OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro*
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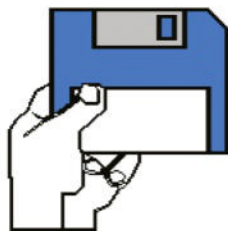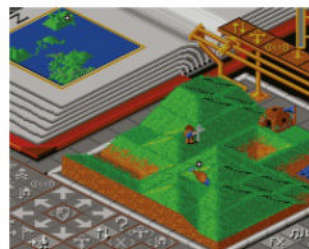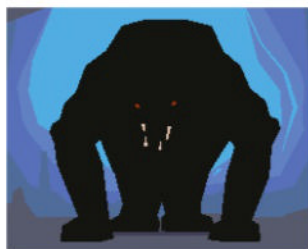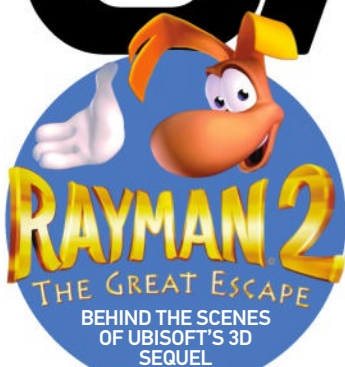
RAYMAN 2
THE GREAT ESCAPE
BEHIND THE SCENES OF UBISOFT'S 3D SEQUEL

40 YEARS OF THE
AMIGA
HOW COMMODORE'S 16-BIT POWERHOUSE RAISED THE BAR FOR GAMING AND BEYOND

THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE AMIGA GAME?

DARRAN JONES
While I don't really like football, I absolutely love playing *Sensible World Of Soccer*. It's just so much fun.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Dungeons Of Hinterberg*
Favourite game of all time: *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*

TIM EMPEY
So many to choose from, but since I left it out of Hot Topic, *Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe*. And maybe *Xenon 2: Megablast*, mostly for the Bomb The Bass tune.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently playing: *Monster Train 2*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE
I'm familiar with so many Amiga games from ports to other systems, but *Another World* is a classic that I always instinctively want to play on the Amiga itself.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Sakura Wars*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER
It would have to be between *Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe* and *Sensible World Of Soccer*. I've only played them once on the Amiga, and have more time with them on other systems.
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
My favourite Amiga game of all time is Sensible Software's *Cannon Fodder*.
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *Angry Birds Bounce*
Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

STUART HUNT
I'm going to avoid the usual suspects and show some love to *Silkworm* – a fantastic arcade conversion and excellent co-op shooter.
Expertise: Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing: *RoboCop: Rogue City*
Favourite game of all time: *Donkey Kong*

DAVID CROOKES
I've played *Sensible World Of Soccer* more times than I care to remember and it's provided me with so many memories. So while I love *Alien Breed* and *Lotus*, *SWOS* edges it.
Expertise: Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, *Dizzy* and PlayStation 2 (but is it retro? Debate!)
Currently playing: *Sensible World Of Soccer*
Favourite game of all time: *Broken Sword*

ANDREW FISHER
Pinball Dreams, my favourite of the amazing pinball titles by the team that became DICE.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Boulder Dash 40th Anniversary*
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

RORY MILNE
There are so many great options, but I can't look past *Uridium 2*. It's like a coin-op shooter that you can play at home, and that ticks a lot of boxes for me.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Banjo-Kazooie*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

LOADING...

I refuse to believe it was 40 years ago when I first encountered Commodore's Amiga. It can't be that old, surely? And yet it is, and it has gone down in history as one of the most popular home computers of its time.

Seeing that intro to *Batman* or the beast punching his way through enemies in *Shadow Of The Beast* highlighted that Commodore's machine was leaps and bounds ahead of the 8-bit micros of the time, and I never missed the opportunity to play the likes of *Sensible Soccer* or *Speedball 2* with my Amiga-owning friends.

It's a delight then to look back at the key areas that defined Commodore's machine, from its many iterations, the magazines that covered it, and of course, its many great games. We've even got plenty of input from Amiga veterans like Mike Dailly, Martin Edmondson and Jon Hare.

Outside of our Amiga coverage we've plenty more retro goodness, including behind-the-scenes articles on *Tiger-Heli*, *Rayman 2: The Great Escape* and *Drakan: Order Of The Flame*, and interviews with Tony Warriner and Richie Shoemaker. We also have a brand-new feature celebrating the priciest games in our hobby, which you'll find on page 104.

Wow. I still can't believe the Amiga's release was 40 years ago. God, I'm old.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

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40 Years Of The Amiga

As the Amiga turns 40, Graham Pembrey and Nick Thorpe break down the many elements of its success and interview key players from the time

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In The Chair: Tony Warriner

The cofounder of Revolution Studios looks back at his impressive career

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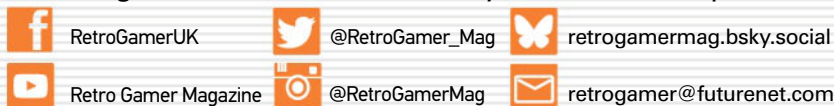
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Cofounder Jon Burton revisits the studio's biggest hits, including *Lego Star Wars*

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The Making Of: Rayman 2: The Great Escape
Find out why Ubisoft moved away from 2D for Michel Ancel's ambitious sequel

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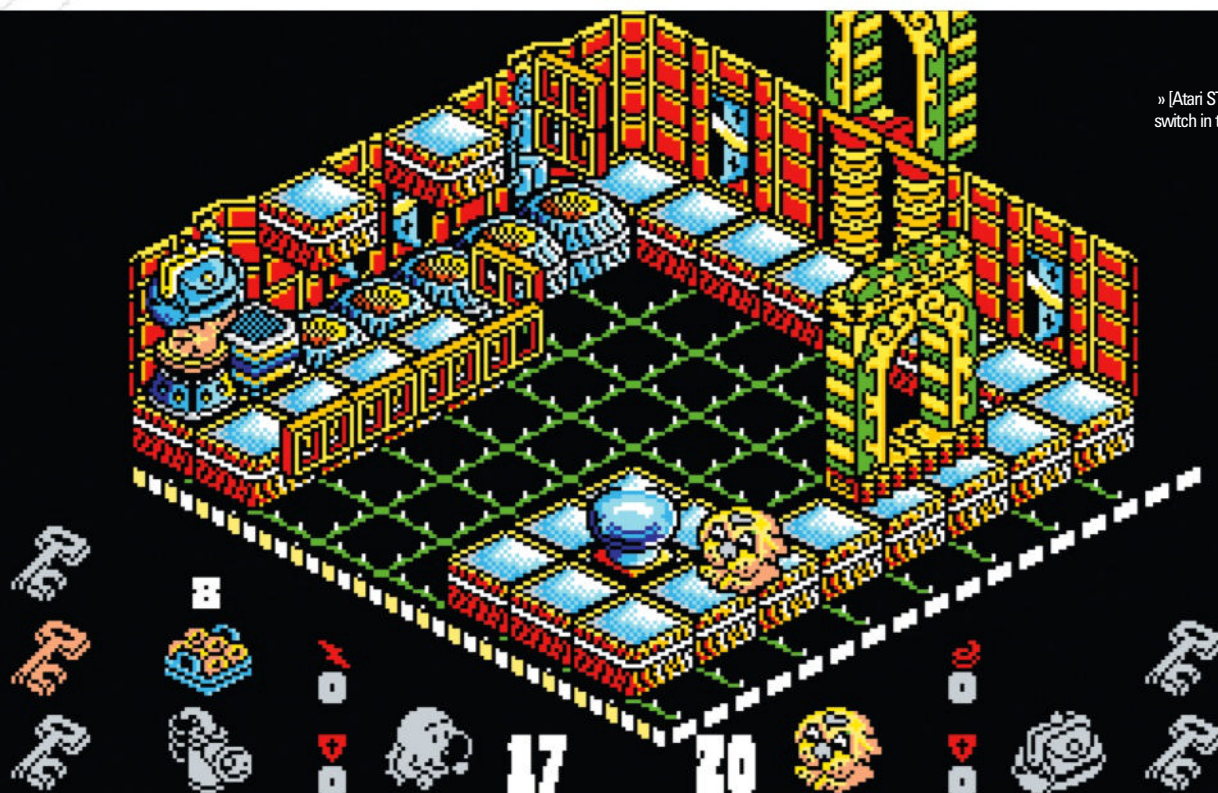
» [Atari ST] Heels hot-foots it over to a switch in the attempt to solve a puzzle.

HEAD OVER HEELS RETURNS

Colin Porch on his 36-year-journey to update the iconic adventure

Head Over Heels and Colin Porch have a connection that has stretched across decades. The 80-year-old Ocean software veteran initially converted the iconic isometric game to the Commodore 64, and then began working on the Atari ST and Amiga versions of the game in his spare time. He later shared his completed work with Ocean's management who agreed to publish both titles, making them arguably the definitive versions of the game.

It turned out that Colin wasn't finished with the popular game though and began to look at ways he could expand it. This started all the way back in the late-Eighties. "I had a few ideas that I wanted

» [Atari ST] The pixel art from the original game still holds up incredibly well.

to envisage for a sequel, but shortly after that, Ocean stopped producing games for home micros, so I shelved it," Colin laments. The sequel was packed up and placed in Colin's garage until a chance meeting with ex-Ocean boss Gary Bracey at an Ocean Software reunion in 2013 saw Colin being quizzed about the lost game.

After being convinced by Gary that there was a healthy interest in retro games, Colin went back to his garage and the hard work in restoring the game began. "The computer didn't work. The monitors didn't work. The disk drives didn't work. The assembly didn't work," laughs Colin, "nothing worked anymore. It took me a while to get it all working again." During that time Colin battled ill health and was also trying to untangle the game's rights.

Colin tells us that the core game was actually finished several years ago and rights negotiation had held the game back. A deal was

» Colin Porch has updated *Head Over Heels*. Here's a picture of his head, not his heels.

initially discussed with Piko Interactive, but that changed once the rights changed hands to Atari. By this point Thalamus Digital Publishing stepped in to officially licence the rights from Atari and has been working with Colin ever since to bring the project to life.

But is *Return To Blacktooth: A Head Over Heels Adventure* a brand-new game or a remix of the original? The answer is a little more complicated. "The layout is not the same, but the story behind it is," Colin tells us. "Some of the rooms are very similar to the original rooms, although not necessarily in the same place, because the story is that the defences have been improved."

There's an air of familiarity as we watch Colin guide us through several areas of the game, but there are plenty of new wrinkles too, with the most devious coming from the original creator of *Head Over Heels*, Jon Ritman. "He watched the game and he liked it and it was his idea to put in
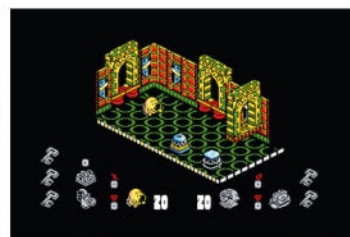
» [Atari ST] Heels finds himself in an empty room and ponders his next move.
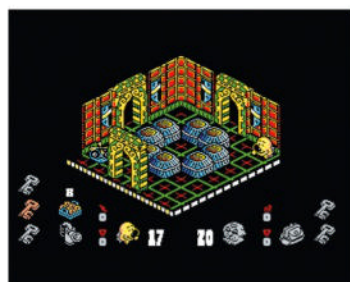
» [Atari ST] Invisible hazards can appear in the new game, adding a deadly new spin to navigating rooms.
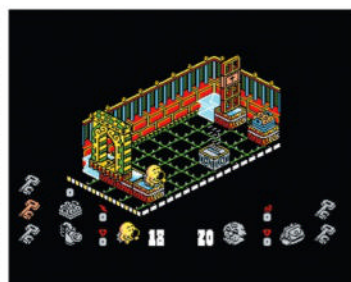
» [Atari ST] Colin has reused most of the sprites from the original game.

» [Atari ST] Colin worked on the original 16-bit versions in his spare time.

these disappearing objects," Colin says. The objects in question flash several times before disappearing, you then have to remember where they are, which is easier said than done. While some will be hazardous, others will be invisible platforms that need to be navigated.

Invisible objects aren't the only new hazards in Colin's sequel. "I've also added coloured keys," we're told. "Some of the rooms you cannot get through unless you own the right coloured key to unlock part of the fence that's got a keyhole in it. They won't be very far away, but you still have to find them. I've also introduced Force Fields, blockages that you can stop

> **I have a middle name of devious now, so I'm told**
> COLIN 'DEVIOUS' PORCH

temporarily by activating a switch of some description."

Some of the new additions Colin describes suggests the game could be quite a bit more of a puzzler than the original classic and Colin doesn't disagree. "I have a middle name of devious now, so I'm told," he laughs. "The [new puzzles] are fair, but they are devious. The whole intention of the game for me is not battling against the clock, but battling against the mind. […] You get to work it out. And that for me is the attraction. It wasn't necessarily about doing it. It was working out what you had to do in the first place."

Despite its long gestation period Colin's sequel has presented few challenges, although he admits that Paul Hughes, a fellow Ocean staffer from back in the

day is currently helping him with one particular problem as a request has come in to have the game playable via the Atari ST's keyboard, as well as a traditional joystick, which is causing issues. "The Atari is simply not built for that and I've been struggling with it over the last week or so, which is why I've been getting some help from Paul."

Keyboard control issues aside, Colin is confident of hitting the proposed release for later in the year and is excited to see the game finally come to fruition after all this time. "I'm not looking to make a fortune out of it," he laughs. "I'd be happy just for people such as yourself who'd like to see it to finally get to play." Thanks to plenty of perseverance and a little bit of help from the likes of Thalamus Digital Publishing and Paul Hughes, Colin's long-gestating project is about to become a reality. We can't wait to play it. ✱

Mrs Cripps' crack house

When I got a disk drive, I lived with the common understanding that software was something you bought – or rented with strict late fees. So when a classmate overheard me discussing how I was saving up to buy a new game, he pulled me aside and told me that if I wanted the good stuff, to bring a box of blank floppies and meet him at an address he had written down on a torn scrap of paper. I asked him if it was his house, and he laughed, "No… it's the crack house."

When I made my way over that evening, the lawn was littered with BMX bikes. It made my hair stand on end. Were they the remains of my predecessors? Was someone about to push a fatal new super drug on me? Before I could retreat, the front door opened with a cloud of smoke, revealing a chain-smoking grandmother holding a dinner plate full of ash like an oversized ashtray. Her voice sounded like her vocal cords were dragged across a cheese grater. "Are you Brian's friend?" "Yes." She took a long drag off her cigarette and sized me up. "Come in."

Inside was chaos. Commodore 64s on card tables, disk drives daisy-chained and humming, kids swapping floppies. It was Swap Day at the so-called crack house, and I was the new recruit. Brian told everyone I was cool, like I was being initiated into some kind of crime family.

I came empty-handed, assuming we were just swapping harmless typed-in programs from magazines. Mrs Cripps – now seated in what was referred to, not ironically, as the smoking room – told me I could take some games this time, but next time I'd need to bring something of value to trade. And nobody called them games… no. They were called 'warez'. And I learned why they called it the crack house. They only traded in cracked games, software that had its copy-protection stripped from its code. "No warez, no trades," she said, then launched into an unsettling cough-laugh combo. Her game of choice was *Ultimate Wizard* – a *Jumpman*-style game starring a wizard who looked like Gandalf doing parkour. She played it religiously.

I went home that night with my warez and a head full of guilt. The next 24 hours were spent alternating between elation and dread that the FBI would crash through my window yelling at me to step away from the illegal copy of *Booga-Boo*. I didn't plan to go back – not just because I was scared, but because I had nothing new to offer.

Then I discovered that *Ultimate Wizard* had a level editor. That changed everything. Maybe I could make stuff that added value without violating federal law (technically). That night, I made a dozen levels. Some were playable. A few were borderline sadistic. I brought them to the next meet up and said nothing about having made them. She didn't ask.

It became a silent exchange: creativity for contraband. She'd ask for more levels. She gave feedback. "This one's impossible." "Is this warp supposed to kill me?" Eventually, she introduced me to her grandson – a sysop who ran a BBS that specialised in 'zero-day warez'. He was, in his words, "a fan of my work". Not ominous at all. He'd later ask me to help him produce 'crack intros' when I started to develop some decent coding skills.

It was the first time I saw someone genuinely enjoy something I'd made. Not out of obligation – no friendship, no family ties – but just because it was actually fun. For all the second-hand smoke and moral gray areas of dealing with a copyright-defiant grandmother, that part stuck.

I don't remember the last time I saw Mrs Cripps… but I often imagine she's still alive – dragging Virginia Slims, cursing at a purple wizard, and pulling the strings behind the last known piracy ring in the tri-county area. And when people ask how I got into game design, I always start the same way, "There was this crack house…" ✱

> **" Then I discovered that Ultimate Wizard had a level editor. That changed everything "**

NINJAS AND MERCH
SYSTEM 3 UPDATES ITS WEBSITE AND DARRAN PLAYS ITS INCOMING COMPILATION

Fans of *The Last Ninja, IK+* and *Super Putty* will be interested to hear that System 3 is planning to revamp its website. In addition to featuring all the latest news on its incoming games, the website will also feature a large amount of merchandise covering everything from the aforementioned games to deeper cuts from the System 3 library. You'll find the new store over at system3.com where you'll be able to get your hands on mugs, certified organic cotton T-shirts, hoodies and much more. We've only sampled a small portion of mugs and hoodies, but the quality seems very good.

That's not the only System 3 news we have though, as Darran was able to have an early hands-on with *The Last Ninja Collection + Bonus Games*, which found big success on KickStarter late last year. While it's lacking the in-depth history timelines that have made Digital Eclipse's compilations so fun to navigate, the presentation is still very good and the selection of games on offer is solid as well. There are multiple versions of many of the games and the emulation felt spot-on across both the PC and Switch versions. Needless to say, you can expect a review later in the year, but fans of *The Last Ninja* won't be disappointed.

» Here's a small selection of the merchandise you'll be able to buy from system3.com

» [PC] Many of the games feature multiple versions. We particularly enjoyed *IK+* on the ZX Spectrum.
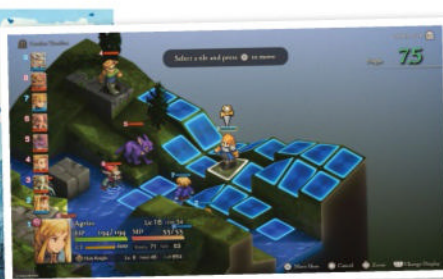
» [PlayStation 5] The new remake of *Final Fantasy Tactics* is looking great.

» [PlayStation 5] *Onimusha: Way Of The Sword* is scheduled for release in 2026. We can't wait!

A SUMMER OF GAMES
A LARGE NUMBER OF RETRO-RELATED GAMES ARE ON THE WAY

Although E3 is no longer a thing, plenty of game announcements still happen during the summer. Summer Game Fest 2025 had a reveal of *Resident Evil Requiem* and more information on *Onimusha: Way Of The Sword*. The event also featured a new 2D *Scott Pilgrim* brawler and news that *Sonic Racing: CrossWorlds* will feature a number of guest racers, including Hatsune Miku and *Minecraft*'s Steve.

The Xbox Games Showcase was a little lighter on retro content, but did have new gameplay info for *Ninja Gaiden 4* and *Gears Of War: Reloaded* (yes, it's retro now). *Call Of Duty: Black Ops 7* was revealed, but there was no sign of *Perfect Dark*. Its omission became more obvious when Microsoft later revealed its cancellation alongside numerous other games and 9,000 jobs.

Sony's State Of Play was a lot better and highlighted *Final Fantasy Tactics: The Ivalice Chronicles, Lumines Arise* and *Mortal Kombat Legacy Kollection*, as well as *Thief VR: Legacy Of Shadow* and *Silent Hill f*.

Needless to say, you can expect reviews as and when these games get released.

A MOBILE CULL

Sega and SNK recently removed a bunch of classic games from various mobile stores. *Crazy Taxi Classic, Shining Force Classics* and *Sonic CD Classic* were just some of the Sega games affected, while SNK's included *Blazing Star, Metal Slug 1, 2* and *X*, and *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*. What's worse, the SNK games can't be re-downloaded, meaning once you uninstall them, they'll be lost forever. Ouch!

RISE FROM YOUR GRAVE

Well this is certainly unexpected news. *Undeadline*, one of the Mega Drive's pricier shmups, is being released for the first time in the West via Retro-Bit. It's due for release in December and includes a reversible inlay sleeve by Zander Martinez and a new translation and localisation by Nathan Deren and Jonathan Antonioli. Hurry, as preorders by the likes of Strictly Limited Games and Limited Run Games close very soon.

Tick, tock, TikTok

Regular readers to my little corner of retro nonsense will know a lot of my time is spent buying stuff, not using it, getting rid of stuff and then buying the same stuff a bit later at an inflated price. Repeat ad nauseam.

The first big purge was 16 years ago. I had a spare room in a flat and it was filled with all kinds of gaming goodness. A QL, a modded BBC Master, a Dreamcast… tons of stuff. But my wife and I were expecting our first child and that room was going to be his bedroom. So instead of picking through the stuff and choosing what to keep, or putting it all in our rather ample loft space, I put everything in a pile and placed an ad on Gumtree. Everything had to go, but it had to go in one bundle. I was not splitting this.

A very nice chap came round and took it all. He brought a trolley with him, and he tripped over the kerb as he approached my block. Funny the things you remember. He managed to secure everything with some very strong bungee cords and off he went. I thought nothing of it. Until a few years later when I realised that within that bundle was some actual treasure I had never meant to give away.

Like a lot of people, I had spent time living in London sharing flats or houses with other people. When I got on the telly, I was sharing with Mackenzie Crook. We'd become friends on the stand-up circuit and ended up living together. I do remember that one night we did a moonlight flit from one place because the landlord was absolutely bonkers and we thought he was going to kill us.

Mackenzie is a very talented artist and he had decorated an OG PlayStation for me. It was a vaguely psychedelic night-time scene. I hadn't thought of this thing for a while and it suddenly popped into my head. I hunted for it and couldn't find it, slowly realising it had probably been part of that bundle. I spent the next ten years looking for it – asking social media, trawling forums and checking eBay. No luck.

Last week someone posted a comment on one of my many hilarious TikToks. "Hope you're well Iain, I still have your BBC Master." Time froze. This was the guy that had collected everything 16 years ago. There was no way he still had the whole collection. Nervously I replied, "Are you the dude that took the whole gaming collection? Do you still have the decorated PlayStation?"

The long and short of it was he did have it. I burst into tears. Finally, the hunt was over. I offered to buy it, but Scott refused payment. He was just happy to know it was going back home. I am deeply indebted to Scott for his generosity. I collected it and sat in the car for half an hour staring at this strange little box before driving home. Time travel is possible and dreams really do come true. ✱

> **" I had a spare room in a flat and it was filled with all kinds of gaming goodness "**

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Time for a truce

Ah, the Amiga. My history – *Digitiser*'s history – with the 16-bit Commodore machine is well documented. The potted version is that when *Digitiser* launched on Teletext we didn't initially feature the Amiga. Cue calls and letters from angry Amiga fans. We relented. And then over the next year or so our initial assertion that the Amiga was on its way out kind of, y'know, came to pass, and so we were duty-bound to report that news.

Admittedly, we probably did a fair bit of gloating too, which angered Amiga fans all the more, and so we revelled in winding them up. They got nasty, tried to get us fired, and… well… the rest is history.

Commodore went bankrupt just over a year after *Digi* launched. But! The truth is, I never hated the Amiga, or Amiga fans. Not en masse. That sort of blanket labelling of one demographic is why the world is in such a mess right now.

I mean, we could've done without them organising petitions to force us out of our jobs, but no… why would I hate a machine? What sort of a mindset is that? I was never one for loyalty to any particular system or brand. I was a big Super NES fan, but that's because I loved Nintendo's games. The fact is, when I was a full-time games journalist we got more support from Sega's PR team – even when we were reporting news that they'd perhaps prefer us not to. We just called stuff as we saw it.

I've written before about how I erroneously chose the Atari ST over an Amiga. I always knew I'd chosen the inferior machine. But by the time I became a games journalist, the writing was on the wall for Commodore. The company was struggling, flailing almost. Its marketing was confusing – was it a games machine, or a business computer? Which of the many models of Amiga were you meant to buy? Why would anyone faff around with floppy disks when you can just slot a cartridge into a console? Or buy a PC – which was a fast-growing market?

To anyone who wasn't all-in on the Amiga, by 1993 it was abundantly clear that the brand was on borrowed time. These sorts of events gain a momentum – one mistake leads to another, which leads to panic, which leads to more mistakes, and there was the whiff of death around the machine. New games became a trickle.

I don't revel in that. Alright, I love being proven right – who doesn't? And the death of the Amiga clearly hit a lot of people hard, for some reason. But… the Amiga never really died. Fans took things into their own hands, and the demoscene continued underground. I know there's still a core of Amiga fanatics out there, because any time I've ever written about it I tend to get abuse.

But, after 30-odd years, I'm willing to call a truce. I'm sorry, Amiga fans. It's not your fault you were idiots. ✳

> " Why would anyone faff around with floppy disks when you can just slot a cartridge into a console? "

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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» [PC] Up to four players can brawl their way through Tromavilla with characters like Toxic, Yvonne, Junkyard and Nozone.

» Retroware creative director Justin Silverman, left, and Troma cofounder Lloyd Kaufman (Courtesy of Justin Silverman)

Toxic Crusaders

Retroware's creative director Justin Silverman on re-animating a cult classic

The Eighties and Nineties had tons of TV cartoons based on grown-up films, like *RoboCop, Rambo* and *Police Academy*. *Toxic Crusaders* turned Troma's violent, gore-grinding, mop-flinging hero the Toxic Avenger into something of a more kid-friendly cult classic. Retroware recently turned the cartoon into an arcade brawler scheduled for release later this year and we spoke to creative director Justin Silverman about it.

So Justin, *Toxic Crusaders* seems very ambitious. Retroware has done some great games but with this one, it looks like the cartoon. It's definitely our biggest, most ambitious title considering a lot of the other devs we work with, it's usually a single guy or a couple of people. A couple of artists, things like that. This one, we've pulled in something like 20 artists throughout the years.

It has motion comic cutscenes and full voice acting to match the original series. It's a lot of writing, considering it is season two of a show that never happened.

Is there anything else Troma-related in the game?
It includes bits of almost every other Troma movie. So if you're a horror fan, if you're a Troma fan, you're really going to like it. If you like the original source material, it's a little false nostalgia because there's only one season of that show compared to something like [*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*]. I think people are digging it because they remembered, "Oh yeah, I remember liking that but I don't remember it too

much." So that kind of works in our favour. Not only do we have to make a game for the fans and the people that kind of remember the show but we also have to make a very tight, balanced brawler that people want to play.

Has there been much involvement from Troma and Troma's cofounder Lloyd Kaufman, Justin?

Troma's involvement was just, you know, "You guys have carte blanche to do what you want. Let us know what you want to put in there." We gave them the whole laundry list. They were very happy about that and they were super helpful with promotion. They're always at various events we go to. They bring the game trailer, flyers and all that stuff when they set up at horror conventions.

Lloyd's also in the game. We have an intro and some character voices from him because at the end of the day, this is a Troma property. So we're very much treating it like that.

We know there have been some delays with *Toxic Avengers,* we imagine because this is such an

> "It includes bits of almost every other Troma movie. So if you're a horror fan, if you're a Troma fan, you're really going to like it"
>
> **JUSTIN SILVERMAN**

» [PC] *Toxic Crusaders* features moving comic cutscenes to entertain players and progress the story between stages.

» [PC] You just can't do a classic beat-'em-up without a fully cooked chicken on the street.

» [PC] The new game takes players to other Tromaville locations, such as the American Chicken Bunker from *Poultrygeist: Night Of The Chicken Dead*.

» [PC] The game's story picks up where the original cartoon series left off, with Dr Killemoff trying to re-pollute Tromaville.

» [PC] Retroware creative director Justin Silverman says *Toxic Crusaders* will take players on a retro journey through some of Troma's other film settings like the radioactive Tromaville High School from the 1986 horror comedy *Class of Nuke 'Em High*.

ambitious project compared to your other games. Were there any other issues you faced during its development?

We really went in and made the project a little more ambitious. We added more characters we haven't talked about yet. We're looking into some DLC and things like that would be cool. A lot of it is free per usual, like we do with our game *Iron Meat* that came out.

We've been juggling four or five other projects at the same time, not just working on one game and it's something we're building from the ground up, not something that we farmed out. We had to do all the actual work compared to just publishing.

Is there a chance of any other Troma characters crossing over, like Sgt Kabukiman?

We're definitely focussing on the characters that were on the show first (ie Toxie, Yvonne, Junkyard). If we do DLC, our [focus] right now is on original stuff because when you watch an old cartoon show like season two of *Turtles* it doesn't bring up everything that happened from the first season. This game is like season two of the show, but I wanted it to feel more episodic so that each level is like its own show [on the] series.

If we did the DLC stuff, I'd like to do some original characters because in the original show, there'd be a new bad guy of the week every episode.

What can you tell us about the game's story?

It pretty much picks up at the end of season one of the show where the Crusaders are just hanging around, doing their thing and protecting the city of Tromaville. Dr Killemoff and Czar Zosta from Smogula are still trying to pollute everything. They've teamed up with a new alliance, which I won't explain who or where they're from. You have to stop everybody and maybe some old enemies become friends, all that kind of stuff in typical cartoon fashion.

They take a trip around Tromaville in this universe and the game is a lot of different than the cartoon show because the show didn't have Nuke 'em High where this one does. ✱

LEGACY OF KAIN

SOUL REAVER

1 & 2 REMASTERED

RETURN TO NOSGOTH

After lying dormant since 2003, the vampire Raziel has arisen thanks to brand-new remasters from Aspyr. As part of Soul Reaver's 25th anniversary, Legacy Of Kain: Soul Reaver and its sequel are now receiving a physical release, including a stunning Collector's Edition that's bound to excite fans of the beloved series.

THE ORIGINALS

Set 1,500 years after the events of Blood Omen: Legacy Of Kain, Soul Reaver begins with betrayal as Raziel, a loyal servant of Kain, is killed by the despotic vampire. Raziel is soon resurrected by The Elder God who makes him his Soul Reaver and the newly raised Raziel vows his revenge. Highly capable in combat and with the ability to transfer between the Material and Spectral Realms, Raziel picks up a wide range of abilities in his pursuit of Kain.

Originally created by Crystal Dynamics, the game itself is an impressive, sprawling adventure and whilst not strictly a 3D Metroidvania, it certainly shares similarities, particularly in how gaining new abilities lets Raziel re-explore previously visited locations. The success of Soul Reaver led to a 2001 sequel that not only continued Raziel's story but greatly enhanced the narrative scope and focus of the overall Legacy Of Kain series. Once again directed by Amy Hennig, Crystal Dynamics' sequel leaned heavily into the lore of the series and expanded its time-travel concepts. Like its direct predecessor, Soul Reaver 2 is a third-person adventure that once again lets Raziel travel between Realms as he attempts to complete his epic quest. It features greatly improved combat over its predecessor and features new abilities to expand on Raziel's already-considerable powers. Raziel still needs to consume souls to sustain himself, but can also pick up numerous elemental powers for use in the Material Realm. It remains a worthy sequel to Raziel's first epic adventure with a truly elaborate story.

THE REMASTERS

Texas-based Aspyr Media has built a strong reputation for porting numerous games, particularly to Apple's Mac, and by 2003 it was responsible for 60% of all games ported to the system. It continues to port and remaster games today and The Legacy Of Kain games are some of its most recent examples, along with a number of Star Wars games and the first six Tomb Raider titles. The remasters of Soul Reaver 1 and 2 add several improvements over the original games, modernising them for a new audience with numerous quality-of-life features and previously unseen materials from the original releases. The most notable difference is that you can instantly toggle between the remasters and the originals, so you can easily see the many improvements Aspyr has made. Other highlights include a new map and compass which makes navigating Nosgoth far easier and even a Photo Mode, so you can capture Raziel's greatest encounters and discoveries. Achievements have also been included.

Raziel himself moves with more precision than he did in the original games (although the original control systems can still be used) and there are new extras like an Interactive Lore Map that charts the history of the series and exclusive concept art that will give fans better insight behind the two games. There's even the opportunity to explore the Lost Levels that never made it into the original games. If you're a longtime fan of the games or new to the series, you'll find Aspyr's remasters more than worthy of your time. ✱

» [PlayStation 5] Kain (left) is no longer the main playable character, as the focus switches to Raziel (right) for Soul Reaver 1 and 2.

» [PlayStation 5] Here's a side-by-side shot highlighting how Raziel has been overhauled for the new remaster.

» [PlayStation 5] Nosgoth is a huge area to explore, meaning you'll really get to test all of Raziel's abilities.

EXCLUSIVE STEELBOOK

The Collector's Edition contains an exclusive steelbook with iconic artwork from the series and is designed to keep your game safe whilst looking stylish on your shelves.

THE GAMES

The Legacy Of Kain: Soul Reaver 1 and 2 are now available in physical form for the Switch and PlayStation 5, making this an essential pick-up for collectors.

ART BOOK

The Art Of Nosgoth is a book full of stunning art that gives you a fascinating glimpse into the world of Raziel and Kain.

OFFICIAL CD SOUNDTRACKS

The Legacy Of Kain series is well known for its atmospheric scores, so it makes sense for the new Collector's Edition to feature two superb CD soundtracks.

ENHANCED EXTRAS

Aspyr's new remasters feature improved audio and visuals and numerous quality-of-life extras, specifically designed to make exploring Nosgoth a pleasure.

BUY IT NOW FROM THE AMAZON STORE

FEBRUARY 2009 – It's a slow month in the world of gaming, with even Skate 2 affording you the opportunity for a leisurely stroll. But Nick Thorpe's not relaxed – not when this month's retro-themed DS releases are so brazenly stealing his time-travel gimmick

NT

NEWS FEBRUARY 2009

A major winter storm hit the UK and Ireland on 1 February, causing major damage and disruption, as well as four fatalities. All London bus services were cancelled on 2 February, over 4,500 schools were closed on 3 February, and both Heathrow and Dublin airports closed completely at points during the week that followed the initial snowfall.

On 7 February, a series of bushfires ignited across the Australian state of Victoria following a heatwave, during which temperatures in Melbourne exceeded 43°C. The day became known as Black Saturday as 173 people died as a result of the fires, which continued burning into March. It remains the deadliest bushfire incident in Australian history.

The 81st Academy Awards took place on 22 February. *Slumdog Millionaire* won the most Oscars, taking eight awards including Best Picture and Best Director for Danny Boyle. Best Leading Actor and Actress awards were given to Sean Penn for *Milk* and Kate Winslet for *The Reader*, and Heath Ledger's performance in *The Dark Knight* earned the Best Supporting Actor prize, making him only the second posthumous Oscar winner.

» [Xbox 360] *The Lord Of The Rings: Conquest* looks exciting, but the reviews paint a very different picture.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM FEBRUARY 2009

When new releases slow down in the new year, magazines usually do one of two things – a big preview feature for the coming year, or an awards feature for the previous one. Choosing to run the latter with reader votes deciding the outcome, *360* had *Fallout 3* as Game Of The Year, well ahead of *Fable II* and *Grand Theft Auto IV* in second and third respectively. *Official PlayStation Magazine*'s readers went for *Metal Gear Solid 4* in first place, ahead of *LittleBigPlanet* and *GTA IV*. *NGamer*'s forum users picked *Super Smash Bros Brawl* as Wii Game Of The Year and *The World Ends With You* on DS, but the magazine team picked *Mario Kart Wii* and *Professor Layton And The Curious Village* respectively.

Skate 2 was the sole multiplatform highlight of the month, receiving review scores of 9/10 from *X360*, 82% from *Play*, 8/10 each from *Official PlayStation Magazine*, *Official Xbox 360 Magazine* and *games™*, 4/5 from *360* and 7/10 from *Edge*. *X360* praised the additional sense of personality and felt that, "The basics, such as the 'Flick It' system, feel far more polished and executing tricks is even more satisfying and responsive than before." However, it did note that, "The level of difficulty can still reach exceptional heights." *Play* felt that *Skate 2*, "Improves on the original in many ways, but fails to address its most fundamental flaw – that its challenges are generally too narrow, prescriptive and frustrating. The fantastic new Hall Of Meat mode offers some considerable compensation, though." By contrast, *Edge* considered that the mode "suggests that the franchise's descent into dangerous slapstick may already have begun", and generally felt that the game "struggles to offer any single compelling justification for its own existence".

The month's other best games were both on Nintendo's DS. The first of them had certainly

» [PlayStation 3] Do you think it's easier for Snake to hide in such a desaturated world?

been a long time coming, as the classic RPG *Chrono Trigger* finally received its first official release in Europe, almost 14 years after the original SNES version launched in Japan. *Official Nintendo Magazine* gave it a whopping 93%. "The dialogue here is genuinely likeable since it simply does what's required – it tells the story and develops the characters' relationships without reeling off a lot of rubbish about the destiny of mankind and the futility of hope." *NGamer* gave it 87%, complaining that "the rambling, unfocussed level design is typical of the mid-Nineties 'tips hotline' culture", but concluding that "its design quirks fade under an onslaught of unrelenting brilliance".

Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon was another blast from the past, a remake of the original NES tactical RPG from 1990. The game received praise, earning 86% from *ONM*, 83% from *NGamer*, and 7/10 each from *games™* and *Edge*. "When it hits its stride at about the half-way point, it becomes fiendishly tricky and there's plenty of gameplay to get stuck into here," noted *ONM*. Assessing the tactical RPG field, *games™* said, "In the wake of *Valkyria*

» [Xbox 360] They yell "do a kickflip!" So, a kickflip is done. It's amazing how simple the world can be.

Chronicles' genre-bending gameplay and a wave of progressive DS titles like *Shining Force Feather* on the way, the once-seminal *Fire Emblem* is looking a bit long in the tooth." The review noted that the game's attempts to soften the consequences of permanent death would be divisive among series fans, but that they may never encounter character death as they're "most likely to show some discipline in their tactics".

In a month with so little to get excited about, a flop like *The Lord Of The Rings: Conquest* was all the more disappointing. The game earned scores of 52% from *Play*, 3/10 from both *games™* and *X360*, and 1/5 from *360*. "There's just no reason to even play it, for anyone," *360*'s review concluded. "Fans of *The Lord Of The Rings* will take it with extensive disgust, while other gamers will hopefully have the sense to seek out a proven title in this vein, such as *Battlefield: Bad Company* or, indeed, Pandemic's own *Mercenaries 2: World In Flames*." *Total PC Gaming* was more impressed, giving the game

» [DS] *Fire Emblem* was still a few years off from becoming the popular series it is today.

7/10 and saying, "It's not a game that manages to represent an interactive *Lord Of The Rings* – that's really not its remit – but *Conquest* does place you in the fighting roles of the trilogy's most bloodthirsty moments."

Join us again next month, when *Killzone 2* and *FEAR 2* will be gunning for glory. ✱

» [Xbox 360] *Fallout 3* took a whopping 38% of votes among *360* readers, 18% ahead of second place.

CHARTS

FEBRUARY 2009

PLAYSTATION 3
1 – **Call Of Duty: World At War** (Activision)
2 – **Resistance 2** (Sony)
3 – **Need For Speed: Undercover** (EA)
4 – **FIFA 09** (EA)
5 – **Tomb Raider: Underworld** (Eidos)

PC
1 – **Football Manager 2009** (Sega)
2 – **Grand Theft Auto IV** (Rockstar)
3 – **Call Of Duty: World At War** (Activision)
4 – **Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3** (EA)
5 – **World Of Warcraft: Wrath Of The Lich King** (Activision)

DS
1 – **Dr Kawashima's Brain Training** (Nintendo)
2 – **More Brain Training** (Nintendo)
3 – **Nintendogs: Lab & Friends** (Nintendo)
4 – **Cooking Guide: Can't Decide What To Eat?** (Nintendo)
5 – **High School Musical 3: Senior Year** (Disney)

MUSIC
1 – **The Fear** (Lily Allen)
2 – **Just Dance** (Lady Gaga)
3 – **Breathe Slow** (Alesha Dixon)
4 – **Crack A Bottle** (Eminem feat. Dr Dre & 50 Cent)
5 – **Take Me Back** (Tinchy Stryder feat. Taio Cruz)

THIS MONTH IN…
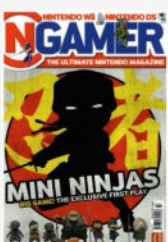
NGamer
It's a slow month for UK releases, so *NGamer* devotes ten pages to a guide on importing games. Four pages are devoted to the Simple DS budget range from D3 Publisher, with *The Fire Fighter* and *The Primitive Man* highly recommended.

Official Xbox 360 Magazine
Brainstorming ideas to save Midway, the magazine suggests revivals including *Rampage* with asymmetrical monsters versus military multiplayer, a "*Lord Of The Rings* meets *Left4Dead*" *Gauntlet* and a new *NBA Jam*.

Play
"The thought of an original 2D, retro-styled *Sonic* game fills us with a feeling that we experienced only in fleeting moments during *Unleashed*," says *Play*'s belated review, likely imagining *Sonic Mania* rather than *Sonic 4*.

SUNNY
SCORE: 1225

MONEY:

Auf Wiedersehen Monty

» RETROREVIVAL

» ZX SPECTRUM » 1986 » GREMLIN GRAPHICS
Although I owned *Auf Wiedersehen Monty* on the Amstrad, I've always felt that the Spectrum version looks superior. There's certainly no denying that the Amstrad game looks great with its chunky pixel art and smart colour choices, but there's something about how sharp the Spectrum version looks and its clever use of colour that has always impressed me. And before any of you who own this game on other systems start gnashing your teeth, these are simply the two versions I had access to back in the day.

Auf Wiedersehen Monty is also my favourite *Monty Mole* game and you can tell that its designers Peter Harrap and Shaun Hollingworth really understood the formula by this point, delivering plenty of cleverly constructed screens to navigate and numerous items to collect.

And item collecting is genuinely important in *Auf Wiedersehen Monty* as you'll need to amass a certain number of points if you want to buy the Greek island of Montos. As you clamber and jump around the brightly coloured screens you'll find a large number of EC (European Currency Units) to gather, as well as handy Air Tickets that will let you zip around Europe once you find the relevant airport. Several areas of the game are modelled around particular landmarks like The Eiffel Tower and The Leaning Tower Of Pizza, but otherwise a lot of liberties are taken with how each featured country looks.

And that's fine, because I don't really need realism in my *Monty Mole* games, I just want to have some fun. And it's a lot of fun whizzing around each screen and hoovering up its many secrets, or working out how to reach those rare items that seem frustratingly inaccessible. Is it the perfect platformer? Of course not, annoyingly placed enemies and random crushers see to that, but for me it's definitely the best *Monty Mole* game and it's a real shame that *Impossamole* ended up being the final game in the series, as *Auf Wiedersehen Monty* makes for a far better swan song. ✳

HIGH: SPAIN   627

300

40 YEARS OF
AMIG

IN 1985, COMMODORE LAUNCHED A POWERHOUSE 16-BIT COMPUTER PLATFORM THAT WAS AHEAD OF ITS TIME, AND HOSTED MANY ALL-TIME CLASSIC GAMES. FORTY YEARS ON, WE SPEAK TO DEVELOPERS AND FANS TO CELEBRATE A FAMILY OF COMPUTERS THAT HAS BECOME SIMPLY TIMELESS

WORDS BY GRAHAM PEMBREY AND NICK THORPE

When the Amiga arrived in the mid-Eighties, it was a real generational leap, a platform that seemed to offer just about everything a computer user could possibly want. Commodore's 16-bit hardware offered a sophisticated desktop environment, and its multimedia capabilities made for graphical and audio packages that aided many an owner's creative ambitions. But of course, we're here for the games, and the powerful custom hardware of the Amiga opened up new possibilities for developers. The audiovisual capabilities of the machine allowed for arcade conversions and similarly styled games with detailed, colourful graphics and rich sounds that had never been possible in the home before, while the raw computing grunt allowed for greater depth and more detailed simulations in the slower-paced, more thoughtful games that have typically been the preserve of computers.

Although sales started slowly, the introduction of the Amiga 500 in 1987 was a shrewd move. This model was seen as a natural successor to the home computers that had dominated the European gaming scene in the Eighties, and became a top games machine in the region. Players felt right at home as part of the Amiga clan, often staying connected through magazines that fostered their own communities around the shared joy of gaming. However, the openness of the platform created a culture around the computer that went as deep as you wanted it to. If you wanted to flex your programming muscles and push the hardware to its limits, the demoscene beckoned, and those who fancied themselves game designers could submit their works to public domain software libraries. In fact, quite a few developers got their start in the industry by following those paths.

Commodore refreshed the platform in the early Nineties with the new Advanced Graphics Architecture, used in hardware like the Amiga 1200 and CD32. However, with IBM-compatible PCs becoming increasingly dominant in the computer market and dedicated consoles on the rise in the world of gaming, the Amiga faced pressure on two fronts and declining sales as a result. Commodore ultimately found itself squeezed out of the market and went bankrupt in 1994, with Escom picking up the line and following its predecessor into bankruptcy in 1996. However, the Amiga story is far from being over thanks to the uncommon passion of the platform's fans. For decades now, they have kept the flame alive with fan sites, magazines, new games and even new hardware projects, ensuring that it's still a great time to be an Amiga fan.

This landmark computing platform has now reached its 40th anniversary, so we're taking a big look back at the Amiga in its totality – the machines, the magazines, the memories, the modern scene and of course the games, which are the reason that we're all here to begin with. So dust off your *Batman Pack*, practice those curlers in *Sensible World Of Soccer*, put on your best Bitmap Brothers shades and get ready to celebrate a family of computers that has truly left a legacy that stands the test of time. ▶

ANDREAS TADIC
Game designer, Team17

ANDREW BRAYBROOK
Game designer, Graftgold

CAM WINSTANLEY
Editor, *Amiga Power*

DAN MALONE
Artist, The Bitmap Brothers

HENNING LUDVIGSEN
Artist, Badger Punch Games

IAN STEWART
Founder, Gremlin Graphics

JOE DECUIR
Amiga hardware design team

THE
GA

JON HARE
Founder,
Sensible Software

KARI LAWLER
YouTuber,
retro repairer

MARTIN EDMONDSON
Founder,
Reflections

MIKE DAILLY
DMA Design
legend

MURIEL TRAMIS
Game designer,
Coktel Vision

SIMON PHIPPS
Game designer,
Core Design

TIM WRIGHT
Composer,
Psygnosis
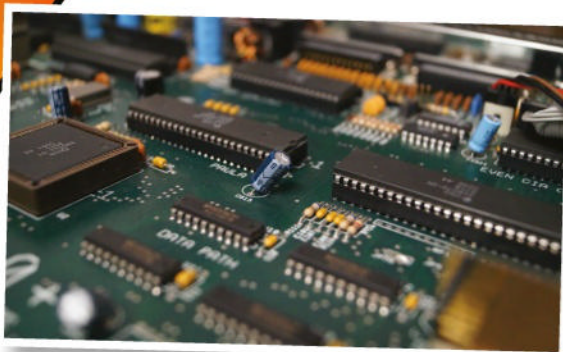
» Inside an Amiga 500+ with its Enhanced Chipset, which improved the Original Chipset.

» Designed in 1984, this famous *Boing Ball* demo was created by RJ Mical and Dale Luck.
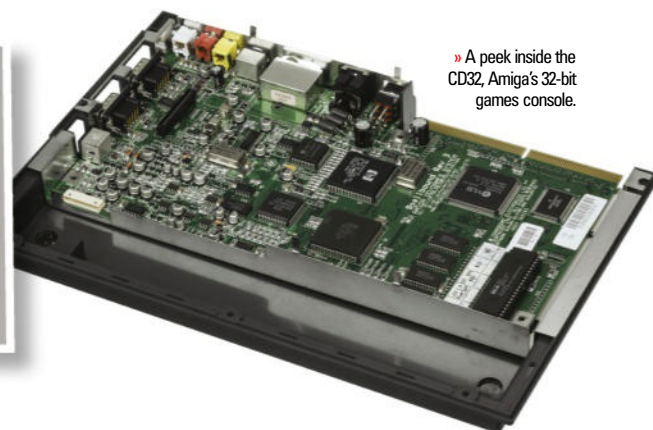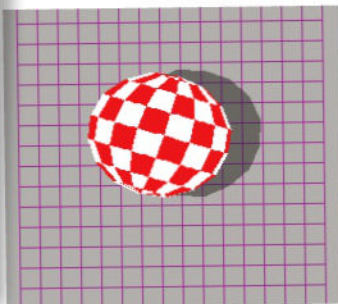
» A peek inside the CD32, Amiga's 32-bit games console.

THE HARDWARE

BETWEEN 1985 AND 1994, COMMODORE LAUNCHED AN ABUNDANCE OF AMIGA MODELS FEATURING CONSTANTLY EVOLVING TECHNOLOGY. THESE INNOVATIVE MACHINES – PARTICULARLY THE ICONIC AMIGA 500 – REACHED MILLIONS OF HOUSEHOLDS AROUND THE WORLD, HAVING A SEISMIC IMPACT ON THE HOME-COMPUTING LANDSCAPE

In a back room at the 1984 Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago, an early prototype of an Amiga was unveiled for the first time – and jaws duly dropped. It was "the most amazing graphics and sound machine that will ever have been offered to the consumer market", swooned *Creative Computing* journalist John Anderson a few months after the event. "Just what kind of technical foundation does Amiga have?" his glowing news report continued. "Well the VLSI chipset was designed by Jay Miner, the man who designed the super chipset of the original Atari machines."

Indeed, Jay Miner had strong form by this point. The talented hardware engineer had left Atari with an auteur reputation, and an ambition to create a powerful computer using the new Motorola 68000 microprocessor.

Among those joining him on this noble quest was Amiga cofounder David Morse, who had previously headed up marketing for Tonka Toys – a career background that reflected the aim to make the Amiga a machine people would play, and not just use for practical means. Also on board was hardware engineer Joe Decuir, who had previously helped craft both the Atari 2600 and Atari 8-bit technology. "I was hired by Atari in 1975 to work on what became the 2600," Joe tells us, adding, "I chose that job to be mentored by Jay Miner." Joe clearly remembers a gaming focus being part of the early plan. "Dave Morse's original vision for the Amiga was to render cartoons in real-time," he recalls. "For the first two years, we were focussed on a games console that could also be a personal computer. Commodore changed the focus to a personal computer."

Ultimately the platform would provide for both gamers and those looking for a functional home computer, although you might not have known it from Commodore's early, practical-application-focused adverts. The first model released in 1985 was originally marketed as simply The Amiga, before becoming better known by its formal title of the Amiga 1000. With a 16/32-bit central processing unit clocked at over 7MHz, it was an impressively powerful machine. It offered a mouse-driven, multitasking graphical user interface, in the form of AmigaOS, that was far ahead of its time. Beneath the hood lay three custom chips dubbed Agnus, Denise and Paula. From these chips, game designers would eventually come to extract all kinds of technical wizardry, including the parallax scrolling in *Shadow Of The Beast* and the glorious, multi-layered soundtrack of *Turrican 2: The Final Fight*.

HARDWARE TIMELINE

A500

■ A more compact and affordable iteration of the A1000, the A500 was released in 1987 and became the most successful model. It was followed by the A500+ in 1991 which boosted the built-in chip RAM from 512KB to 1MB (further expandable to 2MB).

A1000

■ The original 1985 Amiga model has the names of the designers (and a paw print from Jay Miner's dog) embossed inside every case, such was the pride in its creation. The 256KB of chip RAM was expandable to 512KB using an expansion slot.

CDTV

■ In 1991, Commodore targeted the same 'all-in-one multimedia machine' market as the Philips CD-i, with the CDTV (Commodore Dynamic Total Vision). Housed in a sleek black case, it was fundamentally the A500 with a CD drive. Sales faltered, making it highly collectible today.
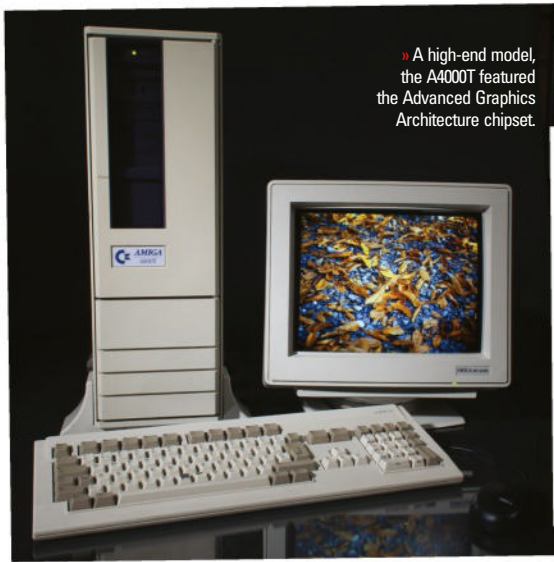
» A high-end model, the A4000T featured the Advanced Graphics Architecture chipset.
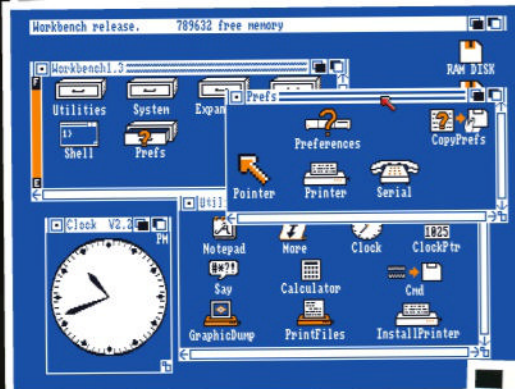
» The Amiga did multitasking years before it became commonplace on computers.

» *State Of The Art*, by the Norwegian demoscene group Spaceballs, was an incredible demo.

Among those custom chips, the Agnus was the gatekeeper, controlling overall access to RAM from both the central processing unit and the other chips. "I helped design the Agnus on paper using huge E-sized drawings," Joe recounts. He adds, "The most interesting thing about the Agnus was the Blitter, which I worked on with Ron Nicholson, who had worked on the original Mac at Apple. He knew the software techniques. We accelerated them in hardware." Among other things, the Blitter enabled memory blocks to be copied quickly, facilitating fast graphics. Another element of the Agnus chip was the Copper, which can manipulate video settings and create dazzling visual effects like raster lines. The Denise chip mainly looks after video output, while Paula does the same for sound and peripherals. Speaking of sound, Joe tells us that, "I also designed the four-channel audio system," which was a dream come true for Amiga musicians as it allowed them to layer and intertwine multiple tracks of audio.

While the A1000 was quietly revolutionary, it was also expensive and a relatively niche purchase for consumers. It wasn't until the iconic A500 launched in 1987 that the Amiga could be found in general retail stores, and then sales truly soared. Based on the same core hardware as the A1000 but in a smaller case with an integrated keyboard, it became even more enticing a year after release, when its price point dropped from £499 to £399 in the UK. With the standard grey 'tank mouse' included, gamers would pair this with joysticks like the Competition Pro or the Zipstick to enjoy the wealth of games that started to become available.

As Amiga models progressed, an Enhanced Chipset (found in models like the A500+, the A600 and the A3000) and then the Advanced Graphics Architecture chipset (found in the Amiga 1200 and the CD32) enabled more powerful games. Meanwhile, big box models like the Amiga 2000 and the Amiga 4000 served audiences after something high-end. Market conditions became more challenging, but the quality of the original technology is demonstrated by the passionate Amiga hardware scene that still exists today.

» This 1986 advert for the Amiga 1000 used Deluxe Paint as a selling point.

LOOKING BACK AT THE MAINSTREAM AMIGA MODELS

A600

■ Similar to the A500+, but contained within the smallest case yet, the A600 was a compact addition to the Amiga family that added a port for external hard drives. Like the A500+, it boasted the Enhanced Chipset, the second evolution of the original chipset.

CD32

■ "To be this good will take Sega ages," read a cheeky billboard placed by Commodore outside the Sega UK headquarters, heralding the Amiga CD32. The September 1993 console was dedicated to gaming, but couldn't turn around Commodore's financial misfortunes.
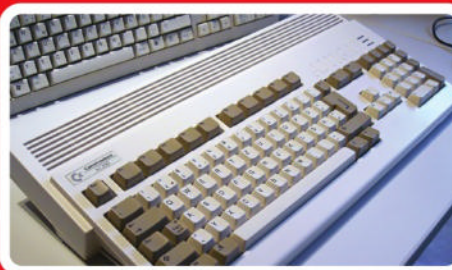
A1200

■ This was a leap forward in power. The A1200 featured a 32-bit Motorola 68EC020 CPU, the Advanced Graphics Architecture chipset and a palette of more than 16 million colours. By this point at the end of 1992 though, more powerful PC hardware was dominating.

THE GAMES

FROM RAPID RUN-AND-GUN GREATS TO THOUGHTFUL STRATEGY GEMS, THE AMIGA WAS A VERSATILE GAMING SYSTEM THAT OFFERED SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE. WE LOOK BACK ON WHERE IT EXCELLED AS A GAMES MACHINE, PLUS HOW IT COPED WITH ARCADE CONVERSIONS AND COMPETING WITH CONSOLES

Nothing could quite beat the excitement of hearing that familiar whirring-clicking sound, as the Amiga drive head moved across the tracks of a floppy disk, while a brand-new game loaded. And what a selection of games there were. Some of those games, like *Lemmings*, *Sensible Soccer*, *The Secret Of Monkey Island* and *Shadow Of The Beast*, would go on to be considered classics.

For *Shadow Of The Beast* creator Martin Edmondson, as with others who had a background programming 8-bit machines in their bedrooms, the Amiga represented "an incredible leap forward", he tells us. "The obvious changes were vastly more memory, higher resolution, far greater colour bit-depth, general programmability and flexibility, and most importantly perhaps, heaps of custom arcade-style hardware." One example Martin gives is the ability to have multiple overlaid playfields, so that an entire game screen could be imposed onto another and scrolled or moved independently. "That was critical to *Shadow Of The Beast*, as it allowed trees and so on to scroll over background mountains. And in *Awesome* we used it when the player wandered around the planet surfaces and you could see through the structure to the surface below."

As well as adapting the hardware to their needs, Amiga developers also excelled at using their creativity, taking often left-field concepts and working them into gaming magic. Take *Wizkid* with its block-munching chaos, the colourful platforming of *Putty*, the unique future-sports action of *Speedball 2*, the insect-based shoot-'em-up chaos of *Apidya* and the movie-like atmosphere of Cinemaware classics such as *Defender Of The Crown* and *It Came From The Desert*. It often felt like there was a free-wheeling, anarchic attitude running through these native Amiga games, in some cases fostered by programmers' beginnings in the vibrant Amiga demoscene.

"The demoscene was always a close community of technically brilliant people," Martin reflects. "There was always lots of excitement around what the demos could do visually, showing off their programming and art skills and maximising the hardware. The Amiga was ideal for this as the hardware and graphic capabilities were powerful but also incredibly open-ended and flexible to the ingenious programmer." Games like *Pinball Dreams*, *Lionheart* and *Full Contact* were able to stun players in part thanks

to the techniques their makers had acquired from the demoscene.

Martin points out that "most of the unique hardware on the Amiga was designed for arcade-style gaming effects", and as you'd expect, conversions of popular arcade games were also a huge deal on the platform. Andrew Braybook's masterful adaptation of *Rainbow Islands* was one of the biggest success stories on this front, attaining the top spot in *Amiga Power*'s top 100 games list in both 1991 and 1992. *The New Zealand Story*, *Midnight Resistance* and *Silkworm* were other successful examples of arcade hits playing brilliantly. On the other hand, there were also middling coin-op conversions such as *Final Fight*, and some such as *Out Run* that weren't a patch on their console counterparts. It was playing those lesser-versions of titles that sometimes got Amiga owners down when speaking with their console-owning pals. The performance of *Street Fighter II*, for example, was quite the downgrade from other platforms. Fortunately, *Mortal Kombat* and its sequel fared better, while original games like *IK+* and *Shadow Fighter* showed how fast and fluid fighting games could be on the platform.

Although there was never quite a Mario or Sonic equivalent that rose the ranks to become an Amiga mascot, there were plenty of enjoyable platform games on offer. *Zool*, *Superfrog*, *James Pond* and *Chuck Rock* were prominent examples, as was Martin's *Brian The Lion*, which made great use of the A1200's Advanced Graphics Architecture chipset and the capabilities afforded by the CD32. "I was always very proud of what we achieved with *Brian The Lion* technically," Martin says. "In many ways it was more advanced than *Shadow Of The Beast* in its use of the Amiga's custom hardware. We developed a technique to cheat the Copper into rotating the screen, like the Nintendo SNES at the time, at 60fps which was something that no game had achieved before on the Amiga."

Slower-paced strategy outings like *Populous*, and *The Settlers* also had a strong place in the affections of Amiga gamers, as did point-and-click adventures. You sometimes just had to be prepared to be patient: *Beneath A Steel Sky*, for example, came on a whopping 15 floppy disks! Beyond the small snapshot given here, the breadth of genres the Amiga catered for was phenomenal. For many, like Martin, "the Amiga was an original 'wow' moment in gaming". ▶
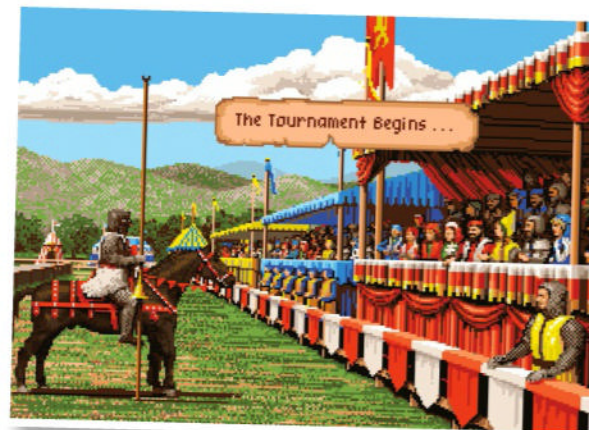
» [Amiga] Cinemaware games like *Defender Of The Crown* impressed thanks to their impressive visuals and movie-like themes.

» [Amiga] The parallax scrolling of *Shadow Of The Beast* looked stunning in 1989.

» [Amiga] Andrew Braybrook designed this excellent conversion of Taito's *Rainbow Islands*.
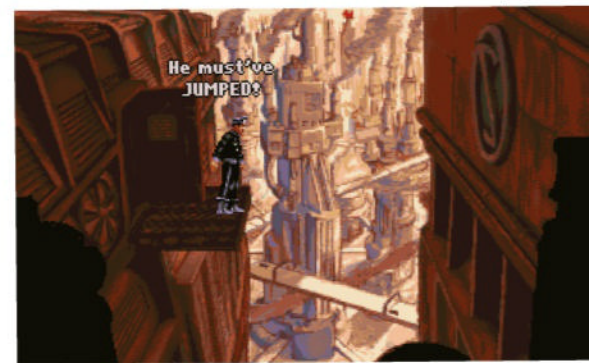
» [Amiga] The Amiga tank mouse was perfect for point-and-click games like *Beneath A Steel Sky*.

» [Amiga] Jeff Minter's *Llamatron* was one of the best-known shareware releases on the Amiga.

» [Amiga] *Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe* was one of many great Amiga games The Bitmap Brothers created.
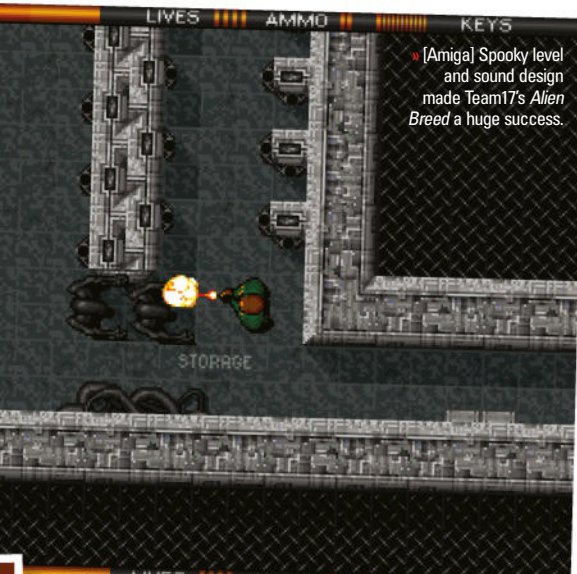
» [Amiga] Spooky level and sound design made Team17's *Alien Breed* a huge success.

» [Amiga] Martin feels AGA game *Brian The Lion* worked the Amiga even harder than his earlier game *Shadow Of The Beast*.

BRILLIANT BUNDLES

REVISITING FOUR MEMORABLE AMIGA RETAIL PACKS

BATMAN PACK

■ Tim Burton's *Batman* film was everywhere in 1989. What better way to sell tonnes of Amiga 500s than to ride that wave? The *Batman Pack* contained Ocean's excellent *Batman*, plus *The NewZealand Story*, flight simulator *F/A-18 Interceptor* and Deluxe Paint II.

SCREEN GEMS

■ Continuing with the silver-screen theme, this pack brought together *Back To The Future II*, *Night Breed* and *Days Of Thunder*. Deluxe Paint II made a return, while *Shadow Of The Beast II* had nothing to do with Hollywood but fitted with the theme by being visually striking.

CARTOON CLASSICS

■ This was another savvy combination orchestrated by Commodore UK managing director David Pleasance. It combined the Amiga 500+ with TV tie-ins *The Simpsons: Bart Vs The Space Mutants* and *Captain Planet*, plus *Lemmings* and Deluxe Paint III. It was released at the tempting price of £359.

COMIC RELIEF

■ One of three Amiga 1200 bundles, the *Comic Relief Pack* was a tie-in with the charity event Red Nose Day. Uniquely among Amiga bundles, it only featured one game: the enjoyable platform-puzzler *Sleepwalker*. The new 32-bit hardware included was the main draw.

Image credit: Vasilis Psomiadis (amigaposters.github.io).

THE KILLER APPS

THERE ARE SOME GAMES THAT JUST MAKE SYSTEMS SING, DEFINING GENRES AND SETTING UP THEIR DEVELOPERS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS. HERE ARE OUR PICKS FOR TEN GAMES THAT REPRESENT THE ABSOLUTE CREAM OF THE CROP FROM THE AMIGA'S VAST LIBRARY
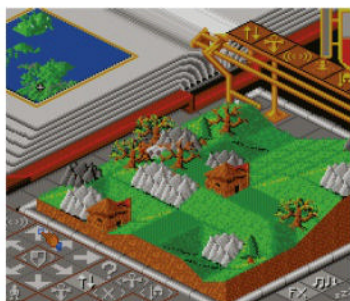
POPULOUS
BULLFROG PRODUCTIONS ▪ 1989

■ Bullfrog blessed the Amiga with fine games including *Syndicate*, *Theme Park* and *Powermonger*, but it all started here. *Populous* tasks you with growing your civilisation via both direct and indirect interventions, with the goal of triumph over a rival civilisation. No other game did as much to popularise the god game genre.

LEMMINGS
DMA DESIGN ▪ 1991

■ Tiny little creatures walk to their death, unless you assign them jobs that can help them overcome the threats. This simple premise proved enormously popular, and though it spread to almost every viable platform, the Amiga is where it feels most at home. Today, DMA Design is *GTA* developer Rockstar North.

LIONHEART
THALION ▪ 1993

■ Few Amiga games look quite as beautiful as this platformer, but then Thalion always did set out to make spectacular-looking games, and Henk Nieborg's art is legendary. It's more than just a pretty game though, as it has enough variety and challenge to keep you going for quite some time.
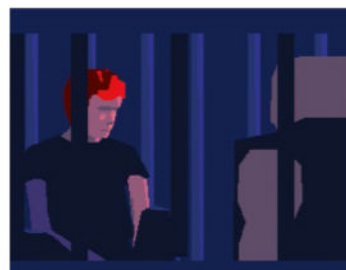
ANOTHER WORLD
DELPHINE SOFTWARE ▪ 1991

■ There weren't many games that could be considered cinematic in the early Nineties, but Éric Chahi's platform adventure was definitely one of them thanks to its detailed cutscenes. Lester's inadvertent trip to an alien world is still enormously atmospheric, and set the stage for modern games like *Inside* and *Limbo*.

FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX
MICROPROSE ▪ 1991

■ The first in Geoff Crammond's series of racing simulators was a true technical marvel. At a time when even arcades rarely hosted true 3D games, it was incredible to see polygonal cars and tracks at home, and they gave the game a sense of realism that other racers just couldn't match.

THE CHAOS ENGINE
THE BITMAP BROTHERS ▪ 1993

■ Britain's coolest developers could be relied upon for some great Amiga games, and this steampunk run-and-gun is one of their very greatest. Co-op play is great, but if you're playing solo the CPU can control one of the six characters to aid you against the mutated monstrosities of Victorian England.
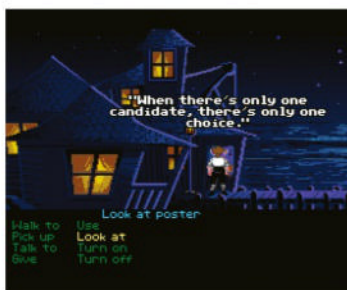
THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
LUCASFILM GAMES ▪ 1991

■ Guybrush Threepwood's first foray into point-and-click pirate adventures may not have been developed for the Amiga first, but this version is undoubtedly the one that many of you played back in the day. It was one of the first truly funny computer games, and had a perfectly pitched difficulty level.

SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER
SENSIBLE SOFTWARE ▪ 1994

■ Is this the best sports game ever? It could just be. Taking the sublime gameplay of *Sensible Soccer* as a base, the developers attempted to make the most comprehensive game possible — hundreds of teams, thousands of players, and a management mode that kept many players totally hooked to their Amigas.
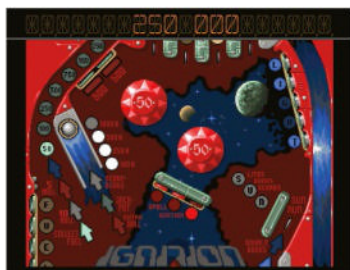
PINBALL DREAMS

■ Not only was this the first really great Amiga pinball game, but it was the work of a group of friends from the Amiga demoscene. The game's success resulted in plenty of conversions and some sequels, while the studio still exists today as DICE and is best known for the *Battlefield* series.

WORMS: THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

■ The classic artillery game had brought Team17 success on many platforms, but the company had always been a stalwart of the Amiga scene. This late release was its goodbye gift to the community, an ultimate version that wasn't available anywhere else, which delivered new weapons and features. ▶

Q&A MIKE DAILLY

THE DMA DESIGN LEGEND ON MAKING AMIGA GAMES

CAN YOU RECALL YOUR FIRST EXPERIENCE WITH THE AMIGA?
I got my A500 in 1990 – a *Batman Pack*, so there were a lot of good games out for it already. Having seen [DMA founder] Dave Jones toy with it for a while beforehand, I had a fairly good idea what it was able to do. I actually started on the Atari ST first which let me mess around with 68000. So when I finally got an Amiga, I was able to jump right in. The Amiga hardware was great fun, incredibly flexible, and the Copper was amazing. After coding on the ST, the Amiga had a lot more toys to play with and I loved tinkering with it.

LEMMINGS WAS A HUGE DEAL FOR THE AMIGA. WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN MEMORIES OF MAKING IT?
I remember making the animation that spawned it pretty clearly. After an argument with Scott Johnston about the size of *Walker* characters, I took a stab at making them as small as I could. After showing the guys and having that eureka moment, Gary Timmons touched it up and made it the usable sprite we all came to know and love. Making the game itself was great fun. Once Dave got the editor up and running, we got down to making really fun, challenging levels, and we all had a blast.

DID YOU REALISE WHAT A HUGE SUCCESS IT WOULD BE?
No. You never do. Each game we did we enjoyed doing, but you never know how well they'll be received. *Lemmings*' huge success was a total shock, and it just kept going. We loved the game

and the characters, so doing more and more with them was just fine by us.

DID LEMMINGS BEING PART OF THE CARTOON CLASSICS PACK HELP IT GAIN EXPOSURE?
What it did do, was bring in the money. From what I remember, it was a tiny royalty, but the volume more than made up for it. The *Cartoon Classics* pack came at the start of the Amiga boom, and DMA profited from it. We were able to move to larger offices, and were suddenly taken more seriously by business people. This money funded DMA's growth for years.

YOU EVENTUALLY WENT ON TO MAKE GTA. WAS A VERSION EVER CONSIDERED FOR THE LATER AMIGA MODELS?
No, we'd put the Amiga aside as it was clear it was in decline. At the time, we were looking at consoles and PCs. We'd just signed with Nintendo to be part of the 'dream team', and we were also looking at the PlayStation and PC. With all this new tech about to shake up the games industry, the Amiga looked positively decrepit compared to that.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE MODERN AMIGA SCENE?
I love the current Amiga scene, and the new tech and new games constantly being made for it. For many it was the peak of their childhood gaming, so it's only natural that it'd be a strong part of the scene. The new games-and-demo scene is incredibly active, and it's an especially simple platform to get involved with. There's cheap FPGA replicas, A500s are plentiful, and Amiga emulation is very mature. This makes development simple and rapid. Music is also still a big thing on the Amiga. All in all, the scene is almost as active as it was 30 years ago.

THE MAGAZINES

AMIGA OWNERS WERE SPOILT FOR CHOICE WHEN IT CAME TO MAGAZINES DEDICATED TO THEIR PLATFORM. STANDING OUT AMONG THESE WAS THE MUCH-LOVED AMIGA POWER. FORMER EDITOR CAM WINSTANLEY TAKES US BACK THROUGH THE RAUCOUS MAGAZINE SCENE OF THE TIME

In its own anarchic way, *Amiga Power* offered a kind of community service for its young readership. "In a pre-internet world, we fulfilled the needs that people have on social media," reflects the magazine's former editor Cam Winstanley. "There were four or five pages of letters, and what we then called in-jokes but you would now call memes. We created our own vocabulary. You were part of a gang if you were an *Amiga Power* reader."

Of course, if you weren't part of that gang, there were others you could join too. For those who had been tempted over from the Commodore 64 crowd, they could simply keep

» Cam Winstanley says the *Amiga Power* crew saw *The One Amiga* as close rivals.

reading *Zzap!64*, which started covering Amiga games from 1988. Then there was *Amiga Format* which balanced technical coverage with gaming and had an impressive innings, lasting from 1989 right up until 2000 – making it the longest lasting and best-selling Amiga magazine. *CU Amiga*, *The One Amiga* and *Amiga Action* were meanwhile all purely devoted to play. The coverdisks attached to them contained generous demos of new games, often alongside eccentric public domain indie releases and sometimes full free applications too.

Among these competing publications, *Amiga Power* carved an impressive niche with its laser-sharp writing, irreverent tone and carefree humour. Was it as chaotically enjoyable behind the scenes as we readers imagined? "It was ridiculously good fun," Cam confirms. In part, he recalls, this was to do with the magazine operating from a building above a post room, set back from the main Future Publishing office in Bath. "That meant *Amiga Power* was physically removed from anyone's oversight. It was barely an office: it was basically just a room in a Georgian house, probably sixteen square feet, with nine or ten people crammed in. Most of the time nobody else came there, so we could do what we wanted. We'd all turn up and

» *Amiga Power* covers showcased big name games and special features like its annual top 100.

work hard – we wouldn't take the piss – but it was very laid back because it was very easy for Future to see that we were getting the job done and selling lots of copies. If we wanted to do a photoshoot and dress up as *Reservoir Dogs*, nobody would ever tell us not to."

Amiga Power lived up to its tagline "a magazine with attitude" impeccably. "Obviously it was part of the magazine that we were always right," laughs Cam. "A lot of that was just our shtick, but also, as far as we were concerned, where we went other people followed. Quite often we would do features and then other magazines would copy the format. Where did we see ourselves against *Amiga Action* and *The One*? *The One* was a close rival, but not as good as us, and *Amiga Action* we were entirely dismissive of. We had a plagiarism case against *Amiga Action*, where they published four reviews I'd written, almost word for word (although to be

MODEM MANIA
HOW PEOPLE MADE BFFS ON THE BBS

While magazines kept Amiga fans connected through printed means, bulletin board systems (BBS) did something similar online. In the years before the modern internet, Amiga users who connected to a BBS through a dial-up modem and a terminal programme could share files and exchange messages. The number of users that could connect simultaneously depended on the number of phone lines the host had connected, which in many cases was only one.

As well as the obscure usernames, like-minded discussions and file sharing, there were also 'door games' – minimalist, text-based games like the 1989 RPG *Legend Of The Red Dragon*. Door games often involved interacting with other users, and as such they were a simple precursor to online multiplayer gaming. For demoscene coders, artists and musicians devoted to making impressive audiovisual showcases, making connections through a BBS was also game-changing. It allowed international collaboration and reduced the need to send floppy disks by snail mail.

Nostalgia for the simple joys of connecting to a BBS has driven a resurgence in recent years. Amiga refurbisher Retro32 started a new BBS in 2023, for example, and you can find a directory of other active BBS at 8bitboyz.com

AMIGA FORMAT

BRITAIN'S BIGGEST AND BEST-SELLING AMIGA MAGAZINE

ISSUE 20 ■ MARCH 1991 ■ £2.95

IF ONLY THERE WAS SOMEONE WHO COULD TELL ME WHICH SOFTWARE TO BUY!

GET THE ANSWERS

WITH OUR NO-NONSENSE GUIDE TO WHAT TO BUY AND WHAT TO STEAL IN: GRAPHICS, WORD PROCESSORS, DTP, MUSIC, VIDEO, FINANCE, SPREAD-SHEETS AND DATABASES.

NO COVERDISK?
THEN ASK FOR ONE FROM YOUR NEWSAGENT
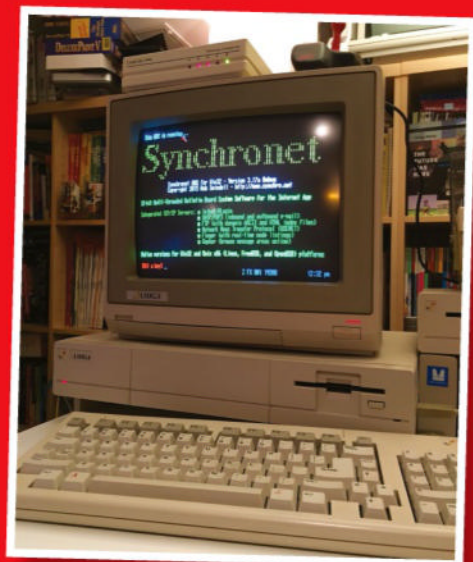
» *Amiga Format* was the longest-running Amiga magazine, stretching from 1989 to 2000.

» [Amiga] Some developers created tailored minigames for magazines, like this *Cannon Soccer* special for *Amiga Format*.

» The 1985 debut cover of *Amiga World*, a long-standing favourite in the US.

» This *Amiga Power* feature pre-empted similar articles and the '*Doom* runs on anything' craze.

fair to them, it was a freelancer and the magazine hadn't realised). There was never any doubt that we were the best."

Part of the ethos of the magazine was using the full breadth of possible review scores, which didn't always go down brilliantly with advertisers. "How weird that we even had to point that out: that an average game should get 50%," Cam reasons. "But that was unheard of. Famously the score of death is 73%; it's just low enough to tell readers not to buy the game, but high enough not to piss off the advertisers." On one occasion there was the national press to contend with too, as *Amiga Power* became embroiled in the brief media furore about *Cannon Fodder* and its remembrance poppy artwork. "I was in the room when a *Daily Star* reporter and photographer burst in," Cam recalls. "They'd somehow got into the building and barged in yelling, 'How do you respond to this?' We were shutting the door on them and they were shouting. It was a storm in a teacup."

Cam recalls plenty of lighter times, like getting to know the likes of David Braben, Jeff Minter and Sensible Software, and giving writers their first break. "During my stint as editor, I took the best letter writers and gave them jobs. There was Mil Millington who became a novelist, and Kieron Gillen who was C-Monster – the funniest letter writer on *Amiga Power* – and is now a massively successful comics writer." You can tell it's a period of his career Cam looks back fondly on. "Somebody disparagingly once on the internet said *Amiga Power* was just university students trying to make secondary school students laugh," he muses. "But that's exactly what it was. I think we succeeded."

» Coverdisks included a mix of game demos, public domain and shareware releases.
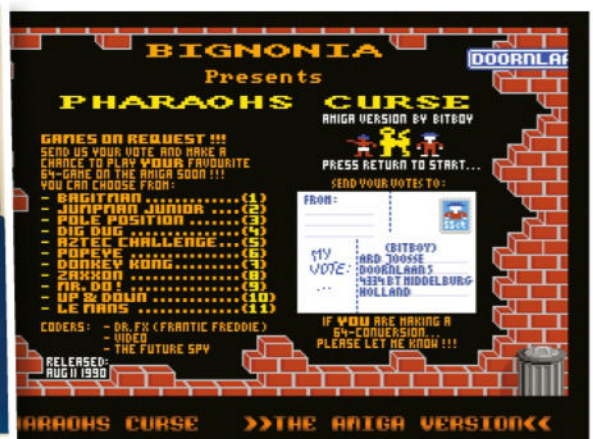
» Coverdisks were an important outlet for public domain games like this version of *Pharaohs Curse*.

THE AMIGA TODAY

FOUR DECADES ON, THE DEDICATED AMIGA SCENE IS BUZZING. IN THE UK AND INTERNATIONALLY, THERE ARE EVENTS, COMMUNITY USER GROUPS, NEW GAMES AND HARDWARE, WEBSITES AND MAGAZINES KEEPING THE DREAM ALIVE. THE PASSION AND INNOVATION SURROUNDING THE PLATFORM SHOW NO SIGNS OF WANING

When Commodore went bankrupt in 1994, the sad decline of the Amiga seemed to have arrived. Game releases gradually fizzled out. Hardware production halted, and one by one, the magazines that had kept keen Amiga gamers informed shuttered their offices. And so it was that, for many years, the Amiga seemed to have become a thing of the past. But in reality, many enthusiasts never stopped

» [Amiga] *Roguecraft* is a delightful retro-inspired roguelike made for the Amiga.

using and modifying their machines. In recent years it's become more and more visible that the platform is alive and kicking, thanks to a passionate community of gaming fans, hardcore hardware tinkerers, software developers, podcasters and content creators who hold the Amiga close to their heart.

A superb example of this community in action is *Roguecraft*, a modern Amiga game by Norwegian indie developers Badger Punch Games. An extended version of the game, *Roguecraft DX*, was recently announced as a cartridge for the Evercade range of retro consoles. Henning Ludvigsen, artist at Badger Punch who makes games with his coding colleague Ricki Sickenger, emphasises that the pair are hugely passionate about the Amiga. "The Amiga has a lovely, active and welcoming developer community," he tells us. "And the machine itself is a joy to make stuff on, so we ended up making new friends, and having a lot of fun in the process of making *Roguecraft*."

Inspired by the original *Rogue* game and Lovecraftian aesthetics, *Roguecraft* offers turn-based exploration in procedural dungeons. Available to buy as an Amiga Disk File (ADF), it
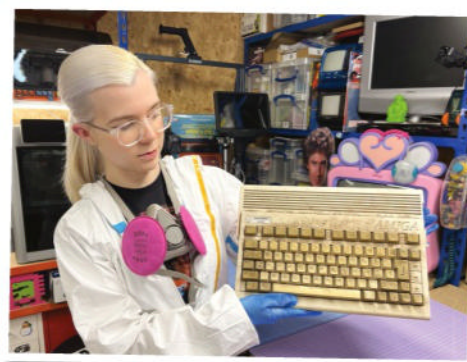
» Kari Lawler manages to clean and restore this mouldy Amiga 600 in one of her videos.

can be played on emulators, or on the modern, HDMI-compatible A500 Mini console, or of course original Amiga hardware should you have any to hand. "We were certainly taken by surprise, and pretty humbled by the response from the Amiga community," Henning admits. "*Roguecraft* also won an award for best retro game back in February at the Debug Indie Game Awards, which also was shocking, considering the games we were up against."

LONG LIVE THE AMIGA

THE A500 MINI

■ While many still enjoy using original Amiga hardware, The A500 Mini by Retro Games Ltd is an excellent plug-and-play option. It emulates both the original A500 and the AGA technology of later models. There are 25 games included and more can be added.
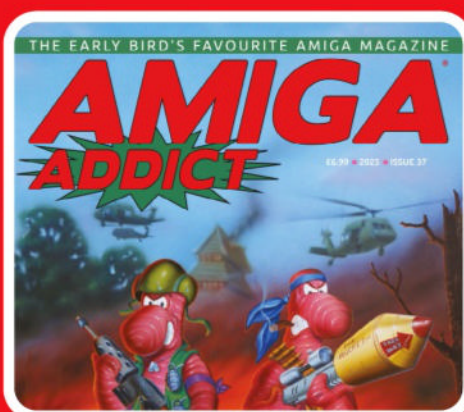
AMIGA ADDICT

■ A community-driven magazine with carefully curated content, *Amiga Addict* carries the torch for the old guard of Amiga magazines with its fun, upbeat vibe. Covering both technical hardware deep-dives and new and old Amiga games, it's well worthy of your time and support.

ZZAP! AMIGA

■ The classic *Zzap!64* magazine first started covering Amiga games in 1988, and these days there's the dedicated *Zzap! Amiga* to meet your needs. Released every two months, it has the brilliantly vibrant cover art you'd expect, plus a wealth of features, reviews, previews and news.

» You can find details of community events and user groups in *Amiga Addict*.

» There are loads of new accessories being made for original Amiga hardware, including Immortal Joysticks.

» [Amiga] *Turbo Tomato* by Nivrig Games is another new release that made waves in recent years.

» The legacy of the Amiga being celebrated at The Science Museum in London.

What does Henning think it is about the Amiga that inspires such devotion? "In our opinion the Amiga was the last of the home computers that felt special and that inspired the owners to be creative. With modern PCs being quite impersonal and boring, nostalgia for the Amiga seems to be everlasting among everyone who was lucky enough to grow up with one."

Fondness for the Amiga spreads beyond those who grew up with it, though – as Kari Lawler will attest. Kari's retro-computing videos have had many thousands of views on YouTube, including videos where she revisits and restores Amiga hardware. How did she become interested in the platform? "It was more of a destined progression," she tells us. "After exploring the explosion of 8-bit machines into the home from the early Eighties, I started moving further

forwards in time, looking at what came next. And so my first foray began into the Amiga line of home computers." In one video she brings an A600 back from the brink, and in another she restores an A500 while also adding a Gotek drive (floppy disk emulator). "Most machines I come across need some TLC, and it's challenging and exciting for me to try and get them working again – sometimes with modern replacements, like the Gotek upgrade in my A500 video – whilst also learning how they work," she explains.

Does Kari have a favourite Amiga model? "Kind of crazy but my favourite is the CD32, the final Commodore, as I have a bit of a fondness for the more niche early Nineties CD-based consoles, like the 3DO and Philips CD-i. But more recently, my go-to model is probably the A500, due to its compatibility with most software. I've spent quite a bit of time looking at the Amiga demoscene (via

Judge Drokk of Anarchy fame), loving the graphics and music, whilst also eagerly reading, like a soap opera, about the drama that often went on behind the scenes."

What do Henning and Kari think about the modern Amiga scene overall? "When it was released in 1985 the Amiga was way ahead of the curve, with its amazing graphics and sound, especially with what it brought to the table creativity-wise," reflects Kari. "It's no wonder it's still fondly remembered today, and still used and supported by so many 40 years after its release. Hopefully I can do my part to share this and carry on the legacy and historical importance of the Amiga for the next generation." Henning is similarly positive. "When we meet fellow Amiga enthusiasts today there's an instant bond which is pretty amazing, and a sure sign that the Amiga was, and still is, something very special," he says. "Amiga forever!" ▶

SIX WAYS TO ENJOY THE AMIGA TODAY

LEMON AMIGA
■ Created by Swedish Amiga and Commodore 64 fan Kim Lemon, this long-lasting website is a database of almost 5,000 Amiga games. It's packed full of details and community reviews, and you can join in by commenting and voting on your favourite releases.

EVERCADE CARTS
■ Blaze Entertainment's Evercade range now has several Amiga cartridges. There are Team17, Delphine Software and The Bitmap Brothers carts featuring classic games from those studios, plus the upcoming expanded release of *Roguecraft*, timed nicely to coincide with the Amiga turning 40.

AMIGA BOOKS
■ There are some wonderful high-quality books out there about the Amiga these days. We'd recommend *The Bitmap Brothers: Universe* from Read Only Memory, *Commodore Amiga: A Visual Compendium* from Bitmap Books and *The Story Of The Commodore Amiga In Pixels* from Fusion Retro Books.

AMIGA ME

THE AMIGA HOLDS A SPECIAL PLACE IN THE HEART OF GAMES DEVELOPERS AS WELL AS PLAYERS. WE ASKED THE PEOPLE BEHIND A VARIETY OF CLASSIC AMIGA GAMES TO SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS ON THE PLATFORM, AND WHAT IT MEANS TO THEM 40 YEARS ON

JON HARE
SENSIBLE SOFTWARE FOUNDER

■ "The Commodore Amiga, without doubt, facilitated the peak era of original game development and the happiest times I've experienced as a game designer and artist over the last 40 years.

In an era when new game genres and mechanics were yet to be invented, the technology jump from 8-bit machines to this was seismic and the technically stable, non-vetted nature of the Amiga as a publishing platform gave more creative game developers free rein to explore and invent like never before.

Mega-lo-Mania, *Wizkid*, *Cannon Fodder* and *Sensible World Of Soccer* owe everything to the wonderful machine they were created for."

MURIEL TRAMIS
COKTEL VISION GAME DESIGNER

■ "The Amiga was a magical machine – a dream for creators in the late-Eighties. Its graphic power (32 to 64 colours, even 4,096) brought my worlds to life in *Méwilo*, *Freedom*, *Emmanuelle*, *Geisha* and *Fascination*. There was also *Gobliiins 1*, *2* and *3* with my fellow creator Pierre Gilhodes. It gave point-and-click adventure games a visual depth that was revolutionary.

Many old games were emulated to run on modern PCs, helping launch the retro-gaming wave in the 2000s. This gave them a second life – and reconnected me with Amiga lovers. It even inspired my new game, *Remembrance*, echoing my first two titles."

SIMON PHIPPS
COKTEL VISION GAME DESIGNER

■ "Forty years. Can you believe it? The Amiga, like the Atari ST I used to code for it, wasn't just a computer; it was my canvas, a way to bring my art to life. For me, those years weren't just a job, they were an exploration. Every line of code, every pixel laid down… it was breathing life into something new. Looking back, it's wild to think – we were pioneers, pushing boundaries with limited resources, fuelled by pure creativity, forging memories for thousands of people we'd never even meet.

Games like *Rick Dangerous 1* and *2*, *Wolfchild* and *Bubba 'N' Stix* were incredibly special – the camaraderie with the guys I worked with, the sheer fun we had. And *Switchblade*? That one was entirely my own, brought to life with music by the late, legendary Ben Daglish. These creations, born from countless late nights and boundless imagination, weren't just products; they were extensions of ourselves. That era, those machines, and those creations – they'll always hold a profoundly special place in my heart."

DAN MALONE
THE BITMAP BROTHERS ARTIST

■ "After working on several 8-bit games I was chomping at the bit for some 16-bit action. My last game at Palace, *Superthief*, was developed for the C64 and the Atari ST, so I'd had a taste of 16-bit. However, next up, I had my first encounter with the Commodore Amiga – and never looked back.

It was the perfect 16-bit machine – both the sound and the graphics – just itching for games to be made on it. I did my most well-known work on this great machine, using only the legendary piece of software called D-Paint. Before the PS1 came along like a tsunami changing game dev forever, the Amiga was the absolute definitive and as the years go by it stands out even more as a design classic."

MORIES

ANDREW BRAYBOOK

■ "We first saw the Amiga in 1986 and immediately fell in love: all those colours, all those CPU registers, all that memory… and Deluxe Paint! 8-bit contractual obligations kept us apart until 1989, when we got together to complete *Rainbow Islands*.

It wasn't until 1992 that we found out how to get the Amiga to really dance. It was hard work. There in the wings was the AGA Amiga 1200, even more proficient: sharper, faster, brighter still. In only three more years, they were gone, taken too soon. They shone so brightly at the time, they will never be forgotten."

IAN STEWART
GREMLIN GRAPHICS FOUNDER

■ "The introduction of the Amiga was the key to unlocking what was the most exciting period in Gremlin's history. Working with Magnetic Fields was probably our most successful partnership, producing *Supercars 1* and *2* and the *Lotus Turbo Challenge* series of games.

Our internal dev teams embraced the Amiga producing popular strategy games including *Utopia*, *K240* and *FOFT (Federation Of Free Traders)*. Our racing games included *Nigel Mansell's World Championship Racing* and *Toyota Celica GT Rally*.

Our most successful game on the Amiga was *Zool*, an alien ninja from the Nth Dimension. Some classed the game as the Amiga's answer to Mario or Sonic but I was just happy for Zool to be mentioned in the same sentence! A big shout out to the guys at Commodore and all the Gremlin employees for making those years memorable."

TIM WRIGHT
PSYGNOSIS COMPOSER

■ "The Amiga allowed me to achieve my dreams. I learned to create music using SoundTracker, eventually composing themes for *Shadow Of The Beast II* and *III*, *Lemmings* and more. My brothers and I formed Jester Brothers International and made the *Fillet The Fish* demos.

It ultimately opened the door to my full-time position at Psygnosis – even scoring music for well-loved PlayStation games like *WipEout*, *Formula One* and *Krazy Ivan* using the Bars And Pipes MIDI sequencer on the Amiga 1200. It is the ideal platform – creative and welcoming. I even built my first website using an Amiga, and it essentially kick-started my entire musical career."

ANDREAS TADIC
TEAM17 GAME DESIGNER

■ "The Amiga was, at least to my knowledge, the first machine with multitasking and co-processors. I learned to program and develop games on this computer, which was at the time a huge leap in technology.

My best memories from back then are sitting up late at night, finding new ways to make games better. When we released *Alien Breed*, it was a moment I fondly remember, the fantastic response we got and how we drove ourselves to improve all the time. It has given me a career I could only dream of. The Amiga era was certainly golden in every way."

IK+

» **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE 64 » **RELEASED:** 1987 » **CHEAT TYPE:** HIDDEN ANIMATION » **CHEAT COMPLEXITY:** VERY LOW

Sometimes, cheats don't have to be much to stick in the memory, and *IK+* (or *International Karate+,* as it's known on its birth certificate) is a great example of that. Fighting games can be some of the most self-serious games out there, but *IK+* certainly isn't one of them, as funny things happen during karate in real life. We once saw a man's protective cup go flying across the dojo after an errant low kick, which was amusing to us and probably a relief to the competitor whose population potatoes didn't get pulverised.

The late Archer Maclean paid tribute to such martial arts mishaps in his original C64 version of *IK+* in a very simple way – press the S and E keys together and the combatants will have their gi trousers drop, looking into the screen in shock as they do. Sophisticated? No, but it's a very amusing little animation that serves to give the game a ton of personality. The later Amiga version simplified the command further, merely requiring you to tickle the T key in order to trigger a wardrobe malfunction. ✳

MORE CHEATS TO TRY OUT

ALL RISE

This one's not as amusing as trouser-based shenanigans, but it's rather more useful. If you find yourself knocked down during a fight, pause the game by pressing the **Shift Lock key**. When you resume, your fighter will be back on his feet as if by magic.

SECRET SKY

Press and hold the following keys in order at any time during gameplay: **D, E, M, O.** The colour of the sky will change, cycling through a few different colours before returning to the default. When there's only one background, any visual variation is gratefully received.

SUN SPOTTING

It's also possible to change the colour of the sun reflected in the water, and you'll likewise get a few variations before returning to the default. You can even mix and match. As with the sky colour code, press the **asterisk key** at any point during gameplay.

AMIGA ANIMATIONS

The 16-bit *IK+* owners weren't left out. Various four-letter codes trigger hidden animations in the background when entered during gameplay, including bird, fish and peri. If you want to see a cameo from a famous arcade character instead, enter **pac** and you'll summon the endless eater.

MESSAGE MANIA

Also in the Amiga version, hidden messages are tied to other four-letter codes. Try arch, jacq, stew, date, jump and toto for a start. There are some less family friendly words the game also recognises, if you're like us and minded to try them.

PLAIN SIGHT

The game actually tells you about a couple of these codes in the high score table, but it scrolls so quickly that it's hard to read the full message, "Why not try pressing the **asterisk key** or the **S** and **E** keys together and others."

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Hardware Heaven

ZX81

» MANUFACTURER: Sinclair Research **» YEAR:** 1981
» COST: £69.95 (launch, assembled), £60+ (today, boxed), £50+ (today, unboxed)

After finding success with the ZX80 computer, Sinclair Research wanted a new model on the market for 1981. The new machine would carry over many of the characteristics of the ZX80 – its small size, its low price, the membrane keyboard and most of its internal components. However, a redesigned case gave the new machine a sleeker appearance, the machine was able to run programs and draw to the screen at the same time, and a new 8KB ROM provided an improved BASIC interpreter.

The ZX81 was significantly more limited than other computers on the market, with a monochrome display, no audio and a paltry 1KB of RAM. However, it was also significantly more affordable than other machines and became wildly popular as a result, and commercial games soon began to appear for the computer. Many of them required a 16KB RAM expansion to function, but a full chess program was squeezed into the computer's standard memory. However, the ZX81 games market proved to be fairly short-lived as Sinclair's next machine, the ZX Spectrum, was far better suited to the task. ✱

ZX81 fact
■ JS Clayden and Mark Clayden of Nottingham-based industrial rock band Pitchshifter were introduced to computing via the ZX81, and named a track on the 1998 album *www.pitchshifter.com* after Sinclair's computer.

PROCESSOR:	8-BIT ZILOG Z80 CPU (3.25MHZ)
GRAPHICS:	64X48 BLOCK, MONOCHROME
MEDIA:	CASSETTE TAPE (OPTIONAL)
MEMORY:	1KB RAM
AUDIO:	NONE

HARDWARE SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

ESSENTIAL GAME
Forty Niner

One of the ZX81's big limitations was its display – games typically had to use the built-in symbols in a creative fashion, or else rely on some very blocky low-resolution visuals. Software Farm found a clever trick to get around that and tease an effective resolution of 256x192 out of the machine, ensuring that this arcade-style digging game looked like nothing else available for it. The goal is simple – dig for gold, avoid getting eaten by rats, and get to the door in order to make it to the next stage.

THE MAKING OF

TIGER-HELI

TIGER-HELI ESTABLISHED TOAPLAN'S REPUTATION AS A SHOOTING GAME POWERHOUSE, EMERGING AS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT, INFLUENTIAL RELEASES THE GENRE HAS EVER SEEN. AND IT'S STILL NOT DONE. LATER THIS YEAR TIGER-HELI LANDS ON ATARI CONSOLES. BUT WHAT MADE IT SUCH A SPECIAL GAME?

WORDS BY WILL FREEMAN

» [Arcade] The pixelated detail of *Tiger-Heli* would improve with each Toaplan shooter – becoming a studio hallmark

The announcement earlier this year that Toaplan's iconic shooter *Tiger-Heli* was being ported to the Atari 2600+, 7800, and 7800+ rather took the retro gaming world somewhat by surprise.

We've all grown rather used to seeing Toaplan's stable of releases migrate to new platforms, following the emergence of Tatsujin in 2017. The company, founded by its president and former Toaplan composer Masahiro Yuge, owns the rights to most of Toaplan's software library. The result? A great many classic shooters have been making their way to the PlayStation 4, Switch, PC, mobile and even the Evercade line. But a conversion to a console family with roots that go back to before Toaplan's own founding – in 2025? Few would have predicted that.

So why did Plaion pick *Tiger-Heli* out of all the icons deserving of a contemporary move to a classic console? No single title can take all the credit for what the shooting game form has become – and today it is a genre bristling with new releases, careful ports, and an abundance of vibrant, creative ideas. Sure – early works like *Asteroids* deserve much credit for enabling all that would follow. But those primitive titans of the medium's earliest days only whispered about what was to come. *Tiger-Heli* certainly isn't a genre progenitor, debuting in arcades in 1985. And nor is it as famed as peers of its time, such as *Gradius* and *R-Type*. Or, at

least, that is true here in the West. But *Tiger-Heli* is deeply important – and perhaps one of the most influential shooters ever to grace an arcade cabinet. And, yes, with Plaion and Tatsujin both being owned by gaming giant Embracer Group, the porting project was relatively straightforward to orchestrate. But *Tiger-Heli*'s story starts long before Plaion came on to the scene.

Toaplan formed in 1979, but would only move to the games space five years later, starting work on the curious action game *Performan*, made when the team still worked from an apartment. "The first game we made as Toaplan was a game called *Performan*, which wasn't a shooting game, and Toaplan wasn't credited on," confirms Yuge, who also stands as a Toaplan founding team member, composer, and driving force on the vision for *Tiger-Heli*. "It didn't do as well as we hoped, so we took a step back and we looked at a game that we'd made at a previous company called Orca. That was a game called *Buster*, which was a shooting game, and that had performed well. And the team – the developers – we were happy with the development from our point of view as well. So we decided for the next one, let's go with a shooting game."

Interestingly, almost no trace of *Buster* remains online – but it would inspire something with profound legacy. The decision to take a shot at shmup development would turn out to set

> ## "WE DEVELOPED IT WITH A COCKTAIL CABINET IN MIND"
> ### MASAHIRO YUGE
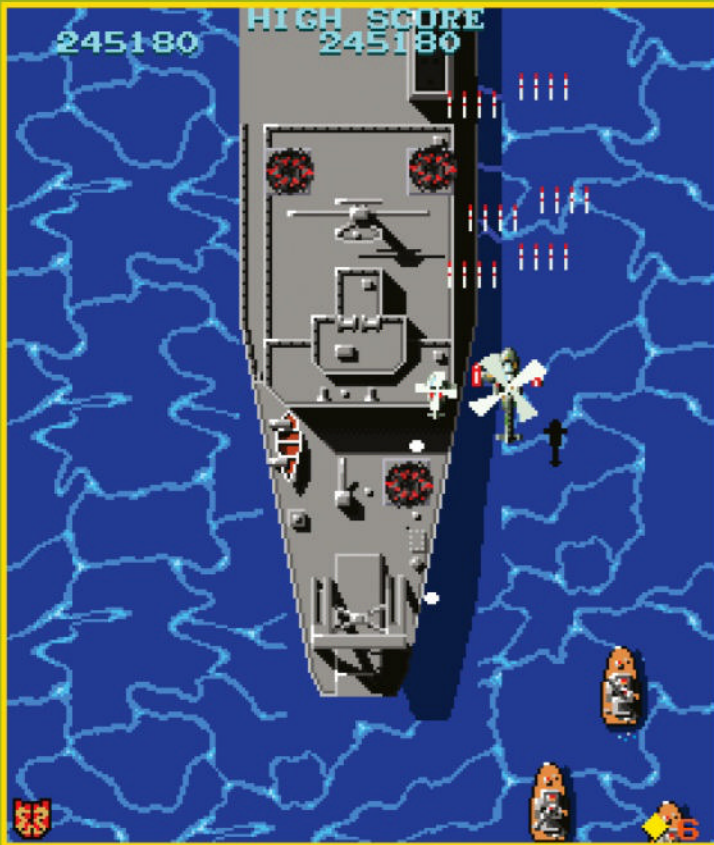
» [Arcade] Like *Gradius*, *Tiger-Heli*'s 'options' system saw tiny support craft join you, boosting attack power.

■ One of the original Toaplan team, Masahiro Yuge is famed as a game composer – and now stands as president of Tatsujin.

■ A man who enviably carries the word 'retro' in his job title, Ben Jones is commercial director of retro at Plaion.

STORMING PORTS

HOW THE ORIGINAL TIGER-HELI CONVERSION REINVENTED THE GAME

■ A little over a year after *Tiger-Heli*'s arcade debut, Japanese players would see the release of a Nintendo Entertainment System port, which made it to shelves in December 1986. Developed by Micronics, and published in Japan by Pony Inc, the NES version had distinct backgrounds, lower resolution and a less extensive colour palette – and in spite of all those limitations, it capably, authentically communicated the feeling of playing the arcade original. Masahiro Yuge's beloved, dramatic soundtrack also had to be significantly rearranged to squeeze into a NES cartridge.

Nintendo itself was seemingly impressed, and eagerly planned to release the game as *Helifighter* under its *Action Series* imprint. Eventually, however, Acclaim handled Western publishing, distributing the game in the States and Europe. Meanwhile, the Korean version was handled by the electronics division of the Hyundai group, more famed for its vehicles and construction projects.

Eventually, the port of *Tiger-Heli* for the PlayStation brought a considerably more arcade-authentic experience. Released on the *Toaplan Shooting Battle 1* compilation – which also included two versions of semi-sequel *Twin Cobra* – the PlayStation port remains a highly sought-after, if relatively affordable option for collectors. Sadly, the following volumes of *Toaplan Shooting Battle* never saw release, with porting developer Gazelle going bankrupt just as the series got going.

Toaplan's creative journey for many years, ultimately influencing the genre itself tremendously. Toaplan's many great shooter works – from *Truxton*, *Twin Cobra* and *Zero Wing* to *Hellfire*, *Dogyuun* and the mighty *Batsugun* – evolved the shmup from its primitive origins into a new space defined by exquisitely detailed visuals that conveyed a deep sense of place, increasingly nuanced scoring systems, and considerably more dynamic, bullet-heavy experiences. And it all started with an effort to speak to two types of arcade visitors. The idea was to make a game with enough challenge and depth to entice scoring-focussed, obsessive players unafraid of high difficulty, while providing a thrill ride for casual visitors stopping by an arcade on a night out. The result was a game that was in equal parts aggressive and immersive.

» [Arcade] Landing platforms mark pauses between otherwise seamlessly blended stages – a model intended to deliver immersion.

Those most devoted, sado-masochistic players could sink hours in, overcoming tightly arranged enemy waves, as well as bullet counts that were considerably numerous for the time. Those players dipping into a game center for a hit of fun, meanwhile, could be delighted by a level of world building and pixelated detail almost never before seen in the genre at the time. And as it turned out, while focussing on immersion was a move to beguile those less experienced players,

it would turn out to drive much of the game's success – for all that played it. "It's basically to give the players a feeling of seeing something that they were familiar with," Yuge says of the military setting, which is heavily grounded in reality. "So if it's set in a real-world setting, then they'll see things that they recognise".

The idea was that familiarity would feel inclusive to as wide a group of players as possible – meaning more coins through slots ▶

» [NES] Despite numerous differences, *Tiger-Heli*'s NES port capably reproduced how the game feels to play.

» [Arcade] It is often when the action starts to quieten that a surprise shot downs you.

▶ and growth for Toaplan. War might not be the most light-hearted of subject matters. Yet shooting games are about shooting, after all – and tanks and helicopters certainly feel less niche than a hard sci-fi or intricate fantasy setting. It's more than a little ironic that the pursuit of wide appeal would underpin a game that significantly inspired a form considered the antithesis of welcoming gameplay – namely bullet hell.

Is *Tiger-Heli* **bullet hell?** Absolutely not. But by the standards of the time, it felt busy and intense – and the fact players flocked to it proved the audience had an appetite for more challenge – and more energetic, testing experiences.

Tiger-Heli also endeavoured to bring something of a diorama like experience to the genre, letting the player sit over a tiny world at their control – another design facet that the team hoped would bring more welcoming realism and familiarity. That, in turn, would lead to the game's focus on helicopters – particularly as the player vehicle. "We developed it with a cocktail cabinet – so the sit-down table cabs – in mind," Yuge explains. "So instead of looking front on, you were looking down, and when we had that in mind, it felt like a fighter plane being able to move all around the screen would feel a bit unrealistic. You know; you're holding the joystick and moving around, and a helicopter theme fitted in with that much better."

Make it to the end of a stage in *Tiger-Heli* – which is rarely a simple task – and atypically for the genre, your helicopter ship lands on a small platform, before setting off into the sky again, with no loading screen or break away from the game world. And again, drawing players in was the central design motivation. "That came down to our thinking towards the players' immersion in the game's world," Yuge confirms. "Rather than the traditional results screen, and then it fades out

"IF IT'S SET IN A REAL-WORLD SETTING, THEN THEY'LL SEE THINGS THAT THEY RECOGNISE"
MASAHIRO YUGE

to black or something else happens, and you get the next stage – we wanted players to be able to continue viewing the world that they were already in. Hence the pause, the landing, then the take off, and then you just continue on to the next stage seamlessly."

That approach was tremendously ambitious, and an effort to make the game play out as much like a 'drama' as a game. Early on, Yuge and his Toaplan colleagues had assumed new stages would require loading into an arcade board's memory one by one, appearing when needed. With new ROMs available on the game's unique board system, however, running one continuous world was possible – again, offering a level of immersion and technical dazzle perfect for luring in less devoted players, while letting the hardcore play out their skills in a game world that pushed expectation in the genre at the time.

Tiger-Heli also introduced a true stalwart of shooting games that has existed in almost every genre-work since. Early location tests – where a prerelease build is installed in a cabinet and taken to the likes of select public arcades to gauge audience response – revealed the game was bringing out quite the passion in many players. For a time the fledgling Toaplan team suspected that the

BY THE TAIL
USEFUL TIPS TO HELP YOU BEAT TIGER-HELI

GET CLOSE
■ Your firepower has limited range for a shmup – and yet the fire rate is aggressively high. That means that like it or not, you'll have to get close when serious damage needs doing – especially to the largest tanks and ships in the game, otherwise it will take ages to destroy them.

SWEEP-'EM-UP
■ One classic shmup play strategy works well when *Tiger-Heli* gets busy; try sweeping movements continuously heading from one side of the screen to the other, back and forth, moving up or down to adjust to bullets or pivot direction when reaching the screen's edge.

A GROUNDED STRATEGY
■ Much of your scoring will come from destroying passive ground targets, so take a pop at every vehicle, building, and grounded plane. On more resilient ground targets – that can dish out an extra 10,000 points – hover close to maximise how many bullets you land.
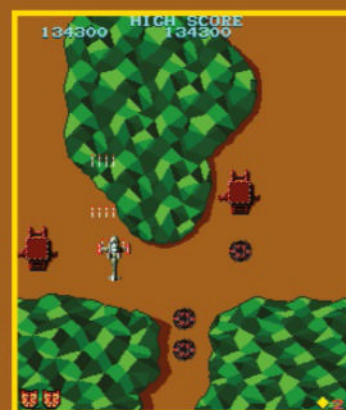
REMEMBER, REMEMBER
■ Your main weapon can take down targets just before – or just as – they appear at the screen's top. As such, memorisation will be a key tool for preventing you getting overwhelmed, giving you a realistic shot at making it deep into the game's ongoing loops.

» [Arcade] The polygonal look of parts of *Tiger-Heli* reportedly came from a canned Toaplan flight simulator.

» [Arcade] Landing platforms mark pauses between otherwise seamlessly blended stages – a model intended to deliver immersion.

player ship was too slow. Location tests revealed this to be the case, with players applying so much force trying to push the ship's abilities, that the famously robust arcade sticks became bent and battered.

Talk of the *Tiger-Heli* location tests, and the player passion they revealed, has Yuge pondering the bomb Toaplan added. "I think it's the first game to have this bomb feature in it," he offers. "The reason it's in there is that for arcade games, you have to limit the amount of time the average player can spend on the machine with one credit, because otherwise the operators are going to remove the machine because they're not making

enough money off it. But on the flip side of that is, if the players are killed too soon, and in a way that they don't feel satisfied in terms of the reason that they got killed, they will feel it is unfair, and they won't play it as much. Then the game is not going to make any money, and the operator is going to remove the machine.

"There's this fine line of balance that you have to hit. And one of the things we thought was that we could put something into the game where the players can take out their frustration. The bomb was born of that. But it also allows them to think that when they died, if they just used a bomb there, then they would have been okay. So it kind of balances out the increased difficulty with an ability for the player to take a look ▶

OPTIONAL STRATEGY

■ Option power-ups will see you joined by up to two support craft – or Little Helis, as *Tiger-Heli* calls them. They can fire forward or to the side, depending on which power-up you pick – white power-ups for forward fire, and red for side fire. Be sure to use them often.

BOMBS BLOCK BULLETS

■ As well as wiping out bullets when deployed, bombs have an extra function. You can carry a maximum of two, visible as red pods on your helicopter's sides. They act as an autobomb, so should an enemy bullet hit one it will explode, only damaging enemies.

» [Arcade] *Tiger-Heli* isn't bullet hell – but it began a chain of events that created the subgenre.

» [Arcade] Destructible scenery offered more scoring opportunities – and made *Tiger-Heli* feel more like a real place.

» [Atari 7800] Despite the move from vertical to horizontal display ratios, the Atari conversion is frequently faithful.

"WE REALLY DID IT FROM THE GROUND UP, FROM SCRATCH"
BEN JONES

1UP   HIGH SCORE
173370   173370
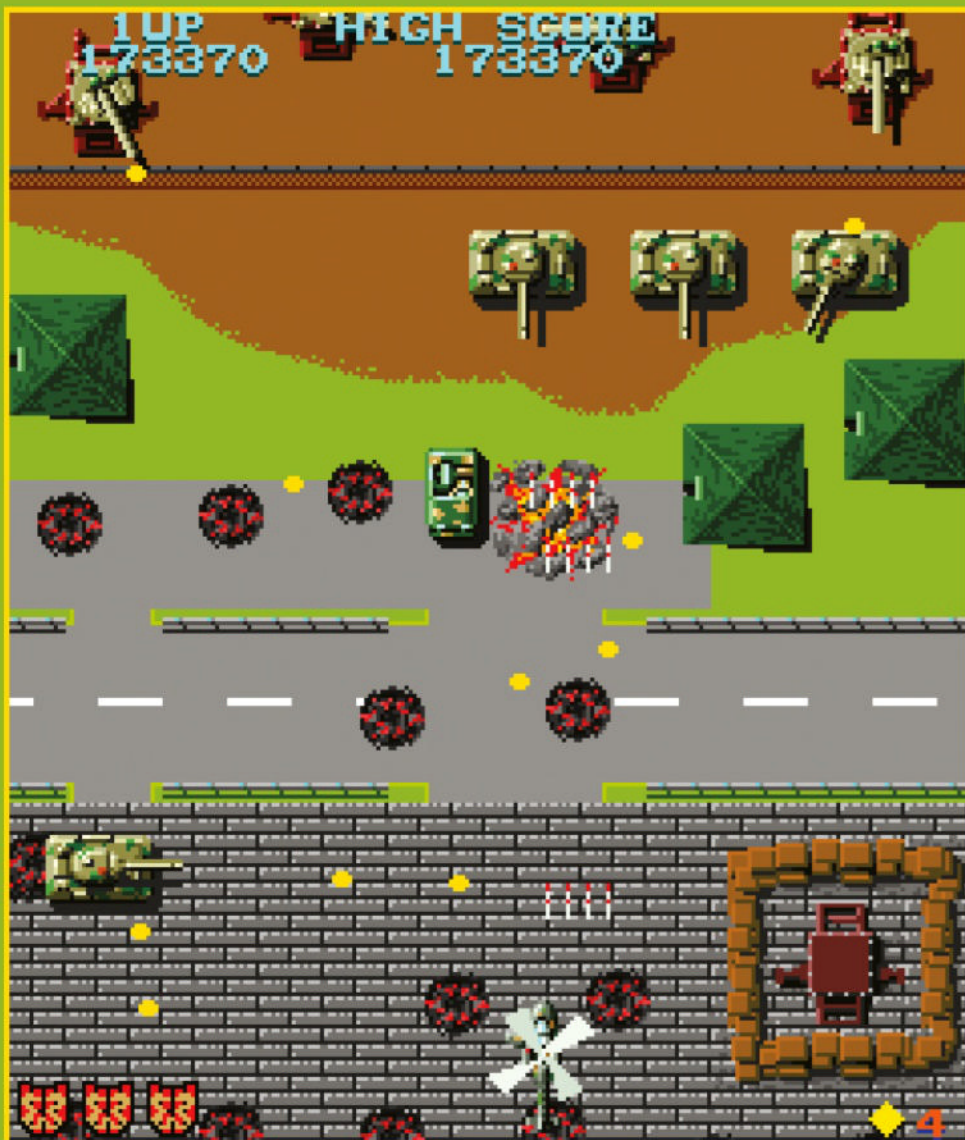
» [Arcade] Across its world visual detail expertly communicated *Tiger-Heli's* sense of time and place.

▶ at their own play and realise how they should have done things, and feel that it was only their fault, and not the game."

For anyone who has devoted serious time to the genre, they will know how alluring the idea of self-improvement is; of having another go to overcome your previous failing. It's a core psychological element of being a shmup devotee – a fight to overcome yourself; to win the battle against your own skills and limitations; to push what you are capable of. It's what makes shooters compelling, and it's what keeps coins being pushed through slots. On the matter of the bomb, it's also worth noting that *Tiger-Heli* also introduced the 'autobomb' concept. With the maximum two bombs being carried – and highly visible on the ship – contact with an enemy bullet would trigger one, acting as a last-moment shield that would help carry through players of all standards – and a moment of power and respite in a journey through terrifying odds.

And now, after all these long years and the recent swatch of ports, *Tiger-Heli* still feels wildly fresh and compelling. It still feels hard too – but if you aren't there to beat the game (after many dozens of gruelling losses), it is still a glorious, engrossing thrill ride. Which is part of the reason Plaion picked it for its first commercial release for the Atari line.

The team there didn't just want to emulate the game. They wanted to be authentic to the time in which it was forged, building a bespoke conversion that endeavoured to replicate the original experience, while leaning into the realities of a distinct home platform. The entire project was in fact born from a meeting of minds over on the AtariAge Forums, where Plaion's commercial director of retro Ben Jones met Bruno Steux, by day director and founder of SandCastle, and by night an eager coder and retro gaming tech obsessive. After meeting on the forums, they committed to the idea of bringing a classic scrolling shooter to the 7800 – and with Plaion and Tatsujin both being part of the Embracer network, *Tiger-Heli* made the perfect choice.

» [Atari 7800] You beat them in the arcade? The battle isn't over. Familiar foes await on the new console conversion.

» [Atari 7800] Everything is in place on Atari, from the tiny option craft to the dizzying challenge.

AN ICON RETURNS

INSIDE THE MAKING OF THE ATARI CONVERSIONS WITH BRUNO STEUX

■ A new port of *Tiger-Heli* is heading to the Atari 2600+, 7800 and 7800+, with an August release date slated at the time of writing (see our review last issue). The conversion comes from the team within the retro department at giant global publisher Plaion – and is a result of a meeting of minds over at the famed AtariAge forums.

What started as an enthusiasts conversation between Ben Jones, commercial director of retro at Plaion, and Bruno Steux, director and founder of SandCastle soon turned into the plotting of a proper release, both to the original 7800, and the updated Atari consoles – which also come from Plaion's stable.

Working on the Atari platforms also meant working with the limitations of the hardware set. While Bruno found the Atari system's reputation for struggling with vertical scrolling less troublesome than many suggest, the conversion still took a lot of creative solutions. "Most of the games – indeed, the good games – on the 7800 are games with almost no background," Bruno offers. "Just sprites, but no background. And that was the real challenge with *Tiger-Heli*, really, because I wanted a colourful background, and you need to fill all the stages. And what was taking time was to change the palettes inside an image. That was taking a lot of DMA, and it stopped the CPU.

"And so in the end, the premise I had was the full screen – and the screen is really full because we made a 224p game, and that is really high, especially for an Atari 7800 game. But it's good for vertical shmups, obviously," Bruno continues. "And so I had very, very

little CPU left when you realise that you have to display all the enemies; more than ten enemies, more than ten explosions, more than ten bullets simultaneously, it's really, really optimised on that aspect. On the CPU side, I really had to tune the compiler so that really I get every cycle – or almost every cycle – used from the CPU and the MARIA chip in that game."

Bruno was also able to push the sound capabilities of the 7800 – with a little help from his son, and the console's support for POKEY sound chips in game carts. "For the sound, yes, we use the POKEY chip in addition to the TIA," Bruno confirms. "So, yes, it's a POKEY game – one of the few. Indeed, my son is a composer, so that was really nice; a nice opportunity to work with him. I just handed him the RMT tracker. It's a raster media tracker. It's a tracker for POKEY, which you can find on GitHub. And I gave him the arc of the music, and he just recomposed everything for the POKEY, and I'm very happy with the results, because it really sounds better than the Yamaha version – the NES version – which was the objective."

» [Atari 7800] The new Atari port of *Tiger-Heli* pushes expectations about the machine's vertically scrolling chops.

"Step by step, Bruno kept feeding me what he was doing – so the first level, and it had different effects," enthuses Ben. "We really did it from the ground up, from scratch. He drew the sprites. The music was from scratch, and there were all these tricks and ways and means that he got it to work – and I was just the tester. We worked in a really good fashion. He would hammer these builds across. I'd spend the evening playing it, making notes, then sending it back. Obviously, all the work was primarily done by Bruno. And then we got to a position where we were ready, so I spoke to my contact at Embracer, we managed to get a licence from Toaplan, and here we are now."

While Bruno is quick to note that Ben is playing down his role – through which he also provided QA support, and a deep understanding of the genre, *Tiger-Heli*'s coming rebirth was enabled by his technical prowess – and a good old back-and-forth between two enthusiasts. That is something many of us in various retro gaming communities will experience. Potential access to the might and budget of a vast gaming organisation simply afforded Ben and Bruno an opportunity to birth an officially recognised Atari release.

And so it is that 40 years on from its original release, *Tiger-Heli* is still busying game makers, captivating players, and making the headlines. And as it lives on, newly re-released alongside all of those modern shooters that it has influenced so profoundly, its importance cannot be understated. ✵

Tusker

INDIANA JONES AND THE ELEPHANTS' GRAVEYARD

» **AMSTRAD CPC** » **1989**
» **CONSULT SOFTWARE**

I was recently lucky enough to play System 3's incoming *The Last Ninja* collection. As I was battling cops in New York and taking on multiple fighters in *IK+*, I suddenly realised that I'd love to play *Tusker* again.

Sadly, the Amstrad version by Consult Software borrows heavily from the ZX Spectrum version of the game, rather than the C64 original and as a result it looks rather disappointing. While admittedly well detailed with some surprisingly robust animation, the game is effectively displayed in just two colours, yellow and black, and as a result isn't the prettiest looking of Amstrad games.

It's challenging too and when you're not being beaten down by *Tusker*'s many varied enemies, you're struggling with the inventory system and distinct lack of weapons. Despite all this, I really used to enjoy playing *Tusker*, even though I never found the elephant's graveyard which was the focus of the game's story. I was a huge fan of Indiana Jones growing up and with most of Indy's Amstrad games not being particularly memorable, games like *Tusker* proved to be solid alternatives. And besides, if you squinted hard enough, *Tusker*'s hero looked identical to Indiana Jones… almost.

Returning to *Tusker* today I found it's far more difficult than I remembered with enemies doggedly tracking you as you cross each screen and a surprising amount of in-game objects to move around. There's also a complete lack of in-game music (I used to hum the *Indiana Jones* theme back in the day to compensate), and yet it still offers a sense of discovery and it's still filled with detailed visuals, even if it's not the most striking of games.

It's also reminded me that there's a surprising number of interesting System 3 games outside of its *Last Ninja* and *International Karate* titles. Hopefully the success of its most recent Kickstarter will make it blow the dust off some of its other classic games. ✱

MAGAZINE CRAFT

RICHIE SHOEMAKER

PC Zone is one of those magazines that fans still champion long after its closure, and Richie Shoemaker's five years on its staff make him a familiar face to many of them. We learn about his start in games media, how he launched a single-game magazine that outlasted many more mainstream titles, and why he's recently returned to print magazines

Words by Nick Thorpe

THEN

Joining *PC Zone* in 1997, Richie rose from staff writer to deputy editor over five years on the much-beloved magazine, before taking on a succession of challenges including editing *EON Magazine*, *games™* and the business-to-business publication *MCV*.

NOW

Richie continues to work in the games press, with a variety of projects on the go – the newest of which is *Debug++*, an industry-focussed magazine for indie developers that serves as a counterpart to *Debug*, the indie games magazine that launched in 2023.

How did you first find an interest in games?
Like a lot of people of my generation, I suppose just being blown away by this amazing kind of space-age technology that allowed you to press buttons and move things on the screen, and just being absolutely amazed by it, like it was witchcraft. I still think it's witchcraft, I still don't understand it. As my dad was blown away by rock and roll, I was blown away by videogames.

What kinds of games did you find yourself drawn to?
Pretty much anything, I suppose. I played all those really early arcade games. I think the ones that I really loved were vector stuff, so *Asteroids*, and then *Battlezone*, and I suppose that directly leads into my favourite game from the early Eighties, and still my favourite to this day, which would be *Elite*. That was a stunning game – it totally blew me away, the scope of that game.

So was writing something you always had an interest in?
Well, no. Even though I kind of had pretensions of writing as a teenager, it never crossed my mind that you could have a career writing about games until I actually applied for a job. Saying that, when I did apply to join *PC Zone*, the way I thought about it was, "I don't have any experience and I don't have any qualifications." I mean, I barely scraped the equivalent of a GCSE in English, no journalism experience, no nothing. So when I applied for the job, I thought, "I've got to do something different here." What I did was I went into PowerPoint, the amazing PowerPoint, and designed a magazine incorporating my CV. I was very proud of it at the time, I've still got a copy actually, it's bloody awful. Anyhow, it got me an interview.

How did the working environment on the magazine compare to your expectations?
I was used to working in a very serious [public health] job – not just health, it was AIDS and HIV stuff, so that was pretty grim. So it was a complete change to that. Maybe my first story that I wrote while I was on the staff, I just remember spending an hour or two writing this piece, and I thought I was very proud of it, and handed it to Paul Mallinson, the news editor. He looked over it in about ten minutes, got back to me, and I looked at this sheet just covered in red marks – none of which I understood, because I hadn't had any copywriting or copy editing experience to know what they meant. I just thought, "This looks bad." So that was kind of a knock into reality, but then it was just how informal everything was, how fun it was – obviously, getting to play games at lunchtime.

That's always fun, though we used to have some pretty competitive people around the office. Did gaming sessions get particularly competitive on *PC Zone*?
I think it was all very good natured. But there was a guy towards the end of my time – I think he took over from me when I left as deputy editor – he was an Australian guy, Anthony Holden. He was so easy to wind up, and the editor Dave Woods would take great pleasure in winding him up. They almost came to blows a few times, which was hilarious. That was *Quake III*. But yeah, we just played for usually an hour at lunch, maybe an hour or two after work before going to the pub, if it was a pub night. It wasn't serious at all. If we were playing *Counter-Strike*, we'd often play with other people in the company, but there was no talking tactics or anything. When we started playing

» According to the caption for this military Supertest spread, Richie's nickname is 'Throat-slitter' – blimey.

online with readers, then we would get schooled. So we thought we were quite good, until we started to play against the readers.

> ❝ I don't have any experience and I don't have any qualifications ❞
> RICHIE SHOEMAKER

Of course, internet usage in the UK increased massively during your time on *PC Zone***. Besides interacting with readers, do you remember any other effects that came from that?**

So we all obviously could access the internet on our machines, and we had email, and that was fine. But when we updated the website, which was once a day, where we'd take one story from the last issue and put it up, that had to be done on a separate machine over dial-up for some strange reason.

But yeah, reader interaction – this was the days when we had our phone numbers in the mag. So not just a phone number for the office, but every person had their number, it was like a company policy. I guess it was quite direct, but obviously there wasn't any social media and even though we did have the website, I don't think we had comments and stories. Even when comments did come in and then forums came in, I didn't engage in any of it myself. But then what happened was some of the readers who were particularly big fans, and who did engage with the staff, a few of them ended up on the staff. So people like Steve Hogarty, he was on

the *Zone* forum, and then he became a *Zone* staff writer, and obviously he's now a bit of a legend, isn't he? I think it was a couple – Dave Brown, he was a reader, I think.

But if you had written a review that was particularly controversial, the problem was never the readers so much – I mean, there'd be some people who would write in and complain, but most of the political fallout would be with publishers.

Did you ever have any particular issues in that regard?

Yeah, I did. Near the beginning, there were two strategy games, that came out within a few weeks of each other – *Dark Reign* from Activision, and then there was *Total Annihilation* from Cavedog and GT. I think *PC Gamer* had the exclusive on *Dark Reign*, and I think they put it on the cover, and they reviewed it and gave it – I don't know, let's say 90%. So the next issue, they do *Total Annihilation*, not sure it was on the cover, but that got 91% so that's 1% difference. So I reviewed *Dark Reign* – I gave it 89%, I really liked it. I think we reviewed *Total Annihilation* in the same issue, because it was the way the embargoes fell. We gave *Total Annihilation* maybe 90% or 91%, so obviously between *Gamer* and *Zone*, we've made the same difference between them, but ours

» Here's Richie's desk from the *PC Zone* days – this is the glamorous reality of writing about games, folks.

▶ was maybe a couple of percent lower. But because the threshold was 90% and I've given *Dark Reign* 89%, Activision threatened to pull their advertising.

Wow, over a score of 89%?
They pulled their advertising on that basis. I'm sure this was when Activision were publishing *Quake II* and things like that. Obviously it blew over after a while, and it happened a lot. It happened before my time – it happened over *Doom*, I think Virgin got upset over the early *Terminator* games.

It kind of happened the other way with us, with *Daikatana*. That was our game, we did our fair share of hyping it, but it increasingly became clear that it was not going to be as good as we were led to believe, and it was falling further and further behind. What we did to Eidos is that we'd say, "Look, this game is not going to work. It's going to be crap. We've signed it up. What can you do for us?" I think we probably threatened to say, "Look, we can't put this on the cover," but it got to the point where everything was so negative around *Daikatana* that by the time it did come out, we put it on the cover because everyone wants to know how bad it is. I think even though it got a bit of a kicking, Eidos were almost relieved that it was over and done with. I think by that point, we'd had favourable terms on various other games, like *Deus Ex* we put on the cover, probably a few others as well like *Championship*

> ❝ We raided Eidos of all their best stuff basically, on the back of Daikatana being terrible ❞
> **RICHIE SHOEMAKER**

Manager. We raided Eidos of all their best stuff basically, on the back of *Daikatana* being terrible. So in the end, that worked out.

You left *PC Zone* after five years. What was behind the decision to move on from the magazine?
The main reason I left when I did was because my wife at the time convinced me that I could go freelance. We'd just bought a house down in Hastings, so we were moving, and obviously there's no way I was going to commute from Hastings to London. So it just seemed the right time – there didn't seem to be any prospect of me being editor, and I just thought freelance was the way to go. Unfortunately, it wasn't. I don't think online advertising had quite taken off then, but it was slowly growing, and what was happening was that magazines were cutting their freelance budgets. I carried on freelancing for *Zone*, so I was in the office a fair bit, still writing quite a bit. So it was no change in some regards.

And during that time, you started *EON*, the official *EVE Online* magazine. How did that opportunity arise?
Very, very, very small audience for that one, but I was very proud of that mag. I was freelancing for a few years, and I got really into *EVE Online*. Everyone at the time had their MMO of choice, and mine was *EVE Online*. Like I mentioned earlier, *Elite* is my favourite game, so anything

» *EON* was a labour of love for Richie, who was a huge fan of *EVE Online* before starting the magazine.

» Richie's *Dark Reign* review upset Activision enough for them to pull adverts from *PC Zone* for months.

MY FAVOURITE MAGAZINE COVER

PC ZONE #65

After much deliberation and a, "How dare you do this to me," Richie goes for issue 65 of *PC Zone*. "It's a weird split cover with *X-COM Interceptor* at the bottom and loads of text at the top. It works, but with a weird symmetry which you don't really see. I love it because we redesigned *PC Zone*. Even though my favourite period of *Zone* is the previous design, because that's when I joined and that's when I was a fan, the redesign was my era, and that's when we became number one and beat *PC Gamer*. It marked a new start really for *PC Zone* and was kind of a high point. We put so many ideas into that relaunch."

with spaceships, anything with trading and all that stuff, I was naturally going to be into. I got into *EVE* during beta, and bought it on launch day. It was probably affecting my freelance and I wasn't doing as much work. I contacted CCP and said, "Look, I've got this idea for a magazine. You give me some money and I'll make this magazine great." And they said, 'That's a good idea, but we don't really make magazines, but thanks for the offer."

Then about a year later, this guy from a London design agency, completely out of blue, gave me a call and said, "We've been pitching the idea of doing official MMO magazines, directly to the makers of the game, that they would sell directly to subscribers." And I was like, "Oh, funnily enough, I had an idea like that." And they're like, "Yeah, we pitched something to CCP, and then they mentioned you." What the idea is, basically, is you just create an official mag, written with fans of the game who were good writers, and then they sell it on their website and you have a 50/50 revenue split. And that was basically the gist of it. CCP loved it, and they just said, "Yep, let's do it."

But yeah, I did that for eight years, did thirty quarterly issues. It was quite expensive – it was like $15 so my thinking was that, as well as being a mag about the game, it was almost like a souvenir of that period of the game's history. The thing is with *EVE*, if you know the game, it's so easy to cover because there's so much happening, and because everyone was in the same universe. Whereas with something like *World Of Warcraft*, you're like, "Well, I don't play on that server, so that doesn't really interest me." That was why the *EVE* one

worked really well. CCP only approved the kind of features that they were working on next – everything else, they were like, "Do whatever you want." So if I'd interviewed a player who was critical of CCP, they were like, "That's fine." It was a shame when that ended, that was just before *games™*.

We remember you taking up the editor's chair, you were next to us in the Imagine Publishing office for a few issues, but we're aware that wasn't a great experience for you. It was just a very different vibe to Dennis Publishing. We were protected by this publisher – I've spoken to him about this a few times since, he saw it as his job to protect us. So whenever there was some shit coming down from on high, like advertising being pulled or mags being pulled off the shelves, he wasn't the one telling us off, he was the one taking it and shielding us and just letting us get on with it. I absolutely did not appreciate that at the time. So when I went to Imagine it was ▶

» Despite covering a single game, interviews with players and developers gave *EON* plenty to talk about.

MY BEST PRESS TRIP

FATE OF THE DRAGON

"I went to see a game called *Fate Of The Dragon*. It was by a Chinese developer based in Beijing, and it was based on the *Journey To The West* type story. It was OK, I don't really remember much about the game. But the PR person, Eva Field, had family in – was it Hong Kong or Shanghai? I can't remember. She was going on holiday, basically, but she wrapped in a press trip to it. So I spent a week, and we went to Beijing for three days and Shanghai for two days. There was no need to go to Shanghai at all. This was still a time when most of Beijing were on bicycles, it was amazing. We went to the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square. On the one day we went to see the game, we spent about an hour seeing the game, seeing the developer – very little memory of that."

CVG REPLAY

"We were doing this thing in *Zone* called Retro Zone, which was a two-page opener, followed by a feature. But obviously *games™* took that a step further and had this massive retro section, which was fucking brilliant. I loved it. I thought I'd take that idea and take it to a full mag as [Dennis Publishing management] were asking for pitches. I had one meeting with the publisher, and it was just a case of, 'No one's gonna buy this.' It was completely shut down."

debug++

THE ART + BUSINESS OF INDIE GAME DEVELOPMENT   25.07

WHAT'S AT THE HEART OF THE MACHINE?

AFTER TWO GALACTIC AI WARS, CHRIS McELLIGOTT PARK RETURNS TO EARTH FOR THE BIRTH OF SENTIENT AI

ODD BUG STUDIO ON THE MAKING OF TAILS OF IRON 2 • JENNIFER ESTARIS HIGHLIGHTS USTWO GAMES' CHARITABLE EFFORTS • BRIAN FOOTE'S VISION FOR FIRESHINE GAMES • HOW TO GET YOUR GAME ON THE NEXT FUTURE GAMES SHOW • CATCHING UP WITH TERRY CAVANAGH'S OTHER GAMES • GROUNDWATER STUDIO QUESTIONS ERIC BARONE

» *Debug++* is Richie's next project, and should be well worth checking out for aspiring developers.

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PLUS: Interview with Mike Singleton, The creator of Manic Miner speaks out. August 1991 remembered. Rose-tinted specs: Atari VCS. The making of Sonic The Hedgehog and

» Inspired by the retro section of *games™*, Richie pitched a retro spin-off of *CVG*, but Dennis Publishing management didn't see a market for it.

▶ obviously completely different. The publishers weren't protecting you, they're in your face, and there were people getting involved in decisions that to my mind, they have no business talking about. So it was completely on its head, it was just exhausting. I was just relieved when I was escorted out of the building. I just was a completely wrong fit, so no shade on the mags and the people, it was just the management was completely alien to me.

So what did you do next?
I got a call from my old *Zone* colleague, Martin Korda, and he's got a BAFTA-winning games consultancy – I don't even know how he heard,

> " You're just kind of reheating lines from CEOs and marketing departments, and you're just basically selling services between developers and studios and publishers "
> **RICHIE SHOEMAKER**

but he called me up and said, "I hear you're free?" I started working for him, doing mock reviews, doing consultancy stuff, mostly under NDA. It was interesting in the sense that you go to see a very story-focussed game, and you've got all these people working on it, and they've been working it so long and so intensely that there's things that they don't notice, gaping errors in the storyline, or things that happen that don't make sense, that they don't see. So you go in as this consultant, you're doing mock reviews effectively, but you're doing a very specific job in the sense you're looking at a storyline with a fresh pair of eyes. Thing is because you're contractors, you're not in the credits. I think the only time I did it get credited was for *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*.
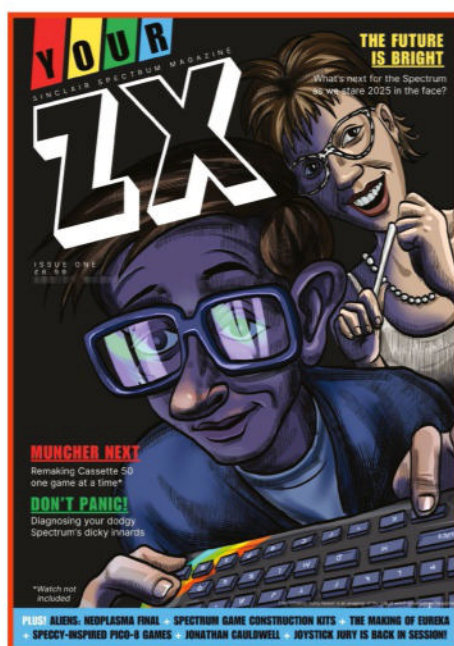
Of all the games to be credited on, that's a pretty good one.
Yeah, it's the only one, sadly. After that I started working for My.Games because at that point, I was living in France. We'd moved over to Paris, because my wife got a job at Wargaming. At the time people who left Wargaming, seemed to go to My.Games for some reason. Again, that was different because

» [PC] Richie only has one credit in a game, but it *is* a multiple award-winning mega hit.

Issue 997 June/July 2024 www.mcvuk.com

MCV DEVELOP

CALLING TIME
Is it time to rethink the drink at industry events?

XR PANEL

The past, present and future of XR gaming, according to those that are making it happen

» *MCV* marked a return to print mags for Richie, seven years after his brief stint on *games™* came to an end.

YOUR ZX
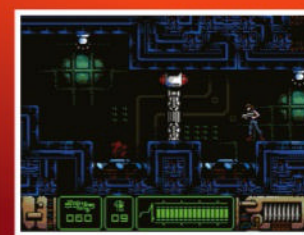
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» *Your ZX* is another of Richie's current projects, which he describes as "my favourite cover that hasn't yet come out – if it ever does".

it was working on a new game that's coming out – not an amazing game, but I was working on background texts and localisation stuff, and working on all the news items that go on Steam, and that was really interesting. So I was spending a few years away from magazines and websites, and it was quite a nice easy period because you'd stop work at five o'clock, which is kind of alien to me.

And then, you had a brief stint on websites before being editor of MCV for a few years. How did that come about, and how was your time there?
My wife saw it on LinkedIn. I remember the first issue when I was at *PC Zone*, when *CTW* and *MCV* were fighting in that market, I didn't realise it was still going, so I was like, "Well that's nice, I'll apply for that." It was OK, but in a sense *MCV* is a bit of a pamphlet really – there's no real journalism, you're just kind of reheating lines from CEOs and marketing departments, and you're just basically selling services between developers and studios and publishers. Which is fine, mostly what it's always been, I suppose. It was great to be working in print again, because that was the first print thing I've worked on since *games™*, and I thought I'd never get back into print. It was quite hard work because there was only really two of us, and we had to do a magazine every five, six weeks and keep the website updated every day, send out newsletters,

plus we had three award shows every year. Obviously going to events was quite a big thing, even though we were coming out of COVID. I didn't go to visit that many studios, but did Gamescom, Develop and GDC. So quite a lot of work, but inevitably it became harder work, because it ended up just being me, and even though we went down to six issues a year, you still have to do the events, the awards, the websites and the newsletters. And I think for one person, it was just too much, really.

So what are you up to now?
Around when [*Debug*] first launched, I did a feature on it for *MCV*, because it was quite novel – obviously there were these boutique retro mags, but there wasn't really a new mag for new stuff. So I got to know Daniel [Crocker, *Debug* publisher]. He kept talking about doing another mag, and when I mentioned to him that I was leaving *MCV*, he says, "Funny you should mention that, because I've always wanted to do something like an indie *MCV*."

But whereas *MCV* is aimed at management level, this would be more lower level, people starting out, people wanting to get into developing games or students, right? So more 'in the trenches' I suppose. So that's *Debug++*, it's going to be available for free, like *MCV* is, digitally. But if there are any events that *Debug* goes to like Develop, like Gamescom, then it will be available there as well in print. ✱

> ❝ Going to events was quite a big thing, even though we were coming out of COVID. I didn't go to visit that many studios, but did Gamescom, Develop and GDC ❞
> **RICHIE SHOEMAKER**

I REMEMBER WHEN

QUESTIONABLE QUAKE
"This was the days of *Quake*, so obviously lunchtime comes around we'd fire up *Quake*. Playing in the office, multiplayer deathmatch was new to me, and I was kind of forever at the bottom. This guy walked past me on the way to the kitchen, and was like, "What the fuck are you doing?" And I'm like, "Playing *Quake*," and he looks at me and goes, "Use a mouse." I'm on the number keys, you know, shifting left and right and looking up and down on the cursor keys."

LOTUS TURBO CHALLENGE ·2·

WITH ITS INSTANTLY CATCHY AND ENERGETIC MELODY, CRISP DIGITAL SAMPLES AND ARPEGGIOS, BARRY LEITCH'S LAYERED, SOARING TITLE TUNE FOR GREMLIN'S LOTUS TURBO CHALLENGE 2 (OR LOTUS II: RECS AS IT'S KNOWN ON THE MEGA DRIVE) QUICKLY DROVE GAMERS CRAZY WITH EXCITEMENT

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES

IN THE KNOW

» **SYSTEM:**
AMIGA

» **COMPOSER:**
BARRY LEITCH

» **DEVELOPER:**
MAGNETIC FIELDS/
IMAGITEC DESIGN

» **RELEASE:**
1991

» **BEST TRACK:**
TITLE TRACK

Magnetic Field's *Lotus* series drove right to the heart of gamers and it's easy to see why. Boasting smooth-scrolling, pseudo-3D road effects, speedy gameplay and adrenaline-fuelled, split-screen, two-player action, the three entries (*Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge*, *Lotus Turbo Challenge 2* and *Lotus III: The Ultimate Challenge*) published by Gremlin Graphics, pushed the abilities of the machines on which they appeared. The games also sounded great!

Lotus' audio is seen as one of the main draws of the trilogy and while Shaun Southern and Andrew Morris did a superb job composing the tunes for the first game – creating audio that could be chosen via an 'in-car' radio interface – the work of Barry Leitch on the second simply blew listeners away. The Scottish composer had begun composing music for videogames in 1986, working on the likes of *Double Dragon* and *Emlyn Hughes International Soccer* on the Commodore 64. But his tracks for *Lotus Turbo Challenge 2* – in particular the title tune – were something truly special.

Barry, a musician for Imagitec Design, was hand-picked to compose the audio. "I was told Gremlin was doing a *Lotus* sequel

» [Amiga] The in-game music credits name-check Imagitec Design rather than Barry Leitch.

» [Amiga] "You can bang something out in a couple of hours without thinking," Barry says, "and people think it's the best thing you've ever done."

and I was doing the music for it," he says. His first idea was to find some "wonderful guitar sounds" from the CDs owned by co-workers. "We'd just got a CD drive in the office and, as we still had no synthesisers or samplers, I went round the office grabbing everyone's CDs before digging into them to see what I could extract."

Finding little of use "except for some synth stabs from *Pump Up The Jam*", the 1989 single by Technotronic, and some samples from *Oh Yeah*, the 1985 single by Yello, he hit a wall. "I lay awake at night thinking about what to write for the soundtrack and had no idea," Barry admits. "But I had a dream that night with an idea for a title tune and how to use some of those samples I'd gotten from the CDs. I dashed into work and laid it all down in a couple of hours."

In that sense, the work was relatively straightforward. "There wasn't any major influence for the title theme other than trying to fit the samples I had into the allocated memory and making a track that sounded reasonably coherent," he says. "It was more a product of the ingredients I had on hand." And yet Barry put it together with astounding creativity, producing a unique piece that has proven so popular, it's frequently played by retro game enthusiasts.

"I liked the big dance-theme-style intro and, as I still wanted guitars in it – and had

» [Amiga] Barry's audio – much remixed over the years – used the Amiga's four-channel MOD tracker system.

■ Barry Leitch currently works out of his home studio in Ohio creating soundtracks for videogames and toys.

» [Amiga] Barry says it's touching that gamers still love the music from *Lotus 2* and *Top Gear* decades on.

GOING UP A GEAR

Barry harked back to the Lotus series when composing the tunes for Top Gear

■ The soundtrack for the third *Lotus* game was composed by Patrick Phelan but Barry Leitch's talents were put to good use on Gremlin Graphics' *Top Gear* – a game that, bizarrely enough, became a cult favourite in Brazil.

For this racer, released for the SNES in 1992, Barry remixed tracks from the *Lotus* series, using the *Lotus Turbo Challenge 2* ending for *Top Gear*'s title tune. "I liked the idea of carrying on from where I left off with the last racing game," he says.

Barry also arranged the songs *Hiroshima*, *Bordeaux* and *Frankfurt* from songs created by Shaun Southern for *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge*. "But I'd argue *Top Gear*'s *Las Vegas* piece is the most iconic," he admits.

"It was created from the ingredients I had on hand: a music driver with no documentation and a disk of SNES instrument samples from Kemco in Japan (even the mighty Gremlin Graphics didn't have one of those $25,000 Sun workstations you needed to create samples for the SNES.

"I wrote an arpeggio going up and down the scales in my favourite little chord progression, and built on it from there. In all honesty, it was just a quick little test piece I wrote. Sometimes it's best not to overthink these things."

little to no memory for a good sound – I ended up using a wee chip sound for a guitar-style solo towards the end which worked pretty well as it matched the synth tones of the *Pump Up The Jam* stabs," Barry explains.

Unlike the original game, the designers of *Lotus Turbo Challenge 2* decided they didn't want in-game music. Instead, they focussed on sound effects – an engine sound plus extras such as skids, cars bumping, thunder, rain and speech. Barry says the SFX would have left too little memory for music, leaving just one or two channels free at most, but he was still able to produce catchy level jingles. "They were all influenced by the first thing that popped into my head when I saw the list of names: rain, snow, fog and so on," he says. "Some of those jingles were a bit questionable and likely rushed out, though. If I got something like The Cult's *Rain* stuck in my head for the rain level idea or John Carpenters' *Fog*, that's what they got."

All of the tunes were composed using music trackers – programs that utilise a

"IF I GOT SOMETHING LIKE THE CULT'S RAIN STUCK IN MY HEAD FOR THE RAIN LEVEL IDEA OR JOHN CARPENTERS' FOG, THAT'S WHAT THEY GOT"
BARRY LEITCH

grid-like interface to enter notes across various channels. With instrument samples taken from Soundtracker, Barry would create the music in the freeware Amiga app NoiseTracker that allowed four channels of sampled stereo sound. "I used various wee hack tools to extract samples from other games and demos because I had no hardware other than an Amiga and a floppy drive. Even the speakers I had in the office were ones I had found at a garage sale."

With that in mind, it's all the more impressive that the tunes sounded so great and there was another treat in store for gamers who completed the game. "The *Lotus 2* completion music was an experiment," Barry says. "I was trying to make four channels sound more like five or six channels. By playing a second arpeggio slightly offbeat on the same channel, it immediately sounded like two channels, even if it musically wasn't perfectly onbeat. Then I squeezed the bass and drums onto another channel and that sounded like two or three more channels, especially when doing a staccato bass.

"It felt to the listener like, 'Oh yeah there's a bass line there,' but really it wasn't playing much at all. Then having some big pad sampled chords, there were another three notes being played at once and so on." It drives us crazy with admiration just thinking about it but it sure worked well. ✱

» [PlayStation 5] Barry took the Forest tune from *Lotus 2* and extended it into a complete piece for *Horizon Chase 2*.

» [Amiga] Each course was announced with an image and one of Barry's jingles.

A TRIBUTE TO Travellers Tales

BEFORE BECOMING PART OF TT GAMES, TRAVELLER'S TALES WAS BEST KNOWN FOR CHARACTER-BASED ACTION TITLES SUCH AS TOY STORY, SONIC 3D AND CRASH TWINSANITY. FOUNDER JON BURTON HELPS RETRO GAMER CELEBRATE THE STUDIO'S FINEST RELEASES

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

JON BURTON

A student of the Amiga demoscene, Jon Burton cofounded Traveller's Tales in 1989 and ran it and its successor TT Games until 2019. In 2021, he formed 10:10 Games. During his career he has taken on the roles of programmer, designer, producer and writer, often managing multiple disciplines simultaneously.

After being set up in 1989 by Jon Burton and Andy Ingram, the UK development studio Traveller's Tales formed a publishing partnership with Psygnosis, which released the firm's debut title *Leander* in 1991.

Two more 16-bit platformers followed in 1993, *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and *Puggsy*, and then thanks to a deal Psygnosis arranged, Traveller's Tales created a third for Sony Imagesoft in the form of *Mickey Mania: The Timeless Adventures Of Mickey Mouse*.

The Disney connection continued into the following year, when Traveller's Tales developed a *Toy Story* platform game. Subsequently, *Mickey Mania* caught the attention of Sega, which commissioned the studio to produce *Sonic 3D* based on a Sonic Team design for the ageing but still popular Mega Drive.

This successful collaboration led to the developer co-creating the *Sonic* racing game *Sonic R* with Sonic Team for the Saturn in 1997, and in 1998 it produced a 3D adventure for the PlayStation based on Pixar's *A Bug's Life*.

More 3D Pixar projects followed as the century turned, including 1999's *Toy Story 2* and 2001's *Toy Story Racer*. Between these titles, the company produced another compelling licensed racer when it developed *Muppet RaceMania* in 2000.

In 2001 and 2004, Traveller's Tales introduced the PS1 mascot Crash Bandicoot to the PS2 with *Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath Of Cortex* and *Crash Twinsanity*, and in 2005 it released *F1 Grand Prix* and *World Rally Championship* for the PSP. It also developed *Lego Star Wars: The Video Game*, before being renamed TT Games in 2006. ✹

LEANDER

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1991

■ Despite the influence of arcade games on its look and feel, *Leander*'s precise platforming and timed hazards bring to mind other Amiga platform games of the time. Where it differentiates itself is with its upgrades, which you buy in a shop after collecting sufficient coins. You also have to seek out magical objects that open each level's portal, but not before defeating that stage's boss.

JON'S MEMORIES

Our major inspirations for *Leander* in terms of the gameplay and graphical style were the arcade game *Strider* and the Mega Drive *Shinobi* game. We also took inspiration from the movies *Krull* and *The Dark Crystal*, and *Legend* in various places, as well as the art styles of Rodney Matthews and Japanese manga/anime."

BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA

MEGA DRIVE, SNES • 1993

■ Although clearly an evolution of *Leander* in terms of mechanics like the hero's lightning-fast sword, *Dracula* has very different themes, visuals and level layouts from the earlier game. It's an adaptation of the 1992 film rather than the book, and so certain movie plot points are baked in, but these are capably adapted into videogame form. Getting around the stages relies less on platforming skill and more on avoiding contact with mediaeval hazards like iron spikes and creatures of the night, which include rats, bats and spiders. On each level you are directed to the vampire hunter Professor Van Helsing, who tells you which of five projectile weapons you require to bring down that level's boss.

PUGGSY

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1993

■ Part platformer/part puzzle game, *Puggsy* challenges you to carry around, stack, throw and otherwise manipulate the objects you find lying about in order to meet per-level goals before you escape through that stage's exit.
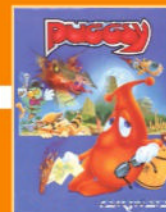
JON'S MEMORIES

Stacking objects in *Puggsy* was emergent gameplay. I loved picking up and throwing objects in *Super Mario World*, so I wanted to make a game that allowed you to interact with lots of objects. I realised that if you could move objects you were carrying up and down a little, you could raise and then drop them on another object, and then repeat to form towers. Other pieces of emergent gameplay were the ability to pull yourself up using an object if you were hanging from a platform, and swimming underwater by raising and lowering a buoyant object."

ALIEN ANTICS WHY THE CUTE ARCADE ADVENTURE IS SO MUCH FUN

OBJECT LESSON
■ Besides power-ups and weapons, objects can be stacked, thrown at opponents and used as hooks that allow you to hoist yourself up to higher areas.
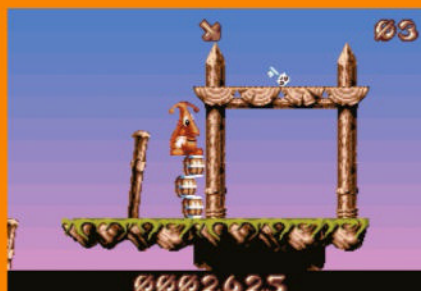
PERPLEXING PUZZLES
■ *Puggsy*'s puzzles involve objects and obstacles. For example, dropping an item on a switch might trigger a fan that blows another item into reach.

EPIC ENEMIES
■ The many and various foes that you face are largely animal-based with some notable exceptions. They include starfish, moles, candles and snowmen.

WHO'S THE BOSS?
■ The craziest boss fights have you chucking fish at a parrot, dropping bags of flour on a badger and firing plungers at a pharaoh in a spaceship!

SONIC 3D: FLICKIES' ISLAND

■ It may not be as fast as its Mega Drive predecessors, but *Sonic 3D: Flickies' Island* is still speedy for a collect-'em-up. As well as securing rings, power-ups and Chaos Emeralds, you also have to rescue small birds called Flickies.

JON'S MEMORIES

Sonic Team had a very clear idea of the game they wanted to make, and supplied us with character designs and maps for each level. At one point Yuji Naka even visited us in the UK so he could give us direct feedback. We went out to dinner with him to one of those restaurants that were very popular in the Nineties where you could draw on the table cloth. He did a bunch of sketches of Sonic on the table cloth, and I'm *so* annoyed we just left it at the restaurant!"

HEDGEHOG HINTS HOW TO APPROACH THE ISOMETRIC SONIC TITLE

RESCUE MISSION
■ Each time you spin jump into one of Robotnik's evil droids you free a Flicky. In order to progress to the next stage you have to save five of them.

COOL COLLECTABLES
■ For some unknown reason you get power-ups in *Sonic 3D* by smashing televisions. The temporary upgrades offered are shields, speed and invincibility.

TREASURE HUNT
■ Securing Chaos Emeralds takes some effort. You have to amass 50 rings and take them to one of Sonic's sidekicks before completing a special stage.

MIGHTY MAYOR
■ You battle Robotnik in all *Sonic 3D*'s boss fights. His weapons include spiked iron balls, stone and robotic fists, snowballs, fireballs and lasers.

MICKEY MANIA

■ The appealing thing about *Mickey Mania* is its wide variety of challenges. Platforming and discouraging foes by jumping on them is a constant, then setpiece tasks include escaping from a rampaging moose and exploring a flooded house using a rotating barrel.

JON'S MEMORIES

Picking the cartoons for *Mickey Mania* involved us going to a special Disney 'vault' in Los Angeles where there were VHS tapes of every cartoon made starring Mickey. We knew that the first level needed to be the first cartoon that Mickey had starred in, namely *Steamboat Willy*, and the last level would be the most recent one at the time, *The Prince And The Pauper*. The rest we picked based on relative popularity along with the variety of environment and gameplay possibilities. We also looked for cartoons with interesting bad guys, like the Giant, the Moose, the Mad Doctor and so on."
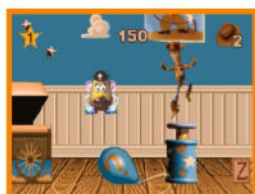
TOY STORY

■ Although primarily a platform game, *Toy Story* has stages that dip their toes in all kinds of other genres. These levels involve top-down and into-the-screen racing, a third-person maze and a side-on flight challenge.

JON'S MEMORIES

The *Toy Story* game ended up with some very eclectic gameplay. For instance, I'd coded a *Doom*-style 3D test level for the never-to-be-finished *Mickey Mania 2*, and I wanted to use it in *Toy Story*. It needed to be very angular and maze-like, so I had the idea of setting a level inside the claw machine in Pizza Planet. It certainly helped that the movie had the characters being chased by dogs, driving around on RC cars and flying – or at least 'falling with style', all of which gave great opportunities for fun new gameplay sections."

SONIC R

■ Although most easily compared to a kart racer where the contestants are on foot, *Sonic R* encourages exploration and involves jumping, so it technically belongs in a subgenre. Collected rings can be exchanged for speed boosts or used to open shortcuts.

" JON'S MEMORIES

We were quite early into making a *Formula One* game for Sega on the Saturn when it asked if we could change course and make a *Sonic* game instead. It seemed their *Sonic Extreme* game was having challenges and they wanted a 3D Sonic game out as soon as possible. The only way to get it done in time was to take the *Formula One* engine and replace the car with Sonic instead. Sega had decided at the time that most of the characters should run everywhere instead of being in cars, and so it was quite challenging to get that feeling fun. Kart games rely on drifting as a major component in their design, and obviously *Mario Kart* loomed large in the competitive landscape, but having a character drifting while running was very hard to code without it just looking terrible."

ACE RACING THE COOL CHALLENGES SET BY THE SONIC RACER

GRAND PRIX
■ The main mode in *Sonic R* initially lets you race as one of four characters on one of four courses.

BOSS RACES
■ Five tokens and a top-three finish unlocks a race with a robotic Sonic, Tails, Knuckles or Eggman.

TIME ATTACK
■ As well as racing the clock, you can try to find five balloons or tag four rivals within a set time.

MULTIPLAYER
■ In the Saturn original, two players either race head-to-head or try to collect five balloons first.

RASCAL

■ A 3D platformer/adventure game in the mould of *Super Mario 64*, although Rascal has tank controls like the original *Tomb Raider* rather than directional controls like Mario's N64 debut. Like Nintendo's plumber, *Rascal*'s titular hero has a butt bounce attack, however this is only effective against lowly opponents such as spiders and rats. That said, given that these start to spawn regularly if you linger too long in any area it can be a handy deterrent to have. For bigger foes, you have a bubble gun, which starts out with weedy ammo but can be upgraded. Once you subdue these enemies they turn into bubbles that you burst to get collectables. This process sometimes feeds into *Rascal*'s overall objective of collecting pieces of a clock from each of the game's themed worlds – first in the past and then the present – in order to free its young hero's father from a time-travelling villain. Within each realm there are locked doors that you need to find colour-coded keys for, and last but not least, there are boss fights in the future versions of each world.
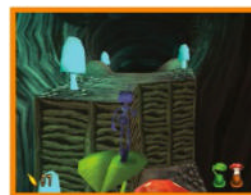
A BUG'S LIFE

■ There's a delicate balancing act to faithfully adapting a movie into a videogame without making sacrifices to how enjoyable its gameplay is, but *A Bug's Life* pulls this off in style. The 3D platformer takes you through the settings depicted in the film, during which time you meet its cast of characters. Progress depends on collecting coloured berries to use as weapons and jumping on seeds to make them grow into plants. These can then be used to restore health, act as a shield, fire you through the air to higher-up areas or bombard your foes with berries. Stages are completed either by beating bosses, finding exits or completing objectives, and to help with these challenges there are telescopes that show you where hidden items and exits are in relation to your current position.

TOY STORY 2: BUZZ LIGHTYEAR TO THE RESCUE

PLAYSTATION, VARIOUS • 1999

■ *Toy Story 2* gives players control of the space ranger as he undertakes a 15-level mission to free Woody from a classic toy collector who has stolen him. The game's ten core stages primarily consist of 3D platforming challenges. If Buzz meets a friendly toy then they will typically set him an exploration or collection-based challenge, often against the clock. If he meets an evil toy of substance then that triggers a boss fight. Rather than general use upgrades, there are power-ups that are specifically required in order to overcome a particular test of skill. An alternative to completing one of each level's five challenges is collecting 50 coins and taking them to *Toy Story* regular Hamm. Between stages, short clips from the film set the scene for the next level.

MOVIE MECHANICS HOW THE GAME ADAPTS THE HIT PIXAR SEQUEL

BEING BUZZ
■ All of Buzz Lightyear's abilities are at your disposal, from wrist lasers that blast foes to extending wings that provide you with a double-jump.

MISSION IMPROBABLE
■ Not only do you have to platform your way through ten stages based on scenes from the film but you also have to beat mayors in five boss fights.

ASSEMBLY JOB
■ When you reunite Mr Potato Head with body parts you get a power-up. These include a shield, a disk launcher, rocket boots and a grappling hook.

TOKEN EFFORT
■ Your overall goal is to collect Pizza Planet tokens. You do this by overcoming challenges, such as winning boss fights and completing set tasks.

MUPPET RACEMANIA

PLAYSTATION • 2000

■ Perhaps because of its kid-friendly licence, you can just pick one of the four initially available characters in *Muppet RaceMania* and work your way through the unlocked courses without ever realising the depth of the kart racer's gameplay. As well as having two power-up slots, there's a boost meter that's filled by collecting fruit. Once full, you get a special move that negatively affects your rivals in an amusing way. There are also multiple modes on offer, including a Race Mode where finishing first unlocks a second track based on the same theme; a Battle Mode where you have to take out all your competitors; an Adventure Mode, which has race, battle and stunt courses; and a Stunt Mode with timed jumps and shortcuts. The use of the *Muppet* licence is equally noteworthy. As well as short clips of the six movies that the game's courses are based on, there are nice touches like one of the collectable weapons being a chicken!

BUZZ LIGHTYEAR OF STAR COMMAND

GAME BOY COLOR • 2000

■ There's a lot more going on in this Game Boy Color exclusive than there appears on first inspection. It's a horizontal push-scrolling racer/shooter with a heavy emphasis on collectables. This is so much the case that if you don't spend time grabbing pick-ups that are lying around and dispatching foes to get them to drop more then you'll struggle to make much progress. Besides hearts that boost your health, there are coins, which you use to buy various colour-coded weapons that take down the differently coloured shields of the bosses on each level. Prior to fighting them you have to race them to their lair, which of course is hampered by the need to properly arm yourself. To help in this respect, there are hoverboards, jet bikes and jet packs that speed you around. There are also teleporters and boost pads, but these all require multiple coins.

CRASH BANDICOOT: THE WRATH OF CORTEX

PS2, VARIOUS • 2001

■ Crash's PS2 debut is far more visually impressive than his PS1 titles, but superior aesthetics aside it faithfully retains the feel, core mechanics and gameplay from the three original games. Life-giving Wumpa fruit are plentiful, and there are numerous crystals to collect to complete the game. As with *Wrath Of Cortex*'s immediate predecessor, you play as Crash's sister Coco in some levels. The mayor at the end of each set of stages is the genetically enhanced Crunch Bandicoot, who either uses earth, water, fire or air against Crash in the boss fights.

JON'S MEMORIES

Quite early on in the development of *Crash: Wrath Of Cortex*, when it was called *Crash Bandicoot: Worlds*, we had developed the main new boss to be a woman called Elli-Mental. She was the master of the four elements: earth, fire, water and air. But it was decided the new boss should be someone more Neo-themed, and so she was replaced with Crunch Bandicoot, but we kept the ideas of the elements as hazards, masks and boss fights throughout the game."

SETPIECE STAGES
MEMORABLE LEVELS FROM THE EPIC PS2 PLATFORMER

TORNADO ALLEY
■ Your task is to shoot down Cortex's 'tornado generators' in a glider at night. The tornados aren't deadly, but they send you into a spin.

JUNGLE RUMBLE
■ After dodging spears thrown by a lost tribe, you drive a jeep over ramps to avoid pits while escaping from a herd of stampeding rhinos.

TSUNAMI
■ There's some fun platforming on the way to this stage's setpiece; once there you use a scooter to speed Coco away from a raging tsunami.

FAHRENHEIT FRENZY
■ After zipping between lasers and radioactive lamps using a copter pack, you platform in and out of X-ray flooded corridors.

TOY STORY RACER
PLAYSTATION, GAME BOY COLOR • 2001

■ A spiritual successor to *Muppet RaceMania*, *Toy Story Racer* puts the cast of the movie in karts and drops them onto race tracks set in locations from the film. Each of its eclectic challenges sets you a task that once completed unlocks subsequent challenges and additional characters. The challenges on offer include knockout races, time trials, and combat and collection challenges. In races, weapons cause opponents to spin out, but in combat challenges they take them out of the game.

JOHN'S MEMORIES

Toy Story Racer came about as we had just made a great racing game called *Muppet RaceMania*, but it hadn't sold very well. Instead of wasting all that tech there was an opportunity to use it along with the *Toy Story* licence. We had very little time to turn the game around, but luckily everything being at toy-scale made for some very interesting environments to race around in."

HAVEN: CALL OF THE KING
PLAYSTATION 2 • 2002

■ Although primarily a third-person platformer with a focus on exploration and collection, it also encompasses the likes of racing challenges, shoot-'em-up sections, flight-based tests of skill and puzzles. *Haven* also has a quite involved storyline that takes you neatly through all of these eclectic genres. The fact that the game is set in a fantasy land with both magic and tech allows for some interesting mechanics. So one moment you might be flying through the air thanks to a magic zip line and the next you might be soaring through the skies in a bi-plane while trying to dispatch a blimp. The protagonist has some interesting options too, like his energy shield, which can act as a weapon as well as absorbing impacts from projectiles. His main weapon is similar to a yo-yo, and like his shield is made of energy. As well as using it in combat, it's useful for smashing open pots to reveal the collectable contents inside.

FINDING NEMO

PLAYSTATION 2, VARIOUS • 2003

■ The thing that impresses most about *Finding Nemo* is how well it adapts platform game mechanics to its underwater setting. Instead of jumping over obstacles there are circles of bubbles to swim through, rather than butt bouncing enemies to take them out you trap them in bubbles that you burst to dispatch them and in place of using keys to unlock doors you drop differently coloured objects in receptacles that match their particular hue. There are even clusters of sponges on the seabed that you bounce between, which is as close to platforming as you can get in a game that's entirely underwater. Exploration plays as big a role in proceedings as it would in a sprawling platformer, but as with levels in an epic platform title you're restricted to small areas of the ocean in each of *Finding Nemo*'s stages. These ably adapt the movie as well as being fun to play.
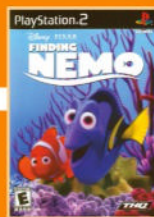
MARVELLOUS MISSIONS TOP TASKS FROM THE PIXAR ADAPTATION

PEBBLE GAME
■ Progress depends on accumulating gold starfish, and you can get one by dropping three stones in sea anemones of the same colour.

WAVE RACE
■ Another way to get golden starfish is by racing other characters. This often involves swimming through rings made out of bubbles.

BUBBLE TRAP
■ One way to deal with foes is to bump a bubble in their direction and then burst it to take them out. This also releases pick-ups.

OBJECT BOUNCE
■ A recurring objective is bouncing once each on a set number of objects or creatures, such as jellyfish and a whale's taste buds!

CRASH TWINSANITY

PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX • 2004

■ Rather than hubs, like its predecessors, *Crash Twinsanity* opts for free-roaming gameplay, and instead of constantly battling Neo Cortex you sometimes have to work with him and at times play as him.

JON'S MEMORIES

Traveller's Tales was busy developing the ill-fated *Haven: Call Of The King*, as well as *Finding Nemo*, when we were approached by Vivendi to make another *Crash Bandicoot* game due to the success of *Wrath Of Cortex*. We didn't have the bandwidth at our studio to make the game, so we decided to use the funding provided by Vivendi to start a new studio. A producer that we had worked with for years, the legendary Steve Riding, had a small team in Oxford that he had assembled that were looking for a project, so it seemed like a perfect fit. They drove the concept and development themselves with just a bit of periodic nudging from me, and came up with a very unique and original take."

LEGO STAR WARS: THE VIDEO GAME

PLAYSTATION 2, VARIOUS • 2005

■ The first Traveller's Tales *Lego* game adapts the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy and establishes using Lego studs as currency. You construct things from Lego almost as often as fighting the empire.

JON'S MEMORIES

When we were designing *Lego Star Wars* there was a lot of debate around whether everything should be made of Lego. I strongly felt that if we did that then the game wouldn't depict the world of *Star Wars* well enough. Low polygon trees and buildings were much easier to make look real with a liberal use of textures, something that you couldn't do with Lego bricks as each is a single colour. Anyway, I decided that anything you could interact with should be made of Lego, which would make it very clear what the player should be playing with. Then the backgrounds would be as realistic as we could get them. The *Lego Star Wars* box art always showed the characters and vehicles you were buying, but they were set against photo realistic backgrounds so it was obvious what was included. So I argued that consumers were used to this 'language' and Lego thankfully agreed!"

F1 GRAND PRIX

PSP • 2005

■ By any measure, *F1 Grand Prix* is an impressive achievement. It was a PSP launch title, but looking at its detailed, near photorealistic visuals you would be forgiven for thinking it was released on the PS2 once developers had got to grips with it rather than being one of the first releases for Sony's handheld. It also boasts a wide variety of modes besides the essential option of competing in the *F1 World Championship*. A Quick Race mode puts you in a random car on a random track, Time Attack is equally good in short bursts and its multiplayer accommodates up to eight players via Wi-Fi. Unlockables include mirror versions of the 19 standard courses and five classic cars. The racing adopts arcade standards as opposed to getting into sim territory. For example, rival drivers ram into each other when vehicles cluster and corners can be taken at insane speeds without the result being death or destruction. As well as making races fun, this approach means that you rarely lose momentum.

WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

PSP • 2005

■ Based around the same engine as Traveller's Tales' *F1 Grand Prix*, *World Rally Championship* has just as lavish graphics as its counterpart. The main difference is that its locations are dirt tracks, muddy paths and alpine forest courses instead of immaculate tarmac circuits. Being a rally title, you race alone with the goal of setting the fastest time, although ghost cars appear when you're matching a rival's time. *World Rally Championship* strikes a nice balance between arcade fun and realism. Battering roadside obstacles results in visual damage to your car, but its handling doesn't suffer. You fly off corners if you go too fast, but drifting is straightforward, so there's no real excuse for veering off course. As with *F1 Grand Prix*, *World Rally Championship* has plenty of modes. As well as Time Trial, Single Track and Single Rally options, you can race a full rally season comprising 16 rallies, each with two to four stages. Heavy rain, blizzards, dawn driving, loose gravel tracks and blinding sunshine add variety to the races.

THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE

PLAYSTATION 2, VARIOUS • 2005

■ Adapting a complex storyline like *The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe*'s into gameplay doesn't always work, but this Traveller's Tales title does a great job. It deals with the fact that there are four heroes in the film by allowing players to switch between them at any time in order to utilise whoever's skills are best suited to overcoming the obstacles or enemies present. This involves clever mechanics that play off the young protagonists' different ages and attributes, in that in any given situation you can only make progress by playing to their strengths. The oldest boy Peter is strongest and so is the best at fighting and breaking through things, and the oldest girl Susan is adept at throwing things, which makes her the best at ranged combat. Their younger brother Edmund is good in a close-quarters brawl and at climbing, whereas their little sister Lucy can squeeze through small spaces with ease. Unlike the film, there's a fair amount of collecting to be done in the game. Particularly useful are its trails of coins, which lead you between challenges and can be used to buy everything from new attacks to healing abilities.

TT GAMES THE STUDIO THAT EVOLVED FROM TRAVELLER'S TALES

■ Following a 2005 merger, Traveller's Tales became part of TT Games. After developing two titles based on *Transformers* and the Narnia movie *Prince Caspian*, TT focussed on making *Lego* games, with the recent exception of providing additional development for other studios' projects. As well as creating follow-ups for Traveller's Tales' *Lego Star Wars* title, TT found success with its *Lego Indiana Jones*, *Lego Ninjago* and *Lego Harry Potter* games. Its *Lego DC* and *Lego Marvel* releases also received critical acclaim and sold in their millions. Despite having core gameplay in common, TT's Lego titles always manage to present unique challenges.

» [PlayStation] The gloomy interiors are a great backdrop for the fancy new dynamic lighting.


CD STORAGE AND THE MAGIC OF PLAYSTATION MADE COVERDISCS BETTER THAN EVER IN THE 32-BIT ERA OF GAMING. THIS MONTH'S PACKED DISC INCLUDES ICONIC CHARACTERS, NOTABLE CURIOSITIES, AND A CHANCE FOR READERS TO GET THEIR OWN GAMES ONTO THE SYSTEM.
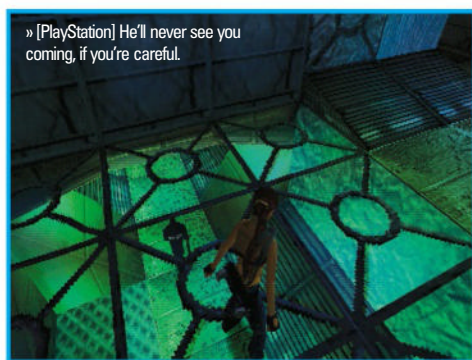
WORDS BY JAMES KONIK

OFFICIAL UK PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE #39

THIS MONTH IN NOVEMBER 1998

The month of November was a good time to be a PlayStation owner. Its growing library was packed with strong titles, and *Official UK PlayStation Magazine* was usually the first to present them to its 300,000 readers.

But change was on the horizon. With the Dreamcast out in Japan and the magazine downplaying rumours of an imminent PS2 launch, a new era would soon be here.

Developers had mastered the PlayStation though, as this month's disc shows. There are big demos of *Tomb Raider III* and *Spyro*, forgotten gems like *Colony Wars* and *Future Cop*, and even an early homebrew console game.

THE MAIN EVENT: TOMB RAIDER III

After two hit games, *Tomb Raider* was a phenomenon by 1998 and the third entry was hotly anticipated. *Official PSM* had readers covered with this huge demo, featuring a slightly cut version of the game's Area 51 level.

Lara begins the demo imprisoned and weaponless, so the first order of business is to escape your cell and find a gun, so you can begin taking out the guards. Then there are laser beams and security turrets to avoid, along with the standard *Tomb Raider* fare of traps, switches and deadly plunges.

It's a dark, brooding level, but there's plenty to see, and the game boasted dynamic lighting, with alarm lights and muzzle flash lighting up Lara's grimacing face as she pumps lead into the nearest unfortunate guard.

Developer Core Design also evolved Lara's moveset with this entry. You could now crawl,
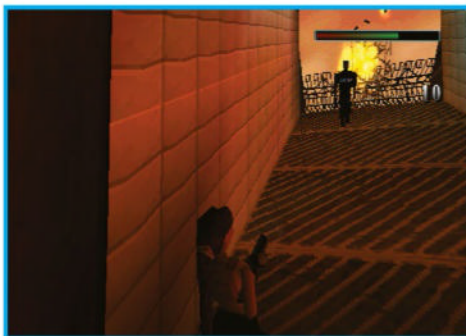
» [PlayStation] The rocket launcher is best saved for turrets, but there's no harm in taking out the occasional guard
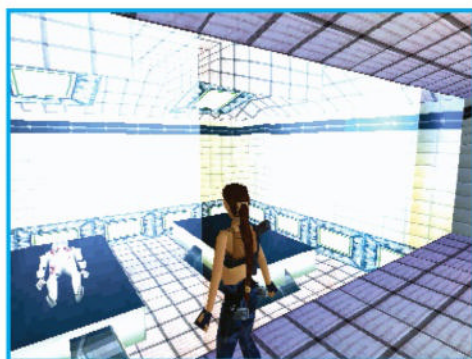
» [PlayStation] Area 51 has its share of secrets. This chap doesn't look too healthy.

» [PlayStation] Spyro's fiery breath is great fun to use. Those sheep are right to look nervous.

» [PlayStation] From up here, Spyro's glide can cover a lot of ground

» [PlayStation] He'll never see you coming, if you're careful.

sprint and swing from the ceiling, as well as jump and clamber, meaning no polygonal surface was beyond your reach. That does mean you have to keep a careful eye on the ceilings and walls to make sure you don't miss a potential route forward, with climbable textures easy to overlook. Being *Tomb Raider*, there are quite a few sneaky traps, and with no save points, this demo will likely last you a while if you want to push through to the end. Though you start unarmed, that soon changes. Your double pistols are soon joined by the hefty shotgun and the grimly satisfying rocket launcher. Useful for dealing with those pesky security turrets, and a fun, if overpowered way to deal with guards.

The demo is shorter than the published level, but thanks to the hidden laser beams and frequent ambushes, it would be a surprise if many players made it that far.

PLAY THIS NEXT: SPYRO THE DRAGON

With its charming lead and world bursting with colour, Spyro had, whisper it, mascot potential. He's cute, full of character and his glide ability gives the platforming a novel twist, making it feel fresh and adventurous. The vast, attractive demo is filled with dragons, wizards and castles, with portals letting you move between areas. Though pitched at youngsters with little to impede your progress, there's plenty to do. There are gems to collect and enemies to charge at or scorch with your fiery breath. You can also mother sheep. It's a playground.

Pete Wilton gave it 8 out of 10 in the same magazine as the demo, calling it "the best 3D platform game to date". ✳

Covermount
HIGHLIGHTS
THE BEST OF THE REST

BUST A GROOVE

■ Dance games were a perfect fit for the PlayStation's club vibe and *Bust A Groove* is a prime example. The demo puts you in a two-player dance off, aiming to outscore your opponent, with on-screen prompts telling you what buttons to press.

FUTURE COP: LAPD

■ A mech-based offshoot of the *Strike* series, but with much more ammo. Blast your way through a generous mission, or try the Base Capture mode, both with optional co-op. The surprise package of the disc. Just watch the time limit.

VIDEOS

■ Long before YouTube, videos gave us our first glimpses of incoming treats. This disc has three. *Alundra*'s (shown) show's off its *Zelda*-like gameplay and impressive animation sequences. There's also a Net Yaroze video for budding developers, and footage of the latest *Formula One* game, too.

VICTORY BOXING 2

■ This is a charismatic pugilism simulator, and the demo gives you one round against Lennox Hedges. Making good use of the face buttons for high and low blocks and punches, you'll need patience and skill to succeed, despite the playful design.

COLONY WARS: VENGEANCE

■ *Colony Wars: Vengeance* is the second in Psygnosis' spectacular, but accessible space combat series. The demo includes two missions letting you take on capital ships in space and defend a planet-based reactor against fighters.

MAH JONGG (NET YAROZE)

■ Net Yaroze let everyone make PlayStation games and *Mah Jongg* is a solid example of what can be done with it. Remove pairs of tiles to clear the board before you run out of moves. Easy to pick up, but hard to win.
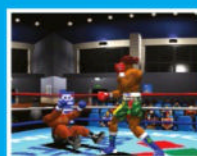
SENTINEL RETURNS

■ This is a genuinely valiant attempt at updating Geoff Crammond's 8-bit classic. Navigate up the landscape by creating new bodies that you teleport into, hoping to reach the top and replace the eponymous Sentinel, before he spots and absorbs you.

WRECKIN CREW

■ *Wreckin Crew* is a quirky *Mario Kart*-style racer. The demo gives you two characters, Ma and Mia, to try out on a single track. It's described as a training level, but, well, best of luck keeping up.
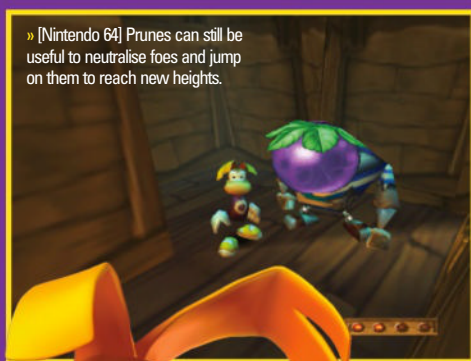
THE MAKING OF
RAYMAN 2
THE GREAT ESCAPE™

ORIGINALLY PLANNED AS A 2D GAME, RAYMAN'S SEQUEL QUICKLY MOVED INTO THE THIRD DIMENSION. HOWEVER, CREATING A 3D PLATFORMER PROVED TO BE CHALLENGING, PARTICULARLY WITH MANY MEMBERS OF THE TEAM NOT USED TO THE NEW TECHNOLOGY THAT WAS REQUIRED...

WORDS BY GUY MIQUEL-ALBERT

» [Nintendo 64] Prunes can still be useful to neutralise foes and jump on them to reach new heights.

Rayman, as a character, was fully created by the French game designer Michel Ancel during his teenage years. When he decided to present his *Rayman* videogame project to Ubisoft, he brought a 150-page file describing the whole game and a demo. Totally convinced, the Guillemot brothers gave him two years to create his game for the expected Super Nintendo CD-Rom hardware. The ways of videogame history decided otherwise and *Rayman* became an Atari Jaguar project, and was also ported to the incoming PlayStation, thanks to Ubisoft's recently created Tokyo branch.

Often considered as reflecting his designer's somewhat eccentric personality, Rayman is a 2D cartoon-style character deprived of arms and legs, capable of launching his fist to defeat opponents or flying short distances thanks to his helicopter hairstyle. Very

» [Nintendo 64] Slide to survive: this might be the scariest sequence ever shown in a *Rayman* game.

unique artistic and graphic designs helped the game reach quite a commercial success, meaning a sequel was inevitable.

Originally designed as another 2D platformer, the arrival of the first 3D games changed the development teams' direction. Olivier Palmieri joined Ubisoft as a level designer on *Rayman 2* in February 1998, soon after he graduated. "The Nintendo 64 had just been released in France and a new era of 3D platformers was born with the advent of *Super Mario 64*, among other games," he recalls. "It seemed interesting to us to take advantage of this additional dimension." To avoid damaging *Rayman*'s reputation, Ubisoft first launched the development of another 3D platformer named *Tonic Trouble*. It seemed like a dry run at the time, with Ubisoft wanting to create its own 3D engine for this project. "The *Tonic Trouble* and *Rayman 2* development teams were different, but we shared ideas and knowledge, working in different directions," recalls Olivier.

Florent Sacré, *Rayman 2*'s lead artist, who was first recruited by Ubisoft on the *Tonic Trouble* project, says, "It was the first game I worked on. The technological and research aspects implemented for *Tonic Trouble* helped design the tech used for *Rayman 2*. The Montpellier team was in charge of developing *Rayman 2* at first, and when the Ubisoft Paris team eventually finished *Tonic Trouble*, they were assigned to help them. Two teams were assigned to *Rayman 2*'s development, but by the end of the project only the Paris team was working on it."

Olivier specifies that "in total 70 to 80 developers, dispatched between Paris and

» [Nintendo 64] Many puzzles have to be solved carrying and throwing flammable barrels around.

"THERE WAS A LOT OF ARTISTIC FREEDOM AT THE TIME, WHICH EXPLAINS THE VERY VARIED STYLES I USED TO CREATE RAYMAN 2'S MUSIC"
ERIC CHEVALIER

Montpellier, worked on *Rayman 2* for more than two years", making it quite the project. Going 3D was such a challenge for Ubisoft that many new team members were quickly recruited. *Rayman*'s sequel was also a challenge in terms of technique and level design. "To make the players move around a 3D world with the required precision for a platformer was a real challenge," recalls Olivier. "We worked a lot on controls and on the camera to make it easy, fun and permissive enough. For instance, we allowed Rayman to be able to walk a bit further over the void from a platform, in order to succeed at jumping and to avoid falling. It was quite subtle but let the player have more fun and fail less."

That wasn't the only tweak the team made to make the life of players as easy as possible. "We also worked a lot on the 'level design cameras' to create game situations where the player didn't need to control the camera angle," continues Olivier. "The purpose was to naturally give a direction to the camera that would allow the player to focus on the action and jumps. Sometimes, it even offered 2D gameplay situations in a 3D environment game."

Florent also explains that the main difficulty related to creating a 3D game were the lack of references at the time. "We didn't have any references related to the *Rayman* background. There were useful references coming from Nintendo's *Super Mario 64*, though. We had a lot of freedom, meaning many back-and-forth transmissions between game designers and graphic designers, involving some ▶

» [Nintendo 64] Razorbeard can manipulate Rayman's friends to fight him thanks to mechanical control devices.

» [Nintendo 64] Some environments are simply wonderfully developed in terms of their level design.
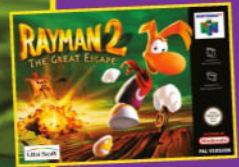
IN THE KNOW
» **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT

» **DEVELOPER:** UBISOFT MONTPELLIER, UBISOFT PARIS

» **PLATFORM:** NINTENDO 64, VARIOUS

» **RELEASED:** 1999

» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS
RAYMAN (PICTURED)
RELEASED: JAGUAR, PLAYSTATION, SATURN, PC
RELEASED: 1995

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL
PLATFORM: GAMECUBE, PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, PC
RELEASED: 2003

PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG: THE OFFICIAL GAME OF THE MOVIE
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION 2, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 2005

OLIVIER PALMIERI
■ Olivier was level designer on *Rayman 2: The Great Escape* and has been working for Ubisoft Montréal for the past 20 years. He's now a game director there.

FLORENT SACRÉ
■ Florent worked on the *Rayman 2* projects as lead artist and art director. He now focusses on drawing bandes dessinées and book illustrations.

ERIC CHEVALIER
■ Eric is a musician, composer and producer whose projects can be found at ericchevalier.com He composed *Rayman 2*'s original score.

» [Nintendo 64] Moving around on a very fast flying rocket can be quite tricky.

» [Nintendo 64] Environments are extremely varied, here's a very spooky graveyard, for instance.

▶ tension. These tensions were also created by the lack of experience, we didn't really have a definitive pipe to use. Everything was very organic."

The new *Tonic Trouble* 3D engine, as Florent remembers, was extremely complicated to use on the *Rayman 2* project. "It was very hard to get something stable at the beginning. The first few months we spent a lot of time producing assets, but the following weeks we could divide the time spent working on one task or the other by two. We could progressively work much faster. Even with this engine, that didn't allow us to create many things, we had enough to develop something enjoyable visually. This could also be achieved thanks to an engineering team in Annecy. They were very reactive and responsive to the other teams, and were developing anything we needed."

A t Ubisoft, each level designer had to create ways to play with the 'game ingredients' they were assigned to work with. "I was attributed to work on levels with ingredients such as the walking rocket, or the updrafts allowing Rayman to ascend thanks to his helicopter ability, and the explosive barrel," recalls Olivier. "Other level designers were working with the bouncing prune or the flying barrel, for instance. This method let us focus on some specific ingredients and try to get the best we could out of them in order to create fun situations where the player had to think their way through. Thus, *Rayman 2's* gameplay became very varied."

"A NEW ERA OF 3D PLATFORMERS WAS BORN WITH THE ADVENT OF SUPER MARIO 64, AMONG OTHER GAMES. IT SEEMED INTERESTING TO US TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS ADDITIONAL DIMENSION"
OLIVIER PALMIERI

Variety quickly became *Rayman 2's* main direction – variety of gameplay, of situations, of environments, of level design. The soundtrack accompanying each different sequence also needed to be varied, creating challenges for Eric Chevalier who composed *Rayman 2's* soundtrack. "There was a lot of artistic freedom at the time, which explains the very varied styles I used to create *Rayman 2's* music," he tells us. "I had a lot of fun and many sources of inspiration helped working on it, considering the diversity of the different worlds and levels. Therefore you can listen to funk, jazz, sometimes folk music, even experimental music, experiencing the game. It's very open. The computers, samplers and synthesisers weren't as efficient as they are nowadays. They required more inventiveness."

Eric found that communicating with the development team was an essential process when it came to writing the game's music. "A permanent artistic dialogue was necessary to work on the soundtrack – I was given pictures of the maps, videos, drafts of the ongoing production to be able to adapt the music," he explains. "The main difficulty

CONVERSION CAPERS

NINTENDO 64
■ As the lead version, it offers smooth graphics and textures, nice environments as well as interesting gameplay and varied level design. Controls are sometimes erratic during sliding or rocket-riding moments, adding to the sometimes high difficulty of these sequences.

PC
■ This version offers the same game and level designs as the Nintendo 64 lead version, adding enhanced graphics and sound, as well as a better framerate. The GOG version is playable on modern PCs, but it is not possible to experience it with a controller without some digging.

DREAMCAST
■ Possibly the most enjoyable and definitive version on home devices. Keeping the gorgeous PC version's graphics and sound enhancements, it offers a few new minigames to experience, more opponents and a widescreen option for the first time.

PLAYSTATION
■ An enjoyable version for PlayStation owners, though suffering visually from the comparison with the other 3D versions. There are also less Lums to find and zones to discover, but the 2D demo of the initial *Rayman 2* project is unlockable, giving this version a very unique flavour.

was to avoid music loops to bore the player. These loops were necessary since the allocated space on the Nintendo 64 cartridge was far from being infinite. The music needs to be interesting enough in case the player stays stuck in a level. Also, working on the cutscenes' music requires the same process as working on a film soundtrack."

Going from the first *Rayman* game to *Rayman 2: The Great Escape* also required some game design changes, as Olivier explains. "Shooting light balls instead of launching Rayman's fist is the main added feature in the second iteration. The longer helicopter capacity, allowing the use of updrafts is another example. We also worked on the helicopter mode so that the lowering speed shortens in comparison to the first game. Thus, it leaves the player more time to control Rayman's directions. The majority of the new features really came from the aforementioned game ingredients, and from the interactions with these ingredients. Water-skiing with the swamp snake or bouncing on giant spider webs are examples among others."

Working on a sequel can sometimes be tricky, as the original game's spirit needs to be preserved, which becomes even trickier to achieve when a new dimension is added into the mix. "Part of the *Rayman 2* team came from the first *Rayman* project, ensuring some coherence," explains Olivier. "We wanted to keep the small puzzles aspect, where the player's challenge is ▶

» [Nintendo 64] Rayman can classically hang onto rings to reach new places.

» [Nintendo 64] The helicopter feature, Rayman's trademark, is naturally part of the sequel.

» [Nintendo 64] The legged rocket concept was already thought of in the 2D prototype version of *Rayman 2*.

» [Nintendo 64] A two-legged mecha follows Rayman around this level.

RAYMAN 2'S DIFFERENT VERSIONS BRING DIVERSE CONTENT AND DESIGNS

PLAYSTATION 2
■ Ubisoft Annecy's PlayStation 2 port started as a whole new *Rayman* game before Ubisoft Paris realised the mistake and corrected it. *Rayman Revolution* offers gorgeous enhanced graphics and a few more areas to travel to than the original Nintendo 64 game.

NINTENDO DS
■ This version provided an optional use of the touch-screen to control Rayman, best operated with the Nintendo thumb stylus wrist strap accessory. A few hardware-related technical issues on top of overall lower quality performance also need to be taken into account.

NINTENDO 3DS
■ *Rayman 3D* was one of the handheld's launch line-up games. Almost identical to the excellent Dreamcast version of the game, it offers the best way to enjoy *Rayman 2* on the go, despite a fairly unstable autostereoscopic 3D feature, and a few sound and graphic bugs.

APPLE IOS
■ Also based on the Dreamcast version, this iOS port requires the player to use touch-screen features to move Rayman around and interact with things. It disappeared from the App store in 2013 and is not compatible with post iOS 11 iPhones or the iPod Touch.

» [Nintendo 64] Rayman can reach switches or gears with his shots in order to set mechanisms into motion.

THE RAYMAN 2 2D PROTOTYPE

HOW OTHER PUBLISHERS' EARLY 3D PLATFORMERS CHANGED UBISOFT'S PLANS

■ A 2D version of *Rayman 2* was planned to be released about a year after the first iteration. Sources like Michaël Guarné's book about the history of *Rayman* or *GameFan* issue 11 (vol 7) confirm with interviews that when Ubisoft teams presented a prototype at E3 in 1996, discovering *Crash Bandicoot* on the showfloor, they were strongly impressed by its 3D gameplay and the technical performance behind it. 3D started to become widely used and to conquer the audience massively. The choice was made to abandon the 2D project and launch a new one in 3D. The prototype offered two layers of level design: one in front, as you can find in the first *Rayman* game, and one in the background, where you could teleport. It is possible to interact from the front layer to the background one by throwing objects, for instance, adding to the puzzle orientation of its level design. Graphically, Michel Ancel's team used 3D software to create the setting and injected their works into a 2D drawing tool. The result is close to what you could find in Rare's *Donkey Kong Country*. An unlockable playable demo was included in the PlayStation *Rayman 2* standard 3D version.

» [PlayStation] You can jump on this dinosaur to reach higher ground.

▶ to think about the game's ingredients in order to make progress, or to find rewards here and there. We didn't want the challenge to come from the character controls or the camera management. We wanted the use of these game ingredients by the player to be the hardships to overcome."

Eric, on the other hand, didn't work on the first *Rayman*'s soundtrack, and had to start from scratch to compose *The Great Escape's* musical themes. "I first created the main theme. I then worked on how to use these main theme elements to create many variations depending on the styles. You can listen to the main theme all along the soundtrack. One can hear some darker ambient music playing *Rayman 2*, of the type you can listen to when watching a film. This is because some maps led me to this music aesthetic."

Rayman's 3D graphic identity was defined and preserved by Ubisoft Montpellier, as Florent explains. "Michel Ancel and his team had already worked on the first *Rayman*. They developed *Rayman 2*'s artistic direction, creating solid bases. Then Ubisoft Paris used these bases to complete the project. I especially worked on modelisation and backgrounds. Montpellier created functional kits, without exploiting their potential fully; Paris team's mission was to exploit these kits to create cool backgrounds. A few leads had been already followed in Montpellier but they hadn't

> **"THE TECHNOLOGICAL AND RESEARCH ASPECTS IMPLEMENTED FOR TONIC TROUBLE HELPED DESIGN THE TECH USED FOR RAYMAN 2"**
> **FLORENT SACRÉ**

created many backgrounds, maybe one or two. Then some members from the Paris team joined Montpellier's team to produce textures in order to develop some graphic uniformity for the game."

The *Rayman* games are well known for their challenge, requiring sometimes to go through a level section again and again. This is particularly relevant in *Rayman 2*'s gliding sequences, and even more relevant regarding the game's rocket-related sequences. Rayman can ride legged rockets, flying powder barrels, and glide over lava on a prune, taking directions depending on the way he shoots light balls, among other examples. Was this difficulty an impediment to reach a wide audience? Olivier doesn't agree. "We tried to work on the difficulty level, and therefore on the distribution of the ingredients in the game, such as the legged rocket, for instance. We had done a lot of playtests to validate the difficulty level and the progress the player can make in *Rayman 2*. Some sequences were harder but this is also what brings a feeling of success to the player when he completes

» [Nintendo 64] Controlling a ship to rescue Globox's family is another example of *Rayman 2*'s game design variety.
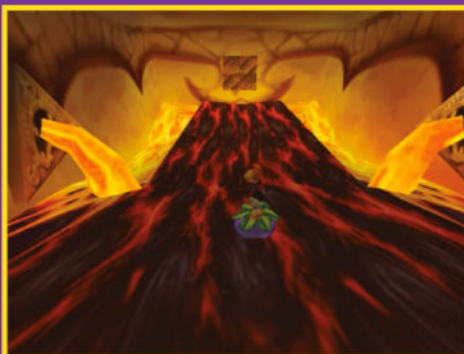
» [Nintendo 64] Navigating around a lava lake on a prune requires mastering *Rayman 2*'s shooting feature.

DEMAKING RAYMAN 2

THE VERSION OF UBISOFT'S GAME THAT WENT BACK TO ITS 2D ROOTS

■ Considering Game Boy's success over the years, there is no need to explain why Ubisoft wanted a Game Boy Color port of its latest platformer. Developed by Ubi Studios UK and released in 2001, this version gets naturally back to traditional 2D platforming on Nintendo's handheld device. Rayman gets all his abilities at the start of the game, as opposed to the previous *Rayman* Game Boy iteration. Offering pleasant and varied 2D platformer-style gameplay, its background story stays similar to the console versions. Its level design definitely offers less opponents to face, but can sometimes remind you of *Donkey Kong Jr* or even *Donkey Kong Country* at times, especially when your partly dismembered hero starts navigating the sails and ropes of pirate ships. Some parts are especially tricky and require as much skill as the first *Rayman* required, and Rayman can automatically hang on the edge of platforms, even when it is not necessarily required. Technically the game upholds to *Rayman*'s colourful reputation, considering the hardware. On the audio side, it is another story, since the Game Boy's sound chipset could only reproduce very basic theme melodies, sometimes quite unpleasant to the ears. Still, *Rayman 2 Forever* remains a very interesting and unique portable version of *Rayman 2* that anyone can enjoy on the go.

a level. Legged rockets or flying barrels phases came later in the game, and we were counting on the fact the player would be controlling the character perfectly at this point. From a design point of view, the character's 3D speed had to be finely tuned to offer a good feeling of speed, and also to manage the collision engine's capacity to avoid bugs. These levels required a lot of design work, integration, playtests and adjustments. We worked on the gliding phases in order to be in control of the descending speed and the engine to avoid collision issues."

Olivier has very good memories of these development years, including the discovery of new features they hadn't originally considered. "[One was] finding out a way to make Rayman shoot after having launched vertically a barrel he's carrying," he says. "Using this feature the player could destroy incoming barrel missiles to destroy a machine imprisoning a faery. No one in the team really realised that this feature could be used at this point, and watching the other developers thinking their way to make progress on this particular level was very enjoyable," he recalls.

The Dreamcast port, arguably the most enjoyable version of the game, required

very few people to work on, as Florent remembers, "It was crafted at the very end of the project. A few engineers and gameplay programmers worked on it quite successfully. On the other hand, developing *Rayman Revolution*, the PlayStation 2 version of *Rayman 2*, had been another story. I left Paris for Annecy, where the local Ubisoft team was supposed to work on the PS2 port. I was appointed as art director on this port. It became quite tense, since they had already started working on another *Rayman* project, contrary to what had been planned. They were simply developing a new *Rayman* game. Needless to say, the situation became very complicated at first."

What most characterises the *Rayman 2* project, starting with *Tonic Trouble*, was the fact that absolutely everyone among all teams involved were having difficulties finding points of reference regarding 3D game development. "On the *Tonic Trouble* project Ubisoft hired 40 animators, for instance, which was completely oversized," says Florent. "The publisher didn't have any reference back then to know how many animators were really needed. Everything needed to be designed or crafted at the time, which made this period really fascinating, all the more we were mostly young people in their early 20s, starting our careers in the videogame industry." ✱

» [Game Boy Color] Rayman takes a rest before he starts climbing.

» [Nintendo 64] Sliding on a rail in a cart is quite the ride.

072%

JEFFRY

TIME 0

MATCH 01   CPU

5

100%

AKIYAMA

All Japan Pro Wrestling Featuring Virtua

JEFFRY'S TAKING YOU TO SPLASH MOUNTAIN

» SATURN » 1997 » SEGA AM1/SCARAB
Taking Wolf Hawkfield and Jeffry McWild and pitting them against legendary grapplers like Kenta Kobashi, Toshiaki Kawada and the late Mitsuharu Misawa might fall just a tad short of the wide appeal of something like *Avengers: Endgame,* **but it's the sort of crossover that appeals directly to my interests as a big fan of both** *Virtua Fighter* **and pro wrestling.** However, even if you can't tell = from John Cena, this is a wrestling game that's worthy of your attention.

The major reason for that is that the game respects the promotion's dramatic King's Road style of in-ring storytelling, with a game design that incorporates both the sport and entertainment aspects of pro wrestling. It's no good finding one effective move and repeating it – you'll need to vary your offence to get the crowd invested in your struggle, which is important because it's easier to score the pin when they're cheering for you. Likewise, a one-sided beating is fine but as wrestlers only pull out their biggest moves when their opponent has pushed them to the limit, you won't get access to yours until you've taken some punishment. Fortunately the grappling system has plenty of depth to make this fun, and the game actually comes with a fold-out move chart.

Initially, it's easy to question the choice of a flat crowd image over a full 3D arena, but it quickly becomes clear that Sega's developers prioritised graphical performance – the game runs at a solid 60 frames per second, affording great fluidity to the bone-crunching attack animations. The audio is great too, with individual crowd chants for each combatant really adding to the atmosphere, completing a quality package that serves as a reminder of the depth in the Japanese Saturn library. It may be short on the outlandish match types and crazy gimmicks of the era's *WWF* and *WCW* games, but it's hard to beat for compelling one-on-one bouts. ✱

THE MAKING OF
Drakan
Order of the Flame

EVERYONE KNOWS LARA CROFT, THE TOUGH 3D ACTION HEROINE. BUT HOW MUCH COOLER WOULD SHE BE IF SHE COULDN'T JUST JUMP AND SHOOT, BUT COULD ALSO DISH IT OUT IN HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT AND RIDE A FIRE-BREATHING DRAGON? WELL, THEN HER NAME WOULD NO LONGER BE LARA, BUT RYNN

WORDS BY PAUL KAUTZ

The Seattle-based company Surreal Software was a very unusual developer. Of the four college graduates who founded the company in 1995, only one, creative director Mike Nichols, had already developed a game or two, while the other three were completely inexperienced in this area. But that didn't change the young team's big plans, as cofounder and *Drakan* lead designer Alan Patmore explains. "I grew up playing classic RPGs like the *Ultima* series and the *Wizardry* series. I was also a fan of *D&D* and fantasy fiction. Creating a game where the team and I could realise our vision of a fantasy world was really the biggest driver. It was an amazing time because we developed this engine and toolset that allowed me to basically craft what I envisioned almost in real time. *Drakan* was a creative expression of what was in my head at that time in my life."

According to Alan, however, his original vision of *Drakan* looked quite different, "The first prototype we built was a pure dragon flight simulator. But as we started to develop it we realised how we were limiting ourselves by focussing solely on playing a dragon. Our technology was evolving at

the same time and it became clear that we could build a much deeper game experience, with a more compelling story and interesting characters and interactions by introducing the bimodal game mechanic of a human riding a dragon with the ability to seamlessly get on and off it. At the time that hadn't really been done in games, so it was something that we were very excited to work on."

The development of the game took almost three years, as Surreal Software did not rely on available middleware, but insisted on using a custom-written 3D system for it, which of course had to be created first. The Riot Engine was a flexible toolset that offered very impressive features for the time: a single-skinned skeletal animation and inverse kinematics system (which made free animation of different body parts at different speeds possible), flexible level-of-detail system, true-colour rendering, dynamic light calculation, organic-looking landscapes, sweet lighting effects with lens flares and transparencies, and a simple physics engine.

Part of the team, which had grown to more than 30 employees over the course of development, originated from the demoscene, which was clearly visible in the thunderstorm of graphical effects. "Stuart Denman, Tim Ebling and Tom Vykruta, three of our engineers, were all active in the demoscene in the mid-Nineties," Alan remembers. "They were always coming up with cool ways to take advantage of the hardware. I remember multiple occasions where one of these guys would come in and show me a cool new graphics effect like making a blade glow or putting shaders on the armour. We would then huddle up and figure out how to fully take advantage of it and integrate it into the game."

According to a press release from publisher Psygnosis on 28 May 1998, the finished game was supposed to be released in January 1999. That didn't quite work out, *Drakan: Order*

» [PC] The fight continues in the air with Arokh's fiery dragon powers.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DRAKAN: THE ANCIENTS' GATES
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION 2
RELEASED: 2002

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: PC, PLAYSTATION 2
RELEASED: 2002

THE SUFFERING
PLATFORM: PC, PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX
RELEASED: 2004

ALAN PATMORE

■ Alan was one of the founders of Surreal Software and the lead designer of both *Drakan* games. After working at Double Fine, Zynga and Humble Bundle, he's now the CEO of Good Games Group.

» [PC] *Drakan: Order Of The Flame* offered great graphics and excellent effects for its time. The biggest drawback was the complete lack of facial animations for the human characters.

» [PC] Rynn is the strong fighting heroine of *Drakan*. With almost 540 polygons, she is about twice as detailed as most of her enemies.

» [PC] As the game progresses, Rynn finds more and more armour that conceals less and less of her.

Of The Flame wasn't available in the US until August 1999, and coming to Europe took another month. In any case, the game came exclusively to Windows-based PCs, which, according to Alan, was the only logical choice, "Consoles hadn't established themselves as the dominant platform at this point in time in videogame history. The Xbox and PlayStation 2 hadn't been released, Dreamcast was just a few months old, and the PS1 was underpowered for what we wanted to do. Our engine was one of the first truly 3D systems out there, and we needed the best hardware to run it. To deliver the game experience we had in mind, we had to focus on PCs with powerful 3D hardware."

In terms of content, *Drakan* offers a very interesting mix: the game begins as a classic action adventure in the vein of *Tomb Raider*, only with close-range weapons instead of long-range ones. The green-eyed heroine Rynn runs, jumps and rolls through gloomy towns, forests and mountains, slicing and dicing small and large orcs, sorry, Wartocks, into bloody pieces with swords, axes and maces. After a short time, however, she finds and awakens the ancient dragon Arokh, with whom she forms a symbiotic bond in the style of the 1996 Dennis

"THE ORIGINAL PROTOTYPE WE BUILT WAS A PURE DRAGON FLIGHT SIMULATOR"

ALAN PATMORE

Quaid film *Dragonheart* – which allows her to ride him in order to stop the evil sorcerer Navros, who has kidnapped Rynn's brother and aims to enslave the world.

On the scaly back of Arokh, the game then suddenly transforms into a dragon-flying-and-fire-breathing simulator. The flying of *Drakan* feels really good even today – it's not too simplistic, not too over the top, just right, with powerful beats of Arokh's mighty wings. Complex flying manoeuvres are not possible with him, however – if you want to pull off Immelmanns, you're in the wrong game here. ▶

» [PC] The plot of the game is mainly driven by in-game cutscenes.
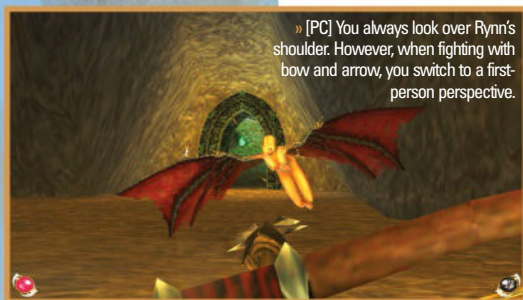
» [PC] You always look over Rynn's shoulder. However, when fighting with bow and arrow, you switch to a first-person perspective.

» [PC] If an opponent gets too close to Arokh, he quickly takes care of the problem himself.
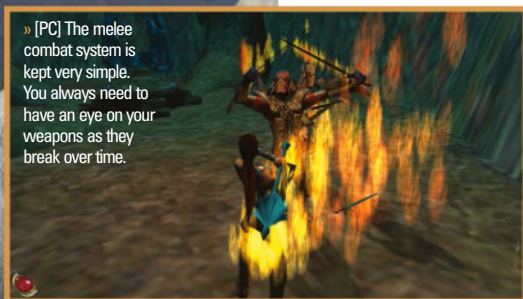
» [PC] The melee combat system is kept very simple. You always need to have an eye on your weapons as they break over time.

▶ Then again, if you want to bombard your enemies with fireballs, ice projectiles or lightning bolts, you've come to the right place. Arokh receives new dragon powers from special crystals at irregular intervals. And as in the *Mega Man* games, some enemies react more strongly to certain Arokh-based attacks than others. However, you don't get to use these skills very often, as you only spend a comparatively small part of the game on Arokh's back. Time and again, you come across areas where the giant beast simply doesn't fit – then Rynn has to leave him behind and continue on foot through caves or dungeons. Once she is back under the open sky, she can call Arokh to her at the touch of a button, whereupon he comes flying. If she does this when she is only a few metres away from him, he comments with a dry line like, "Getting a bit lazy, aren't we?"

O ver the course of the adventure, Rynn finds around 50 different weapons such as swords, spears and axes, leaving behind smaller and larger chunks of Wartock. There are even variations with fire, ice or energy effects, which cause significantly more damage to the corresponding enemies. The smaller of them are shock-frozen by a blow with the ice sword, for example, whereupon a further hit smashes them into cold pieces. However, if you wait for too long with that second blow, the enemy will thaw out again.

"THREE OF OUR ENGINEERS CAME FROM THE DEMOSCENE" **ALAN PATMORE**

There are also bows that shoot ice, fire and explosive arrows from a useful first-person perspective.

All of *Drakan*'s weapons differ significantly in terms of range, strike frequency and damage. It is therefore very important to vary them depending on the enemy type, as different enemies react very differently to the weapons. It is just as important to always pay attention to the condition of your weapons, as the vast majority of them break as you use them. There is no repair option – what is broken stays broken and gets disposed of automatically. There are also no shields, but many different types of armour (which sometimes cover more, but most of the times less of Rynn's body) and various helpful potions, which you can fish out of the very limited inventory and consume at any time.

In addition to combat and flying, *Drakan* also offers many platforming challenges, a few simple puzzles and occasional conversations with NPCs. All of this is integrated directly into the very large world, which is divided into four main areas and fourteen chapters which flow seamlessly into one another. However, there is no open world here, even if it occasionally appears to be: Rynn moves from one mission to the next in a straight line for about 15 hours, only to be left on a nasty cliffhanger at the end, which is not even resolved in the 2002 sequel (see the Shiny New Wings boxout). This was an intentional decision, as Alan tells us, "I always envisioned the overall story as a trilogy. So ending on a cliffhanger was

LOST HEROINES OTHER FEMALE GAME LEADS THAT DISAPPEARED LIKE RYNN

JILL
JILL OF THE JUNGLE, 1992
■ The success of *Commander Keen* inspired young programmer Tim Sweeney to develop his own platformer. However, it was not jumped through by an action hero, but by a real jungle queen, a female Tarzan called Jill. Jill hopped, swam and flew through three adventures, and went on to make cameo appearances in *Jazz Jackrabbit* (1994) and *Epic Pinball* (1995) – but never again in a game of her own.

LOLLY
LOLLYPOP, 1994
■ *Lollypop* was the debut work of the small Danish development studio Brain Bug. It's a charming platformer centred around the wind-up doll Lolly, which, despite its sugar-sweet exterior, offers a decent challenge. The game, published exclusively in Europe by Rainbow Arts, wrote "to be continued" in its credits – but this was not to be, as *Lollypop* only sold around 30,000 copies.

JULIE
HEAVY METAL: FAKK 2, 2000
■ The animated film *Heavy Metal 2000*, based on the fantasy magazine of the same name, was weird. What was even weirder, however, was that it received a sequel just a few months after its release – in the form of a game that sent heroine Julie on a wonderfully bizarre adventure using the then brand-new *Quake 3* engine. Too bizarre for the market, unfortunately, the game went completely under.

KONOKO
ONI, 2001
■ *Oni* was a wild experiment by Bungie: a mixture of shooter and martial arts melee action, presented in a cool anime style. Just as unusual was the game's heroine, the young policewoman Konoko, who takes on a totalitarian regime in the year 2032. Unfortunately, she only did this once, as the game was a veritable flop and Konoko disappeared into oblivion.

» [PC] Some of the enemies are huge – it is recommended to fight them from the air.

SHINY NEW WINGS

A LOOK AT DRAKAN'S PLAYSTATION 2 SEQUEL

■ While *Drakan: Order Of The Flame* wasn't a mega-hit, it was successful enough to warrant a sequel – which was released exclusively on the PlayStation 2. According to Alan, the reason for this was as follows, "Psygnosis was owned by Sony Europe and was run fairly autonomously at the time. They were free to kind of do what they wanted, so launching on PC wasn't a big deal. But by the time *Drakan* finished up, Sony was getting more involved in what Psygnosis was doing and they wanted to focus on Playstation exclusives. The PS2 was on the horizon and Sony was very interested in us building a *Drakan* game exclusively for that system. We felt like this was a great opportunity to launch on this next-gen console."

The result, subtitled *The Ancients' Gates*, was released in the summer of 2002 and was very similar to its predecessor: lots of melee combat, lots of flying on Arokh. The graphics were significantly improved, Rynn was now allowed to cast magic, there was a larger world, simplified combat and even an experience point system that led to a skill tree.

In short, it's a really good game that also received mostly good ratings. But unfortunately, it also wasn't that big a success, which meant the end of the series according to Alan, "Sales expectations for a first-party game on the PS2 were high. *Ancients' Gates* underperformed those sales expectations and so the franchise sort of died." We feel this is a real shame, as the series showed great potential.

» [PlayStation 2] Two years after *Order Of The Flame*, Rynn and Arokh are fighting their way through an even bigger adventure world.

» [PlayStation 2] The combat system has been simplified; among other things, Rynn can now target individual opponents directly.

designed to motivate people to buy the sequel. Unfortunately due to factors out of our control we were not able to release *The Ancients' Gates* on PC, and the franchise lost some of its continuity."

For the most part, *Drakan* was well received upon release. For example, it got 5/5 in *Computer & Video Games* in December 1999, 4/5 in *Computer Gaming World* and 81% on IGN. According to Alan, this led to solid sales, "For the time it sold well. I think we sold over 100K worldwide. But keep in mind this was before the days of digital distribution. This was all retail. It's funny to think that 100K was considered a modest hit, enough to justify a sequel."

Drakan's sequel also sold well, but not well enough, which sealed the fate of Rynn and Arokh. It's a shame, and not just because of the still unresolved plot. Even catching up on the original game today is not that easy, as it is not available from any of the usual digital shops. "Sony owns the rights and I'm assuming it's just not high enough on their priority list to put it on GOG or Steam," Alan regrets. "I had made some progress on that front, but unfortunately, the person I was working with at Sony retired, so I'll need to restart the process."

Once you've got the game running on modern systems, though, which is quite easy thanks to various community patches, you will still find a fascinating adventure. Graphically, it may no longer be the eye-opener it was 25 years ago – but in terms of content, it's just as fun and imaginative as ever. Alan feels the same, telling us, "I still love the game. I'm immensely proud of the world we built, the characters we developed, and the story we told. It was ambitious for its time, and we poured so much creative energy into bringing that universe to life. Even now, I occasionally hear from fans who have fond memories of the series, and that's incredibly rewarding. For me, *Drakan* will always be a meaningful chapter, both in my career and in the broader evolution of narrative-driven action games." ✱

» [PC] Flying on the back of Arokh is a lot of fun. However, you don't do it that often and there's a lot of fog in the skies.

» [PC] Arokh and Rynn make a great team – even if they are very sceptical of each other at first.

» At trade shows, *Drakan* was represented by a model with the stage name Myrna Blankenstein.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

Info

» **System:** PC, PS5, Xbox Series S/X
» **Year:** 2025
» **Publisher:** Kepler Interactive
» **Developer:** Sandfall Interactive
» **Key People:** Guillaume Broche, Nicholas Maxson-Francombe, Jennifer Svedberg-Yen.

Go Deeper

» The story is inspired by the 2004 French novel, *La Horde Du Contrevent*, about a group journeying to uncover a mystery, also following other failed expeditions.

» For writer Jennifer Svedberg-Yen (originally hired as a voice actress) and composer Lorien Testard, this was their first professional gig in games

» [PlayStation 5] Counters are powerful but you must parry every hit in a sequence for it to activate.
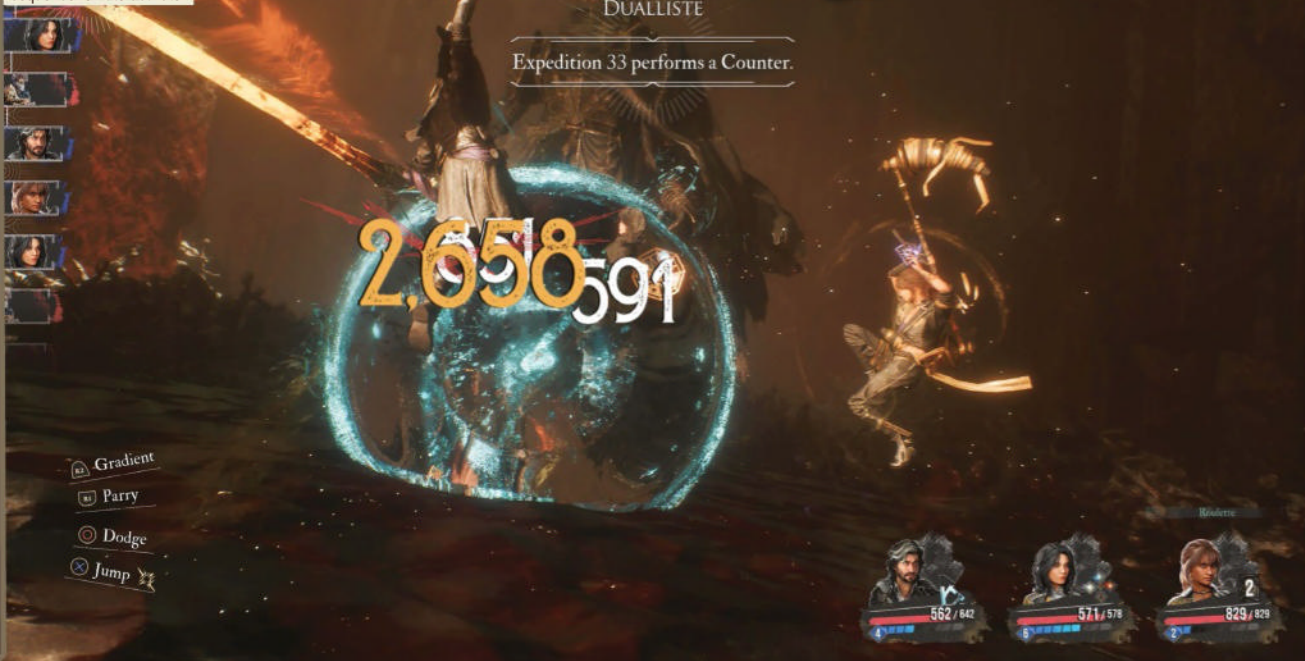
As JRPGs either feel pressured to modernise or double down on the archaic, Sandfall Interactive, a new France–based studio made up of young fresh talent, not only pays tribute to the genre but triumphs with its own distinct French identity and razor–sharp battles

Words by Alan Wen

CLAIR OBSCUR: EXPEDITION 33

THE BACKGROUND

It would be fair to say that no one expected a game like *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33* to turn up in Xbox's Summer Showcase in 2024, or any other showcase. This year already had several other big-name JRPGs on the calendar, such as *Metaphor: ReFantazio* and *Dragon Quest III HD-2D Remake*, which proudly follow the genre's traditions of turn-based commands. More divisive was the previous year when *Final Fantasy XVI* pivoted to full-blown action with perfect dodges and larger-than-life boss battles that feel more like a PlatinumGames joint.

This is not however a traditional JRPG, or at least not one originating from Japan. Rather it's the work of a new studio based in Montpellier, France, founded by a former Ubisoft employee and a core team of mostly juniors – for some, this was their first professional gig in games, such as writer Jennifer Svedberg-Yen

(originally cast in a voice role) and composer Lorien Testard. It's a game that pays tribute to the genre but less the pixel-art classics and rather ones from the 3D/HD era that contemporary critics had often dismissed, such as *Final Fantasy XIII*. The biggest inspiration is undoubtedly Mistwalker's cult classic *Lost Odyssey*, a rare example of a JRPG with mature characters and themes. That it was an Xbox 360 exclusive also seems to be why it not only made perfect sense for its de facto spiritual successor to be spotlighted by Xbox but to also be a day-one Game Pass title.

THE GAME

Set in Lumière, a fantasy world inspired by Belle Époque France, *Clair Obscur* goes heavy on its doom-laden themes. The people of this fractured island city are being wiped out year after year by a mysterious godlike figure called

[PlayStation 5] Dungeon areas allow for exploration though they lack a mini-map so it's easy to get lost.

» [PlayStation 5] You'll often find evidence of the failed expeditions that came before you, including every checkpoint.

» [PlayStation 5] It's not a world map without eventually being able to traverse by land, sea and air.

Things of note

PAINT IT BLACK (AND WHITE)

Among *Clair Obscur*'s beautiful cinematics, some of these are presented in black and white, which are supposedly Maelle's nightmares. But what significance do they have?

THREE AIM

You can use your gun while exploring as well. There are treasure chests that only unlock once you've destroyed three hidden targets nearby.
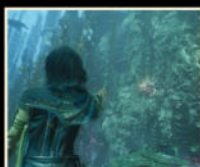
THE OLDEST HOUSE

Throughout the Continent, you'll find doors that lead you to the Manor, each room holding its own secrets, including journal entries, music discs, and outfits.

MIME OVER MATTER

The devs are proudly French, sometimes ridiculously so. One such example is fighting Mime creatures, your reward being very stereotypical French 'baguette' costumes for each expeditioner.

A LIGHT BRUSH

Gestrals are cute impish characters resembling brushheads, adding a lightness to the main story's heavy themes. There are also lost Gestrals to find on the Continent.
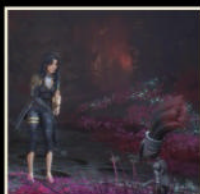
the Paintress. Each year, she paints a number on a distant monolith, instantly causing people of that age to 'gommage', dissolving into fragile petals before scattering into the winds.

Yet while the citizens have accustomed themselves to preparing a farewell festival for all who come 'of age', a group of those whose number is next set out on a journey to kill the Paintress and defy their fate. All expeditions have failed, and so the game begins as the number has reached 33 while you follow the titular expedition, made up of mostly 32 year olds.

That's quite a change from the usual wide-eyed teen heroes on a journey to save the world. Each of the cast has faced loss, such as Gustave, who begins the game reuniting with his ex Sophie to bid her farewell for her gommage, giving a different weight to their conversations.

It helps that it's conveyed with not just some of the most naturalistically written and performed dialogue in this genre (the English voice cast includes screen actors like Charlie Cox and Andy Serkis as well as *Baldur's Gate III* alumni Jennifer English, Devora Wilde and Tracy Wiles) but breathtaking cinematics powered by Unreal 5 that has *Clair Obscur*'s visuals going toe-to-toe with blockbuster productions like *Dragon Age: The Veilguard*.

With that modern sheen, *Clair Obscur* plays like a classic 3D JRPG, beginning quite linear as you explore the Continent, traversing an overworld map that takes you to dungeons that provide some light exploration as you also encounter enemies in turn-based combat. Yet while it might have the clearly presented turns of *Final Fantasy X* or stylish UI of *Persona 5*, the action-based mechanics take it to another level.

Sure, you might be thinking of the QTEs in *Mario* RPG spin-offs, but when it comes to defence, it plays more like *Sekiro*, FromSoftware's unforgivably tough samurai

action game where dodging and parrying a long sequence of attacks is crucial to victory. Or perhaps like playing a hardcore rhythm game without the songs, though for those who master the many fiendish attack timings you can even get through a battle completely unscathed. It's a system that makes every encounter feel electrifying and tense, while each expeditioner also has unique mechanics, such as Lune's elemental magic that is enhanced with Stains, while Verso has *Devil May Cry*-style grading where his attacks get more powerful the more he avoids getting hit.

But there's also plenty for players who just like watching numbers go up thanks to Pictos and Luminas that apply powerful passive buffs. Unlock more of these through optional challenges to customise your build, and the damage you can end up dealing gets truly astronomical. Indeed, getting sicko deep into these mechanics is going to be the only way to complete the game's absurdly challenging optional content.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

While there have been plenty of examples of non-Japanese studios giving their own take on the JRPG, *Clair Obscur* succeeds not as a mere throwback but one that elevates the genre to new heights. It's the *Final Fantasy* game you wished Square Enix was making now instead of trying to be like *God Of War*. In the context of an industry obsessed with remakes, sequels and doubling down on bloated and unsustainable games, it feels like a lightning rod that encourages originality with a scope that doesn't demand over a hundred hours of your time. Even without its side content, *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33*'s powerful story, your hard-won battles and its astonishing score will linger in the memory for years to come. ✱

TONY WARRINER

Before creating classics like Beneath A Steel Sky and Broken Sword, the Revolution Software cofounder had a chaotic start to his career that saw him working on the infamous World Cup Carnival and programming flight control systems

Words by Lewis Packwood

Tony Warriner began his career in the mid-Eighties at Artic Computing, then headed by Charles Cecil, and later left with Charles to form Paragon Programming. When Paragon was wound down, Tony worked on games like the Codemasters-published *Death Stalker*, as well as doing a brief stint in aviation software, but reunited with Charles in 1990 to cofound Revolution Software alongside Noirin Carmody and David Sykes. Initially based in Hull and later moving to York, Revolution launched a string of point-and-click hits, including *Beneath A Steel Sky* and *Broken Sword*. Tony wrote the book *Revolution: The Quest For Game Development Greatness* in 2023, and is currently working on *UrbX Warriors* with Stoo Cambridge.

How did you get into games, Tony?
Someone I went to school with got a ZX81, so we started going round to his house to play on this thing. We saw *3D Monster Maze*, and we couldn't believe it. I was just hooked, really, from then.

How did you make the leap to writing your own games?
We found a BBC Micro in a storage cupboard at school, and we got permission to use it at lunchtime. All there was with this BBC Micro was the welcome tape, so what else are you going to do with it, apart from write games in BASIC?

How did you go from coding games on your lunch break to doing it for a living?
I was having a very bad time at school, but I was looking at these computers and thinking, "I can do this." So I dropped out of doing tedious things like revising for exams and I bought myself a Camputers Lynx. I did a couple of BASIC games, and then progressed into learning assembly. Then I saved again and got an Amstrad CPC, and in my last year at school I was doing *Obsidian*, which was inspired by *Sorcery* for the Amstrad. I sent that off to Artic Computing, who said, "Yeah, we'll publish it." Then I went to work there.

And that was where you met Charles Cecil.
Yeah, he was running it. Artic had risen to be quite rich at one point, and they all had Lotus Esprit Turbos and stuff like that while they were still at college. Then it all started to go bad for them, because the bigger companies started moving in and they were getting squeezed out. Then the cofounder Richard Turner said, "Right, I'm going to do CAD software for kitchen retailers. Charles, you've had the Lotus Esprits, now it's your turn to fix this company." So Charles was tasked with saving it if he could.

What did you do at Artic?
The first thing we had to do was the very unfortunate *World Cup Carnival* thing. In the build up to Mexico '86, US Gold had bought the rights to produce a World Cup game, but they'd screwed up the development. So they were four months out from the World Cup, and they had no game. So they thought, "*World Cup Football* by Artic, let's licence that." They did a deal whereby they would pay us 20,000 quid to add some sub-games and change the title screen. So my first job, along with Adam Waring, was to write the sub-games. I wrote a goal-scoring thing. Then US Gold packaged it up and put it out. But of course, people started tweaking what had happened, so there was a huge scandal.

How did it lead to Artic going under?
Artic had previously sold the rights to *World Cup Football* to Prism Leisure, and Prism realised *World Cup Carnival* was the same game. So they went to US Gold and said, "We're going to sue you." In the end, US Gold paid them the 20 grand that Artic was meant to get. So Artic came out of it with nothing whatsoever and continued to sink pretty fast. But surprisingly enough, US Gold still liked Charles. So me and Charles formed a company called Paragon Programming in London, and we did a year's worth of ports for US Gold.

Then Charles left Paragon to work for US Gold. What happened after that?
Paragon was wound down, and I went to work for Cascade Games in Harrogate, where we did *19 Part One: Boot Camp*, based on the Paul Hardcastle song *19*. But the whole company imploded just before it was done. I came back to Hull on the understanding that I would finish this

> **"** Our little flight control system was actually running fights for the entire world for, like, ten years **"**
>
> Tony Warriner

» Tony and Charles Cecil during the development of *Broken Sword 5*.

SELECTED TIMELINE

» [Amstrad CPC] *Obsidian* was Tony's first commercial game. He soon went on to work for the publisher, Artic Computing.
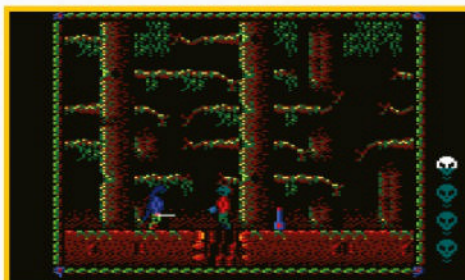
» [Amstrad CPC] Tony wrote *Death Stalker* for the Amstrad CPC, which was his second computer after a Camputers Lynx.

» Tony signs a copy of *Broken Sword 5* during the game's launch party at the Regent Street Apple Store in London.

» [ZX Spectrum] Tony was working on *19 Part One: Boot Camp* when Cascade Games imploded.

▶ game for them in return for two PDSes [Programmers Development Systems]. Then I joined up with Adam Waring and said, "I've got these development kits, let's write some games." So I wrote a game called *Death Stalker* and Adam wrote a game called *Ninja Massacre*, and we sent them to Codemasters.

Why didn't you do any more games for Codemasters?

We were having big arguments with them as to what we were going to do next. I wrote *Arcade Trivia Quiz*, but Codemasters sent us a letter that backdated the whole thing to say it was their idea and their copyright. So we split with Codemasters and sent it to a Newcastle company called Zeppelin. Zeppelin published it, but they gave me, like, five quid. It was all really, really grim.

How did you end up working in aviation after that?

It was through Dave Sykes, who was working at the aviation company Bytron. Back then, the information on where the planes were travelling to and from was entered manually before being sent to all the relevant airports and printed out on 'strips' via a private network. Because there was no validity checking, it was prone to errors. So we created a computer version, and our

» [PC] Revolution's *Lure Of The Temptress* was a reaction to *Leisure Suit Larry* and introduced the Virtual Theatre system.

» [Amstrad CPC] Tony ported *Black Magic* to the Amstrad CPC while working at Paragon Programming.

little flight-control system was actually running flights for the entire world for, like, ten years.

How did Revolution Software start?

Charles gave me a call and said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "Well, I'm very bored writing this stuff for Bytron." And he said, "Meet me in Wales, I've got something to show you." So me and Dave drove up there to see Charles, and what he had on a 386 PC that he'd taken from Activision was *Leisure Suit Larry*. He said, "Have a look at this. Can we do this? Can we beat it?" That was the brief. And that was the beginning of Revolution.

You programmed the Virtual Theatre system for Revolution's first game, *Lure Of The Temptress*. How did that come about?

Charles said, "What can we do with *Leisure Suit Larry* to make it more interesting?" And we had the idea of the characters living a whole life away from what was shown on the screen. Down at one of the micro fairs, we saw Level 9 were working on something similar for a prototype Raj adventure game that didn't end up coming out. So that kind of cemented the idea: maybe the next big thing is games with living worlds.

Where did the idea for *Beneath A Steel Sky* come from?

One of Charles' ideas was to have these big cities in the desert that hate each other in a future world. But he couldn't nail it down, so he sent me and Dave Cummins to Wales and said, "Don't come back until you've got a design for *Beneath A Steel Sky*." In my book, you can see that handwritten design document, and a lot of it actually made it through to the final game. So I kind of talk about *Steel Sky* as my game now, because I really did write the first draft of the design.

OBSIDIAN

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» An advert for *Obsidian* on the Amstrad CPC 464.

Can you tell us what that first Revolution office was like in Hull?
It was a room above a fruit shop on a rather sad street in west Hull. Then we moved to different people's flats on the marina, but we weren't supposed to be there, so we used to stagger coming into the office so that the residents didn't figure out that there was something going on. But towards the last bit of *Beneath A Steel Sky* we actually got a real office: two or three rooms above an arcade. Then we signed a deal with Virgin Interactive to do four games, and they pumped a bunch of money into Revolution, so that's when we moved to York.

Why did you move?
We had a lot of problems with Hull, because the train lines were terrible at the time, really crappy two-carriage things, so we just couldn't recruit anyone. Even journalists would say, "We're never coming back." But it was not a problem getting people to visit York.

Broken Sword came next: what was the reception like when it released?
We had a big problem with the first review in *PC Zone*. They had an exclusive, but they gave it to someone who didn't like adventure games, and it came out as a bad review. Virgin went insane and cancelled all the advertising with them, it was a huge blow up. But then the next review was good, the one after that was good, and it just rolled on from there.

Is it right that Revolution didn't end up making a huge amount of money from it?
The whole industry was, and is, rigged in terms of the publisher–developer relationship. Virgin made a lot of money because it didn't cost them all that much to make, a million or so. But then the developer gets a 20% royalty, and you have to pay off the development budget. I don't think we made any money from the PC version. But funnily enough, Revolution did make money from the PlayStation port.

Why was that?
Virgin were like, "We're never going to touch the PlayStation, because we need to grovel to Sony to get permission to publish things." So Revolution had the rights to do PlayStation

> **The whole industry was, and is, rigged in terms of the publisher–developer relationship**
> Tony Warriner

ports. Sony estimated it would sell 50,000 copies, but it went on to sell about ten times that amount. Revolution made quite decent money on that version, and then again on *Broken Sword II*.

You were under a lot of pressure to put out a sequel quickly, weren't you?
Well, initially Virgin was very good, but by the time we were finishing *Broken Sword*, all of the good people were pretty much out of Virgin, and it was taken over by a cohort of much less pleasant people. They dragged us in and said, "We can't believe how much money has been spent on *Broken Sword*, it's outrageous. The only way anyone's going to recoup the money is to knock out a sequel really quickly." Which was a total lie, because they made a huge amount of money on it. They said, "We'll give you half the budget and half the time to knock out a sequel, and if we're lucky, we'll just about break even on all this." They treated us like naughty school children.

Virgin had a rapid succession of owners in the Nineties, didn't it? What happened next?
Towards the end of *Broken Sword II*, Virgin was being sold off by Spelling Entertainment, and they hired Brett Sperry from Westwood to keep the group alive while it was being sold. We had a contract to write two more games for them, but they didn't want to spend any money, so they thought they would string us along for as long as possible. We would get ▶

WORKS FROM WARRINER
Tony picks five of his favourite games
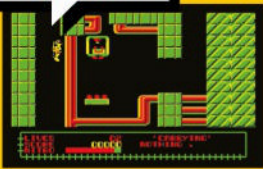
OBSIDIAN
■ "I wrote this when I was still at school and supposed to be revising for my exams," says Tony. "It got me started, so the gamble paid off!" *Obsidian* was inspired by the Amstrad CPC game *Sorcery*, but Tony swapped the fantasy setting for outer space.
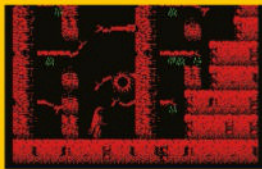
DEATH STALKER
■ Following the implosion of Cascade Games, Tony set up TAG Computer Games with Adam Waring and wrote this Amstrad title. "After the drama of Cascade, this game was fun to write and turned out nicely," says Tony. "Codemasters were nice to work with, too."

BENEATH A STEEL SKY
■ Revolution's second release, this huge adventure title came on 15 floppies. "Making this game was crazy and intense all the way through," says Tony. "It was the proper way to make a game, though." Now, decades later, he remembers the time fondly.

BROKEN SWORD: THE SHADOW OF THE TEMPLARS
■ The first game in Revolution's most successful franchise launched in 1996, and has been re-released numerous times since then. "I guess it's the most famous game I've worked on," says Tony, "and I still enjoy playing it through."

URBX WARRIORS
■ Since leaving Revolution, Tony has been working on this *Gauntlet*-esque game for the Spectrum Next alongside Sensible Software alumnus Stoo Cambridge. Tony says that although it's not finished yet, working in a small team with Stoo, "doing whatever the hell we want", has been a revelation.

OPPOSITES ATTRACT

The perfect chemistry of Revolution Software

■ Tony has spent most of his career working with Revolution head Charles Cecil, although the pair couldn't be more different, with Tony's quiet, methodical manner juxtaposed against Charles' fanciful, gregarious nature. But they complement each other. Every dreamer needs someone practical who can make those dreams a reality.

"I basically implemented Charles' games, and made sense of what was coming out of the design process," says Tony. "He's always been quite good to work for in a slightly chaotic sort of way: you never quite know what's going to happen next. You can never see too far into the future with Charles. I call it the fog. It's not like there was ever a spec, so I wrote very flexible engines that could anticipate crazy stuff coming, when the design changed and needed something else."

Tony also acted as a mediator between Charles and his wife Noirin Carmody (the three cofounded Revolution in 1990, along with David Sykes). "Charles was the creative guy and Noirin was doing finances, so there was sometimes a conflict," he says. "Noirin would be saying, 'How big is this game? How many rooms is it? How long is it going to take?' And Charles couldn't tell her, because he didn't exactly know, because there was always fluidity in the design. So I'd sometimes end up mediating between Charles and Noirin to try and resolve things."

Although she rarely takes the spotlight, Noirin's guiding hand is the biggest reason why Revolution is still going today. Charles and Tony would typically be impatient to sign contracts so they could get to the business of making games. "But Noirin was like, 'No, we're not signing this. We're going to send it back, and we're going to keep working on this contract until it's right,'" remembers Tony. "So we did, and thanks to her, we did keep the IP, which was the most valuable thing, and we did avoid some of the worst stuff that was going into these contracts."

Tony left Revolution a few years ago, and says he has no plans to return. But he remains on good terms with Charles. "I've always liked working for him," he says.

▶ dragged down there to do pitches, but Brett would do this big show of being bored by everything we tried to sell them. We couldn't do anything, and our contract meant we couldn't work for anyone else.

How did you get out of that?
In the end, we hired a QC who looked at the contracts and marched into Virgin and said, "You are going to let these people off their contract because you're in violation of this, that and the other, and if you don't, we're going to sue you." Litigation would have stopped the sale of the company, so we forced their hand. We were free, but then we faced the reality that people didn't want to commission adventure games anymore, because we were into the PlayStation era, and it was all *Tomb Raider* and *Resident Evil*. Sony said, "People like your narrative, people like your characters, take those bits and do something more PlayStation." So that's where *In Cold Blood* came from.

No one had done a 3D game at Revolution at that point, it must have been a huge learning curve.
Yes, and it was quite a painful one, because we went down a blind alleyway, which was trying to do voxel sprites on the PC. We went down that route for a long time before we realised that it wasn't going to work.

In Cold Blood got a lukewarm reception, what do you think went wrong?
Our main mistake was it was a little bit difficult to play at the beginning, and that put people off. If it had just been more easy to pick up and play, it could have been really good. Also, Sony's PR had put out that it was a *Metal Gear Solid* killer, and obviously the reviewers just laughed and said it's not anything of the sort. Really it was more of an adventure game than an action game.

Has Revolution ever thought about returning to *In Cold Blood*?

» Tony at his desk during the making of *Beneath A Steel Sky*.

> **❝ People didn't want to commission adventure games anymore, because we were into the PlayStation era ❞**
> Tony Warriner

A few years ago, I was proposing that we remix it as a point-and-click, where the fights would be orchestrated. I kind of got it working, but I couldn't get signed off on it.

What happened after *In Cold Blood*?
There was a game called *Good Cop Bad Cop* that we were proposing for Sony. We were going to fix the bits that didn't work on *In Cold Blood*. But our producer at Sony had left by then, and the guys coming in were like, "Nah."

Then you ended up going to THQ.
Yeah, THQ came sniffing around, and they said, "We like *Broken Sword*, but we don't like 2D, so what can you do?" So that's what *Broken Sword 3* was: do it in 3D, but make it more *Tomb Raider*-y.

It felt like no one was interested in 2D in the Noughties, right?
It's interesting, because now no one cares about anything like that. But it was completely different in the Noughties and the Nineties. I think mostly it was because of the magazines. If you're not on trend with the magazines, then they'll give you bad reviews and not do previews. They had a lot of power, and they were basically steering taste.

Broken Sword 3 was criticised for its repetitive block-pushing puzzles. What are your memories of that?
The problem was the time and the money weren't there to do X number of alternate box-type things, so we ended up being forced to reuse them. Essentially, we had to pad the game out with stuff we'd already done. It's not what we wanted to do at all.

You also had some money problems with THQ, didn't you?

» [PC] *Broken Sword* was a huge success for Revolution Studios and was recently remastered.

» Revolution cofounders Tony, Charles Cecil and David Sykes in 1993. They recreated the same pose in 2015 for Revolution's 25th anniversary, this time joined by the fourth cofounder, Noirin Carmody.

Revolution had taken out some loans to finish that game, so we were in an extremely bad position financially at the end of it. We never made any money, and THQ were taunting us because they were telling us how much money they were making almost immediately. They were a really bad lot at THQ.

What did you do then?
Graeme Struthers from Take-Two Interactive came along and said, "We love you guys, we'll give you $3 million to do whatever you want." So we had this horror-type idea, and we made a demo. And then at some point, the American office got involved, and they said, "What the fuck is this thing?" So Charles went off to New York to present this game, and they weren't happy at all, and said, "No, we're not doing it." And that was the end of that. We'd always been saved before, something had always come along. And this time it didn't. So Revolution collapsed down to two or three people. There wasn't an office, there was nothing at all.

So how did *Broken Sword 4* come about after that happened?
THQ came back and said, "We'll do another *Broken Sword*, but this time we want to do it with Sumo Digital down in Sheffield. They'll do the tech and the implementation, and you design it, Charles."

How did Revolution bounce back?
Earlier I'd done Game Boy Advance *Broken Sword*, which was actually pretty cool, because technically it really shouldn't have

» From left to right, the Revolution cofounders Charles Cecil, David Sykes, Tony Warriner and Noirin Carmody.

been possible. Ubisoft looked at that and said, "Why don't you extend it a bit with some extra director's cut stuff and put it out on the DS?" So from having nothing, we were reborn a little bit with the *Director's Cut*.

But *Broken Sword* on the iPhone was the big turning point, wasn't it?
Yeah, that built Revolution back up again. Obviously the phone market is a total hellscape now, but for a few years it was really great. There was 70% royalty, so for a time it was quite a healthy market. As far as I know, *Broken Sword* still sells quite nicely on iPhone.

And then you went to Kickstarter for *Broken Sword 5*.
We saw that Kickstarter from Double Fine, and it clicked that this is what we should do. The Kickstarter did OK, but it wasn't anything like enough money to actually write that game. *Broken Sword 5* was pretty stressful because there were a lot of money problems towards the end.

What made you decide to leave Revolution?
Myself and Steve Ince had spent a lot of time over the years trying to get a *Steel Sky* sequel off the ground, so when it finally happened, I naively thought that some of the ideas that we'd worked on would be the ones that went to the forefront. But it instantly started going in what I considered to be the wrong direction. And then there was lots of tech stuff going on with the 3D which I didn't like at all. I looked at it and thought, this is going to be as stressful as *Broken Sword 5*, so I'm just not going to do it. And I walked away.

Looking back, it feels like your career was marred by some dreadful experiences with publishers.
Yes, but then it's the same for everybody. All the developers from that era will tell roughly the same story. The difference is that Revolution still exists, rather than having been wiped out completely. We ran it in such a way that it could scale to nothing and still survive, whereas a lot of companies just went spectacularly bankrupt. ✳

Special thanks to Tony Warriner for sharing many of the featured images shown here. Find them in his book *Revolution: The Quest For Game Development Greatness*.

URBX WARRIORS

A look at Tony's incoming Spectrum Next game

■ Tony has teamed up with pixel artist Stoo Cambridge, formerly of Sensible Software, to create the arcade adventure game *UrbX Warriors*, which with its keys, food, enemy generators and maze-like levels is highly reminiscent of the Atari classic *Gauntlet*. Visually, however, it's much more like the 16-bit gem *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* – although Tony says this is a complete coincidence. In fact, he says he hadn't even heard of the game until players pointed out the similarities.

The game sees the urban explorers Alejandro and Ramona investigating an underground temple complex near Lake Titicaca, and fighting off zombies, demons and various other creatures in the hunt for treasure. It's initially being developed for the Spectrum Next, and Tony says that because it's pushing the machine to its limits, it remains single player only for now: but there are plans to port the game to other retro consoles further down the line, which might allow for a two-player mode. The *UrbX Warriors* Kickstarter campaign launched on 28 May and almost immediately smashed through its modest £6,000 target, and the estimated launch date for PC and Spectrum Next is April 2026.

Onimusha Tactics

A TACTICAL RPG FOR BEGINNERS

With Capcom's *Onimusha* series back in the public eye, it feels like the perfect time to revisit this lesser-known spin-off. While the publisher seems to be slowly remastering its way through the original PlayStation 2 releases, it's highly unlikely we'll see any sort of remaster of *Onimusha Tactics* (although a digital release via the Nintendo Switch Online service doesn't seem out of the question).

If you've never played it before, it's a tactical RPG that looks very similar to Square Enix's *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* series. It's a far simpler take on the genre though and is perhaps best thought of as a My First Tactical RPG. That's not to say it's bad of course, but those coming to it after Square's game or similar examples of the genre may be disappointed with the lack of substance that *Onimusha Tactics* offers.

You don't need to worry about how your character is positioned during fights or aggressive enemy AI like in other games. Similarly, the levelling system that *Onimusha Tactics* features for improving characters and enhancing weapons is also straightforward (as is its story). The early battles are laughably simple as well, meaning the first few hours present very little challenge.

And yet, I've always enjoyed the game and recently added it to my collection again with the intention of playing through it once more. I've been slowly making my way through all the *Onimusha* games (I've recently completed the first three) and I've forgotten how much I like the lore of the series that features noble samurai battling against evil demons.

Onimusha Tactics is definitely a cuter take on the typically dark series thanks to its delightful pixel art and colourful backgrounds, but it somehow hangs together and works, particularly when you meet characters from other games like Magoichi Saiga and Ekei Ankokuji. *Onimusha Tactics* may not be as good as some of the other games in the series, but it absolutely shouldn't be ignored, particularly if you've never dabbled in tactical RPGs and always fancied giving them a try. ✳

» RETROREVIVAL

>> This month we go bananas for Nintendo's new game, have a hands-on with the latest Super Pockets, take the new Irem collection for a spin and find out how Lara Croft fares in the world of pinball

» [Switch 2] We've never seen Donkey Kong as expressive as he is in *Bananza*. He sure does love bananas.

retro GAMER SIZZLER

Donkey Kong Bananza

IT'S TOP BANANA

INFORMATION

» **FORMAT:** SWITCH 2
» **RELEASE:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £58.99 (DIGITAL), £66.99 (PHYSICAL)
» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO EPD
» **BUY IT FROM:** ONLINE, RETAIL
» **PLAYERS:** 1-2

Nintendo's first new game since the release of the Switch 2 is an absolute belter and proves that when it comes to platforming, it really is in a league of its own. *Donkey Kong Bananza* is quite simply fantastic, bursting with ideas, creativity and, most importantly of all, fun. But then, we'd expect nothing less from the team behind *Super Mario Odyssey*.

Structurally, *Donkey Kong Bananza* is similar to Nintendo EPD's earlier game in that there's a strong focus on exploring sandbox

» [Switch 2] You can buy various items for DK and Pauline, some of which will bestow useful bonuses.

Change Your Style

- Classic Tie
- All-Natural Fur
- Red Britches
- Rock-Out Rags

Increases your swimming speed by 10 percent.

levels, while battling enemies, completing numerous challenges and meeting each area's charming residents, known as Fractones. The big difference here though is the focus on *Bananza*'s destructive environments, which not only neatly highlight Donkey Kong's sheer strength, but also allows the player to remould levels in exciting new ways. It's genuinely delightful just punching your way through rock, sand and numerous other substrates leaving a shower of gold ore in your wake (which is used to buy items and depletes slightly whenever you die). Buried chests hold a variety of secrets, from Red Balloons that save you when you fall too far to fossils that allow you to buy new clothing at shops and we've lost count of the times we've been distracted from the main story because we were just tunnelling through the game world in search of hidden secrets.

In terms of story, *Bananza*'s is fine, focussing on Donkey Kong teaming up with a very young Pauline in their attempt to stop Void Kong whose business Void

BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *Donkey Kong* debuted in arcades in 1981 and became a huge success for Nintendo. The series was then revitalised by Rare in 1994 on the Super Nintendo and was once again rebooted in 2010 by Retro Studios with *Donkey Kong Country Returns*.

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN
Evercade:
Gremlin Collection 2
There's only four games, but I've had a lot of fun with them, particularly the entertaining *Hogs Of War* and *Loaded*.

NICK
Irem Collection Vol 3
There aren't many games on this compilation, but I can't help loving the opportunity to pilot a big fiery dragon.

» [Switch 2] There are a number of timed challenge rooms to discover, many of which are combat based.

■ SOMETHING OLD
DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

■ SOMETHING NEW
DONKEY KONG COUNTRY: TROPICAL FREEZE

» [Switch 2] The 3D map will highlight hidden fossils and Banandium Gems are.

Company is hoarding up all the world's Banandium Gems. The pair set off in hot pursuit with DK determined to rejoin his friends and retrieve his bananas, and Pauline hoping to overcome her crippling shyness to sing in front of others. For the most part the relationship between them is quite sweet, with Pauline offering recaps as you travel to each new area and it reminded us of the bond between Jak and Daxter (albeit with far less wise-cracking).

Pauline's musical ability is key to the new Bananza mechanic as it allows DK to transform into a number of animal forms, including a bomb-dropping ostrich who can flutter short distances and a fleet-footed zebra that can effortlessly race across ground
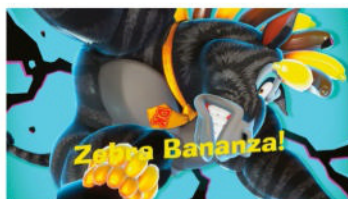
that would be too light for DK to otherwise traverse. Needless to say each Bananza form will need to be mastered if you hope to collect all the Banandium Gems and overcome the game's many inventive bosses. The new Bananza abilities are at their best when you first discover them as each stage is specifically designed around their skill sets, acting as a test drive before you start exploring the later stages of the game. Handily, you can switch between forms at will (which becomes essential in some of the later boss fights) but you do need to keep an eye on your energy bar as it quickly runs out (don't worry, collecting gold ore restores it).

That constant need to fill up with gold ore to keep your Bananza forms available mean you'll always be exploring in the hope of finding a rich vein to exploit and it's so much fun to thoroughly scour each Layer and Sublayer (as *Bananza*'s levels are known as) because there's simply so much to find in them. Just like with *Super Mario Odyssey* there are always new gameplay mechanics to test out,

puzzles to solve, quests to master and items to obtain. It's genuinely satisfying tunnelling through the game world and opening up new areas or discovering previously hidden Banandium Gems and you soon get into the mindset of thoroughly exploring each new layer before you move on to the next one.

And exploration is a joy thanks to how well designed each layer is and how versatile DK is as a character. The great ape can roll, climb most surfaces and punch like the best of them, but he's also able to tear up large pieces of terrain and use it as a weapon or shield and even surf with it. Additionally, collecting Banandium Gems unlocks extra powers in a skill tree that range from enhancing each Bananza form in a number of useful ways to boosting DK's own core skills.

For all of *Bananza*'s brilliance, it's certainly not perfect. Its early bosses are a complete cakewalk leaving the later mayors to be a real shock when you encounter them, while performance issues can crop up when a lot is going on. Certain Bananza forms also feel a little redundant due to the overall strength of some of the others. It's pricey too, although as with many modern Nintendo games, there's plenty still to do once the final credits have rolled. Make no mistake though, this is the definitive *Donkey Kong* adventure and one you shouldn't miss.

In A Nutshell
This is one of the best modern platformers we've recently played and it's easily our favourite *Donkey Kong* game. Don't miss it.

>>   Score **92%**

» [Switch 2] DK's Bananza forms are great fun and expand his core skill set in numerous ways.

» [Switch 2] It wouldn't be a *Donkey Kong* game without a few frantic minecart sections.

» [Switch 2] There's a variety of different enemies in *Bananza* and they often require specific tactics to beat.

✱ PICK OF THE MONTH

Super Pocket: Neo Geo & Data East Edition

WHO WILL WIN THE LATEST SUPER POCKET HEAD TO HEAD?

INFORMATION

» **FORMAT:** SUPER POCKET
» **ALSO ON:** NA
» **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £49.99
» **PUBLISHER:** HYPER MEGA TECH!
» **DEVELOPER:** HYPER MEGA TECH!
» **PLAYERS:** 1

✱ BRIEF HISTORY

» The Super Pocket series is a cheaper alternative to Blaze Entertainment's popular Evercade range. They offer full compatibility with Evercade cartridges and also come pre-loaded with a number of games. So far, the expanding range consists of offerings from Capcom, Taito, Atari and Technos.

✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Super Pocket: Neo Geo & Data East Edition

» Blaze Entertainment has three SNK cartridges announced, greatly expanding the Neo Geo Edition's built-in library.

» Interestingly, 15 of the 18 Data East games are on earlier Evercade arcade cartridges, so keep that in mind when buying.

» The Neo Geo Super Pocket fares better, with only one of its games appearing on the incoming Evercade carts.

We were surprised when Blaze Entertainment didn't announce a Neo Geo Evercade Alpha earlier this year, so it's pleasing to see its sister company Hyper Mega Tech! picking up the slack. Numerous licensing deals in recent years have meant that Neo Geo games are nowhere near as mystical as they once were, but that didn't stop us from immediately choosing this latest Super Pocket over its Data East counterpart.

It's certainly a stylish-looking device, with a black and grey finish that looks far less child-like than the orange and blue combination used on the Data East system. If you've used a Super Pocket before you'll find both devices very similar as little has been done to change how they look. Both units are pleasingly compact, feature rechargeable batteries and USB-C charging and you'll get around four hours of play. You will need to supply your own plug and cable though. The 2.8-inch IPS screen is every bit as sharp and responsive as previous Super Pockets and both systems feature a headphone socket. Both devices continue to feature the uncomfortable back buttons, but fortunately none of the games we played required them.

The 14 included Neo Geo games represent a solid insight into the console's back catalogue and includes shmups, one-on-one fighters and

» The Neo Geo Super Pocket (right) looks great and feels a lot more premium.
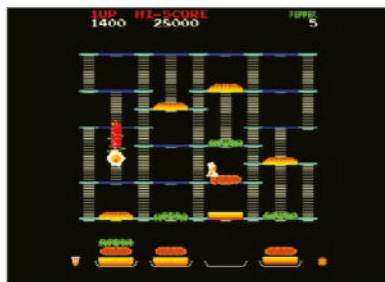
» [Super Pocket] Vertically orientated games don't fare too well on the Super Pocket's small screen.

» [Super Pocket] There's a great deal of variety on the Data East device like the puzzler *Chain Reaction*.

» [Super Pocket] *Metal Slug X* is one of the highlights of the Neo Geo Super Pocket library.

» [Super Pocket] *Last Resort* has appeared in countless compilations, but it's still a great Neo Geo shooter.

action games, meaning there's plenty of value here. *Alpha Mission II*, *Blazing Star* and *Last Resort* offer intense shooting, while fighters are represented by *Fatal Fury Special*, *Samurai Shodown II* and *The Last Blade*. Action is provided thanks to *Top Hunter: Roddy & Cathy*, *King Of The Monsters 2*, *Metal Slug X*, *Mutation Nation*, *Shock Troopers: 2nd Squad* and *Sengoku 3*, while *Soccer Brawl* and *Over Top* add further variety. That's an excellent selection, with the only weird omission being no game from *The King Of Fighters* series.

The Data East Super Pocket offers even more games clocking in at 18 and there's some big hitters included. *Bad Dudes Vs Dragon Ninja*, *BurgerTime*, *Joe & Mac: Caveman Ninja*, *Edward Randy* and *Tumblepop* are all great fun, although the likes of *B-Wings*, *Peter Pepper's Ice Cream Factory*, *Spinmaster* and *Chain Reaction* are less impressive. There's still a lot of choice here though with *Breakthru*, *Burnin' Rubber*, *Crude Buster*, *Gate Of Doom*, *Joe & Mac*

Returns, *Karate Champ*, *Lock 'N' Chase*, *Super BurgerTime* and *Wizard Fire* rounding out the collection.

The emulation across both systems is great, particularly the Data East Super Pocket, which offers games throughout the Eighties and Nineties, but it does suffer due to some of the titles being vertically orientated, meaning there's not a lot of screen estate to enjoy them. And as with previous Super Pockets, you won't be able to connect them to your TV. Both Super Pockets are also compatible with the Evercade cartridge range and while we didn't play everything, we didn't have any issues with the games we did play. While we prefer the Neo Geo offering, it's hard to see how either device is going to disappoint money-conscious gamers. ✱

In A Nutshell

While both Super Pockets are well made and offer solid emulation, just be mindful that the Data East option doesn't represent the same value as its Neo Geo counterpart.

★ PICK OF THE MONTH

Gex Trilogy

» **System:** Switch (version tested), PS5, Xbox Series S/X, PC » **Buy it for:** £24.99 » **Buy it from:** Online

No matter how much TV you watch, you probably haven't watched as much as Gex – a gecko whose sense of humour relies heavily on pop culture references. The leaping lizard served as the 3DO's most prominent platform game mascot, before having 3D adventures on other platforms. This collection from Limited Run Games brings together the PlayStation versions of his games, which are emulated using the company's Carbon Engine.

Gex is a staple of lists of Nineties mascots with attitude, and it's fair to say that his humour is an acquired taste. However, you might be surprised to find that while the games weren't the best examples of the genre upon their original release, all three are pretty solid and remain fun today. *Gex 3D: Enter The Gecko* fares the least well thanks to a limited draw distance, but the 3D games benefit from widescreen support and all three have quick saves and rewind functions available.

The European versions of *Enter The Gecko* and *Deep Cover Gecko* were unfortunately not in the package at the time of review. However, they've been added to the PC version and Limited Run Games has stated that console players will get to enjoy these versions. It would have been nice to have the Game Boy Color versions of those two games included too, as they're naturally very different to their PlayStation counterparts.

Still, the compilation has a generous helping of bonus content. You get artwork, box art and manuals, video interview content with *Gex* writer and voice actor Dana Gould, videos showing cut content and even the scrapped game *Gex Jr*, as well as an extensive sound test. It's clear that care has gone into a package that will delight *Gex* fans, and may pleasantly surprise those of you experiencing Tail Time for the first time.

» [Switch] Gex's ability to stick to walls and crawl along them sets him apart from other characters.

» [Switch] *Gex 3: Deep Cover Gecko* isn't quite up to Spyro's level, but it's a decent 3D platformer.

>> **Score 82%**
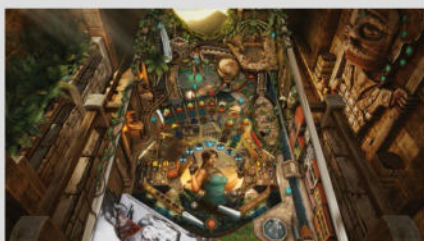
Tomb Raider Pinball

» **System:** PC (version tested), PS4, PS5, Switch, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X » **Buy it for:** £8.50
» **Buy it from:** Online

The latest expansion pack from Zen Studios offers two tables based on the exploits of Lara Croft. We had a huge amount of fun with *Secrets Of Croft Manor* due to its numerous ramps, clever missions and its overall table structure. *Adventures Of Lara Croft* (pictured) is a far tougher proposition thanks to its large open table space, lack of ramps and challenging missions that will require a lot of precision to hit. As with other games in the *Pinball FX* range there are additional challenges to complete in separate game modes, items to unlock and place in your virtual Pinroom and authentic feeling ball physics. It's the perfect distraction until Lara's next quest.
DARRAN JONES

>> **Score 71%**

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50 Indie Games That Changed The World

» **Buy it from:** bitmapbooks.com (on sale 20 August) » **Buy it for:** £32.49

From its slick presentation to developer input on every featured game, this is an absolute delight to read from Aaron Potter. While you won't find many hidden gems amongst the star-studded list, each featured game, from *Stardew Valley* and *Super Meat Boy* to *Spelunky* and *Hotline Miami* feels worthy of inclusion. You're told how each game changed the world and the insight you receive into its creation from various developers is often fascinating. While we've no issue with the games that do and don't make the final list (there is also an Honourable Mentions chapter for titles like *Braid*, *Hollow Knight*, *Celeste*, *Dear Esther* and *Terraria*) it does feel odd that the monumental *UFO 50* doesn't get a mention. Here's hoping it makes a later revision. Even with this small oversight, Aaron's book is an essential read for anyone that loves videogames. Don't miss it.
DARRAN JONES
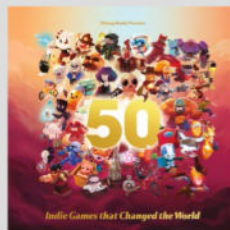
Irem Collection Vol 3

» **System:** Switch (version tested), PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X » **Buy it for:** £19.99+
» **Buy it from:** Online, strictlylimitedgames.com

This collection brings Irem's shoot-'em-up heritage to the fore, featuring the arcade games *Dragon Breed* and *Mystic Riders*, plus *Mr Heli* (or *Battle Chopper*) for arcade and PC Engine. There's no quibbling with the quality of the games included, and they feel varied despite belonging to the same genre. In-game features are good too, with quick saves, rewinds, cheats and online rankings, as well as a choice of Japanese or English language releases. However, at this price we'd expect some extras like artwork to sweeten the deal, and you don't really get any. Genre enthusiasts will have fun, but those less sure should wait for a price drop.
NICK THORPE

>> **Score 74%**
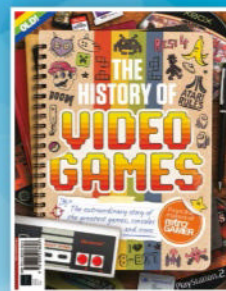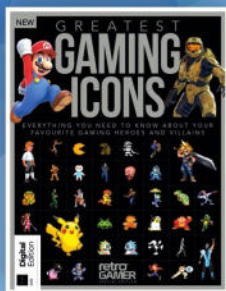
THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE
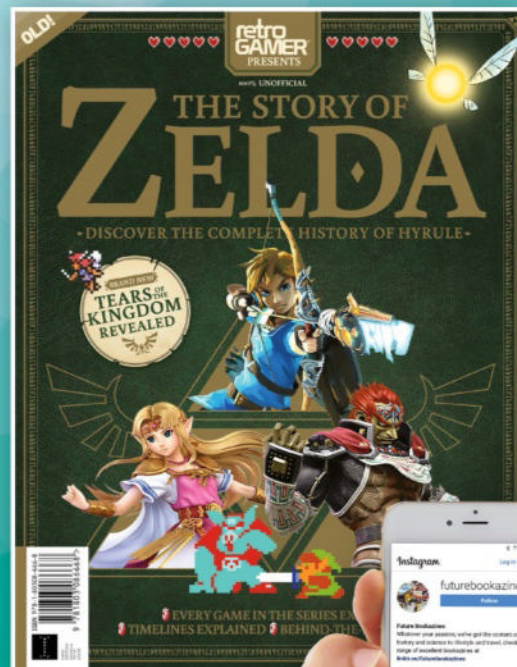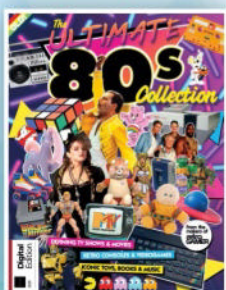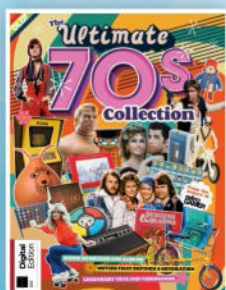
<!--- BROKE STUDIOS FOUNDER ANTOINE GOHIN (LEFT) AND JULIEN BOISSEAU (RIGHT). --->

<!--- [NES] THE GAME THAT STARTED IT ALL FOR ANTOINE, TWIN DRAGONS. --->

<INTRO> TURNING YOUR GAME INTO A PHYSICAL PRODUCT CAN BE DIFFICULT. THAT'S WHERE THE HOMEBREW FACTORY COULD HELP, AS OUR MAIN FEATURE DESCRIBES. THERE ARE GREAT CONVERSIONS BETWEEN FORMATS AND AN INTERESTING HANDHELD RELEASE IN THE REVIEWS. JAGUAR FANS WILL BE ENJOYING A CLASSIC ARCADE FIGHTING GAME SOON, COURTESY OF OUR CHAMPION CODER, AND THERE'S A CANDY QUEST IMMINENT FOR GAME BOY COLOR. WHETHER YOU BUY PHYSICALLY OR DIGITALLY, CHECK OUT THESE GREAT GAMES SOON. </INTRO>

<!--- WE WERE RECENTLY SENT REVIEW CODE OF PIZZA POP AND FORTIFIED ZONE 2 AND THE PRODUCTION VALUES SEEM VERY GOOD --->

<MAIN HEADER>

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

<INTRO> FRENCH PUBLISHER BROKE STUDIO HAS LAUNCHED A NEW WAY FOR HOMEBREW CREATORS TO SELL PHYSICAL PRODUCTS — THE HOMEBREW FACTORY. </INTRO>

<BODY> **Antoine Gohin launched Broke Studio with his NES game *Twin Dragons* in 2017.** "I did all the code, the PCB design and pretty much everything else regarding manufacturing," Antoine tells us. "Having the production line in place to manufacture NES games, I thought that it would be interesting to offer my services to help other developers manufacture and sell their games. That's how Broke Studio became a publisher, with *Micro Mages* and *Nebs 'N Debs* being added in 2019."

Broke has since published 26 games across multiple formats and created physical games for 29 creators running their own Kickstarters. Antoine's favourite console however remains the NES, telling us, "The community around this console is great, very helpful and supportive." So what has inspired the new initiative? "Homebrew Factory is a two-in-one platform: on one side, it's a store where gamers can discover and purchase homebrew games; on the other, it's a powerful online tool for creators," Antonie explains. "They set up a product page and submit a configuration request – a form with all the details needed to manufacture their game. They can also choose whether they want to launch a preorder campaign or go straight into production. It's a simple way for creators to self-publish their games with no financial risk when running a preorder campaign, or

with minimal risk when producing a (very) small batch. They can even let us take care of the fulfilment if they have already assembled copies of their game. They can send us copies, set up their product page, and we'll take care of everything else."

Julien Boisseau joined the team in 2023, and takes care of social media, customer service, QA testing and packaging design. "Developers usually already have their artwork done. If necessary, we can put

RECENT RELEASES

CHANGEABLE GUARDIAN ESTIQUE
<The superb NES and Famicom shoot-'em-up featured in **RG**268 and earned a deserved Retro Sizzler award in **RG**271.

DATA MAN
<Olof Naessén took us behind the scenes of this *Robotron*-inspired NES game in **RG**256. It ended up receiving a score of 86% in **RG**262.

96 | RETRO GAMER

<!--- POKETTOHIRO FOR GAME BOY COLOR IS A FAVOURITE RELEASE OF BOTH ANTOINE AND JULIEN. --->

<!--- [NES] PUZZLE GAME MAZEZAM CHALLENGE FROM ALEKMAUL STUDIOS WAS SEEKING FUNDING THROUGH HOMEBREW FACTORY (AT THE TIME OF WRITING). --->
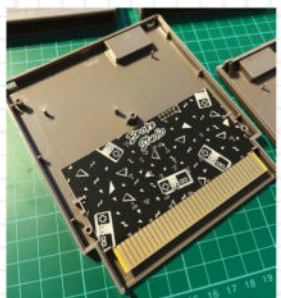
<!--- HERE YOU CAN SEE NES CARTS BEING ASSEMBLED. --->

037 them in touch with artists to work on a cover, and
038 we can handle the packaging design," says Julien. If
039 you're interested in submitting it's worth noting that
040 new games need to be completed before publishing.
041 "We usually prefer to play the full game before making
042 any decision, but there can be exceptions, like *The
043 Fallen Crown*, for which we had only played a demo,"
044 Julian continues. "Physical production takes about one
045 to three months once we have all the files."
046   New offerings are currently on sale through
047 homebrew-factory.com (see Recent Releases) including
048 Jaleco games *Pizza Pop* (NES) and *Fortified Zone 2*
049 (Game Boy), both getting their first European releases
050 with English translations and enhancements. Although
051 the NES and Famicom remain the focus, other formats
052 are supported. "The Super Nintendo would be the next
053 logical step for us, but I'd really like to see what can be
054 done for the Neo Geo," Antoine says. "Also, I'd love
055 to make a game again… life's too short!" Julien adds,
056 "Yeah, Super Nintendo and Neo Geo! But secretly,
057 the WonderSwan!" We look forward to the next titles
058 produced by the Homebrew Factory. `</BODY>`

<!--- [PC] THE SECOND LEVEL OF BATTY, RECREATED FROM THE SPECTRUM VERSION. --->

NEWS BYTES

`<INTRO>` NOW ORGANISED BY FORMAT, HERE ARE THE LATEST NEWS BYTES TO ENJOY `</INTRO>`

Atari STE: Matt Lacey converted Rob Caporetto's ZX Next game *Invasion Of The Emerald Saucers* (the latter is available via the same link). Name your price and grab it from bit.ly/emerald-ste

C64: *Tyrian's Towers* is ICON64's take on the isometric arcade game *Crystal Castles*, with tape and cartridge versions also on sale from Psytronik. Grab it at bit.ly/tyrian-c64

Game Boy: *Castle Of Terror* is the latest title from PCNONO Games and can be found at bit.ly/castleofterror-gb – with the physical cartridge to preorder at pcnono.es/

Jaguar: Ricco59 converted the Atari ST shmup *Space Zot* (see **RG**240's preview). Get blasting by visiting bit.ly/zot-jaguar

PC: Space-Time Games released its remake of the Spectrum classic *Batty,* with 15 levels from the Spectrum game and 64 recreated C64 levels. Get wall busting by visiting bit.ly/batty-pc

Pico-8: Tom Mulgrew's *Air Pico* is a flight simulator, where you fly charter flights, make deliveries and even spray crops. Download it from bit.ly/air-pico

Sinclair QL: Check out the great conversion of the classic isometric *Batman* game at bit.ly/batman-ql You'd be bats to miss it.

Saturn: Zhamul's multiplayer PlayStation game *Silkasaurus* has been converted for 2-12 players with multitap. You can download it from bit.ly/silkasaurus

Various: Adventure game *Echoes From The Future* by Dareint is available for a wide range of formats at just $2. Grab it from bit.ly/echoes-various
    Mazy2 is the latest multiformat outing from Japanese coder Inufuto. You'll find it at bit.ly/mazy2-various

ZX Spectrum: The latest PuttyCAD and 100TinSoldiers release is *Baby-Man Vs Terminatots Part 1.* Get terminating by visiting bit.ly/terminatots1

`<INTRO>` BROKE STUDIO GAMES THAT ARE AVAILABLE AT HOMEBREW-FACTORY.COM `</INTRO>`

FLEA 2
We interviewed Alistair Low all the way back in **RG**241, and this hyperactive NES sequel scored 88% in **RG**267. It's a highly enjoyable follow-up.

INSPECTOR WAFFLES: EARLY DAYS
Available for Game Boy Color and on Steam, this cute feline detective story was previewed in **RG**255 and reviewed well in **RG**267.

SKATE CAT
Another great NES game we previewed, talking to Dale and his son SJ in **RG**246. Skate Cat is also available to play on the Switch and Switch 2.

CHAMPION CODER

CHRIS BRYANT

<INTRO> CHRIS IS A LIFELONG ATARI FAN AND WAS 11 WHEN MORTAL KOMBAT WAS ORIGINALLY RELEASED </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: DALLAS, TEXAS   WEBSITE: PATREON.COM/TRUFUNGAMES   FORMAT: JAGUAR   PREVIOUS GAMES: SUPER RAD RAYGUN (PC, MAC, LINUX), RAD RAYGUN (XBOX 360 INDIE GAME), BOP N' POP! (XBOX 360 INDIE GAME)   WORKING ON: MORTAL KOMBAT />

WHAT GOT YOU INTO PROGRAMMING FOR THE JAGUAR, CHRIS?

<When I was 14, I got into programming because I wanted to make my own games. Today, I work as a software engineer in the corporate world, but my passion for gaming never faded. Two years ago, I decided to dip my toe into homebrew development, and I chose the Jaguar! I'm writing *Mortal Kombat* in C using JagStudio and the Raptor API. I test the game using the Virtual Jaguar and BigPEmu emulators, as well as GameDrive to test it on real hardware. ♪>

<!--- "MORTAL KOMBAT 2 WOULD BE AN OBVIOUS CHOICE [NEXT], BUT I WANT TO KEEP MY OPTIONS OPEN," SAYS CHRIS. --->

HOW ARE YOU CONVERTING GRAPHICS AND AUDIO?

<The graphics are from several different versions – including arcade, MS-DOS, and Super Nintendo. It's a balancing act to see what the Jaguar can handle performance-wise and still look as close to the arcade version as possible. The sound effects are straight from the arcade, but they are trimmed and reduced to save space. For music, I am currently using songs from the Amiga ports, but these are placeholders. I've reached out to chiptune artists to see if we can come up with songs that sound closer to the arcade. The toughest part is fitting all the assets onto a 6MB cartridge. ♪>

CAN YOU TELL US WHAT STILL NEEDS TO BE DONE WITH THE GAME?

<Currently, the game has nine playable fighters: Johnny Cage, Kano, Raiden, Liu Kang, Scorpion, Sub-Zero, Sonya, Reptile, and Kasumi (a Jaguar exclusive). I need to add endurance matches, Goro, Shang Tsung, and Test Your Might. Once these are taking care of, it's fixing bugs, improving performance, and polishing. ♪>

HOW CAN OUR READERS HELP?

<I have a Patreon page where folks can sign up to be testers, and they will get their names in the credits! Currently, the game is only playable on an actual Jaguar using a GameDrive. I would LOVE to obtain a licence from Warner Bros to distribute the game physically. But the chances of that happening are slim. In all likelihood, the game will be a free ROM. ♪>

<!--- [ATARI JAGUAR] SCORPION GETS HIS HOOK INTO THE JAGUAR-EXCLUSIVE CHARACTER KASUMI. --->

<!--- [ATARI JAGUAR] SUB-ZERO HAS FINISHED HIS BOUT AGAINST LIU KANG BY PERFORMING A NASTY FATALITY. --->

DATA BURST

GEMDALUS

<INFO FORMAT: AMIGA AGA/CD32 (PAL DISPLAY, 1.6 MB CHIP RAM)   CREDITS: RETREAM (SIMONE BEVILACQUA)   PRICE: $5 OR MORE (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD AS ADF, LHA, ISO)   WEB: BIT.LY/GEMDALUS />

<BODY> *Gemdalus* has you controlling a gem harvester, which starts each level in the central home square. As the harvester moves away from home, it leaves behind a pipe and can only change direction at intersections. The harvester can retreat along the pipe by holding Fire (lifting any sections it passes over until Fire is released) and the aim is to clear all the on-screen gems while avoiding the patrolling drones. The harvester can kill drones, but if a drone touches the pipe (or the harvester hits its pipe), a life is lost. Bonuses include the Zapper that lets the pipe kill drones and the Brake that slows drones down for ten seconds. Meanwhile, the Skull Malus stops the pipe from retracting but awards extra points. Selecting Fixed layouts on the title screen gives identical level layouts every game and allows the high score to be saved; switching Fixed layouts off gives different procedurally generated levels.

The Sierra classic *Oil's Well* inspired this colourful maze game. The graphics have a great metallic sheen, and the presentation throughout is excellent. Beating your high score will draw you back, although it also needs the randomly created mazes for boosting the longevity. This is a very enjoyable release from Retream and a must for puzzle fans. </BODY>

SCORE: **84%**

<!--- [AMIGA AGA] THE ROUND BLACK ICONS ARE THE BONUSES, WHICH CAN ALSO INCREASE THE SCORE MULTIPLIER. --->
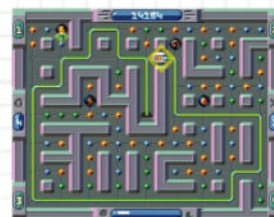
<!--- [AMIGA AGA] COLLIDING WITH YOUR 'TRAIL' PROVES FATAL. --->

<!--- [AMIGA AGA] THE MAIN MENU ALSO SHOWS THE CURRENT HIGH SCORES. --->

THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<!--- [GAME GEAR] IN SURVIVAL MODE, SHOOT THE GREY BALL TO START DEMOLISHING, BUT DON'T SHOOT THE GREY PEOPLE! --->
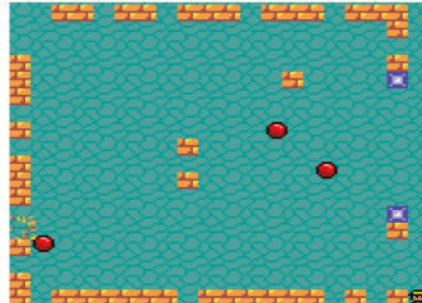
<!--- [GAME GEAR] HIDING IN THE CORNER MAY NOT BE THE BEST TACTIC TO USE WHILE PLAYING ARCADE MODE! --->

DANGEROUS DEMOLITION

<INFO FORMAT: GAME GEAR **CREDITS:** DR LUDOS (DESIGN, CODE), JADEN H (MUSIC), 2MINDS (PUBLISHER) **PRICE:** PHYSICAL PREORDER FROM €39 **WEB:** BIT.LY/DEMOLITION-GG **/>**

<BODY> **This quirky game combines shooting with _Breakout_ and features four distinct modes.** In Arcade mode, there are 30 increasingly difficult levels where you, as Leo, must demolish all the walls. Grey wrecking balls enter the arena, but they only do damage to walls when you shoot them and turn them red, and Leo must avoid being squashed by the red balls! Time Attack sees you play any completed level and try to set a record time, while Survival requires you to clear the level without shooting any people. Finally, Dodge throws multiple balls at you and challenges you to survive as long as possible. _Dangerous Demolition_ is fun and tries something different, but it may not have the depth for the long haul. **</BODY>**

SCORE: **75%**
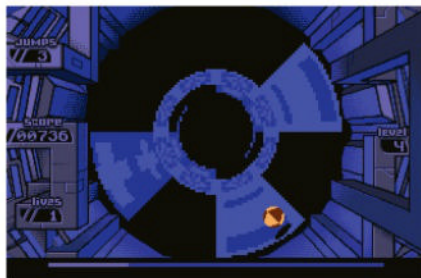
<!--- [ATARI ST] CERTAIN TILES WILL MAKE THE TUBE LIGHTER OR DARKER, MAKING IT HARDER TO SEE THE PATH AHEAD. --->

<!--- [ATARI ST] DANCING ON THE CEILING IN YOOMP! IS AN IMPORTANT SKILL TO MASTER. --->

YOOMP!

<INFO FORMAT: ATARI ST/STE **CREDITS:** DEKADENCE (BRITELITE – CODE, BRACKET – GRAPHICS, RICKY MARTIN – SOUND) **PRICE:** NAME YOUR OWN PRICE (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD) **WEB:** BIT.LY/YOOMP-ST **/>**

<BODY> **The brilliant Atari 8-bit game has finally made the jump to the Atari ST and it's absolutely been worth the wait.** Control your bouncing ball through a series of tubes, landing on helpful squares (such as the up arrow for a double-jump) and avoiding hazards (including black squares and gaps). The levels get more challenging as you progress, and this version adds a brand-new Rush mode, where you try to complete all 22 levels as a continuous sequence with just one life! All in all, this is a genuinely excellent conversion with smooth graphics and a great soundtrack, so don't miss it. **</BODY>**

SCORE: **87%**

PROCESSING

<INTRO> MAXBEFORETHEONE'S CANDY QUEST IS A FORTHCOMING HALLOWEEN-THEMED PLATFORMER FOR THE GAME BOY COLOR WITH GORGEOUS GRAPHICS **</INTRO>**

<BODY> **Max became a Game Boy fan in high school.** "I also got into making pixel art. I started making texture ROM hacks for _Super Mario Land_ and _Link's Awakening_. Then, I discovered GB Studio. _Candy Quest_ is being made with the latest version, and Aseprite for the background and sprite work."

The player controls the Pumpkids, collecting candies for the Pumpking. "_Candy Quest_ was originally going to be an _Animal Crossing_-themed platformer," says Max. "The Pumpkids are inspired by the pumpkin masks you could obtain in _Animal Crossing: New Leaf_."

Max hopes eventually to produce a physical cartridge. "The game still has a decent chunk of content left to be worked on – the entire fourth world, which is what I'm currently tackling, a shorter fifth world, story-centred content such as multiple endings, and unlockables to reward players. I can't say for certain if the game will be finished this year, but no matter how long it takes, the wait will be worth it!" Try the most recent demo at bit.ly/candyquest-demo **</BODY>**

<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] PURPLE PUMPKID SHOUTS BOO TO SCARE AWAY ENEMIES AND CAN USE JUMP AND DASH MOVES TO PICK UP CANDIES. --->

AMIGA BANGERS

The disks to die for

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

The Amiga is the cover star for this issue, as the 16-bit computer platform is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. In recognition of this, the team decided to get together and have a chat about the games that really defined the machine for them – not only the very best to play, but the ones that made the biggest initial impression and favourite conversions from other systems, too. Just don't get us talking about the wildlife, or things will go horribly wrong…

NICK
Was there one particular game

> " Oh, screw Hard Drivin' – it's too flipping hard. I never made it round the whole course "
> **TIM EMPEY**

that you saw back in the day that made you think, "Wow, I need an Amiga"?

DARRAN
This is certainly a clichéd answer, but it's probably *Shadow Of The Beast*. It looked absolutely astonishing and I knew my Amstrad was pretty much obsolete upon viewing it.

TIM
I think it was *Defender Of The Crown*, the graphics just blew me away. It was certainly one of the games that my brother and I played all night when we first got the Amiga. Couldn't do the jousting though!

DARRAN
The Cinemaware stuff was really impressive to be fair. Things like *It Came From The Desert* felt like watching a movie.

NICK
I have the NES version of *Defender Of The Crown*, which isn't quite so spectacular. I did like *SDI* quite a bit, though, just for how thoroughly Eighties it is.

» [Amiga] *Lemmings* is a desert island essential for both Darran and Tim. "Oh no," indeed.

DARRAN
Can anyone think of a game concept that wouldn't have worked on the earlier computers? After all, we all know the Amiga is the big dog when it comes to visuals.

TIM
In terms of 3D gaming I reckon *Hunter* is a good start. Lots to do and see in that game, shame just about everything killed me when I played it.

DARRAN
I only discovered *Hunter* thanks to Graham Pembrey's Making Of. Wow, that would have blown me away as a youngster.

NICK
The 3D stuff is really impressive, yeah. Going back and looking at *Formula One Grand Prix* for the main feature, with the context of it being between *Hard Drivin'* and *Virtua Racing*, was crazy – and they were arcade games.

DARRAN
It's a shame Geoff Crammond no longer makes games. The worlds he could build now.

TIM
Oh, screw *Hard Drivin'* – it's too flipping hard. I never made it round the whole course. And looking back at my replies here… I think I was rubbish at games back then.

DARRAN
While we're on the subject of arcade games, what were your favourite Amiga conversions? Mine are *Rainbow Islands* and *Marble Madness*.

TIM
The NewZealand Story and *Operation Thunderbolt* were damn good. *Street Fighter II*… not so much.

NICK
I remember *Rodland* being really good, too.
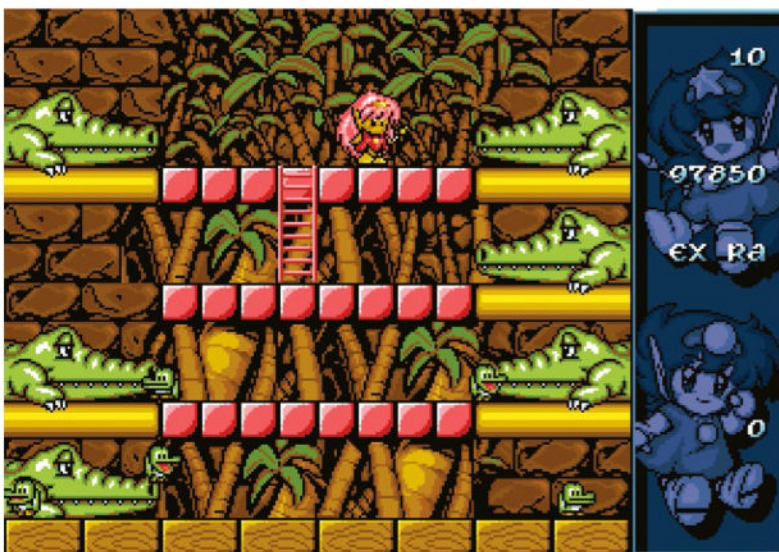
» [Amiga] Nick encountered *Rodland* early in his time on **Retro Gamer** and it has stuck with him ever since.

» [Amiga] *Hunter* was a 3D treat, and had exceptionally forward-thinking game design too.

» [Amiga] Like many a gamer, Darran was dazzled by *Shadow Of The Beast*'s graphical quality.

» [Amiga] Darran has a soft spot for the *Marble Madness* conversion, and it does look great.

DARRAN

Rampart was a lot of fun, and I quite liked *Golden Axe* as well (although it wasn't a patch on the Mega Drive version).

NICK

I do always closely associate the Mega Drive with the Amiga, just because there were a lot of ports. You definitely felt the control differences in games like *Cannon Fodder*.

DARRAN

Yeah, as decent as the Mega Drive version of that is, it's not as good as the Amiga game. So if you were stuck on a desert island, what three games would you take with you?

TIM

Super Cars II, *Lemmings* and I may as well also pick *Hunter*, to see if I could finish it this time. Though I did use to crash when using the hang-glider and fall off the bike all the time.

NICK

Definitely *Speedball 2*, just in case anyone else ends up stuck there. *Another World* because I've replayed it plenty of times, and it holds up every time, and *Lotus II* for some variety.

DARRAN

I'd go for Lemmings because I've never completed it. The timeless fun of *Pinball Dreams* and *The Secret Of Monkey Island 2*, because when I finish it, I'll use its many disks to make a corral for my pet crab Spanky.

NICK

So Darran, is that a pet crab you

» [Amiga] *Defender Of The Crown* was an early showcase of the Amiga's power for Tim and his brother.

adopted on the island, or is it one you already had and took with you? Inquiring minds need to know.

DARRAN

I'll have used my bird knowledge to scare him out of his shell by imitating the sound of a Greater Black Backed Gull, because we all know there's no such thing as a seagull.

NICK

Apparently, *The Quest For The Time-Bird* is pretty good on the Amiga, but I digress.

DARRAN

Ah, that came to my attention because of a reader I think. Damn, now I need to play it.

TIM

Well great, this was supposed to be about brilliant Amiga games and Darran's turned it into a chat about birds. Again! What's next month's Hot Topic subject – best birds in gaming?!

DARRAN

Come now. This is **Retro Gamer**, Tim, not *Playboy*. ✳

» [Amiga] *Operation Thunderbolt* was one of the conversions that managed to make an impression on Tim.

» [Amiga] We think Nick has misjudged his desert island choice – it'll make him miss ice-cream.

READERS REACT

What are your desert island Amiga games?

Ken Harrison
The Chaos Engine, *Sensible World Of Soccer* and *Lotus II*. All boxes ticked for gameplay, looks and sound. It doesn't get any better and I still play all three regularly.

Simon Burton
Virus – getting reacquainted with the controls will pass away a good amount of time. *Hunter* – might pick up some tips to get off the desert island. *Carrier Command* – hope it's in real time and I get picked up before the enemy can capture my island.

Tom Hahn
Sensible Soccer, *Theme Park* and *Formula One Grand Prix* by Geoff Crammond. Because they were very playable and provided endless fun!

HighScorsese
Prince Of Persia, *Turrican II* and *Agony* for me. *POP* because it's a great game and I can keep trying to beat it faster, *Turrican* for some action platforming, and *Agony* for its fantasy art style that looks like a Yes album and being a shmup where you play as the Psygnosis owl.

Mark
The baller move would be to forgo two of the games and take DevPac, Deluxe Paint and *Lemmings* for entertainment while you build your own games.

Stephen Smith
Pinball Fantasies – the best in the series to my mind (AGA or OCS, doesn't matter). *SimCity* – the 1MB version, which looked so much better than the 512K version. *Lotus II* – I'm terrible at it, but it's probably my favourite driving game on the Amiga.

Rich May
The Settlers – chill kingdom building times. *The Chaos Engine* – banging tunes and a cracking atmosphere. *Pinball Fantasies* – endlessly replayable.

Fernando Gonzalez Sidders
Sensible Soccer – the funniest football game in history. *Another World* – a revolutionary game at the time, it's like a short film. *The Secret of Monkey Island* – one of the best point-and-click adventures I've played.

Sanny Syberfeldt
SWOS and *Civilization* for endless replayability, and *The Chaos Engine* since I might finally have enough time on my hands to beat it.

RESIDENT EVIL WITH SIGNED BARRY BURTON PHOTO
"I was lucky to find this signed by Greg Smith, who played Barry Burton in the game, being sold online."
PRICE: €70

CUSTOM BUILT SUPER NINTENDO WITH CARRY CASE
"I built this myself using parts I purchased from online sellers."
PRICE: £45

SUPER COLLECTENDO

Mark Smith's love for the SNES comes from lifelong friendships

At the age of seven, Mark Smith was about to embark on a journey that would create lasting friendships. "In 1992, my parents took me to the local toy store to get me a Master System II and a copy of *Sonic The Hedgehog*," he tells us. "That was it for me, I was videogame crazy after that. Every kid on the street ended up getting a Master System as well, so we would be forever at each other's houses to hang out and borrow or swap games."

Sometime later, Mark discovered a new console to indulge in. "When my lifelong friend Charlie got the SNES a few years later, that was the game-changer," Mark remembers. "We would spend countless hours playing *F-Zero*, *Starwing*, *Super Mario World* and whatever weekly game he got on rental. I remember us thinking that this had to be the peak of technology. Then, *Donkey Kong Country* happened!"

Mark kept his old games but only started seriously collecting when he found like-minded folk on Facebook. "I've always been a casual collector of games and consoles, but the internet was a big reason I started seriously collecting," he explains, "Before, I would occasionally play the games and consoles that were left over from my childhood or pick up the odd cartridge on eBay, but as Facebook groups became popular, it was so great to interact with retro-game enthusiasts and buy up what they had to offer."

Mark also repairs consoles and finds this is a great way to connect with fellow retro gamers. "I became really interested in repairing consoles in the 2010s, so being able to buy things non-working for a good price and fix them also grew my collection. I met my lifelong friends Tobes and Radu simply by repairing Nintendo systems for them. For me, moments like these are better than the actual collecting."

As with all collectors, Mark has also had his fair share of bargains. "I was at a car boot sale around 2017," Mark tells us. "I was rooting through a big bag of VHS tapes and pulled out mint condition copies of *Manhunt*, *Manhunt 2*, *Final Fantasy VII*, *Devil May Cry 3*, *GTA Vice City* and *Predator: Concrete Jungle*. I paid a total of £4 for all of them. It was the right place at the right time."

Originally from Essex, Mark now lives in Estonia, and this has opened his eyes to having a more varied collection. "Living in Estonia has exposed me to obscure items that I haven't seen before, so I'm sure items from the post-Soviet times will make it onto the shelves. Also, Japanese games have my attention right now. It's so cool to have the Japanese artwork next to the Western releases. I'm travelling to Japan later this year, so I am sure some amazing items will be coming home with me."

To finish this off, we ask Mark what videogame he still wants to add to his collection. "It has to be *Resident Evil 2* for the N64. It fascinates me how they were able to port that title to the console, given the technical limitations, and I have an undying love for the early *Resident Evil* games." ✱

BIO

NAME:
Mark Smith

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

LOCATION:
Tallinn, Estonia

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ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
£10,000

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Super Nintendo

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

FAVOURITE GAME:
Resident Evil 2

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

INSTAGRAM:
tigsi.retro

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Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com retrogamermag.bsky.social

STARWING SNES BUNDLE
"This one was purchased from a friend in a Facebook group."
PRICE: £90

MIGHTY MORPHIN POWER RANGERS & TMHT TOURNAMENT FIGHTERS
"I love both these titles on the SNES and found them online from private sellers."
PRICE: €260

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

SUPER METROID
■ "This is one of my favourite games. I love how it is bundled with a players' guide; this is a great collector's item. I snagged this on a Facebook group."
PAID: £140

BARGAIN HUNT
Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR
AMIGA 500
Commodore's classic computer isn't a hard item to find for sale. However, prices vary wildly depending on condition. Loose used units can be as little as **£100,** with mint boxed ones going for as much as **£200.** Those wanting the matching monitor could be looking at paying several hundred more pounds on top, so keep that in mind.

AUF WIEDERSEHEN MONTY
This timeless Speccy title can be purchased for under **£10** if condition isn't an issue. You'll pay up to **£30** if you want it in good condition.

TIGER-HELI
Those looking for a loose NES cart of Toaplan's scrolling shooter can spend as little as **£12.** Even nice condition boxed copies can be had for under **£40** if you're patient.

TUSKER
The Amstrad version is hard to find in mint condition, although complete boxed copies can be found for under **£20.** Budget-conscious collectors may want to look for the much cheaper KIXX release instead.

SONIC 3D: FLICKIES' ISLAND
This is a common PAL Mega Drive title that can cost under **£10** for a loose cart. Complete copies cost under **£20,** and even mint condition copies can sell for as little as **£30.**

RAYMAN 2: THE GREAT ESCAPE
PAL platforming action can be yours for **£12** if you go cart-only. Collectors may want to look for a complete copy with the elusive map for around **£40.**

DRAKAN: ORDER OF THE FLAME
This is not one you'll find complete all too often, and the big box PC version will cost over **£50,** although the occasional disc-only copy will surface and cost around **£20.**

ONIMUSHA TACTICS
Capcom's classic samurai series remains popular and loose carts of this strategy spin-off start at **£25.** Complete boxed copies go for over **£50,** and mint copies can often go over **£100.**

BENEATH A STEEL SKY
This was Tony Warriner's favourite game that he worked on, and complete copies of this adventure epic can be had for under **£20,** with mint copies costing around **£60.** Alternatively, it's readily available digitally on the likes of GOG.com for a few pounds.

HOW MUCH?!
DONKEY KONG JR MATH
If doing maths couldn't get any worse, it will now cost over **£3,000** to own a copy of number lessons from *Donkey Kong Jr.* King of the big spenders!

Prices correct at time of print

59700 PTS.

LV.3

» [Game Boy Advance] The bosses tower over Joe, making it all the more satisfying when he finally bests them.

» If you see a loose cartridge on eBay for under £45, be wary, it's most likely fake.

» Limited Run Games' physical release is a good alternative for those who want to save some cash.

NINJA COP

Hudson Soft's Ninja Cop swung into action on the Game Boy Advance, delivering fast-paced, justice-fuelled thrills and playing like a cross between Strider and Bionic Commando. It now demands a hefty price on the second-hand market, but is it actually worth the effort to track down?

THE GAME

While you could imagine stumbling across *Ninja Cop* in an Eighties video store, due to its cheesy-sounding name, it's actually an impressively acrobatic platformer from Hudson Soft. Released for Nintendo's Game Boy Advance in 2003 and known as *Ninja Five-O* in the States it has received cult status in more recent years due to its known quality as an entertaining action game and the high price of entry if you want to take the plunge and buy a physical copy.

Hudson Soft's game has a simple premise, placing you in the athletic form of Joe Osugi, a skilled ninja who is waging a vendetta against the Mad Masks, a terrorist group who have kidnapped a bunch of hostages and

are holding them captive across five challenging missions. In many ways *Ninja Cop* actually plays out like a lost offshoot of the *Shinobi* series. Like Sega's game, missions contain several levels with the final one being a boss fight, there are hostages to rescue and you're playing as a deadly ninja. *Ninja Cop* differentiates itself with the inclusion of Joe's grappling hook, which allows him to stylishly swing through each stage. It also serves as a way for Joe to reach otherwise inaccessible areas and there's a lot of smart level design where the grappling hook is your only means to reach certain hostages. These prisoners are used as shields by their aggressors and if you accidentally kill one you'll lose a significant portion of your life.

THE QUALITY

There's no denying that *Ninja Cop* is a very entertaining game and it's also extremely polished in numerous areas. Although the visual design of everything is rather on the small side, the actual animation of Joe and his enemies is of a very high standard. This smaller scale also means that when you do encounter the game's many bosses, they're often huge in size and easily dwarf Joe's tiny form.

Initially it takes a while to get used to the game's swinging mechanics, but once you do, you'll be zipping through stages with ease. While *Ninja Cop* is a fairly linear game, it still offers plenty of exploration as missing hostages are often kept behind doors which can lead to new areas. These rooms
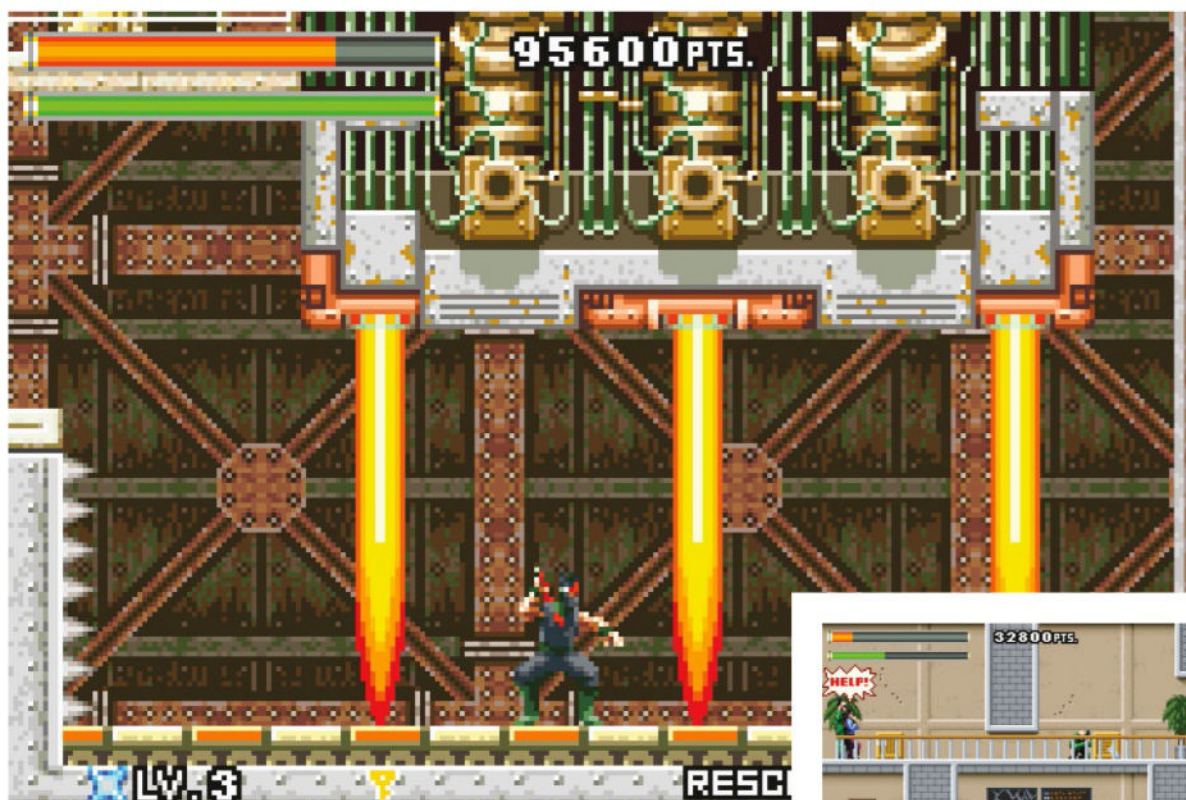
» [Game Boy Advance] It's not just enemies you need to worry about, *Ninja Cop* is filled with a variety of dangerous hazards.

can sometimes be quite puzzle-like to explore as you attempt to sneak past enemies by crouching or swinging past them, and it's always satisfying whenever you're able to clear a level without killing any hostages. It's certainly tough though, and some might find the challenge a little too much.

WHY IT'S EXPENSIVE

It's unclear how many copies of *Ninja Cop* were published by Konami, but its print runs for its smaller games have always been on the conservative side, which is most likely a contributing factor to its current scarcity. Interestingly, despite being made by a Japanese developer, *Ninja Cop* was never released in Japan either, which would also factor into its current desirability, as any interested gamers from that country would have had no choice but to import it if they wanted to add it into their collections. *Ninja Cop*'s reputation will have also added to its price tag as more gamers will have sought it out after seeing it mentioned in numerous Best Game Boy Advance Games lists. Add in the fact that Game Boy Advance games come in boxes, and their

extra fragility makes the acquisition of complete copies in good condition that little bit harder to achieve.

CHEAPER ALTERNATIVES

Unless you're adamant about owning an original Game Boy Advance cartridge it's actually very easy to officially experience *Ninja Cop* today. The game is currently available digitally through Limited Run Games, which re-released it via its Carbon Engine. It's priced at £19.99 and can be found on PC, PS4, PS5 and Nintendo's Switch. Additionally, Limited Run Games released physical versions for the Switch, PS4 and PS5, although these have long since sold out. These versions rarely top £85 to buy in complete condition, which is still a lot of money, but significantly cheaper than the £455-£800 a boxed Game Boy Advance version can currently reach. While we always personally prefer to own the original version of the game whenever possible, re-releases like this are ultimately a very good thing for gamers as they allow so many more people to access long-lost classics.

» [Game Boy Advance] You'll often have to navigate tight crawl spaces or span walls to reach your goal.

» [Game Boy Advance] Sections like this really test your swinging skills. Try not to swear!

THE BOTTOM LINE

As great as *Ninja Cop* is, that high point of entry is going to be far too much for most gamers. If you can justify the outlay you'll discover a very good game, although keep in mind that there appears to be no way to easily erase existing saves, which may put some off. Our advice is to go for the newer version with its quality-of-life extras as it's far more easier on the wallet and arguably improves the original experience by a considerable amount. ✳

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

XBOX ~~360~~ 180

Stuart Hunt explains why Microsoft's second console remains its best

Microsoft should have named its second console the Xbox 180, because that's kind of what it pulled off with the machine. Despite those infamous early technical issues, with the dreaded Red Ring Of Death causing much anxiety among gamers back in the Noughties, Microsoft turned things around in spectacular fashion.

It launched a games console that, while initially felt as stable as playing Jenga on a waterbed, and looked like a VHS player launched by Apple, went toe-to-toe with the PlayStation 3 and sold more than three times as many units of the original Xbox (according to some quick internet research). In years to come, I do think that the seventh console generation could be seen as the last 'classic console generation'. Let me explain what I mean by that…

These days everything is online and data reliant. In those generations most big games only released on physical media, in more stable states and didn't require so much faffing about. Want to play the latest videogame these days? Sure, first, free up a third of your hard-drive space, then set the game to install overnight. Sometimes you may even have to create an online account, check some T&Cs, and make sure you're always online for the constant updates and upselling. Can you imagine us having to jump through these same hoops to play *Cybernator* or *Desert Strike*?

When I go into my local branch of CEX I always do the same thing. First, I check out the retro section to see how many copies of *Super Mario Land 2* and *Cool Spot* they have safely secured behind glass. I then completely bypass the current generation of games to poke around the Xbox 360 shelves, remembering what a great era for gaming that was. Occasionally, I even treat myself to something I missed the first time around for a few quid (recently it was *James Bond 007: Blood Stone*).

Nostalgia naturally plays a big part of this for me. My full-time games journalist days began and ended in that seventh console generation. During that time, I worked as a staff writer, and then features editor, on this very magazine, occasionally freelancing for Imagine's Xbox, PlayStation and Nintendo magazines.

That generation launched some memorable IPs and game mash-ups: *Assassin's Creed* (*GTA* meets *Tomb Raider*), *Mirror's Edge* (*Jumping Flash* meets *Tomb Raider*), *Rock Band* (*Guitar Hero* meets *Gauntlet*) and arguably the best game of that period: *Bayonetta* (*Devil May Cry* meets *God Hand*). And it felt like I had a front-row seat to it all!

We also had some talented developer studios that are no longer here. Bizarre Creations, Free Radical Design, Black Rock Studio, to name just a few… oh, I almost forgot Grin. Grin did that great 2009 *Bionic Commando* 3D reboot, plus the *Rearmed* NES remake.

For many, that generation also had some of the best games in their respective franchises: *GTA IV*, *Assassin's Creed II*, *Gears Of War 2* and *Fable II*. I remember when *GTA IV* arrived in the office – it was a real *Super Mario 64* moment, with everyone flocking to the games room to see it in all its grand-theft-gritty glory. The physics, the destruction, the presentation. It seemed like such a leap, and you couldn't fail to be impressed, even if you weren't a massive fan of the series.

It was a console generation that felt like a significant step up from the one before it. These days, the line at which one console generation ends and the next begins can seem a little blurred.

Game worlds are much bigger these days, but is that always a good thing? I've always felt that games should be played, completed and mastered – not lived in. And sure, there are cool new visual effects, like ray tracing, but turning on these features just seems to cause your games to run slower and your machine to run hotter.

There were also way more gaming mags back then, sometimes as many as four per system, which is both astonishing and brilliant. For me, print media is another sorely missed part of the current gaming sphere. The recent relaunch of *Game Informer* magazine in the US has me smiling.

A week after my son got an Xbox Series X for his 12th birthday, he asked me to set up my Slim in his room so he could play that too. I smiled and obliged, as I understood exactly where he was coming from – sometimes you just want to plug and play instead of planning ahead to play. A powerful tear rolled down my cheek. ✱

LOOK OUT FOR THESE
FIVE HIDDEN GEMS FOR THE XBOX 360

NEED FOR SPEED: THE RUN
An enjoyable narrative-led checkpoint racer with QTE cutscenes. Perhaps the closest *Need For Speed* ever gets to *OutRun*.

BIONIC COMMANDO
A wonderful 2009 3D reboot of the classic Capcom platformer – great level design, music and, most importantly, a cool swing mechanic.

SPLIT/SECOND: VELOCITY
A must-play for fans of the *Burnout* series, particularly *Takedown*. Racing meets shunt-'em-up from the studio behind the equally great *Pure*.

STRANGLEHOLD
If you're a fan of *Max Payne* and gun-fu action cinema, this videogame sequel to John Woo's Nineties classic, *Hard Boiled*, is one to pick up.

TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER
An entertaining squad-based tactical shooter with some high-stakes campaign. It plays like a cerebral *Call Of Duty*.

THE COPY OF JAMES BOND 007: BLOOD STONE I PICKED UP FOR A FEW QUID AT MY LOCAL CEX.

[XBOX 360] BAYONETTA IS LOADED WITH EASTER EGGS, REFERENCING EVERYTHING FROM SPACE HARRIER TO RESIDENT EVIL 4.

[XBOX 360] ONE OF THE BEST RHYTHM ACTION GAMES – PERIOD. PLUS, ONE OF THE BEST GAME INTROS TO BOOT.

THE XBOX 360 HAS A DECENT COLLECTION OF SHOOTERS, WITH RISING STAR GAMES RELEASING A FEW DELUXE VERSIONS OF SOME CAVE CLASSICS.

[XBOX 360] NEED FOR SPEED: THE RUN IS A VERY ENJOYABLE ADDITION TO THE SERIES.

[XBOX 360] BIONIC COMMANDO IS A FANTASTIC 3D REBOOT OF THE CLASSIC CAPCOM PLATFORMER.

[XBOX 360] THERE WERE SOME INTERESTING TITLES THAT FAILED TO MAKE AN IMPACT ON LAUNCH, LIKE BIZARRE CREATIONS' THE CLUB.

[XBOX 360] STRANGLEHOLD IS AN ENTERTAINING 'BULLET TIME' SHOOTER WITH SOME NEAT HARD BOILED-INSPIRED GAME MECHANICS.

[XBOX 360] GTA IV MARKED SOMETHING OF A SUPER MARIO 64 MOMENT FOR THE SEVENTH GENERATION.

A FEW GAMES FROM MY COLLECTION – MOST HAVE THE YELLOW 'PROMO COPY' STRIP AND WASHED-OUT COVER ART.

[XBOX 360] TMNT: MUTANTS IN MANHATTAN, BY PLATINUMGAMES, WAS ONE OF THE LATER TITLES TO BE RELEASED FOR THE CONSOLE.

360 GEMS
The Xbox 360 games readers can't be without

Xela the Zebra
The memories made during *Minecraft Xbox 360 Edition* are lodged in my brain forever. It has such a unique vibe that no other version of *Minecraft* will ever achieve.

David Autovino
Burnout Revenge, the first game I re-bought to play in HD. I was already in love with the PS2 version, but once I saw it running in glorious 720p (hah!) I could tell, like, "Ah, yes, I didn't know what I was missing, this is the way it's MEANT to be experienced!"

Grace E
Stacking, a somewhat strange (in a good way!) adventure/puzzle game. I was looking for something to just chill out with at the time, and ended up getting rather invested in finding all the potential solutions!

Alessandro Perlini
Eternal Sonata. A game that, of all things, decided to represent the last dream of composer Frédérik Chopin in game form, depicting a moving tale of love for music and life. It's a great JRPG that I haven't heard mentioned that much.

Martin Dewar
BioShock felt like something very different when it came out. I remember playing the demo, then immediately buying the full game when it was released.

pilkomon
Crackdown, it was collectathon perfection. I didn't even use my *Halo 3* beta code!!

Vivalahazy
Condemned: Criminal Origins will always be up there for me. The 5.1 surround setup was used brilliantly to the point it had me physically turning round at points as it was such a new feature for games. Add in the HD graphics and it really felt like the last big generational leap.

the-poppies
Mass Effect 3 for me. *Leaving Earth* by Clint Mansell is an iconic piece of music. Ignore the game's controversies and bang on the OST.

Jan Hendrik
Mass Effect 2 because it really felt like a next-gen game.

MAILBAG

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of one of our classic retro books from our archives. Good luck everyone!

MAGAZINE MEMORIES

Hi there,

I just wanted to drop a quick message to say how much I've been enjoying the mag – I've been reading/collecting them since issue 7. Your new features that look at other retro games magazines (Magazine Craft and Covermount Corner) are

» Covermount Corner has proven really popular, so you'll be seeing it each issue from now on.

a fantastic new addition and I hope become a regular part of **Retro Gamer**. To me personally, magazines are a huge part of my interest in retro gaming. I have fond memories of reading my dad's copies of *Crash* and *Sinclair User*, and chatting about what games we might get next. Thanks for keeping me entertained,

Rob Blanks

Many thanks Rob, glad to hear you're enjoying the new features. You're one of many readers that have told us that they like the addition of Magazine Craft and Covermount Corner, so you'll be pleased to hear that they're both going to be regular parts of the magazine.

UPGRADE DELAYED

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I just wanted to write in after reading Nick Thorpe's My Retro Life column in issue 273. It really resonated with me. I've owned many consoles over the years, starting with the Commodore Amiga in 1990, and I realised while reading that the only ones I've got on day of release are the Wii U, the Switch and the Evercade VS. Every other console I've bought has been at least a year after it was released. This was partly a financial thing (back in my youth, I'd usually have to sell my previous console to buy the new

one), but I also never really minded. I had plenty of games to play on the old consoles, and I'd get the new ones eventually.

I'll get the Switch 2 eventually as well, but I'm happy waiting. I'm currently playing through *Hollow Knight* and *Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker* for the first time, and I'm replaying *Super Mario 64* alongside my two-year old son. Gaming isn't something I have as much time for as I'd like right now, and I have a large to-play pile on my current consoles. Of course, once they announce a new *Zelda* for the Switch 2, it will then become a must purchase. Anyway, thanks for the great column, Nick! I'm 100% with you! And thanks to the whole team for an excellent magazine.

PJ Montgomery

Thanks PJ, it's a subject that means a lot to Nick personally as you could tell. Most of the best Switch 2 games are Switch games right now anyway, and the memories you make with your son are going to be precious no matter what hardware you're playing on. Keep enjoying that Switch until the time comes to upgrade.

★ STAR LETTER

VINTAGE VISUALS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

For a while, we associated 'vintage graphics' with pixel art, but early 3D aesthetics are making a comeback, with N64 and PlayStation graphics and their quirks particularly in fashion at the moment. What we consider retro is simply a side-effect of a given system's limitations. Just recently, I was playing *King Kong* on my PS2 (thanks to your excellent article), and again, the style influenced by the system's specs and the era's zeitgeist took me back to simpler times. So, retro is not Eighties, retro is 'about 20 years ago', which means that one day, PS5 graphics will seem retro too. How? It's difficult to say, as you never can tell at the time, but my non-gaming wife recently made a comment about the characters in *Horizon Zero Dawn* "looking funny when they talk", like lifeless puppets… I wonder if in 20 years, this will be what we find retro and nostalgic?

Anyway, enough rambling. Thanks for the mag, I have been a subscriber for ten years now, and it's been a blast. Here's to many more.

Alix Bergeret

That's a really interesting point – graphical limitations that we initially see as flaws to surpass eventually become a source of nostalgia once we've done so. It's something you see in other visual media too, just look at all the VHS filters people use on digitally shot video. Of course if retro in gaming terms truly is about 20 years ago, we're due for an influx of brown and grey games imitating the 'gritty realism' of the Xbox 360 and PS3 era, which doesn't really bear thinking about. In any case, please enjoy a bookazine in exchange for a thought-provoking letter.
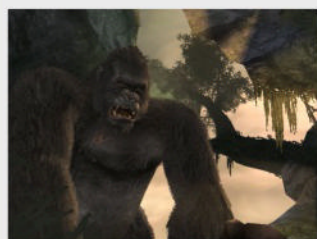
» [PlayStation 2] We'd expect that PS2-style fur shader from *King Kong* to come back one day.
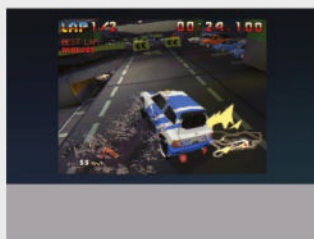
» [PC] Games like *Parking Garage Rally Circuit* really leverage that mid-Nineties 3D look.

» Having new hardware is nice, but the Switch won't stop being fun now its successor has arrived.
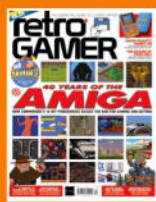
CONTACT US

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Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com

» [PC] *Jazz Jackrabbit* deserves some love in the magazine, so we'll look into future coverage.

GETTING JAZZED

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
Let me begin to say that my appreciation for your magazine has grown immensely over the past years. I started with just an issue every now and then if I saw something interesting (thanks for all the articles on anything LucasArts, love them), but since a year or two I'm a full-time subscriber as I think you deserve it, thanks to all the great content that just keeps coming.

As I've not read all the magazines (yet), I wanted to ask if you've ever done a retrospective on one of my favourite games of all time: *Jazz Jackrabbit 1* and *2*. If not, I would surely give this to you as a suggestion. It's also a great candidate for your new and fun Music Memories feature! I would love to know more about the composers. As a kid I was mesmerised by how good tracks like *Diamondus* and *Tubelectric* sounded on our first Sound Blaster, an immense departure from the bleeps and bloops coming from the PC speaker. Keep up the good work!
Danny Bolhuis

Thanks for the support Danny, it's always nice to hear that readers are enjoying the magazine. Looking back, we did a short Classic Game spread on *Jazz Jackrabbit* in issue 61, way back in 2009, but we haven't done a major feature on the games like a Making Of or Ultimate Guide. They're definitely worth covering, so we'll see what we can do.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Terminator trepidation
There's always a bit of uneasiness when you leave your comfort zone, and putting a new game on the cover of issue 274 definitely qualified as leaving ours. Our nerves were settled when we saw so many positive responses to the *Terminator 2D: No Fate* cover, but more feedback is always welcome so let us know what you thought of the feature and if you want to see more like it.

Your say

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…
Why is the Amiga special to you?

Alan Mealor
It came with Deluxe Paint II. Simply put, this was a game-changer for me. The computer ceased to be just about games and became a tool to create things. What started with DPaint II and the *Screen Gems* pack in 1991 turned into a full-blown career in 2001 and has continued ever since. Like the advert says, "Only Amiga makes it possible."

Conservation of Anger Momentum
The music. I didn't have an Amiga, but a buddy dubbed a whole load of tracker files to tape for me.

Shiryu
It was the first home computer I saw connecting to a BBS from Portugal to Finland over the phone line… in 1989! It gave me a glimpse of things to come and it was also my first baby-steps into computer music production, a hobby/career that I carry on to this very day!

Alexandra Doukakis
It felt like the first computer made for artists by artists. Best sound, best graphics, best animation. Everything seemed possible with it, and still is. Even if the hardware is 40 years old now.

Paolo D'Urso
Amiga was the computer where a kid could easily learn programming, graphics and tracked music and create his own videogame. I personally used AMOS, Deluxe Paint and ProTracker to create my first games that I was selling at school (everyone had an Amiga back then). Creativity, multimedia and freedom… Amiga was and still is this!

George From NY
There's something romantic about the Amiga; a noble but doomed last stand against an oncoming juggernaut (MS-DOS, then Wintel).

Ken Harrison
The jump from the 8-bits was mind-blowing, the games got better year after year and everything was new. I'd go back to those days if I could and do it all again.
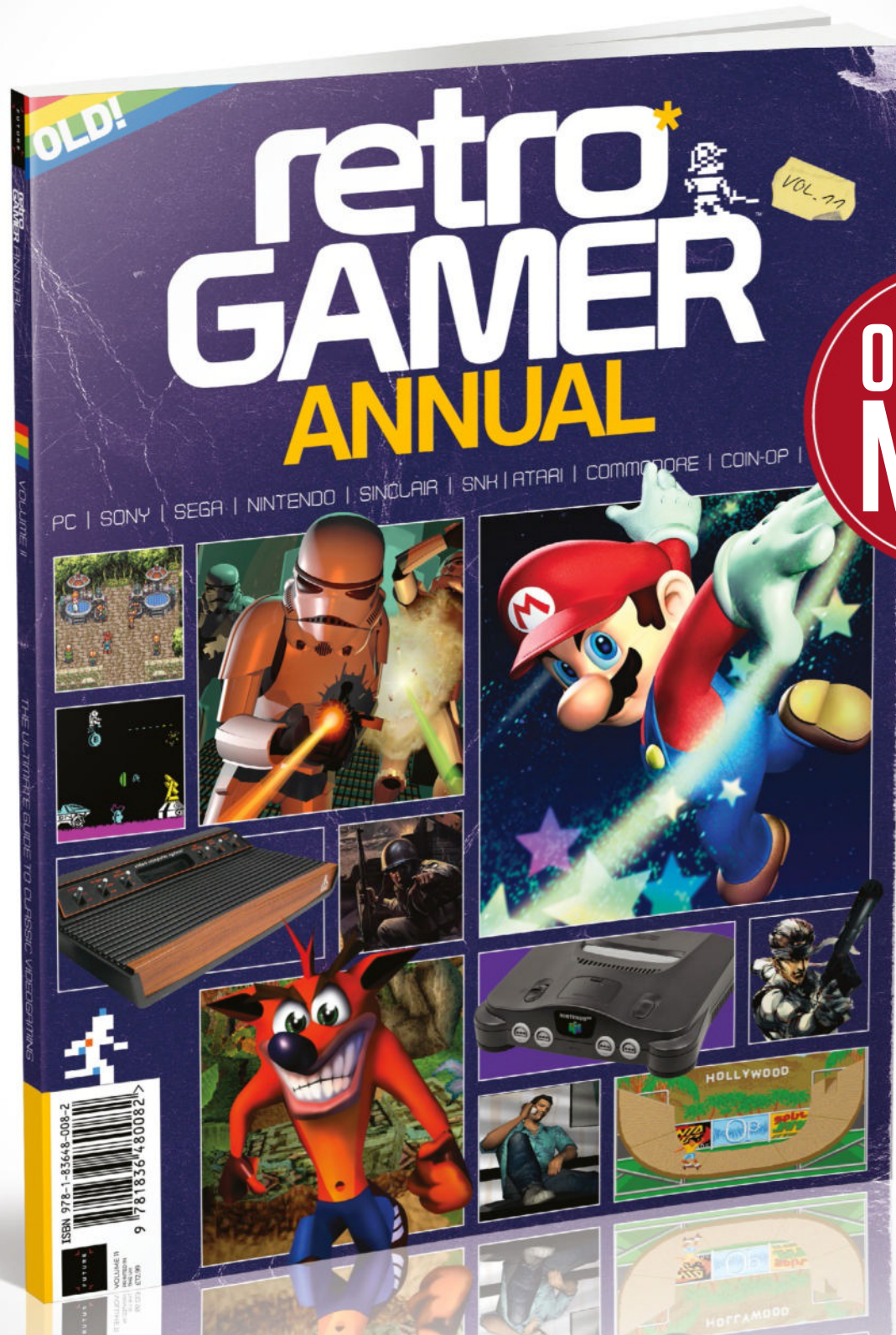
Harvey Bowstead
Five-year-old me and my brother going from limited arcade experiences on holidays to seeing full 16-bit games running at home. The music, the gorgeous pixel graphics and quite simply, *The Secret Of Monkey Island*.

nextmonth

ON SALE 28TH AUGUST 2025

THE HISTORY OF

JAK AND DAXTER

DAN AREY LOOKS BACK AT WORKING ON NAUGHTY DOG'S POPULAR SERIES AND EXPLAINS HOW THE TITULAR DUO EVOLVED OVER NUMEROUS GAMES

AND MUCH MORE, INCLUDING…

Championship Sprint, Joe Blade, Bomb Jack, Frontier: Elite II, Covermount Corner, Descent, Dead Space, Shinobi, Teresa Maughan, Gaming Grails, Sayonara Wild Hearts, Final Fantasy VI, Arcade Club, Sonic Adventure 2

The Legend Of Kage 2

ONE GIANT LEAP FOR NINJA-KIND

» DS » 2008 » LANCARSE

Back in 2008, I was surprised that The Legend Of Kage 2 was a game that even existed. I was familiar with the original mid-Eighties arcade hit thanks to *Taito Legends 2*, but I hadn't seen any particular demand for a sequel. I was certainly intrigued though, and after reading some positive impressions online, I picked it up, played through it and enjoyed myself. I hadn't thought about it in ages, but it popped into my head again after I had plenty of fun trying both *Shinobi: Art Of Vengeance* and *Ninja Gaiden: Ragebound* ahead of their launches this summer.

One thing about *The Legend Of Kage* that always stuck out to me was the vertical scale of the action – trees are many times the height of the screen, and you have to scale the castle wall and then make your way up the tower. The twin screens of the DS are perfect for this so the sequel's levels also incorporate plenty of vertical movement, and the huge jumps that Kage performs are the main point of connection between the two games for me. He's a satisfying chap to play as, with plenty of agility and a range of techniques that make combat pretty satisfying – you can perform air dashes, slice through enemies while running, all kinds of good stuff.

The Legend Of Kage 2 is fun, but I wouldn't go quite so far as to say that it's a hidden classic – the background graphics are nicely drawn but slightly repetitive, the tunes fit the action but don't stick in the memory, and the difficulty has the potential to frustrate. However, I remember it made me appreciate the DS more, simply because 2D ninja action games weren't exactly in style on home consoles at the time and it kept me entertained. As I prepare for a summer of swords and shurikens, it's nice to know that trends come back around. ✱

ENDGAME

TOP HUNTER: RODDY & CATHY

» You might think that Roddy and Cathy would be Top Hunters, being that there's two of them, but they just don't get the credit any good double act deserves. They weren't originally going to take on the space pirates, but Rod, Jane and Freddy turned the job down after they learned about the lack of pluralisation. Erm, where were we? Oh yes, the ending…

01
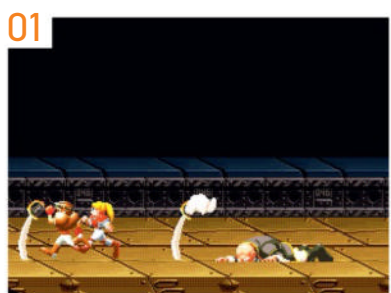
» The head of the space pirates has been defeated, and it turns out he was bald the whole time, just like in *Scooby-Doo*. Anyway, Roddy and Cathy know that the time to exit has arrived.

02
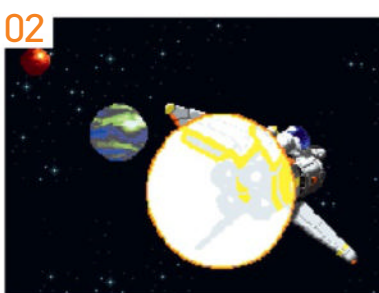
» The bounty hunter duo book it in their spaceship, not wanting to wait for the explosion that the baddies are inevitably going to have to endure. They've got their money, after all.

03

» The space pirates make their own escape, on the interplanetary equivalent of a lifeboat. Don't they look thoroughly hacked off about the consequences of their own highly illegal actions?

04

» There are so many of them that they don't all fit in the vessel, and we have a rather dangerous human chain hanging off the back of it. It reminds us of that bit in *Gunstar Heroes* where Smash Daisaku starts throwing goons off the train. Do all baddies have rubbish safety standards?

05
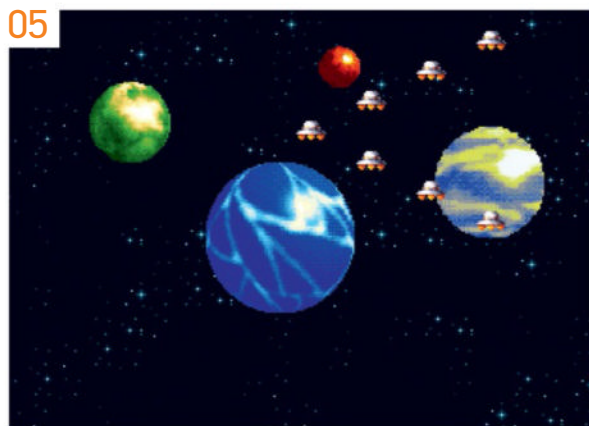
» The last flying saucers beat a hasty retreat, wanting to be anywhere in the universe that Roddy and Cathy aren't. The galaxy is safe once again, thanks to the efforts of two bounty hunters who aren't as famous for their stretchy arms as Dhalsim – and who *still* don't deserve plurals.

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