her tasks done by five o'clock so she can make it to the company party – to the more absurd – a salaryman who must find courage to defeat Mousezilla, or two bumbling policemen saving the city from a robot invasion.

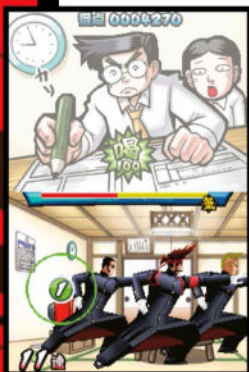
But just like the ouendan, the setting is also in Japan (with one exception) dealing with uniquely Japanese themes, such as a ramen shop or a matsu festival. "Since the game was developed primarily for the Japanese market, the story is also centred around social circumstances that resonate with Japanese people," says Okada. The very over-the-top facial expressions of the characters feeling at breaking point mixed with the hot-blooded passion to keep going from the ouendan, frequently heard shouting 'Osu!', a masculine Japanese expression that means 'push', in other words to keep going. It's not hard to see how the art style and philosophy of *Ouendan*, both light and comedic yet with a strong emotional message of support and resolve, appealed to Nintendo.

"What's interesting about ouendan is that they don't directly help people in trouble like superheroes, the people in trouble always work hard to solve problems on their own," says Saito. "After the game was released, we received fan letters from people who were feeling down because things weren't going well in real life. They told us that playing the game had cheered them up,

Taking about three months to prepare, the pitch consisted of a paper proposal and video mock-up of the DS screens. "We

had [Nintendo's reps] virtually experience it by tracing the moving video with a pen," Saito explains. "Nintendo's reaction was very positive from the beginning, and we immediately decided to move forward with the project. The quality of the video mock-up we made to pitch the game is still impressive even now."

Although the scenario in the demo, which involved a group of people coming together to save a puppy from danger, didn't make it into the final release (due to the realisation that it would require creating a bad ending where the puppy dies), the direction and tone carries through for the stories told in *Ouendan's* gameplay. While you technically play as the ouendan cheering and dancing, the heart of the game is undoubtedly experiencing the story vignettes depicted



» [Nintendo DS] You play as Hayato Saionji in the normal difficulty, as his rival cheer squad takes on half of the townspeople's problems.



» [Nintendo DS] Detailed portraits taking up both screens give a sense of narrative progression after completing a few levels

and I was really moved by this.” No doubt that message was just as effective for the team at iNiS who had been facing their own hardships to make another game.

While responsible for the programming tools for getting the music and animations in sync with the markers and paths of the notes you have to hit, David observes how the rest of *Ouendan*’s presentation was also a perfect fit for the DS. “When you look at the introduction of the stories at the beginning the way the story plays out, it’s top to bottom,” he explains. “So it is very [manga] and then we’re using both of the screens together to build a single page.”

As for when the songs start playing, the game is also neatly divided so that the top screen follows the story of that specific character while the bottom for gameplay shows the trio of ouendan



» [Nintendo DS] While you’ll be too focussed on the note markers, effects like hot flames and close-up shots indicate how you’re doing.



» [Nintendo DS] David says, “The [ouendan] usually aren’t the focus of the story, personality-wise. They’re very stoic guys.”

dancing along with the markers you need to interact with using the stylus.

It’s also notable how the visuals differ as the vignette continues with 2D art whereas the ouendan are 3D animated models, demonstrating the DS’s 3D rendering capabilities. From Okada’s recollection, the 3D rendering was actually easier, since it was limited to one screen and didn’t use any lighting. Saito further adds that 3D helped save memory on the game cartridges. “Also, if the ouendan were 2D, they wouldn’t be able to move around much. But it’s also difficult to create manga-style presentations in 3D on the DS hardware, so [the story] lent itself to 2D.”

While other DS games prior to *Ouendan*’s release would also have hit and slider mechanics, the most unique element is actually the spin marker, which requires spinning with the stylus until the gauge in the background is charged up before the circle around the marker disappears. ▶



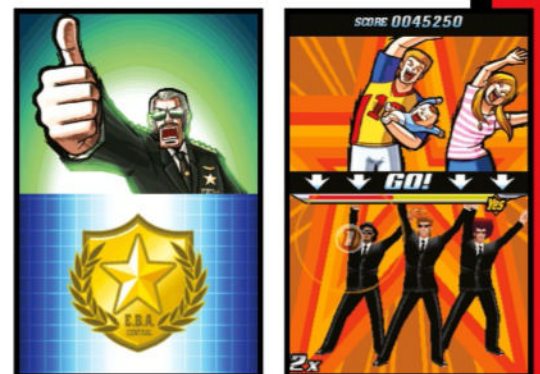
» [Nintendo DS] Even if you avoid a game over, poor performance can still result in a bad ending.

OVERSEAS ELITES

WESTERNISING THE OUENDAN GAMEPLAY WITH ELITE BEAT AGENTS

■ While the Western versions of the ouendan characters were initially inspired by the Village People, film influences like *The Blues Brothers* and *Men In Black* resulted in the cool agents dressed in black, not entirely dissimilar from the original black-clad ouendan. One notable difference is that due to their cool persona, the hot-blooded vibe which included on-screen flames no longer felt a suitable fit. While *Ouendan* also had a mentor in the tutorial, *Elite Beat Agents* leans on this further by having Commander Kahn, a *Charlie’s Angels*-type figure, who sends out the agents at the beginning of each song with his line, “Agents are goooooo!!!”

Developed after *Ouendan*, *EBA* has noticeably improved graphics, including a 3D world map, and successfully adapts the structure of story vignettes albeit with Western stereotypes, including high-school jocks, taxi drivers, celebrities and oil barons, as well as one involving a young Leonardo da Vinci finding his Mona Lisa. The soundtrack meanwhile consists of a lot of covers of punk pop artists like Avril Lavigne, Sum41 and Good Charlotte, capturing the Noughties frat party vibe, though there is also room for some more classic tunes, including The Rolling Stones’ *Jumpin’ Jack Flash*, a stellar choice for the game’s finale.



» [Nintendo DS] Instead of the fired-up expressions, characters in vignettes are shown dancing along with the agents.



» [Nintendo DS] A running theme of quite a few of these vignettes is romance with an objection of affection.



» [Nintendo DS] A full manga page using both screens, though these panels usually appear one at a time for effect.

» “The spin marker doesn’t feel like a rhythm game because you don’t have to match precise timing, you just turn it with all your might,” Saito explains. “It fits the atmosphere of ouendan perfectly and has a unique sense of excitement.”

On the flip side, it also features the **Kiai mechanic, which makes it a little more challenging than other rhythm games if you do poorly.** On one hand, it’s like a typical life bar which goes down when you make a mistake, but as the camera zooms in on your ouendan’s face when it’s almost depleted, it becomes more apparent that the gauge slowly goes down by itself, adding tension when trying to recover. “It’s like your life force is fading away because



» [Nintendo DS] The ouendan have novel ways of turning up to help, like as customers of a struggling ramen shop.

as you cheer less people become more fatigued and get more depressed,” David explains. “So once you slip off the beat, then maybe you’re going to start hitting everything off and it will just drag you down immediately.”

Besides the wacky visuals and intuitive touch controls, it’s the soundtrack that really makes *Ouendan*, even if the songs themselves may not necessarily have any connection to the stories, not just because the story came first before the songs, and also because these were licensed songs rather than original ones, and which the team made a long list of in case they couldn’t obtain the rights. Even then, the game only secured covers rather than the original recordings.

“When we made *Gitaroo Man*, original songs were still generally accepted in music games, but around 2004, it seems like more and more users bought music games because they have famous songs,” Saito laments. “Personally, I prefer original songs



MUSIC MAESTROS

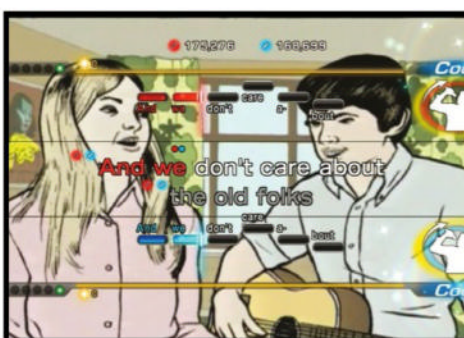
MORE MUSIC GAMES FROM INIS



GITAROO MAN

PLAYSTATION 2 • 2001

■ This big-hearted rhythm game about a young boy fighting aliens with a magic guitar to save the girl of his dreams was the cult hit that remains iNiS’s most beloved, with bold visuals from Japanese artist Mitsuru Nakamura and an original soundtrack from Japanese band COIL.



LIPS

XBOX 360 • 2008

■ Essentially Microsoft’s version of *SingStar*, this karaoke game made use of motion sensitive wireless microphones while even letting you use songs you owned on your iPod. While the game scores you in categories like rhythm, pitch and vibrato, it generously doesn’t fail you if you sing badly.



THE BLACK EYED PEAS EXPERIENCE

XBOX 360 • 2011

■ There were two versions of this twist on *Just Dance*, with iNiS working on the 360’s Kinect version where you create your own dance avatar then repeat the dance moves of The Black Eyed Peas. How much you’re into the pop-rap group will naturally factor into your enjoyment.

because it's difficult to release a soundtrack if you use famous songs."

The one exception is *Melody*, a song by Japanese ska band 175R, featured in the story vignette set during the matsuri festival, which does feature the original recording, albeit edited. "I think all the songs are great, but *Melody* is the best," Okada adds. "The concept and words are closely entwined with the theme of the game, and it also plays at the end credits."

Despite being a game with a concept and cultural themes that meant it was made exclusively for the Japanese market, *Ouendan's* release in 2005 ended up being a surprise cult hit for importers from the West, made easy thanks to the DS being a region-free device. There were also no qualms over the soundtrack being licensed or covered – in any case, the all-Japanese soundtrack added to its appeal. Its cult status however was perhaps not a factor in the decision behind overseas follow-up *Elite Beat Agents*, which after all arrived the following year. "We started developing the overseas version immediately after *Ouendan* was completed," Saito recalls. "It was decided right away that the gameplay system would be accepted outside of Japan, but the characters, setting, and music wouldn't work as they are, so we decided to create

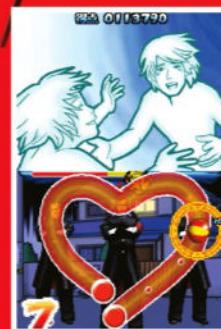
"OUENDAN DON'T DIRECTLY HELP PEOPLE IN TROUBLE LIKE SUPERHEROES. THE PEOPLE IN TROUBLE ALWAYS WORK HARD TO SOLVE PROBLEMS ON THEIR OWN"
ATSUSHI SAITO

them from scratch." Nonetheless, the games' critical acclaim didn't translate to popular success, which may explain why further follow-ups beyond the DS didn't materialise. Saito says there had been a

3DS prototype for *Ouendan 3* though, "I thought it was a good game, with the cheer squad popping out in 3D and a new rhythm gameplay system, but various things happened and it never made it to release."

Since then, iNiS also technically no longer exists, having rebranded on multiple occasions, and going by Liona Interactive since 2020, but with a very different business, while the interviewees of this feature have all since moved onto other pastures. Yet 20 years later, *Ouendan* remains one of the defining titles of iNiS and the rhythm genre. "It was the first game I worked on in my life, so it had a deep effect on me," says Okada. "I remember going to the store to see the packages on the day of its release, it's the happiest moment in game development."

But given the greater appreciation of Japanese culture in the West in recent years as well as Nintendo's willingness to remaster some deep cuts from its library like *Another Code* and *Famicom Detective Club* (the latter even getting a new entry), it's surely not impossible that maybe we'll see a fully localised revival of *Ouendan*. Perhaps all it needs is a bit of a push to make it happen. Osu! ★



» [Nintendo DS] The finale sees all the game's characters come together to stop a meteor from destroying the planet.



DEMON'S SCORE

IOS/ANDROID • 2012

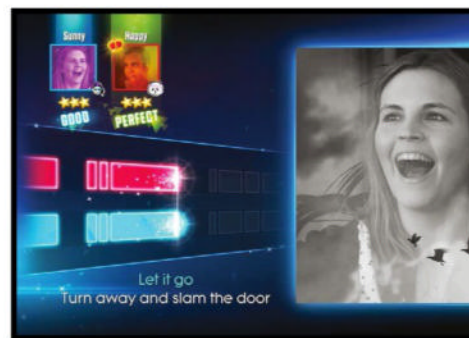
■ On one hand this updates *Ouendan's* rhythm marker touch and swiping gameplay to mobile devices with Unreal graphics. On the other, it has a very weird demonic rock fantasy aesthetic where you unlock more skimpy outfits for your heroine, who also befriends a talking teddy bear.



THE HIP HOP DANCE EXPERIENCE

WII/XBOX 360 • 2012

■ A continuation of the *Experience* spin-off but with even more variety when it comes to customising your avatars. Unlike *The Black Eyed Peas*, the 40-track soundtrack also covers a lot more ground, from early rap pioneers The Sugarhill Gang to contemporaries like MIA and Wiz Khalifa.



JUST SING

PLAYSTATION 4/XBOX ONE • 2016

■ The developer's last commercial release as iNiS returned to karaoke in a spin-off to *Just Dance*, which also let you record lip-sync videos if you weren't into belting out the tunes yourself. Sadly, Ubisoft pulled the plug on the game's online mode just 18 months after release.





Power Stone

MORE POWER, MORE POSSIBILITIES

» RETROREVIVAL



» DREAMCAST » 1999 » CAPCOM
As the UK launch of the Dreamcast approached in the autumn of 1999, one of the games that really caught my imagination was *Power Stone*.

After years of excellent 2D fighters, Capcom was taking advantage of the next-gen hardware to do a chaotic fighting game in proper 3D arenas, all the magazines loved it and the still shots looked great. I was desperate to find out whether it lived up to the hype, but that wasn't straightforward – I never saw it on demo units, and I even had to exchange the first copy I got, because it didn't work.

Thankfully, it was a sheer delight when I finally got to experience it for myself. Those 3D arenas aren't quite as large as I'd imagined they would be, but it quickly became obvious that their compact nature works to keep fights close and chaotic – and wow, are they ever chaotic. Part of that is because of the obvious offensive items like swords and bombs, but I personally love the way that the game's environmental interactions inspire an action film mentality. If you can imagine doing something cool, you can probably pull it off. Characters swing across ceilings, launch themselves off of poles and hurl chairs at one another – and if your timing is good, you can even catch that chair and chuck it straight back.

Better yet, all of the cool stuff you can do in *Power Stone* is exceptionally intuitive, as the complex move lists of standard fighting games are nowhere to be found. Years down the line, I felt that would make it a perfect multiplayer game to enjoy between *Mario Kart Wii* sessions in my student house, even though it only supported two players. I didn't know just how right I was, until I came home one day to find that one of my housemates had bought me *Power Stone 2* so we could have four-player matches. Thanks, Mat! ★



» New console launches are always exciting and you'll find some of the Switch 2's biggest games reviewed for this issue. We'll also look at a new book dedicated to FPS games and a cracking retro compilation

* PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild Nintendo Switch 2 Edition
It's been a real delight to return to the world of Hyrule and various graphical upgrades nearly make this the ultimate version of the game.



NICK
Tiger-Heli
This is a really strong conversion of Toaplan's shoot-'em-up. It's great to see quality new developments for any retro platform, but particularly ones with smaller libraries like the Atari 7800.



» [Switch 2] Power-ups remain as unbalanced as ever, although they're fun when you're trailing behind.

Mario Kart World

DOES NINTENDO'S LAUNCH GAME OFFER YOU THE WORLD?



INFORMATION

- » **FORMAT:** SWITCH 2
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £66.99 (DIGITAL), £74.99 (PHYSICAL)
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO
- » **BUY IT FROM:** ONLINE, RETAIL
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-4 (1-24 ONLINE)



A good launch game needs to do a lot of things.

It needs to justify an upgrade to a new console, show off the capabilities of your shiny new piece of hardware, ideally offer an experience you couldn't get on your previous system and be worth its financial outlay. *Mario Kart World* nearly manages to do all these things.

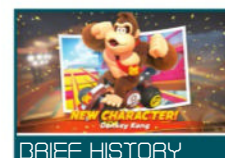
Firstly, *Mario Kart World* is a significant upgrade over *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe*, not so much in terms of the number of tracks it offers, but definitely in its sheer scope and the ambitious design of its stages. There's a lot to unpack in Nintendo's

new game, as well as a lot that will be familiar to longtime fans.

The standard cup structure is still here, meaning you can attempt to master 50cc, 100cc and 150cc classes. Multiplayer has once again been included, and bloody chaotic fun it is too, and it features a mix of brand-new and retro-inspired tracks, as well as a killer medley of familiar tunes and characters. So far, so *Mario Kart*.

Mario Kart World introduces numerous new features though, and Free Roam is easily one of the best new additions to the series. The new mode quite literally gives you the world, allowing you to traverse through a giant map as you please, discovering secrets, seeking out Peach Medallions and looking for the many ? Panels that are devilishly tucked away. You'll also discover P Switches that trigger small missions and it's a lot of fun simply pootling around and seeking out new experiences. Its only downside? Unlike *Burnout Paradise* or *Forza Horizon* you can't access the single-player events during Free Roam mode.

Equally enjoyable is the introduction of Knockout Tour, an



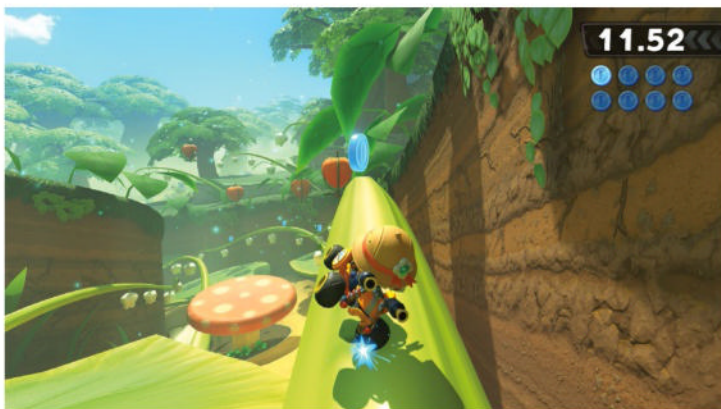
BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *Super Mario Kart* debuted on the SNES in 1991 and became an instant hit. A sequel followed on the Nintendo 64 in 1996, while the 2001 debut of *World Circuit* on the Game Boy Advance introduced the concept of retro tracks. As the series has progressed, it has branched out into arcades and even mobile phones and remains one of Nintendo's biggest franchises.





» [Switch 2] New tracks like Faraway Oasis do a good job of showing off the Switch 2's graphical grunt.



» [Switch 2] Free Roam is a significant addition to the series and there are plenty of challenges to complete.

intense, adrenaline-fuelled race across six stages that requires you to clear checkpoints in a certain position in order to continue. It's a great addition to the series and becomes particularly challenging once you move up to 150cc.

Mario Kart World is also a real looker, with the addition of HDR really adding to the game's stunning style. From the eye-searing lava of Bowser's Castle, to the vivid colours of Cheep Cheep Falls, the game absolutely pops with colour and is filled with graphical splendour. Huge dinosaurs storm past you in Dino Dino Jungle, a gargantuan robotic Kong hurls barrels at you in DK Spaceport while zebras frantically race past you as you battle through Faraway Oasis. It's a genuinely jaw-dropping game at times, helped along by a truly exceptional score that's filled with memorable

bangers and wonderfully catchy remixes of iconic tunes.

Outside of significantly improved visuals and impressive new game modes, *Mario Kart World* adds further wrinkles to the successful formula including racing against 23 other competitors, the need to actually race to the next new course, the inclusion of weather effects, the ability to grind rails and new Snacks that, when consumed, will sometimes unlock characters.

Interestingly, while Nintendo has improved many areas of the series, one aspect we were disappointed by was the inability to customise vehicles. Each kart is fully formed and more can be unlocked by picking up 100 coins during play. It's nice to return to an unlocking system after everything was readily available in *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe* as it improves longevity and encourages you to explore,

as you never know when a new Snack will include a new character.

One thing *Mario Kart World* does copy from the earlier games is the party-like nature of its racing. While the game is significantly challenging on the later difficulty levels, it also retains the same old frustrations of old where you can be effortlessly leading a race for every single lap, only to drop multiple places because you've been taken out by a Blue Shell as you were just about to cross the finish line. It still feels like luck, rather than skill, but it's pretty much baked into the series now.

The online options also feel a little lean. While we've been exceptionally impressed by how well the game runs online, it's disappointing that only Balloon Battle and Coin Runners have been carried over from *Mario*



* WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD SUPER MARIO KART



▼ SOMETHING NEW MARIO KART 8 DELUXE



Kart 8 Deluxe. Still, there's a lot of customisation throughout the game and a huge amount of game to plow through and that point is particularly important because it leads to the one place where *Mario Kart World* falls down somewhat.

Let's be honest, £75 is a lot of money for any videogame and there's a good chance it's simply going to be too high a barrier for some. Still, you're certainly getting plenty of game for your hard-earned cash and *World* genuinely does feel like a significant upgrade over its predecessor. ★

In a nutshell

Yes it's expensive, but it's arguably the best *Mario Kart* yet thanks to the excellent Free Roam mode, a robust multiplayer and the sheer longevity that it offers.

➤ **Score 90%**



» [Switch 2] Not being able to customise vehicles is disappointing but there are still plenty to unlock.

* PICK OF THE MONTH

Arcade Archives 2: Ridge Racer

DOES THE KING OF DRIFT STILL HAVE IT?

INFORMATION

- » **FORMAT:** SWITCH 2
- » **ALSO ON:** PC, PS4, PS5, XBOX ONE, XBOX SERIES S/X
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £13.49-£14.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** HAMSTER
- » **DEVELOPER:** HAMSTER
- » **PLAYERS:** 1



Well this has been a pleasant surprise. As much as we've enjoyed the multiplayer and open-world shenanigans of *Mario Kart World* recently, it has been a port of a 32-year-old arcade racer that's proven to be our biggest time sink on Nintendo's new console, not Nintendo's own launch game.

So why have we been spending so much time constantly replaying the lone track that *Ridge Racer* offers. It's simple, Namco created one of the best racing games of all time when *Ridge Racer* made its debut in Japanese arcades and Hamster has not only captured the original game's essence, but also added numerous improvements to make it the definitive version of the arcade classic.

If you've only experienced *Ridge Racer* on Sony's PlayStation it may be hard to get over just how bare-bones Hamster's game is, even with the many online extras that it offers. There are no different cars to unlock, no mirrored tracks, no third-person view and various other omissions – this is the arcade version in all its original glory and it may not offer much, but boy, is it fun.

The draw of the original arcade game has always been about racing against a challenging set of AI opponents and setting your best time and it's this aspect of the game that Hamster's port leans into. As with previous games in the *Arcade Archives* series, there's a Hi Score Mode where you can globally record your best time and Caravan Mode that gives you five minutes to score as many points as possible. New to the Switch 2, Xbox Series S/X and PS5 is Time Attack Mode, which



» [Switch 2] Caravan Mode gives you five minutes to clear as many laps as possible.

effectively has you tackling the four base modes of the game: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced and TT (the only mode of *Ridge Racer* that pits you against a single car).

If you're not interested in battling online you can simply play Original Mode, which doesn't record your scores, but does offer four ROM variants of the game, the Japanese and English versions of the original arcade game and the Japanese and English versions of *Ridge Racer DX* which adds control over the neutral gears and the clutch.

The game itself looks absolutely superb in that it's arcade perfect. It plays extremely well too and while we weren't able to test out the wheel options, it plays great on both a d-pad and analogue stick with a few settings adjustments. Sliding around corners in *Ridge Racer* has always felt highly satisfying and Hamster has nailed that sensation perfectly. This *feels* like arcade *Ridge Racer* and outside of owning



» [Switch 2] Original Mode just offers ROM variations and no online options.



» [Switch 2] It wouldn't be a *Ridge Racer* game without a helicopter flying overhead.

the original cabinet (or the Arcade1Up variant) this is as close as you're going to get to the original deal on a home console. Outside of startling authenticity, Hamster has included all its standard extras, from various scanline options and borders, to full control customisation and even the ability to change the difficulty of each mode and the amount of laps you can race. The price is certainly high at £14.99 but there's no denying this is the best home version of *Ridge Racer* we are ever likely to see. *

In A Nutshell

Yes it's rather pricey in comparison to Hamster's earlier arcade releases, but it's also the definitive version of the arcade classic and will keep you chasing scores for hours.



Score **85%**

* WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD RAGE RACER



▼ SOMETHING NEW RIDGE RACER UNBOUNDED



* BRIEF HISTORY

» Namco's *Ridge Racer* hit arcades in late-1993 and instantly drew acclaim thanks to its polished 3D visuals and superb feeling of drifting. A PlayStation version followed for the console's launch and several arcade and home-console sequels and spin-offs have appeared over the years, with the most recent, *Ridge Racer Draw & Drift*, debuting in 2016.

* GO DEEPER

The facts behind Arcade Archives 2: Ridge Racer

» You can use the right analogue stick to control your acceleration if you fancy an additional challenge.

» There's an upgrade path option to the Switch 2, PS5 and Xbox Series X if you don't currently own those consoles...

» ...but buying the Switch 2 version, didn't give us access to the Switch version (which was a little disappointing).



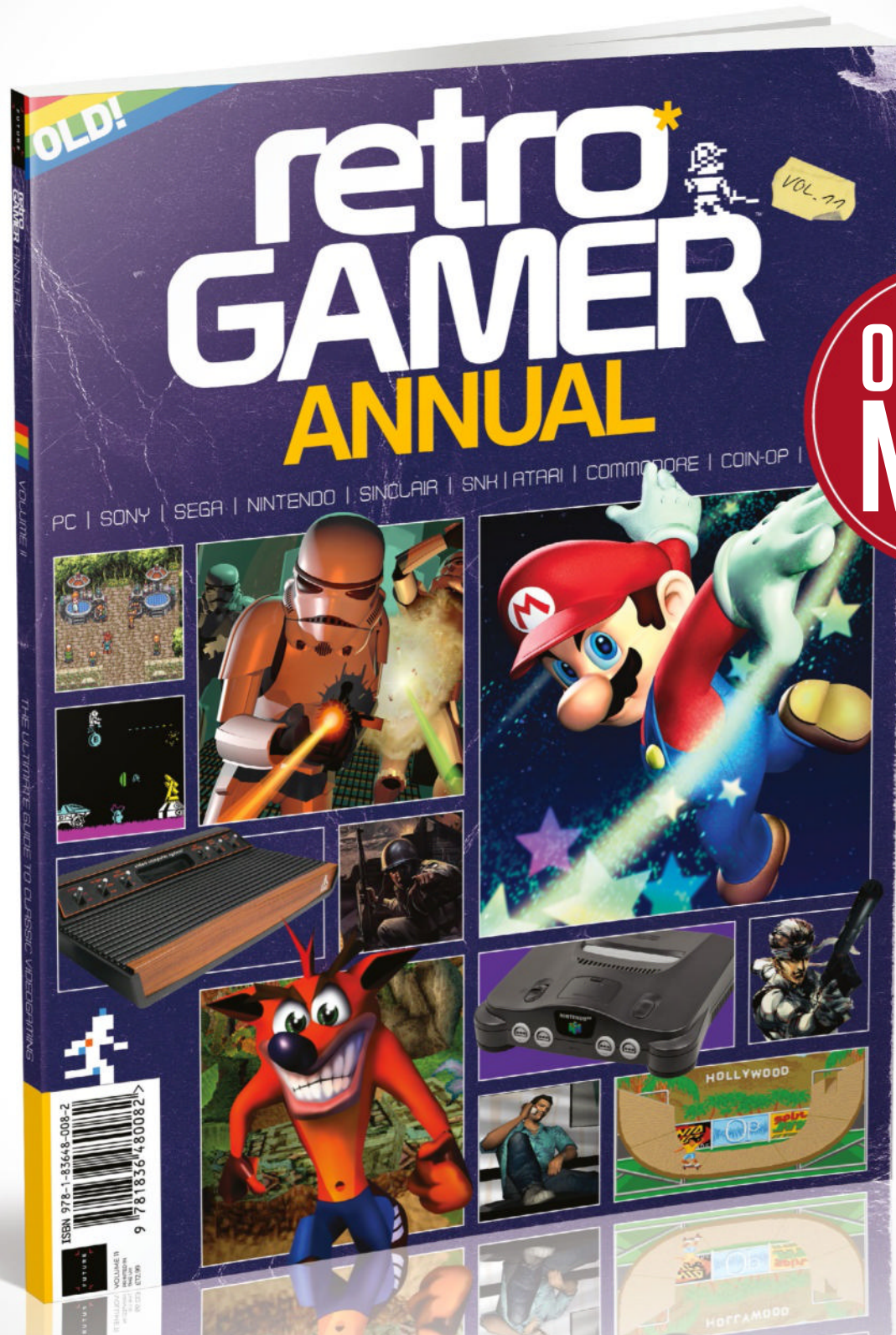
» [Switch 2] There are numerous options for scanlines for those wanting a more authentic-looking experience.



» [Switch 2] We clearly need to improve our drifting and move to manual gears if we want to improve our position.

CELEBRATE THE BEST OF RETRO GAMING IN 2024

Our latest tome features an incredible amount of fantastic content from Retro Gamer's past 12 months. Iconic characters, huge franchises and classic systems all feature, making it an essential read for retro fans. Don't miss it!



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* PICK OF THE MONTH

The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild Nintendo Switch 2 Edition

» System: Nintendo Switch 2 » Buy it for: £799 (upgrade for Switch), £66.99 (physical Switch 2)



When it comes to creating money from old rope Nintendo is one of the undisputed kings. This is the second time that *Breath Of The Wild* has been a launch game for a Nintendo console and the Switch 2 marks the third console that it has been released on, so it would be easy to accept this new iteration with a healthy dose of cynicism.

But can you really be cynical when you've got your hands on an updated version of one of the greatest open-world games of all time? After all, *BOTW* remains a masterpiece and the best *Zelda* game ever made (sorry *Ocarina Of Time*).

This new version of Nintendo's hit game sorts out the minor quibbles that we had with the original release pertaining to performance, particularly on the Wii U. While the game benefits greatly from the introduction of HDR and 4K visuals, it's the new

framerate that really makes a difference. Exploring Hyrule's world is now buttery smooth and it greatly improves the game's already solid combat. Less impressive is the inclusion of Zelda Notes, which is accessible on Nintendo's mobile app. Sadly, many of its extras feel superfluous and we soon got annoyed with the new voice navigation system, but it will certainly please completionists.

Overall, the £7.99 upgrade price feels fine for the many graphical improvements and Zelda Notes, but the standalone Switch 2 version feels a harder sell at nearly £70, particularly as that version doesn't include *BOTW*'s existing DLC. That addition would have made it the definitive version in our eyes. Granted, it's still the best *BOTW* you can buy, it just could have been much better.

>>

Score 95%



» [Switch 2] Killing animals leaves behind useful items that you can craft or make tasty recipes from.



» [Switch 2] *Breath Of The Wild*'s higher framerate on the Switch 2 makes combat encounters even more satisfying.



Tiger-Heli

» System: Atari 7800 » Buy it for: £24.95
» Buy it from: Retail

Here's a real treat for Atari fans – this is an excellent conversion of Toaplan's shoot-'em-up, which faithfully recreates the gameplay and level layouts of the arcade original. That means it's tough as nails, but it has that crucial "one more go" factor as you strive to best your previous scores. The visuals are also as authentic as the system will allow, and the POKEY renditions of the original tunes are very welcome. Make sure you've got a two-button controller if you're playing on the modern Atari 2600+ as you'll need it for the crucial bombs. Other than that, all we could ask for is an option for rapid fire.

NICK THORPE

>>

Score 92%



Hurt Me Plenty: The Ultimate Guide To First-Person Shooters 2003-2010

» Buy it for: £34.99 » Buy it from: Online

The second tome in Bitmap Books' FPS series is another cracking read. Rather than trying to cover every FPS ever released, author Aaron Potter has wisely focussed on important and esoteric titles, meaning oddities like *Psychotoxic* and *FireStarter* are given just as much coverage as big hitters like *Call Of Duty* and *Half-Life 2*. It follows the same year-by-year format as the original book and manages to feel surprisingly comprehensive. There's a slew of engaging interviews and some great imagery, as you'd expect from Bitmap Books. All in all, this is an essential read for fans of the genre. Here's hoping there's a third entry planned.

DARRAN JONES



Super Technos World: River City & Technos Arcade Classics

» System: PC (tested), PS5, Switch
» Buy it for: £22.74 » Buy it from: Online

Here's an odd collection of 12 Technos games which includes beat-'em-ups like *The Combatribes*, *River City Renegade* and *China Gate*, a couple of dodgeball games plus *Downtown River City Baseball Story*, run-and-gun *Xain'd Sleana* and puzzler *Kunio's Oden*. The presentation is decent and the inclusion of online play is very welcome, as are the English translations for games that didn't previously have them. Sadly, the action RPG *DunQuest* and board game *SugoroQuest++ Dicensics* haven't been translated. Overall, it's a collection which offers lots of variety, but doesn't represent the best of Technos.

NICK THORPE

>>

Score 77%

RELIVE THE GLORY DAYS OF HANDHELD SUPREMACY

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THE HOME BREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE>



<!-- ORGANISER GUNNAR KARNOLD. -->



<!-- [AQUARIUS] ROY TEMPLEMAN'S BOMBER HAD TO FIT INTO THE 72-CHARACTER LIMIT PER LINE OF THAT MACHINE'S BASIC. -->

<MAIN HEADER>

BASIC BRILLIANCE

<INTRO> ORGANISER GUNNAR KARNOLD AND COMPETITOR BEN COFFER TALK ABOUT THE 2025 EDITION OF THE BASIC 10-LINER COMPETITION </INTRO>

<INTRO> CREATING A GAME FOR THESE OLD MACHINES IS A CHALLENGE. CREATING SOMETHING PLAYABLE IN JUST TEN LINES OF BASIC IS A REAL ACHIEVEMENT, WHICH IS WHY WE CONCENTRATE ON THE BASIC 10-LINER COMPETITION FOR OUR MAIN FEATURE AND CHAMPION CODER MATTHEW BEGG. WE'LL ALSO BE KEEPING AN EYE ON THE GB COMPO 2025 - BIT.LY/GBCOMPO2025 - TO SEE WHAT THE GAME BOY CODERS CAN ACHIEVE. AND THERE'S NEWS OF MULTIPLE ARCADE CONVERSIONS FOR YOU TO TRY. </INTRO>



<!-- [SHARP M2] HERE IS BEN'S BUGGY10 FOR THE SHARP M2. -->



<!-- [C64] BUILD WALLS AGAINST THE INVADING VIRUS AND EXTRACT WATER IN BAGO ZONDE'S STRATEGY GAME, AQUALQUE10. -->

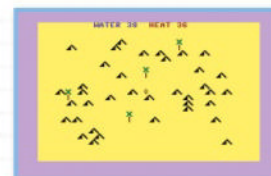
001 <BODY> Gunnar Karnold formed an Atari group
002 in northern Germany with some friends, which
003 led to a friendly competition. "In 2011, we started
004 the first BASIC 10-Liner competition," says Gunnar.
005 "After a break in 2012, in 2013, the task was to write a
006 game in Atari BASIC. 2015 was the year in which the
007 competition was expanded to other 8-bit computers. In
008 2016, all 8-bit computers were allowed, and the rules
009 were further differentiated with new categories."

010 The main categories are PUR-80 and PUR-120 for
011 that number of characters on a line. EXTREM-256
012 covers alternative forms of BASIC. The WILD category
013 is for anything that doesn't fit, and SCHAU (Show) is
014 for graphic demos and utilities. As the competition
015 grew, more unusual machines took part. "By 2018,
016 the C64 surpassed the Atari," says Gunnar. The
017 2020 pandemic allowed people more time to take
018 part. "Some produced programs in which the global
019 threat was dealt with playfully - Covidbreaker (C64)
020 was the most successful," says Gunnar. The invasion
021 of Ukraine in 2022 prompted a thought-provoking
022 entry. "Nick Shcherbyna wrote a 10-liner while his
023 homeland, Ukraine, was being bombed," Gunnar
024 continues. "He gave expression to his anger and
025 despair with his game, NLAW (Next Generation Light
026 Anti-Tank Weapon). In 2023, we had multiple games
027 in one (Retropoke managed to fit four games into
028 the ten lines, including the selection menu) and one

029 game across multiple systems (Tic-Tac-Toe written
030 in ugBASIC)." How does Gunnar reflect on the
031 competition to date? "It has become part of my life. I
032 have met countless impressive people and exchanged
033 thousands of emails. I developed (long-distance)
034 friendships. Every year, you see programs from old
035 acquaintances who have been loyal to the competition.
036 But you also see new people who have discovered the
037 competition for themselves, new ideas."

038 Ben Coffey of Sharpworks (mz-sharpworks.co.uk)
039 took part this year with his Sharp MZ-80A. "The BASIC
040 doesn't allow user-defined graphics, you have to use the

PRIZE PROGRAMS



SAND-STORMER
RoePipi, Plus/4

<Winner of the PUR-80 category, this survival game sees you tapping palm trees for water and reaching stone bunkers to cool down. />



MINI GOLF
Eric Carr, Atari 8-bit

<Written using Fast Basic, Eric's game featured water hazards and a power gauge to win the PUR-120 category. Congratulations! />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: retrogamer@futurenet.com



←--- BEN COFFER WITH HIS SHARP MZ-80A. ---→



←--- [ATARI 8-BIT] WORDLE WITH ITS LISTING BY THE ATARI VETERAN D SCOTT WILLIAMSON. ---→

- 041 Sharp characters. This is handy as there are lots of little
042 graphic symbols that fit nicely into games. We're at quite
043 a disadvantage as you cannot use any abbreviations.
044 Also, it'll only allow 78 characters on a line."
045 Ben usually takes part in the PUR-80 category.
046 "Buggy10 was inspired by *Moon Patrol*. It turned out
047 differently, with obstacles appearing along the road
048 ahead of you instead of enemies to shoot in the sky.
049 The closer you are to the obstacle when you shoot
050 it, the higher your score. I was still very pleased with
051 my parallax scrolling foreground/background!" Ben
052 encourages more people to get involved with the
053 competition. "It encourages you to get creative and
054 get thinking. The programming of a 10-liner is almost
055 like a puzzle in itself. I do hope that more Sharp users
056 will contribute next time."
057 For more, visit basic10liner.com and download this
058 year's entries at bit.ly/10liner-2025 </BODY>

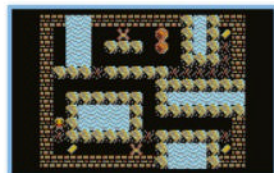
←INTRO> THE 2025 CATEGORY WINNERS <INTRO>



5 TIDES AT THE PURPLE OYSTER BEACH

FUED, Coco

<The WILD category winner used ugBASIC, tasking you with picking up purple oysters before the tide rolled in. />



LOST TEMPLE OF GOLD

Eric Carr, Atari 8-bit

<Winning the EXTREM-256 category, this brilliant remake of the DOS game *Paganitzu* sees you manipulating boulders as you collect gold. />



TINY BASIC

Matthew Begg, ZX Spectrum

<A clever port of Dennis Allison's Seventies Tiny BASIC interpreter for early microcomputers, Matthew Begg's version won the SCHAU (show) category. />

NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY SYSTEM <INTRO>

<Amstrad Plus: *Harrier Attack Reloaded* now has an armour gauge and smoother scrolling, with a cartridge version also being produced. Name your price at bit.ly/harrier-attack-reloaded />

<Atari ST: Electric Dreams converted the influential 1978 David Ahl BASIC game *Super Star Trek*. Download it by boldly going to bit.ly/st-trek />

<Atari 2600: Among the entries for the Jeff Minter I, Rebel jam was *StarGiraf* by Dr Ludos. Get blasting by visiting bit.ly/stargiraf />

<BBC Micro: Read all about lovebug's brilliant *Lady Bug* conversion at bit.ly/ladybug-bbc />

<C64: Visit lowcarb.itch.io/ for LC-Games' superb new *Space Invaders* conversion and a fun one-button variant. />

<ColecoVision: Check out collectorvision.com for some new releases including *Arabian* and *Super Space Acer*. />

<Enterprise 128: KTB Retro Computing Productions has converted its Spectrum games, including *Painterman*. It has also posted tutorials for converting MPAGD games to the Enterprise. There's more information over at bit.ly/ktb-enterprise />

<Lynx: *Wayzard* by Retroguru was created for the Revision party game competition and achieved third place. Play it at bit.ly/wayzard-lynx />

<Master System: badcomputer0 released his new game, *Frontier Force* (\$4.99). You'll find it at bit.ly/frontierforce />

<MSX: The cute puzzle game *Matchy Matchy* launched from bitsofbas recently. Grab it by visiting bit.ly/matchy-msx />

<PICO-8: *Snekburd* is Werxy's fun demake of *Snakebird*. Play it at bit.ly/snekburd />

<Plus/4: The Hungarian game dev competition attracted great entries, including *Gravity Boy* and the tower defence game *Rush!*. There's more info at plus4gamedev.hu />

<Various: *Jurl* from Tonsomo Entertainment (RG 264) has now reached the Spectrum, Amstrad, Game Boy, Neo-Geo Pocket Color, and GP2X! Find it at tonsomo.itch.io />

<ZX Spectrum: Deanysoft released its brilliant conversion of the arcade classic *Gorf*, which can be found at bit.ly/gorf-zx />

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CHAMPION CODER

MATTHEW BEGG

<INTRO> MATTHEW RETURNED TO SPECTRUM BASIC, 40 YEARS AFTER WRITING PROGRAMS WITH HIS COUSIN RICHARD </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: MANCHESTER, UK (ORIGINALLY MIDDLESBROUGH)
WEBSITE: BIT.LY/BEGG-10LINERS FORMAT: ZX SPECTRUM BASIC 10-LINERS
PREVIOUS GAMES: ZXFM (2024), HARDWARE HUSTLE (2024), BIMMOBILES (2023)
WORKING ON: DELOREAN DASH, MINESWEEPER, BARCODE BATTLE, ZX STOCK EXCHANGE >

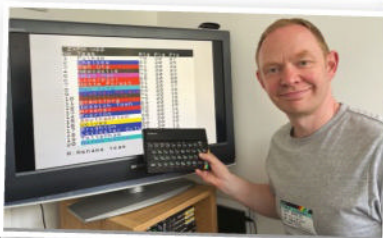
WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN THE COMPETITION, MATTHEW?

I read about it in **Retro Gamer**. I liked the immediate feedback of writing short games, the challenge of squeezing it all in. I use a trick with FOR loops to zero so you can fit loads of IF-like statements on a line. The Spectrum stores its commands as a single character, so that helps fit even more. I like the EXTREM-256 category so games can be more complex, with more custom graphics.

I use 128 BASIC in FuseX on a MacBook Pro; I make notes to track variables and things that need fixing. I've written a utility for counting characters, and I always playtest the games on my real Spectrums before submitting.

HOW DID YOU CRAM A FOOTBALL MANAGEMENT GAME (ZXFM) INTO JUST TEN LINES?

I was playing Kevin Toms' *Football Manager* and accidentally pressed BREAK – discovering it was written in BASIC! I thought it would be a great challenge to get a management sim into ten lines and make it playable with transfers, injuries, squad selection, etc. There were compromises – my fixture generator had your team playing itself twice each season, so I disguised those as the 'international break'!



<!-- "EVEN IF YOU HAVE NO PROGRAMMING BACKGROUND, THE 10-LINER FORMAT MAKES IT EASY TO GET STARTED," SAYS MATTHEW, SHOWING OFF ZXFM. -->

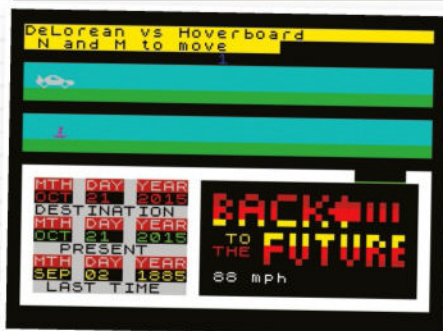
CAN YOU TELL US WHAT INSPIRED YOUR 2025 ENTRIES?

DeLorean Dash: I wanted to write a *Back To The Future*-themed game, with the music, logo, and the time circuits. That took seven lines, I only had three left to put the actual game in – a racing game using simple *Daley Thompson* keyboard-bashing gameplay!

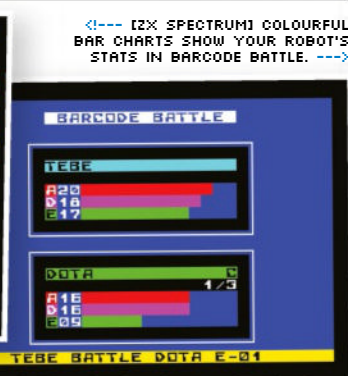
Barcode Battle: I loved the old Barcode Battler handheld. Fitting in a brand-new custom font was especially challenging.

Minesweeper: *Minesweeper* was the first puzzle game I remember getting addicted to. I tried to mimic the look of Windows 3.1.

ZX Stock Exchange: I saw an episode of *Friends* where Monica dabbles in the stock market. I thought the scrolling ticker and time moving would make for a frenetic game. >



<!-- [ZX SPECTRUM] RACE ACROSS FOUR DIFFERENT TIME ZONES TO RECOVER LOST ITEMS IN DELOREAN DASH. -->



<!-- [ZX SPECTRUM] COLOURFUL BAR CHARTS SHOW YOUR ROBOT'S STATS IN BARCODE BATTLE. -->

DATA BURST

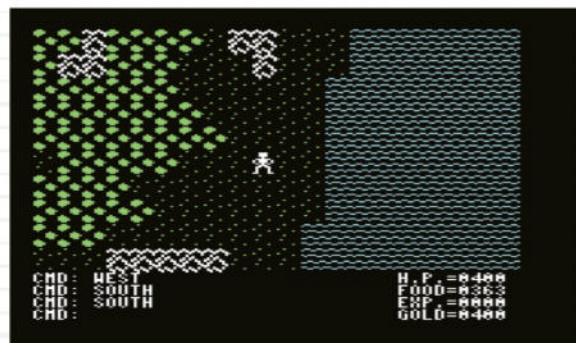
ULTIMA II AND ULTIMA III

<INFO FORMAT: VIC-20 (35K REQUIRED) – TESTED, C64
CREDITS: ALEKSI EEBEN PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD
WEB: BIT.LY/ULTIMA2-VIC20 AND BIT.LY/ULTIMA3-VIC >

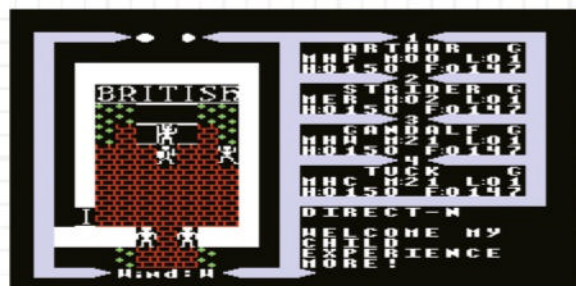
<BODY> Richard Garriott's classic early role-playing games set in the land of Sosaria were never available for the VIC, and so Aleks's ambitious ports (cleverly reworked and compressed to fit onto a single disk image) are very welcome. In *Ultima II: Revenge Of The Enchantress*, after the defeat of the wizard Mondain in the first game, Minax takes her revenge by unleashing a nuclear war on Earth. A new hero must travel across time and space, fighting monsters and finding equipment to stop the destruction of the Earth in this game's quirky and unusual plot. And in *Ultima III: Exodus*, the child of Mondain and Minax (called Exodus) must be stopped by the hero. This instalment allows you to generate four characters (choosing race, class and spending stat points) and now features separate combat arenas when you encounter enemies on the overworld map. Fortunately, Aleks has provided excellent documentation to help players get into the dense and involving world. The graphics are primitive but accurate to the originals, including the first-person perspective for dungeons, while there is effective use of sound. The sheer depth will entice dedicated players to keep playing. There are also enhanced C64 versions available to download at the links above, so take up arms to save Sosaria (and the Earth!) </BODY>

SCORE:

82%



<!-- [VIC-20] EXPLORE THE OVERWORLD, ENCOUNTER ENEMIES, AND THEN FIND CAVES, TOWNS, AND CASTLES TO VISIT. -->



<!-- [VIC-20] MEETING LORD BRITISH EARLY IN YOUR QUEST TO STOP THE ENCHANTRESS. -->

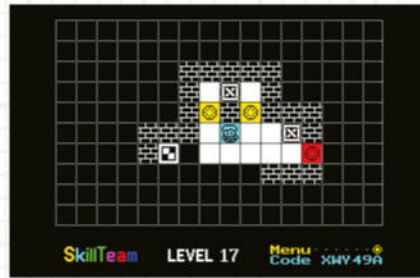
NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: retrogamer@futurenet.com

THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT



<!-- [AMSTRAD CPC] SOMETIMES, THE ORDER YOU PICK UP SKILLS WILL DETERMINE IF YOU ARE SUCCESSFUL IN COMPLETING THE STAGE. -->



<!-- [ZX SPECTRUM] YOU START THIS LEVEL ABLE TO PULL CRATES AND NEED TO MOVE ONE TO THE BOTTOM LEFT. -->

SKILLTEAM

<INFO FORMAT: AMSTRAD CPC, ZX SPECTRUM CREDITS: DAVID PROGRAM (BASED ON FANCADE GAME BY LUKASZM) PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD & PLAY ONLINE WEB: [BIT.LY/DAVIDPROGRAMA](http://bit.ly/davidprograma) >

<BODY> A trial of 60 different levels awaits, each containing a mixture of crates, holes in the floor, and crumbling tiles, preventing you from reaching the exit.

Coloured discs grant a special skill, with six different colours to discover. Yellow allows you to push a crate, while cyan lets you pull a crate behind you. If you get completely stuck, you can skip to the next level three times. A level code is displayed as you start each new level and can be entered to get back to that point. This is a great variation on the classic *Sokoban* format, but we do prefer the presentation of the Spectrum's in-game graphics. This one will certainly test your brain and is worth downloading. </BODY>

SCORE:

85%



<!-- [GAME BOY COLOR] RACE FROM THE BACK OF THE GRID TO PLACE AS HIGH UP AS POSSIBLE. -->



<!-- [GAME BOY COLOR] INITIALLY, ONLY STAGE 1 IN CANADA IS AVAILABLE, BUT MORE STAGES UNLOCK AS YOU PLAY. -->

GP HERO

<INFO FORMAT: GAME BOY COLOR CREDITS: SHANE MCCAFFERTY (DESIGN, CODE, GRAPHICS), BEATSCRIBE (MUSIC & SOUND FX), THALAMUS DIGITAL (PUBLISHER) PRICE: \$1.99 DIGITAL DOWNLOAD WEB: [BIT.LY/HEROGP-GBC](http://bit.ly/herogp-gbc) >

<BODY> After earlier racing games, *Hoonigans* and *Nitro*, Shane has tackled the classic Sega coin-op *Super Hang-On*. As you compete in motorbike races worldwide, new stages are unlocked if you beat the race criteria (based on time taken and finishing position). Try not to crash into other riders or trackside scenery, as it will cost valuable time. The changing graphics give a decent 3D effect, there is a pacy soundtrack, and the challenge increases as you progress. This enjoyable racer makes us look forward to Shane's proposed *OutRun*-inspired title! </BODY>

SCORE:

80%

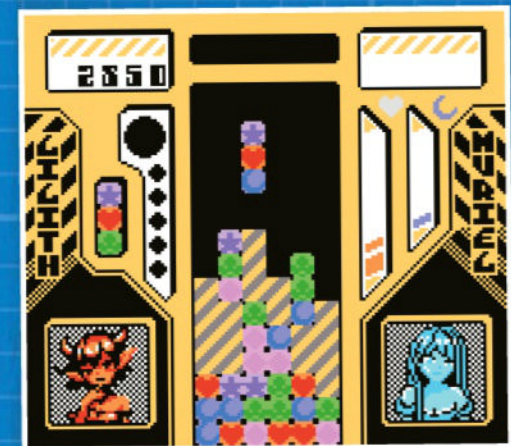
PROCESSING

<INTRO> MIKE LEISZ (@TECHNOFANTASY) IS WORKING ON HELL BREAKER, A BLOCK-DROPPING PUZZLER FOR THE GAME BOY COLOR </INTRO>

<BODY> Mike tells us his latest game was inspired by Sega classic *Columns*. "I started to pour my personal influences into the game – *Puyo Puyo* and *Pinickies* by Compile, *Tetris Attack* by Intelligent Systems, and my undying love for 2D fighting games of the Nineties. *Hell Breaker* features asymmetrical battles against the CPU – the player uses a standard match-three system while the CPU uses a dice-based system to drop obstacles onto the player's field and defend against their attacks."

Development is being done in GB Studio, with sound by Robotmeadows and Tronimal, and the help of Tara Touzie. "She is involved in all high-level concepting, game design, narrative and art direction," explains Mike. "The full release will get an Endless mode and 2P Versus mode, where players can battle over a link cable." The demo can be found at bit.ly/hellbreaker

With *Hell Breaker* due by Autumn 2025, Mike has more games planned. "We're also working on a time travel-themed puzzle adventure game for the Game Boy Color called *Project Pegasus*, and a dystopian driving game about a motorcycle courier called *Box Runner*." </BODY>



<!-- [GAME BOY COLOR] THE BLOCKS MURIEL (THE CPU PLAYER) DROPPED CAN BE CLEARED BY MAKING MATCHES NEXT TO THEM. -->



HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

DIRTY CHEATS

If you're not cheating, you're not trying



DARRAN JONES



NICK THORPE



TIM EMPEY

Our new Secret Service spread makes its debut in this month's issue. With that in mind, we thought we'd share our history with a subject that's rarely discussed in these pages – our experience of using illicit codes, rather than playing games the way they were meant to be played.

NICK

Can you remember the first time you ever used a cheat in a videogame?

TIM

Well not me specifically, but my brother used a paperclip to do something to our Commodore 64 so we could enter some PEEKs and POKes. I can't remember what game we did it for or what it did, but he very sternly told me never to do it because it could wreck the computer! So I didn't.

DARRAN

I can't remember if it's the

first cheat I ever activated but for some reason the ability to change the blood in *Renegade* on the Amstrad from blue to red remains forever in my memory. God knows how you activated though.

NICK

Unsurprisingly, mine was the *Sonic 1* level select, which my dad learned from a Saturday boy at the family business. I hoped I'd learn the equivalent code for my Master System version, but it doesn't have one. Did you find yourselves using cheats much when you were younger?

DARRAN

I have to admit, unless the code was a simple series of key strokes like with *Renegade*, I usually avoided cheats on the Amstrad. Many of them required strings of code that I could never get my head around so I never got to use them. I stayed away from PEEKs and POKes for the same reason. It was all baffling to me.

“I have to admit, unless the code was a simple series of key strokes, I usually avoided cheats on the Amstrad”

DARRAN JONES

TIM

Not so much. I did press Restore when playing *The Way Of The Exploding Fist II* to walk across gaps. And did know the passwords to unlock everything on *Super Cars II* – I even had them written down on some paper tucked into the disk sleeve. But I don't think I did cheat much on the Amiga. Come the Mega Drive and PlayStation though and it was cheat central! Does 19, 65, 09, 17 mean anything to you, Nick?

DARRAN

Doesn't mean anything to me.

NICK

Sure does, that's the *Sonic 2* level select! Yuji Naka's birthday, and perfect for days when you can't be bothered with Metropolis Zone. I must admit, every time I go back to an old game and find it harder than I remember, I think it's

because I used a lot of cheats back in the day. I even used the console equivalent of POKes with the Action Replay cartridges. Shameful, I know.

DARRAN

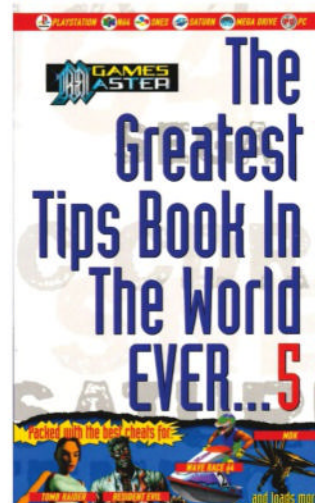
I can remember the WE5t ONE 0000 000 code from *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap* on the Master System easily. It did feel like cheats were a lot more accessible during the console era, but that could be me getting it wrong. It was great being able to use codes on the likes of *Shinobi* to select and practice later levels.

NICK

I liked it when cheats started to become a bit less functional and quite a bit sillier as the Nineties wore on. Obviously you had things like the celebrity characters in *NBA Jam*, and we rarely played a game of *GoldenEye* without big



» [Amstrad CPC] Here's the blue blood Darran wanted to avoid, because we couldn't get the cheat working.



» In the Nineties, a free tips book was always a welcome gift with a magazine.



» Pages of POKes like this weren't of much use to Darran back in the Eighties.



» [Mega Drive] We always liked the little level portraits on the *Sonic 2* level select screen.

heads and paintball splatters enabled. Did you guys have any favourites along those lines?

TIM

Dullard. Not mocking, that's just the code for the cheat menu in *Mortal Kombat* on the Mega Drive.

DARRAN

Big heads in *GoldenEye* was a lot of fun and I remember the numerous teams from *NBA Jam*. They're not technically cheats, but pulling off Friendships in the later *Mortal Kombats* was funny. The Disco Mode in *Turok* is pretty silly as well.

TIM

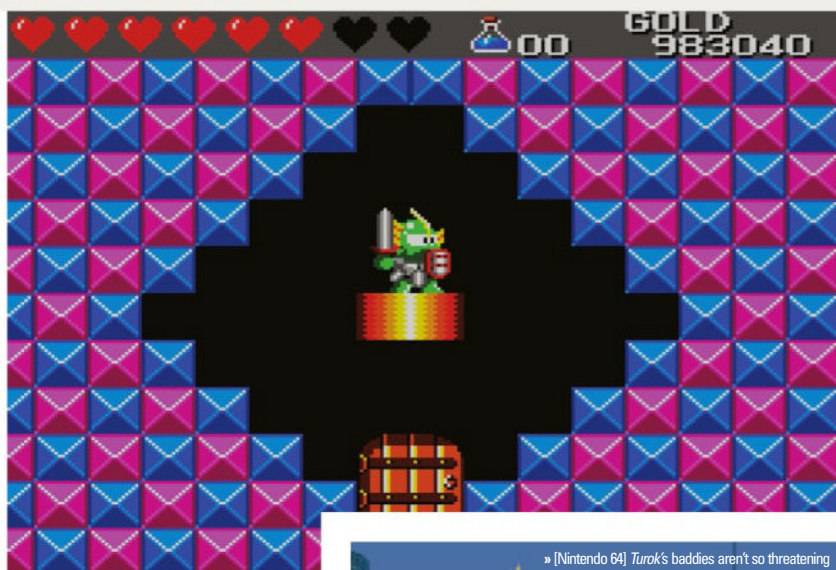
I used to collect and read the cheats books that came free with many videogame magazines. Dunno why I enjoyed reading them, bit weird I guess. Anyway, the collection got way too big and then my housemates used the covers for roaches, and that got rid of a good few of them.

DARRAN

Pretty much all of my *N64* Magazines don't have the cheats book gifts, but that's an aspect I'm not going to try and collect.

NICK

I had a box full of the ones that used to come on *GamesMaster* as a reference for years, until they got destroyed by a leaky boiler. GameFAQs had rendered them pretty redundant by that point though. I think the golden age of cheating kind of ended when companies discs were full of completed save files,



» [Master System] That *Wonder Boy III* cheat gives you access to this snazzy free transformation room.

rather than actual cheating tools. These days 'unlock everything' codes are just paid DLC.

DARRAN

I was going to ask if cheats were even a thing nowadays, but yeah, you're right. DLC is probably where most of them are found now. I do have fond memories of the Action Replay disc, for no other reason than it let me play the US version of *Resident Evil 4* early. I don't think I ever used the device for an actual cheat!

TIM

Oh yeah, *Cube* used to come with a cheats disc every issue. And I did use a disc from *P2* to help with my third playthrough of *Final Fantasy X*.

DARRAN

I don't really know what's worse here Tim, cheating your way through a game or simply playing *Final Fantasy X* three times. Still, at least it wasn't *Shadow The Hedgehog*...

NICK

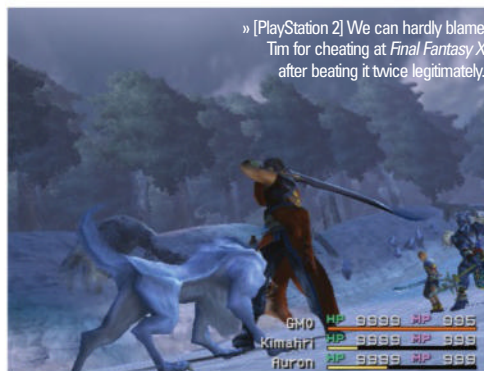
Oof. But yeah, the only cheating there was me cheating myself out of time I could have spent with better games. ✨



» [Nintendo 64] *Turok's* baddies aren't so threatening when they're dancing under the disco lights.



» [Mega Drive] Word has it that King Charles III can sink three-pointers all day long.



» [PlayStation 2] We can hardly blame Tim for cheating at *Final Fantasy X* after beating it twice legitimately.

READERS REACT

What's your favourite cheat?

David Autovino

The Warp Zones in the original *Super Mario Bros* are so unique: they exist in-game, and must be accessed by breaking the visual boundaries of the game world. It's a meta-textual sense of discovery, and a magical (and very Nintendo) contrast to the button-input cheats of its 8-bit contemporaries.

Stacey King

The cheat for the Atari ST version of *Silkworm* required entering your name as 'edamedam'. This gave you infinite lives with a side dish of Edam cheese flying about while playing.

Mat Allen

Rubbing an empty joystick port 1 in *C64 Creatures 2* to gain infinite lives.

9999 Damage

In *Armed Police Batrider*, hold start and tap right during gameplay to cycle enemy shot colours. Without this, the police team's blue bullets mask the enemy's blue bullets, making them hard to see.

Luke The Fox VA

In the PC game *Betrayal In Antara*, if you type 'somecallmetim' all the enemies die of a heart attack.

Edward Joe Steel

I was never good enough to execute special moves on *Mortal Kombat Trilogy* but holding L1+L2+R1+R2+up on the option screen unlocks a cheat menu for one-button fatalities.

mister pizza

The debug code for *Sonic The Hedgehog*. The ability to see everything in a level and start to tear down the components of a game; it was mind-blowing to me as a young kid.

Rich

Up, down, left, right, A+Start was memorable, but then so was 19, 65, 09, 17. Either of those is ingrained in my head!

Simon Dueck

Thunder Force IV, 99 lives cheat (hold A and Start before title screen, set lives to 0). And I still couldn't beat it back in the day!

Bens Jammin

The one I remember the most is for *Lotus II: RECS* on the Mega Drive. It's a fantastic driving game in itself, but if you type your name as POD PLEASE you get to play a really good *Centipede*-type game too.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH THE RETRO KEYHOLE



PHANTASY STAR IV

"I stumbled across this one in a local videogame shop and just had to pick it up."

AMOUNT PAID: £90

SHADOW RUN

"This was an auction bid that I was lucky to win at a decent price."

AMOUNT PAID: £85

SNATCHER

"A friend of mine was kind enough to sell me his copy for a very reasonable price."

AMOUNT PAID: £160

IMAGE FIGHT X MULTIPLY

"I purchased this from a Japanese auction site, and was lucky it came sealed."

AMOUNT PAID: £40

A MEGA JAPANESE COLLECTION

From small acorns mighty collections grow

BIO

NAME:
Harley Palmer

LOCATION:
Oxford

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
£6,000

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Mega Drive

FAVOURITE GAME:
Darius Gaiden

INSTAGRAM:
retrogamer_japan



It all started in the early Eighties for Harley Palmer. "My earliest gaming memories were on the Atari 2600 and Acorn Electron," he remembers. But it was a love for the din of smoke-filled arcades where his love for Sega and Japanese gaming took hold. "The booming loudspeakers and colourful cabinets were pure bliss," Harley explains. "All those games I could still play now without feeling they've aged a day. I don't think anything will ever beat an arcade cabinet for the ultimate experience."

After starting to collect games for the BBC, Harley was then swayed by the amazing artwork on Japanese Mega Drive titles. "I was attracted by the Japanese cover art on early Mega Drive games. I've even spoken to *Phantasy Star II* cover artist Hitoshi Yoneda recently, and his artwork for that game is one of the most famous in retro gaming. I'm also fascinated by the discussions about Western vs Japanese artwork, generally, I love them both. *Phantasy Star II* is a great example where the artwork is

different yet promotes the game to two very different audiences."

It's not just the great artwork that decides Harley's next purchase; the sturdiness of the boxes is also a factor. "Neo Geo and Mega Drive boxes are tough and look great in a collection. I would love to own more Super Famicom games, but the boxes damage easily from frequent play, they just don't last. The ultimate combination in deciding my purchases is games like *Gaijars* and *MUSHA Aleste*. Beautiful art matched with awesome gameplay. As far as condition goes, I don't mind a bit of wear and tear, or notes in instruction manuals, especially maps, as I think it adds to the nostalgia."

Harley's collection includes many Japanese titles, but which one is his absolute favourite? "*Darius Gaiden* is one game I keep coming back to. I have it on multiple formats, including an F3 arcade board. The Japanese design is mesmerising and immediately engages the player. The weapon system, intricately designed bosses and Zuntata soundtrack are all timeless.

Dungeons & Dragons Collection is another of my faves. It has so much depth and replay value."

We ask Harley why he thinks retro gaming is so popular today. "I think nostalgia in general is a key aspect. When I saw the arcade scene in *Stranger Things*, I couldn't help but respect the effort that went into getting a true Eighties arcade experience. Also, it's because retro gaming is simple and fun. Here we are in 2025, and people are talking about Nintendo and Sega games from the Eighties. We're even having regular new Mega Drive, Game Boy, and Famicom games made all the time!"

We finish up by asking Harley where he sees his collection going in the future and what his ultimate grail purchase is. "I'd like to get more Mega-CD games, *Shining Force CD* being high on the list. There are also a few Super Famicom games, such as *Magical Pop'n*. The ultimate grail would be *Metal Slug* on the Neo Geo AES. It's perfect in every way. Although I already own it on many different systems, I'd love the genuine article." ★

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

f RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag ✉ retrogamer@futurenet.com 📺 retrogammag.bsky.social

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

T2: TERMINATOR 2: THE VIDEOGAME

Our cover game won't be out until September, so why not try this as loose SNES and Mega Drive carts go for as little as **£15**, up to about **£20**. You'll be telling work, "I'll be back," for overtime if you want a mint boxed copy, as that will terminate your wages at over **£80**.



ADVANCED PINBALL SIMULATOR

You won't need to flip many notes or nudge a mate for a loan as decent boxed copies of this pinball sim usually go for about **£3**.

SPLATTERHOUSE

It will feel like you're in your own horror movie spending around **£80** for a complete boxed copy of this bloody PC Engine classic. Even loose HuCards can sell for over **£50**.



BANJO-KAZOOIE

You will jump for joy picking up a loose cart that costs less than **£10**, and good condition boxed complete copies regularly go for under **£25**.

JUNGLE STRIKE

While a real Comanche helicopter will probably cost you millions, a complete boxed copy of this PAL Mega Drive game is only around **£7** and just **£3** for a loose cart.



SUIKODEN

Konami's legendary RPG is a popular choice and holds its value. Complete PAL copies will cost over **£100**, with the much cheaper NTSC-J version costing around **£20**. The recent remaster is a far cheaper alternative.

OSU! TATAKAE! OUENDAN

The price depends on your patience. It regularly sells for **£25** for a complete copy, although a low starting auction can get you a copy for under **£10**.



KONAMI ANTIQUES MSX COLLECTION ULTRA PACK

This Saturn release doesn't appear often, and the price varies wildly. You may get lucky and grab this for around **£20**, or want one with a spine card for over **£100**.



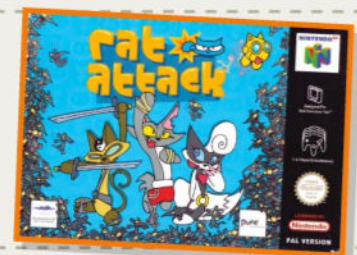
THE ORANGE BOX

You could play Valve's collection of classic games for as little as **£5** for a rough copy. If you want to own it in mint condition then expect to play closer to **£20** for it.

HOW MUCH?!

RAT ATTACK

Your wallet will certainly feel like it's been attacked if you bought this pristine PAL *Rat Attack* for almost **£3,600**. At least it had the manual.



SAGAIA + VHS

"I placed my bid on an auction and came out as the top bidder; the VHS is a rare find."

AMOUNT PAID: **£70**



JEWEL IN THE CROWN

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS COLLECTION

■ "This is a late, great collector's item for Sega Saturn and RPG fans. I couldn't believe my luck finding this online for this price."

PAID: **£110**



MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR SHARED PASSION

BUDGET BRILLIANCE

How PC gaming is turning Darran to digital releases



How much is too much for a new videogame? There

has been plenty of internet drama surrounding the likes of *Mario Kart World*, *Borderlands 4* and *Grand Theft Auto VI* over the past few weeks and it's feeling more and more likely that we'll be seeing games cost as much as £100 in 2026, which is quite simply bonkers. We're a long way from the days of being able to get an entertaining game for just £1.99 like we could in the Eighties when our pocket money was burning a hole in our pockets. Or are we?

The fact of the matter is that if you don't mind not 'owning' your game then it's possible to get digital games for an absolute pittance, particularly if you go down the PC route. Admittedly, digital console games are cheaper now (in the sales at least) than they've ever been, but because you can typically only buy directly through the shop stores of Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo, you'll never find games as cheap as you'll find them on the PC.

Fierce competition means that you'll very rarely, if ever, have to pay full price for a PC game on release. If you're like me and prefer to pick your digital games up when they're on sale you'll get even better deals. Look at Humble Bundle Choice. For £8.99 a month you'll typically get around eight games and the quality can be pretty decent. This month for example I've received *The Thaumaturge*, *Amnesia: The Bunker*, *Evil West*, *Shadow Gambit: The Cursed Crew*, *Eiyuden Chronicle: Hundred Heroes*, *Star Wars: Bounty Hunter*, *Ultros* and *Corpse Keeper*. That's

more than enough to keep me going for the month and if I had the restraint to simply stick with those Choice selections I'd be saving a fortune.

I can't resist a good bargain though and there are many digital bargains to be had online. In addition to its Choice range, Humble also sells numerous gaming bundles, with many of them being themed. I recently grabbed *9 Circles Of Bullet Hell: A Survivors Bundle* for £7.59, which included the likes of *Vampire Survivors*, *AK-xolotl: Together* and *Patch Quest*, as well as the *Dice & Destiny Bundle* for £10.04 which included *Broken Roads*, *Citizen Sleeper*, *Disco Elysium*, *Road Warden* and both *Pillars Of Eternity I* and *II*.

"I can't resist a good bargain and there are many digital bargains to be had online"

Fanatical is another website I've been regularly buying from since owning a Steam Deck. Like Humble, it offers bundles as well as stand-alone games, but you can curate these bundles yourself from a pre-selected number of games and you'll often receive a better overall price if you buy in bulk. I've been a sucker for its *Mystery Bundles* where you get 25 games for around £13. Most of the games are pump, or titles that I'd

RECENT PC BARGAINS

THE BEST TITLES AND BUNDLES I'VE PICKED UP IN 2025

HUMBLE CHOICE: APRIL

Some killer games for £8.99. I added *Dredge*, *1000XRESIST*, *Aliens: Dark Descent*, *Nova Lands*, *Diplomacy Is Not An Option*, *Distant Worlds 2*, *Nomad Survival* and *Tomb Raider I-III Remastered* to my collection.

CHRONO TRIGGER

I've always wanted to experience this time-travelling RPG, but my DS copy is sealed and I can't justify the SNES price. I jumped at the chance to own it on PC for 49 pennies.

BLOOD KNIGHTS

Yes, it's janky as hell, but I've still had a lot of fun with this action-RPG. The price? Just 63 pennies.

GLOOMHAVEN

I paid £9.95 for this, completely forgetting I had it for free via the Epic Games Store. Doh!

never typically play, but it's the excitement of what I might find – AAA titles are often sprinkled in – that always pulls me in.

The likes of GOG, CDKeys, Itch and Green Man Gaming have all become great places for stretching my money and grabbing digital bargains and that's before you even consider the many free games through Epic Games Store and Amazon Prime. However, there's a downside to this that you've probably already guessed. I have way too many games now, more than I can ever possibly play, and still I buy more. Similar to my growing iTunes film collection, I'll go to myself, "That's a bargain," grab it and then forget I have it.

Even though I have more games than I can ever play, I do make an effort to play through stuff now. Owning the Steam Deck has proven to be a wake-up call, both for the diversity of games that can be found on the PC format and how it has pushed me away from physical titles.

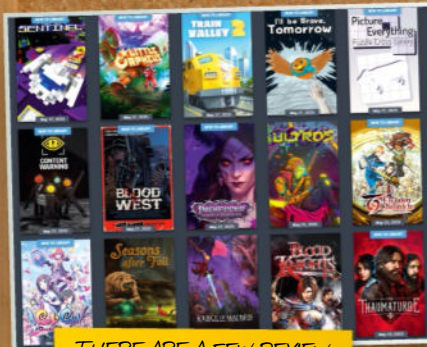
I don't really know what's going to happen to my physical games collection going forward, but I do know that something is going to have to be really special in order for it to get added to my collection in the future. ✨



[PC] CHRONO TRIGGER IS A CLASSIC RPG THAT I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO PLAY.



[PC] I HAVE PHYSICAL COPIES OF ALL THE STEAMWORLD GAMES ON SWITCH, BUT NOW I HAVE PC VERSIONS AS WELL.



THERE ARE A FEW REVIEW CODES HERE, BUT MOST OF THESE GAMES HAVE COME FROM BUNDLES.

DIGITAL OR PHYSICAL?

Readers share their gaming media preferences

Kara Jane Adams

Over the years I probably have over 1,000 digital games in my collection. Mostly because even digitally I like to own an official version of something and when it comes to older games, you tend to get some QOL improvements.

Gendou

I live in a third-world country and digital is my main way to get games because here you only get super popular titles in physical form and it's impossible to get hidden gems or check out new games.

Robb from 8/16/32bit

Digital on my PC. You don't really have any other options these days. Steam, Epic, GOG. On my PS5... not really. The closed ecosystem of a console means prices tend to stay higher for longer.

Chris Jowett

I buy digital games most of the time as they can very occasionally be cheaper than physical games, but it's mostly because I can install them on more than one console and don't need to put the disc in!

Psi/Ben

I only buy digital if it's my only option. I enjoy the freedom of being able to lend or sell my physical games and whilst I appreciate people might not like the space it can take, I find it to be minimal unless holding on to things to collect.

Ana Lu

I only gave in to buy digital because there are less and less physical releases (at least in Portugal). And that's the only way to play some games. But I have a limit. More than €10 is a no-no.

Arctic Panda Popz

I usually always try to buy physical, as I like looking and browsing through my physical collection. I only buy digital when there's an extremely good sale or it's a game I'm not as fussed about having in my personal physical collection.

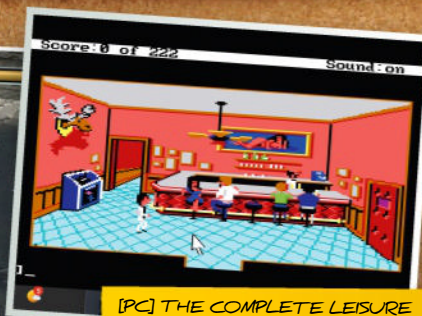
LeChuck Rising

I do appreciate buying physical games but I can instantly purchase digital games and start playing them almost immediately.

[PC] THE FIRST TOMB RAIDER TRILOGY REMASTER WAS PART OF A RECENT HUMBLE CHOICE BUNDLE.



[PC] THE COMPLETE LEISURE SUIT LARRY COLLECTION WAS PART OF ONE OF MY MYSTERY BUNDLES.



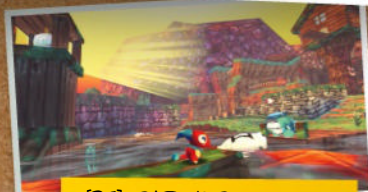
[PC] YES PHYSICAL COPIES OF GAMES ARE NICE, BUT PAYING £1 FOR AMAZING GAMES LIKE LUMINES REMASTERED IS ALSO NICE.



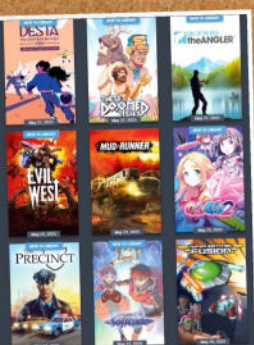
[PC] I'VE SUNK OVER 22 HOURS INTO AFTERIMAGE AND I'VE STILL NOT FINISHED IT. NOT BAD FOR £11.19.



[PC] I PAID 49 PENCE FOR CAVERN OF DREAMS. IT'S A LOVELY TAKE ON THE N64 PLATFORMERS OF OLD.



[PC] AKXOLOTL TOGETHER IS A FUN TWINSTICK SHOOTER I'VE RECENTLY ENJOYED.



[PC] ALIENS: DARK DESCENT IS A GREAT TOP-DOWN ACTION GAME, BUT I SUCK AT IT.



MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – [TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG](https://twitter.com/RETROGAMER_MAG)

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of one of our classic retro books from our archives. Good luck everyone!



★ STAR LETTER

RETRO GAMER: THE TEACHER'S AID

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I first got my PS1 when I was six and had my first exposure to 'game design' making custom scenarios in *Age Of Empires* when I was nine. Fast forward and I now work as a computing teacher at St Margaret's Academy in Livingston and also teach game design.

I realised when teaching my class that students don't read gaming magazines like I did growing up anymore (some of them thought I was making demo discs up). Feeling nostalgic, I bought an issue of your magazine and became hooked. I started buying back issues featuring games that meant a lot to me and I ended up reading more about games than actually playing them. I chose to display them in my classroom to show students the connection between what they learn in class and the games they play at home – or at least, the skins they wear in *Fortnite*...

Unfortunately, there were no issues from my favourite series: *Tekken*. I took out a subscription and when the first issue arrived I opened the package and Jin Kazama was staring at me (I may have screamed)! I run end-of-term *Tekken* tournaments in my class and now Jin gets recognised on my shelf.

Since putting it up, I've had lots of students discuss gaming and their memories. I love the *WipEout* issue, because none of the students know what it is and when they ask it gives me an excuse to talk about how I had a number one global Time Trial record in *WipEout HD* for a single day before being dethroned.

I look forward to adding many more issues to my gaming library! Thanks,
Bobby Stroud

PS: As a PS1 fanboy, can you do me a favour and make a *Spyro The Dragon* cover.

What an incredible letter, Bobby. It's so heart-warming to hear that Retro Gamer is being enjoyed by so many of your students. We can't guarantee a Spyro cover anytime soon, but we can send you a bookazine to add to your shelves.



» Here's an image of Bobby's class room. Maybe **Retro Gamer** will become a subject matter one day...



» Want to learn more about the Boozler family and Teletext in general? Head to the excellent teletextart.co.uk

BLOCKS AWAY!

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

Recently, whilst shopping around for puzzle games across the different systems I own, I became overwhelmed by just how many 'falling block' games there now are. Especially the ones which involve connecting the same colours together. I'm sure I remember a time when there was only one... the grandfather of all these games... *Tetris*. So, it got me thinking, have you considered doing a feature exploring the history of the falling block game? Starting with *Tetris* (if indeed that was the first?) and then all the various offshoots that came thereafter... 'Chips Off The Old Block' you could say? It may make for an interesting read. I'm a recent subscriber and enjoying every issue.

Regards,
Stewart Boulton

Thanks for writing in, Stewart. We ran a Bluffer's Guide To



» [PC] We'd imagine that Stewart already owns a copy of Digital Eclipse's *Tetris Forever*.

Puzzle Games all the way back in issue 119, which may be of interest to you. We quite like the idea of focussing on the falling block side of things though, so we'll see what we can do.

BAMBOOZLED

Hi **Retro Gamer**

I just wanted to pile onto what I'm sure will be a deluge of outrage regarding your Favourite Quiz Games feature in issue 272. The omission of Teletext classic *Bamboozle* is completely unforgivable for a publication that deals in all things retro, and how often do you actually get a legitimate chance to talk about Teletext? I think you owe a personal apology to the entire Boozler family. Yours,
Robert Williams

Thanks for writing in, Robert. We've sent the Boozler family an apology but we never heard back from them.

NINETIES FOREVER

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I really enjoyed the Nineties bookazine from last year. This is by far my favourite era of gaming. I was just eight when I got my Sega Mega Drive for Christmas 1992 with *Sonic 2* included. This was my first games console. I

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates



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» The Ultimate Flashback To The 90s is still available to buy from magazinesdirect.com

can remember endless afternoons playing the likes of *Streets Of Rage 2*, *Golden Axe* and *Shinobi III* along with *Sonic 3* and *Sonic & Knuckles*. For me I will always remember the Nineties as the last golden era of gaming, with the transition from 2D to 3D gaming and then from the 16-bit to the 32 and 64-bit era later in the decade. Lee Passmore

You're quite right that the Nineties were exciting, Lee. What impresses us is the sheer evolution we went through, with 8-bit home computers like the Spectrum at the beginning of the decade, to Sega's Dreamcast at the end.

FAILURE TO LAUNCH

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
Is it just me, or are console launches becoming less and less exciting? Outside of *Mario Kart World* there appears to be no genuinely exclusive launch games for the Switch 2, which seems weird. Think back to the release of the N64 with *Super Mario 64* or the Wii with *Wii Sports*. The launches for the PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X felt quite unexciting as well. Do you agree, or am I just getting old and cynical?
Yours,
Duncan James

While console launches have changed significantly over the

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Switch 2

Due to Nintendo sending us through a review unit, the Switch 2 has been on everyone's lips this month. Darran has been busy reviewing the likes of *Mario Kart World*, Nick is still on the fence about buying one, while Tim wants to know when Game Pass games will start being released on it. Though he did finally complete *Blasphemous 2*



years, we've still seen plenty of online excitement for the new Switch. Interestingly, both Nick and Darran feel the PS Vita had the strongest launch of recent memory (for all the good that did it). We're certainly looking forward to seeing what Microsoft and Sony do next.

retro GAMER

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Cover image

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Your say

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...
What's your favourite Terminator game?

Pixel Memories

There's only one and that is *T2: The Arcade Game*.

Patrick Diggins

Terminator 2: Judgment Day for the NES. I got it for my 12th birthday. I was obsessed with *The Terminator* at the time. The game isn't amazing, but I played the heck out of it and enjoyed the varied gameplay.

Dark Blue Monkey

Skynet. A really fun little game that allowed deathmatch in

great levels, but allowed you to fly HKs and drive machine gun-mounted jeeps too. The graphics were really nice compared to other games, quite hi-res, and the level design was not bad too. Short, but very sweet.

Alex79

T2: The Arcade Game. Every weekend after playing football all afternoon as kids, a small group of us would pile back to a mate's house and play it on his Mega Drive. It was

like a lightgun game, but you used the controller. It's maybe not the best, but I have good memories of it!

PastBlastr

T2 Terminator 2: Judgment Day! It was absolutely mind-blowing for its time!

Mr Flumps

My favourite has to be *The Terminator* for Sega CD – the soundtrack, atmosphere, and gameplay captured the essence of the movie perfectly.

» [Mega Drive] We'd imagine this image will make Alex79 very nostalgic.



PixelLove77

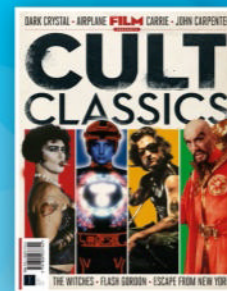
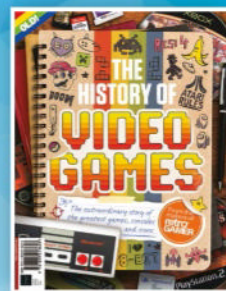
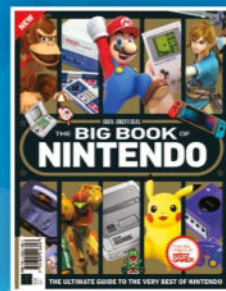
My first *Terminator* game and my favourite is *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* on the Atari ST. Pure childhood memories!

Jaws

I have to say that *T2 Terminator 2: Judgment Day* was a fantastic game.

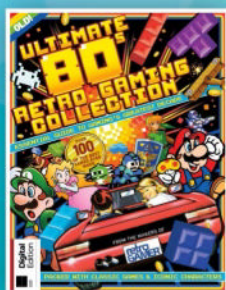
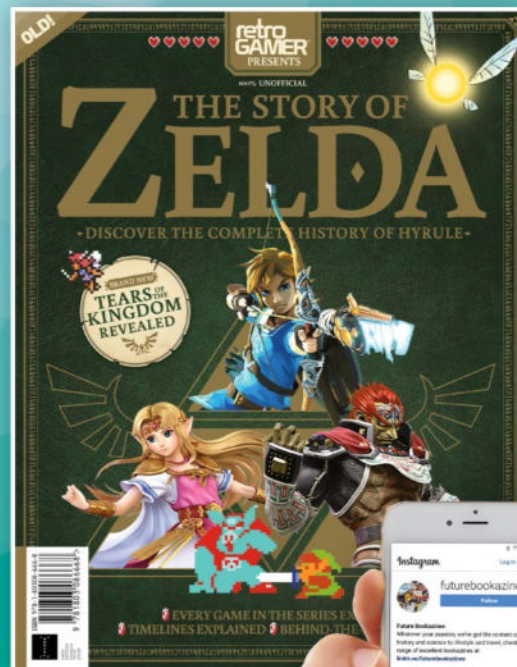
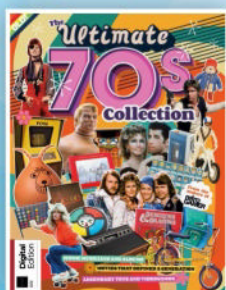
Good Games

True Lies. [There's always one – Ed]



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HEALTH

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The Orange Box

TWISTING THE RULES

» RETROREVIVAL



» XBOX 360 » 2007 » VALVE SOFTWARE

I was recently listening to the Xbox 360 Mega Draft that took place on The Back Page Podcast a few episodes back. It's a

great videogame-based podcast helmed by Samuel Roberts and Matthew Castle and

this particular episode also featured Dave Scarborough and Ashley Day, who, like Samuel, all used to work at Imagine Publishing with me and have written for **Retro Gamer** on numerous occasions.

Anyway, in addition to some great banter between the four drafters, I particularly enjoyed Dave instantly going for *The Orange Box* as one of his choices. Was it particularly fair that Dave chose a game that was essentially five choices in one? Maybe not in the spirit of the draft (although it was allowed), but it's still a fantastic choice.

As I listened to Dave easily defend his pick, it highlighted to me just what a rarity *The Orange Box* actually is. Not in how hard it is to acquire nowadays, but that you didn't really see collections like this when it was released. Granted, compilations were nothing new on the PS3 and Xbox 360, but it was very unusual to see a studio release a selection of new, genuinely great titles in one lavish collection.

Half-Life 2 (shown here) was only three years old when *The Orange Box* debuted, while *Half-Life 2: Episode One* was only two years old. The other three games, *Team Fortress 2*, *Portal* and *Half-Life 2: Episode Two*, were (initially) exclusive to the collection and nothing on the Xbox 360 could really match it when it came to sheer value for money. The PS3 version was hobbled and is best-avoided nowadays, but I heartily recommend you seek out the Xbox 360 version if you can, as it's easily available for under £15. You won't be able to play *Team Fortress 2* anymore, due to the servers being down, but all the others are perfectly playable and remain some of the best examples of their genre that you can play on the console. Nice choice, Dave. ★



ENDGAME

PUYO PUYO 2



» In a land where the beans aren't mean and Kirby doesn't operate a ghost trap, the *Puyo Puyo* series draws its plot from the *Madou Monogatari* RPG series it was spun off from, with Arle playing the hero and Satan the villain. Let's see what happens when the two do battle once again, this time utilising little coloured blobs rather than swords and sorcery...



» Arle has defeated Satan – or the Dark Prince, as he's known by the hoity-toity delicate English-speaking audience. Unfortunately, he's turned his tower into a rocket, and Arle's only gone and set it off. Oh dear, oh dear.



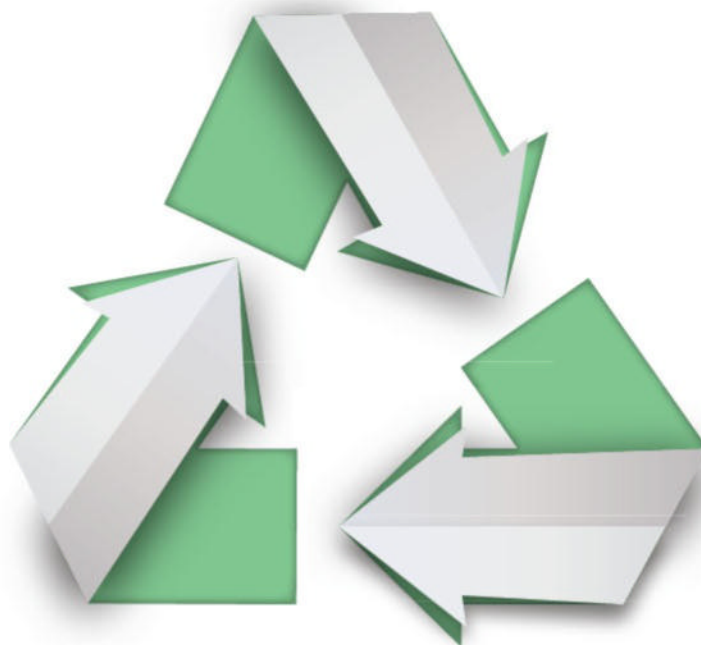
» The duo are trapped together, shooting toward an unknown fate in space. Satan is predictably rather pleased with the situation. "This is the one thing I didn't want to happen," complains Arle.



» Fortunately, they don't so much touch down on the red planet as obliterate it completely, creating an unexpectedly pretty pyrotechnic display. Sorry to any billionaires hoping to turn it into real estate – maybe you could try a mission to Uranus or something?



» As our adversaries improbably parachute back to safety, Carbuncle has fallen asleep gazing at the moon. He's presumably dreaming of the days when he used to terrorise a certain editor by making unexpected appearances in the pages of a certain magazine about old games.



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