NEW

The PlayStation Book

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CELEBRATING
OVER **20** YEARS
OF PLAYSTATION

INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING GAMES

- RESIDENT EVIL
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- CRASH BANDICOOT
- TOMB RAIDER
- WIPEOUT

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTOR'S GUIDE TO THE PLAYSTATION

Welcome to

The PlayStation Book™

Sony's 32-bit console really was a game-changer. While it originally started off as a project with Nintendo, Sony decided to go it alone when it became clear that its now-current rival had other plans...

Released as the gaming world was becoming fascinated with the rising power of 3D technology, Sony's PlayStation felt like a quantum leap over the previous generation of consoles, and in all truth it was. Here was a CD-ROM-based console that was not only extremely powerful, but had the $2 billion support of Sony behind it. Not only that, but publishers and developers flocked to the console, with everyone from Namco and Activision to Electronic Arts and Capcom eager to ride the hype that was surrounding Sony's exciting new system.

PlayStation wasn't the first games console by any means, but it was the first to truly bring gaming to the masses and it remains an incredible achievement. With that in mind we're scoured the last 11 years of Retro Gamer to bring you fascinating features on some of the biggest games and franchises to appear on Sony's system. It's the perfect way to celebrate such an amazing console.

In association with retro GAMER magazine

The PlayStation Book

Part of the

retro* GAMER
bookazine series

The
PlayStation Book
Contents

PlayStation

THE NAME PLAYSTATION HAS BECOME SYNONYMOUS WITH VIDEOGAMING, BUT SONY'S ROUTE INTO THE INDUSTRY WAS ANYTHING BUT STRAIGHTFORWARD. JOIN DAMIEN MCFERRAN AS HE CHARTS THE HISTORY OF WHAT IS ARGUABLY ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CONSOLES OF ALL TIME

It's almost impossible to conceive it now, but prior to the 32-bit PlayStation's launch in 1994 there were real doubts in the media over its chances. Over 100 million hardware sales later, such pessimism seems woefully misplaced, but it's easy to forget just how many hurdles Sony had to overcome to make a success of its first piece of videogames hardware – and media scepticism was the least of those problems.

The PlayStation concept actually has its roots way back even before the 16-bit generation had hit the marketplace – 1988, to be precise. Always thinking a few steps ahead of its rivals, Nintendo was actively courting manufacturers to create some kind of expanded storage device for its Super NES console, which was in development and due to hit the market in just over a year. Sony – in conjunction with Dutch electronics giant Philips – was working on a new format called CD-ROM/XA, a new type of compact disc that allowed simultaneous access to audio, visual and computer data, making it thoroughly compatible with the medium of interactive entertainment. Because Sony was already being contracted to produce the SPC-700 sound processor for the SNES, Nintendo decided to enlist the electronics manufacturer's assistance in producing a powerful CD-ROM add-on for its 16-bit console.

For Sony, it was a dream come true. Having been instrumental in the production of the ill-fated MSX computer format, the firm never hid its desire to become a key player in the burgeoning videogame business. Therefore, an alliance with what was unquestionably the biggest and most famous name in the industry would not only help elevate Sony's standing; it would also enable the company to set the wheels in motion for its ultimate plan: to put its consumer electronics experience

to good use and produce its own videogame hardware. The industry was growing at an alarming rate thanks largely to Nintendo's hugely successful NES and Game Boy systems, and Sony was keen to obtain a foothold.

The initial agreement between the two firms was that Sony would produce a CD-ROM expansion for the existing SNES hardware and would have licence to produce games for that system. Later, it was supposed, Sony would be permitted to produce its own all-in-one machine – dubbed PlayStation – which would play both SNES carts and CD-ROM games. The format used by the SNES-based version of the PlayStation was called 'Super Disc', and Sony made sure that it held the sole international rights – in other words, it would profit handsomely from every single SNES CD-ROM title that was sold. It was a match made in heaven: Sony would instantly gain a potentially massive installed base of users overnight as the SNES was a dead cert to sell millions of units. SNES users would upgrade to the new CD-ROM add-on when they knew that Nintendo's cutting-edge games would be coming to it, and Sony would make money on each software sale. What's more, once the all-in-one PlayStation was launched, Sony would gain even more in the way of profits and become a key player in the videogame industry. The man behind this audacious scheme was Ken Kutaragi, the engineer also responsible for producing the aforementioned SNES sound chip.

However, behind the scenes Nintendo was predictably far from happy with the proposed arrangement. It was very protective of its licensing structure, which allowed it to extract massive royalties from third-party publishers. Allowing Sony leverage in this sector would only damage Nintendo's profitability; the Kyoto-based veteran reasoned that it should be making the majority of the profit on SNES CD sales, not Sony. The plan – if it came to fruition – would ultimately benefit Sony far more than Nintendo: the former would merely be using the latter as a way of getting a ready-made market share and would eventually become a determined

SPECIFICATIONS BOX

Year released:
1994 (Japan), 1995 (US/Europe)

Original price: ¥39,800 (Japan), $299.99 (US), £299.99 (UK)

Buy it now for: £10+

Associated magazines:
PlayStation Plus, Official PlayStation Magazine, Play

Why the PlayStation was great…
Some would argue that the videogame industry in the mid-Nineties was in dire need of a boot up the backside, and the PlayStation delivered this kick. Technologically groundbreaking and supported by a wide range of third-party developers, the machine is home to countless classic titles. While some of these games have aged badly, most remain just as essential today as they were over a decade ago.

INSTANT EXPERT

■ The Sony PlayStation is the first videogames console to sell over 100 million units worldwide

■ *Gran Turismo* is the system's bestselling title, with 10.85 million copies sold

■ The PlayStation can generate 360,000 flat-shaded polygons per second

■ With only 2MB of main RAM, the PlayStation struggled with 2D titles that required lots of animation frames, while its rival the Saturn fared better thanks to the fact that it had twice the amount of memory and could be expanded still further with a separate cartridge

■ Approximately 7,900 different games were produced for the PlayStation during its 11-year lifespan

■ Cumulatively-speaking, PlayStation software sales stand at an astonishing 962 million units worldwide

■ Each Sony Memory Card came with 128KB of storage for save game data. Higher capacity third-party cards were also available

■ The console's impressive sound processor can handle 24 channels of audio

■ Early versions of the machine were afflicted with skipping FMV and sound, thanks to the poorly designed nature of the CD drive. Later models rectified this issue, but early adopters still shudder at the memory of having to place their beloved consoles upside down in order to get them to work properly

■ Early UK adverts for the machine featured SAPS – the Society Against PlayStation – a fictional organisation that was committed to preventing the console from ensnaring the country's youngsters

rival as a result. Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi was famous for being particularly ruthless in his numerous business practices, but what happened next is one of the most infamous double-crosses in the history of the videogame industry.

It was at the 1991 Consumer Electronics Show that Nintendo dropped the bombshell. Sony went to the event full of enthusiasm and on the first day proudly announced the details of its new alliance with Nintendo, as well as news of the Super Disc format and the impending development of the SNES-compatible PlayStation. Sony had less than 24 hours to soak up the palpable level of excitement generated by this press conference before Nintendo confirmed that it was, in fact, working with Philips on the SNES CD-ROM drive. Yamauchi had gone behind Sony's back at the last minute to broker a deal with the Dutch company – a deal that was predictably skewed in Nintendo's favour – leaving Sony publicly humiliated at the very moment it had expected to usher in a new era as a serious contender in the videogaming arena. At the time, Yamauchi and the rest of Nintendo's top brass were suitably pleased with their skulduggery; such swift action had prevented Sony from taking a sizeable bite out of the company's profits. As it happened, the planned Nintendo-Philips alliance resulted in little more than a handful of risible Nintendo licences on the CD-i, and the abject failure of Sega's Mega-CD seemed to lend credence to the viewpoint that expanding existing consoles was a mistake, so while Nintendo had protected its best interests by leaving Sony at the altar in such degrading fashion, it actually gained little else of note – aside from a dogged rival.

» Although SNK's Neo Geo system had used the same concept some years beforehand, Sony's decision to go with removable data storage for save game files was regarded by many as truly groundbreaking.

Sony had, by this point, poured a significant amount of cash into the proposed PlayStation concept. It had even moved as far as the prototype phase, with PC CD-ROM titles such as Trilobyte's *The 7th Guest* being mooted as possible launch games. Despite the tumultuous events of the 1991 CES, a deal was signed between Nintendo and Sony that would allow the latter to make its machine compatible with SNES CD-ROM titles – with the proviso that Nintendo would retain all software royalties. Although it was nothing more than a clever stalling tactic by Nintendo to keep Sony from entering the market on its own, this proposed alliance nevertheless kept the increasingly frustrated Kutaragi and his team busy. However, by 1992 it had become clear that such a union was going nowhere. Sony cut off communication with Nintendo and the company was painfully close to withdrawing from the arena for good.

Only Kutaragi's intense resolve and determination prevented the PlayStation dream from ending in 1992. During a meeting with Sony president Norio Ohga in order to decide the future of the project, Kutaragi made bold claims about the kind of machine he had been developing. He argued that the 16-bit PlayStation, with its reliance on a union with the incumbent – not to mention untrustworthy – Nintendo, was a dead end. The only option was to go it alone and create a brand new piece of hardware capable of shifting 3D graphics at a hitherto unprecedented rate. When Kutaragi's ambitious proposal was greeted with derision from the Sony president, he presented another side to his argument: could Sony's pride allow it to simply walk away when Nintendo had so blatantly abused its trust? By making

» UK gamers were treated to the amusing 'Society Against PlayStation' advertising campaign, complete with its dorky spokesman.

VARIANTS PLAYSTATION'S MANY FACES

SNES PlayStation

■ The fruit of Sony and Nintendo's ill-fated union, this machine would have played SNES carts and SNES CD-ROM software. Although it was never officially released, it formed the basis of the 32-bit machine. Legend has it that Sony still has 200 prototype units secreted within its Japanese headquarters.

Sony PlayStation

■ The groundbreaking original. This piece of hardware kick-started an era of Sony-led market dominance that would last for the best part of a decade. Early units suffered from skipping FMV and CD audio thanks to their entirely plastic CD-ROM mechanism; later versions had metal parts that fixed the issue

Net Yaroze

■ Aimed at bedroom coders, the Net Yaroze came with development tools that allowed users to create their own games, some of which turned up on official demo discs. It also had no regional lockout, so games from any part of the world could be played on it. Naturally, it was far more expensive than the standard PlayStation

PSone

■ Released in 2000, this revised machine was smaller than its predecessor, clocking in at a minuscule 38x193x144mm. An official LCD screen accessory could be attached to make this the first portable PlayStation, albeit without an official battery. It outsold the PS2 in its first year on sale

COMMUNITY THE BEST PLAYSTATION RESOURCES ON THE WEB

The PlayStation Museum
playstationmuseum.com

■ A truly amazing site that is dedicated to preserving the history of Sony's machine. Here you will find reviews and features, as well as lots of data relating to unreleased titles or prototypes. Well worth a visit if you have a few hours to spare.

PlayStation DataCenter
psxdatacenter.com

■ A must for collectors, the PlayStation DataCenter has listings for almost every game released on the format. It even has high-quality cover scans to download. A real gold mine of information for dedicated PlayStation fans.

Push Square
pushsquare.com

■ While it's not strictly aimed at the PSone, Push Square is nevertheless one of the net's leading Sony sites. It covers retro-related news items as well as the PlayStation's offspring. If you're a Sony fanboy, then you should bookmark this site for sure.

Absolute PlayStation
absolute-playstation.com

■ Another site that covers the entire PlayStation brand, Absolute PlayStation is packed with reviews, guides, blogs and even a chat forum. It's also regularly updated with the latest and greatest Sony games, so if Sony is your passion, this is the place to be.

» *PaRappa The Rapper* was one of the first music action titles and helped kick-start the recent explosion in rhythm-based gaming.

» *Final Fantasy VII* was one of the PlayStation's most significant releases, not just in commercial terms but from a critical viewpoint as well. It became the first JRPG to gain truly international acceptance.

the PlayStation project a success, the company would experience the sweet taste of revenge at the expense of its one-time ally.

Kutaragi's speech hit a nerve, and early in 1994 Sony confirmed that it was entering the videogame arena with its own console, and even formed subsidiary Sony Computer Entertainment in order to oversee the new venture. Keen to differentiate this new project from its previous namesake, Sony branded it the 'PlayStation-X' – this gave rise to the abbreviation 'PSX', which is still used even today, even though the 'X' was later dropped when the console was officially launched. Early reports were impressive, with some developers confidently proclaiming that Sony's console would blow away the competition. Despite the company's wide entertainment portfolio – which included music label CBS Records and Hollywood studio Columbia Tri-Star – Sony boldly decided not to focus on the multimedia market, as its rival Philips, with its CD-i and 3DO, had done, to its great cost. Instead, the PlayStation was unashamedly proclaimed as a dedicated

gaming machine, with SCE's director Akira Sato confidently stating that: "If it's not real-time, it's not a game" – a thinly veiled criticism of other CD-based consoles and their reliance on FMV titles that featured live actors but little interaction. The sheer power of the new system shocked other players in the industry; Sega of Japan president Hayao Nakayama was reportedly so furious when he read the specs for the

When you take into account Sony's position as one of the world's foremost electronics manufacturers, it's hardly surprisingly that the original PlayStation was a highly desirable piece of kit. Unmistakably a games console but showcasing a hint of mature design, the machine seemed to speak to those gamers who had cut their teeth on the likes of the NES, Mega Drive and SNES and were now ready to progress to

" By making it a success, Sony would experience revenge at the expense of its one-time ally "

PlayStation that he personally visited Sega's hardware division and gave them a stern talking to. His tirade would result in the Saturn, Sega's entrant in the 32-bit console war, getting an additional video processor to boost its graphical muscle, but this would make the system harder to program for – an issue that had severe ramifications in the future.

an entirely different level of challenge. Everything from the two-pronged joypads to the removable Memory Card storage system seemed to drip sophistication. Sony later revealed the numerous hardware designs that had been considered before the final version was decided upon; this was the work of a company that was taking its entry into

the videogames market very seriously indeed. Kutaragi – and the entire project in general – had come under fire from high-level Sony executives who argued that videogames were toys for children, and therefore, one of the PlayStation's key aims was to challenge that view. As a result, the final design for the machine was sleek and serious, mimicking the appearance of a top-end piece of audio-visual equipment rather than a games-playing device.

However, while this posturing caught the attention of gamers, some industry experts were less enthused, citing Sony's poor track record in the industry up to that point. The company's software publishing arm – Sony Imagesoft – had so far failed to generate any titles of note, pushing half-baked movie licences such as *Cliffhanger* and *Last Action Hero* onto store shelves to the complete indifference of the games-buying public. Indeed, software was one area in which Sony was at a distinct disadvantage, as Sega and Nintendo had highly talented internal development teams that traditionally produced the best software for their respective consoles. Sony lacked

Developer Viewpoint

Robert Troughton (programmer, Destruction Derby)

■ "IT WAS LATE in 1994 that Sony – and myself – were launching into the console games business. Straight out of university, I wasn't really sure what to expect. Reflections, a game developer based in the North East, were just beginning work on a new genre of racing game: *Destruction Derby*. The premise was simple: a racing game which you win not by coming first – although that helped – but by smashing your competitors' cars to a pulp. From starting in January '95, we had only nine months to complete the project, with a team consisting of just three programmers and one artist. The PlayStation was technically leagues ahead of the competition, with amazing 3D graphics and CD-ROM technology. I can't remember whether any of us saw daylight for those nine months, but I'm not sure that any of us cared all that much. Sony loved us for how fast we were creating the game – they gave us a release date that would tie in with the PlayStation's US and European launch – the press were all over us and it was clear that the game was going to be a success. *Destruction Derby* went on to sell millions. The PlayStation sold many times more, and I've stayed in the industry ever since, still doing what I was doing back then: hacking away at code and trying to squeeze every last bit of juice out of whatever platform I'm working on – and thankful to Sony for giving me this opportunity."

Station to Station

■ RELEASED LATE IN the machine's lifespan, the PocketStation was a self-contained handheld similar in design to Sega's Dreamcast Visual Memory Unit. Its announcement caused a surprising degree of excitement, and many industry insiders confidently predicted that this miniature console was Sony's attempt to crack Nintendo's stranglehold on the handheld market. Dubbed a "personal digital assistant", it stored save game data just like a typical PlayStation Memory Card but could also play crude games on its 32x32 dot matrix LCD display, although, predictably, the quality of these titles was well below what could be experienced on Nintendo's Game Boy. An infrared connection was also included so users could exchange data without having to connect their PocketStations to their main console. Launched in 1999, it was only supported by a handful of titles and sadly never saw release outside Japan – although a release was obviously on the drawing board at some juncture as several Western games came with PocketStation functionality.

▶ this key feature, although it was at least attempting to rectify the issue by courting highly rated UK code shop Psygnosis, which would go on to publish vital launch titles such as *WipEout* and *Destruction Derby*. Still, there was an overwhelming feeling that although Sony was perceived to be doing everything right, it would ultimately fall at the final hurdle; Sega and Nintendo would continue to fight it out, just as they had done during the previous format war. 'Sony doesn't know games,' the critics cried. Thankfully, the firm managed to secure the assistance of a company that certainly did know something about the industry: Japanese arcade veteran Namco.

Pac-Man creator Namco was undergoing something of a resurgence thanks to the incredible impact made by its 3D coin-op *Ridge Racer*. A texture-mapped tour de force, the game was unquestionably a cutting-edge piece of programming and had given its parent company the ability to leapfrog persistent rival Sega in arcades. When Namco revealed that it was porting its hugely successful racer to the PlayStation, it caused quite a stir. The notion that Sony's new console could replicate an arcade title that cost thousands of pounds created astonishing levels of expectation, and this only increased when the first shots of PSX-based *Ridge Racer* were released to the public. Coded in an incredible six months, the game might not have been arcade-perfect, but it did enough to cement Sony's position as a key player, purely because it made Sega's heavily delayed in-house conversion of its *Daytona USA* coin-op look decidedly second-rate by comparison. Elsewhere, the PlayStation's visual prowess was demonstrated by exquisite third-party titles such as *Jumping Flash* and *Battle Arena Toshinden*, the former being a groundbreaking, if shallow, 3D platformer and the latter a likeable, if uninspired, one-on-one brawler. *Toshinden* couldn't hold a candle to Sega's *Virtua Fighter* port when it came to gameplay, but it was nevertheless a fundamental game in Sony's arsenal because it looked far, far better. From screenshots alone, it was clear that the PlayStation had the edge in terms of raw power.

The Japanese launch took place on 3 December 1994 – a handful of days after Sega had shifted 200,000 Saturn consoles on its first day of sale. Priced at ¥39,800 (around £250 in today's money)

» DMA's controversial *Grand Theft Auto* started its console life as a PlayStation release and made several appearances on the machine.

the PlayStation sold strongly, although the Japanese public seemed to gravitate towards Sega's console more, possibly because *Virtua Fighter*, despite the slightly unimpressive Saturn conversion, was the country's number one arcade title at the time. Both formats started out fairly evenly, but as the months rolled by Sony was able to deliver on its promises thanks to sterling releases from Namco, Konami and Capcom, while Sega's in-house projects stalled. Ironically, Sony's reliance on third-party developers proved to be in its favour. Because it needed outside assistance, the company had made great efforts to get software support, while it could be argued that Sega was less active in courting developers. Sony had made the PlayStation as accessible as possible, and it was paying dividends.

The technological gulf didn't do the PlayStation any harm, either; titles such as *WipEout* looked gorgeous, with transparent textures and eye-popping flare effects. Sega's machine lacked both of these embellishments, and, thanks to its complex dual-CPU setup, required the best coders to really get the most out of it. Meanwhile, third-party studios were getting stuck in to PlayStation game production, and a string of classic titles began to emerge. *Tomb Raider* – ironically a Saturn title originally – along with *Tekken 2*, *Soul Blade*, *Ridge Racer Revolution* and *Resident Evil* all contributed to the PlayStation's wide and varied catalogue of titles.

The Western launches were equally

» *WipEout* came to define the PlayStation's approach to gaming and is a staple of Sony's first-party lineup.

» Norio Ohga was Sony president during the genesis of the PlayStation project. He saw off apathy within the company to ensure that Kutaragi's dream came to fruition.

» Sony developed several different logos before finally settling on the one we now know and love.

» Sony Europe's Phil Harrison was instrumental in attracting quality developers to the machine and would eventually rise to the top of the company.

» Fraternising with the enemy: Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto samples *Crash Bandicoot* during the 1996 E3 show.
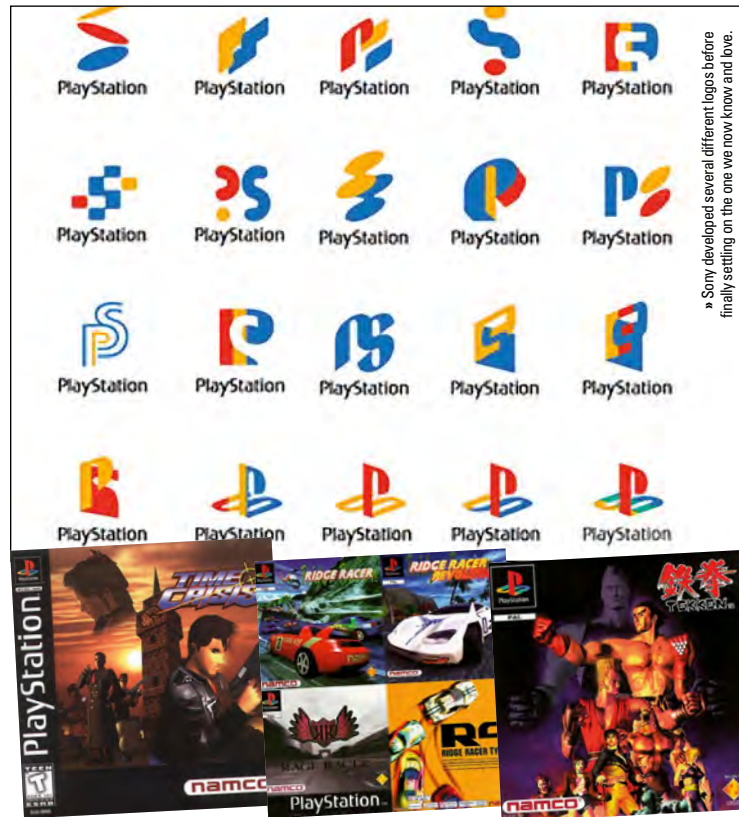
successful, with Sony managing to undercut the retail price of Sega's Saturn in both North America and Europe. In Europe, especially, Sony displayed a masterly grasp of how to market a games machine to a more mature audience. The company knew that those gamers who had grown up with the 8-bit and 16-bit consoles were gradually reaching adulthood and would therefore require more 'grown-up' gaming experiences. While Sega and Nintendo focused on building recognisable mascots to appeal to youngsters, Sony released the PlayStation with a range of software that was unashamedly adult in tone: the aforementioned *WipEout* featured a soundtrack that showcased the talents of real recording artists, such as The Chemical Brothers and Leftfield, while visceral top-down shooter *Loaded* not only featured excessive gore and allusions to transvestism but also enrolled the assistance of grebo-rock outfit Pop Will Eat Itself. One thing was clear: Sony wasn't aiming for the *Mario* and *Sonic* audience with the PlayStation.

Sega's challenge soon began to falter, and so Nintendo became Sony's next opponent. The firm responsible for such classics as *Super Mario Bros* and *The Legend Of Zelda* had been making confident noises about its cartridge-based Ultra 64 (later Nintendo 64) console for some time, and although

it wouldn't be ready until 1996, Nintendo went to great lengths to encourage gamers to hold off on buying a 32-bit machine. Sadly, the decision to stick with the expensive cartridge format would cost the firm the support of one of its most prized third-party publishers: Squaresoft. Although the highly anticipated *Final Fantasy VII* had been confirmed as an N64 release, Square eventually switched development over to Sony's machine, citing the limited storage and high unit cost of cartridges. *Final Fantasy VII* was going to be the most epic game yet conceived, and it needed as much storage space as possible. Only CD-ROM could offer this, Square argued. Nintendo's loss was, of course, Sony's massive gain; published in 1997, *Final Fantasy VII* was a worldwide smash, selling 10 million copies in the process. This success established the console as the leading platform of its generation and subsequent system exclusives such as Konami's *Metal Gear Solid* and Polyphony Digital's seminal *Gran Turismo* cemented this lofty status even further.

With both Sega and Nintendo subdued, Sony's dominance was assured. So tight was the company's grip on the marketplace that even the launch of Sega's technically superior 128-bit Dreamcast in 1999 was unable to upset the status quo. With millions of units sold and a more powerful

successor – the PlayStation 2 – waiting in the wings, 2000 saw Sony release a new iteration of its 32-bit console in the form of the PSone. Smaller, sleeker and sexier, it boasted enhanced functionally that allowed it to link to mobile phones and even supported a fold-down LCD display, giving it a small degree of portability. The revision was a triumph and enabled the ageing machine to remain relevant in a marketplace that was gradually leaving it behind in technological terms.

Sony ceased manufacturing the PlayStation in 2006, giving the console an impressive production lifespan of 11 years. During that time it redefined the world of videogames, granting gamers a taste of 3D visuals and making the oft-derided hobby a cool and relevant pastime. Of course, such activity earned Sony – and, by association, its console – a fair degree of scorn also, but few would have the temerity to debate the PlayStation's incredible influence on modern interactive entertainment. Without it, the gaming landscape today would be near-unrecognisable.

PERFECT TEN

TOMB RAIDER

» **RELEASE:** 1996
» **PUBLISHER:** EIDOS INTERACTIVE
» **CREATOR:** CORE DESIGN
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FIGHTING FORCE

01 **Although her star** has waned a little over the past few years, there's no denying that Lara Croft remains one of videogaming's most enduring icons. Her 1996 debut was actually on the Saturn, as developer Core Design had traditionally supported Sega's consoles. However, it was the PlayStation version – released shortly afterwards – that was truly responsible for firing the delectable Miss Croft into the realms of global superstardom. Sequels followed as it firmly became a PlayStation series and arguably improved on the template, but the original game retains a near-legendary status.

GRAN TURISMO 2

» **RELEASE:** 1999
» **PUBLISHER:** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
» **CREATOR:** POLYPHONY DIGITAL
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** OMEGA BOOST

02 **The first *Gran Turismo*** was possibly the most technically groundbreaking release of the 32-bit era, and this sequel beefed up the already considerable experience by adding more cars, more tracks and even a rally mode. The title's visuals – already pretty mind-blowing in the original release – pushed the 32-bit hardware to the absolute limit, with Polyphony Digital's unique development software eking out every last drop of power from the PlayStation in its final years. Spanning two discs, *Gran Turismo 2* is arguably the definitive racing title of that era and still plays great today.

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS

» **RELEASE:** 1997
» **PUBLISHER:** SQUARE
» **CREATOR:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DEW PRISM

03 **Released only in** Japan and North America, this strategy RPG arrived around the same time as *Final Fantasy VII*, which caused some confusion when gamers discovered that they actually had very little in common. Developed by the team behind *Tactics Ogre* – Square snapped up studio Quest prior to producing the game – *Final Fantasy Tactics* showcases gorgeous visuals, breathtaking music and a surprisingly mature and complex plot. It was recently released on the PSP in a slightly enhanced form.

METAL GEAR SOLID

» **RELEASE:** 1998
» **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
» **CREATOR:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER PRO

04 **Hideo Kojima's magnum** opus set a new high watermark for storytelling in videogames, as well as introducing an entire generation to the wonderful stealth sub-genre. Solid Snake has gone on to become a household name, starring in more technically impressive sequels on the PS2 and PS3 consoles. However, hardcore fans maintain that this instalment remains the best, thanks largely to its tight plotting, memorable characters and judicious use of the host hardware.

RESIDENT EVIL 2

» **RELEASE:** 1998
» **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
» **CREATOR:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DINO CRISIS

05 **The first title** established Capcom's reputation as master of the 'survival horror' genre, but it was the second game in the series that truly confirmed the company's god-like status. Offering the ability to play the story with two different characters – one to each of the game's two discs, with differences depending on which you play first – *Resi 2* mixed relentless zombie slaughter with intriguing puzzles and some of the best visuals seen on the PlayStation up to that point. It's unsurprising that series fans hold this entry in the utmost regard.

GAMES

The original PlayStation brought us a massive number of franchises that have become part of the gaming landscape today. Just take a look at the following classics...

06

07

08

TEKKEN 3

- » **RELEASE:** 1998
- » **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO
- » **CREATOR:** IN-HOUSE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SOUL BLADE

06 *Tekken 2* had proven that Namco was more than capable of taking on Sega's illustrious *Virtua Fighter*, but it was the third game that dazzled the most. Sceptics had feared that it would never appear on the 32-bit console, but Namco's expert coders managed to squeeze in every aspect of the coin-op to create a fitting pugilistic swansong for the ageing PlayStation. While the Tekken Force and Tekken Ball modes were superfluous additions to the domestic port, all of the important features were present and correct.

EINHÄNDER

- » **RELEASE:** 1997
- » **PUBLISHER:** SQUARE
- » **CREATOR:** IN-HOUSE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BRAVE FENCER MUSASHI

07 **Famous for being** Square's one and only entry in the shooter genre, *Einhänder* is an incredible achievement. The team involved had no previous experience with this type of game, yet it managed to create a classic that is still talked about in hushed, reverent tones even today. Featuring a unique weapon system based on grabbing the ordnance of fallen enemies, *Einhänder*'s brilliance is made even more remarkable when you consider that Square hasn't ventured to the genre since its release.

FINAL FANTASY VII

- » **RELEASE:** 1997
- » **PUBLISHER:** SCE
- » **CREATOR:** SQUARE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SAGA FRONTIER

08 **Having sold over** 10 million copies worldwide, *Final Fantasy VII* needs no introduction. Cited as the game that sold the Japanese RPG to the Western mainstream, this three-disc epic made the most of the PlayStation's technical capabilities to deliver hours of turn-based entertainment. It remains arguably the most popular entry in Square's evergreen franchise and has recently spawned several spin-off games and other projects, such as *Crisis Core* on the PSP and the *Advent Children* CGI movie.

09

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

- » **RELEASE:** 1997
- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **CREATOR:** IN-HOUSE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** PROJECT OVERKILL

09 **The PlayStation has** a reputation for being something of a duffer when it comes to 2D titles, and to a certain extent, this is true. The console had only 2MB of RAM compared to the Saturn's 4MB, and this resulted in some lacklustre conversions. However, titles like *Symphony Of The Night* – coded with Sony's hardware in mind – were mind-blowing. Fusing 2D and 3D effects, Konami's designers created one of the most mesmerising titles of the generation. Look out for the limited edition European version, complete with art book and CD.

VAGRANT STORY

- » **RELEASE:** 2000
- » **PUBLISHER:** SQUARE
- » **CREATOR:** IN-HOUSE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FRONT MISSION 2

10 **One of the** most ambitious role-playing games of the 32-bit era, *Vagrant Story* is epic in every sense of the word. Produced by the same team responsible for *Final Fantasy Tactics*, the game featured a deep and sometimes disturbing storyline, and lead character Ashley Riot has to rank as one of the most hard-edged protagonists in videogame history. *Vagrant Story* was recently re-released on Sony's PlayStation Network and can be purchased and downloaded for play on both the PlayStation 3 and PSP, and it even lives on through its shared universe with the *Final Fantasy Tactics* series and *Final Fantasy XII*.

10

PlayStation

and the rest…

The PlayStation has one of the most interesting and diverse catalogues of games around. How many of the following have you experienced?

01

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HOW THE
Plays

tation
CHANGED GAMING

It was the console that arguably killed the arcades, but revolutionised the way we played at home. David Crookes looks at why, two decades on from its western launch, we shouldn't underestimate the power of PlayStation

In 2000, some six years after the PlayStation had launched in Japan and with the PS2 finding its way into the sweaty hands of smitten gamers, **Phil Harrison, then senior vice president** for Sony Computer Entertainment Europe, spoke retrospectively of the ambition of the console brand that shook the dominance of Nintendo and Sega to its foundations.

At this point in time, Sega was months off throwing in the towel as its acclaimed yet largely shunned Dreamcast flopped in the shadow of its Sony rival. The Nintendo 64 was about to be set aside in favour of the GameCube. Atari had long been cast into the wilderness as its final console, the Jaguar, was discontinued in 1994 and its name was on the verge of being sold by Hasbro Interactive to Infogrames.

But Harrison had a different company in mind when he reflected on the manner in which the PlayStation had cleaned up the opposition and made the fifth generation entirely its own. "We wanted it to become the Hoover of videogames," he said, of the aim to make the console late-comer a proprietary eponym. "And, in many ways, it has."

It is fair to say that no gaming machine up until that point had ever had the widespread, mass-market impact of the attractive, CD-playing grey plastic box of tricks that became the PlayStation, as controversial as that may sound. Countless amazing consoles had come before it, but none of them were able to truly break into the mainstream and ▶

» Two decades ago we would have never predicted how important this logo would become.

» Although it catered for two players out of the box, it was possible to add more pads with a Multitap.

none were able to say that, nine years and six months after launch, they had sold 100 million units.

"I think really, the legacy of the original PlayStation is that it took gaming from a pastime that was for young people or maybe for slightly geeky people and it turned it into a highly credible form of mass entertainment, really comparable with great legitimacy with the music business and the movie business," says Sony's current European boss Jim Ryan.

Yet how did a console made by an outsider make such an impact? How did it become so successful that the stars of its games would adorn the covers of fashionable magazines? And why do people talk of the period between 1990 and 2000 as the era of the PlayStation Generation when the console wasn't even around for a good third of that time?

The answer is about to unfold. **"I think Sony did a fantastic job in presenting PlayStation as a brand new way of playing and making games,"** explains Nick Burcombe, the lead designer of seminal title *WipEout*. "Sony's message about how powerful the PlayStation would be prior to launch did enough to get gamers looking at them, even though Sega's Dreamcast also had 3D capabilities and used discs too. Dreamcast was a good console but the message was loud and clear: PlayStation was even better. The message worked well."

The story of the PlayStation's origin has been well told. It's an intriguing tale of two companies; Sony and Nintendo striking a deal in 1988 to create a CD-ROM add-on to the SNES that would use Nintendo "Super Discs". Sony went further and added support for Video

MARTYN BROWN

VIDEOGAME DEVELOPER AND CONSULTANT

"Back then it was all about 3D and especially the T-Rex demo that was doing the rounds – but we had our greatest PlayStation hit with a 2D game: *Worms*."

PAUL RANSON

FORMERLY OF BIG RED

"Levels, cutscenes and music previously squished into carts could now be developed with panache and in a style that we thought emulated the movie business. PS1 for me was the proper start of the Hollywood style entertainment in the videogame business. "

CDs and it took advantage of its permission to create its own standalone console which it called the Play Station (note the space), a machine that allowed for the playing of both CDs and cartridge. Sony showed off its creation to great fanfare at that year's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in 1991.

But within mere hours of the unveiling Nintendo got cold feet. It believed Sony could potentially pull the rug from under them and steal a portion of the industry so it cancelled the deal, announcing the day after that it was instead bringing rival Philips on board. Eager not to waste the huge amount of time invested in the project, Sony's president Norio Ohga ordered that development would continue without the experience of Nintendo. Ken Kutaragi who had begun his career in Sony's digital research labs was given the task of designing the machine, which Sony codenamed PSX.

Kutaragi pooled the resources of engineers who had been working on a geometric computer graphics engine called System-G that was capable of real time 3D texture mapping for broadcasting networks. By 1992 he had a prototype ready to show his bosses, but it wasn't an easy ride for Kutaragi and his team. There was much internal resistance to the idea, with ▶

» *Nightmare Creatures* tapped into the survival horror genre.

» Cliff Bleszinski's favourite ever PlayStation game is *Jumping Flash*.

» *Pandemonium* was an early platformer that used 2.5D.

PLAYSTATION BABIES

The classic gaming franchises that were born on PlayStation

— NUMBER OF GAMES
— UNITS SOLD

Franchise	Number of Games	Units Sold
CRASH BANDICOOT	18	50,000,000
METAL GEAR SOLID	12	39,000,000
SUIKODEN	11	3,900,000
TOMB RAIDER	19	42,000,000
TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER	17	30,000,000
TENCHU	9	4,800,000
SPYRO THE DRAGON	17	29,000,000
SILENT HILL	14	8,500,000
DRIVER	7	19,000,000
ODDWORLD	4	8,000,000
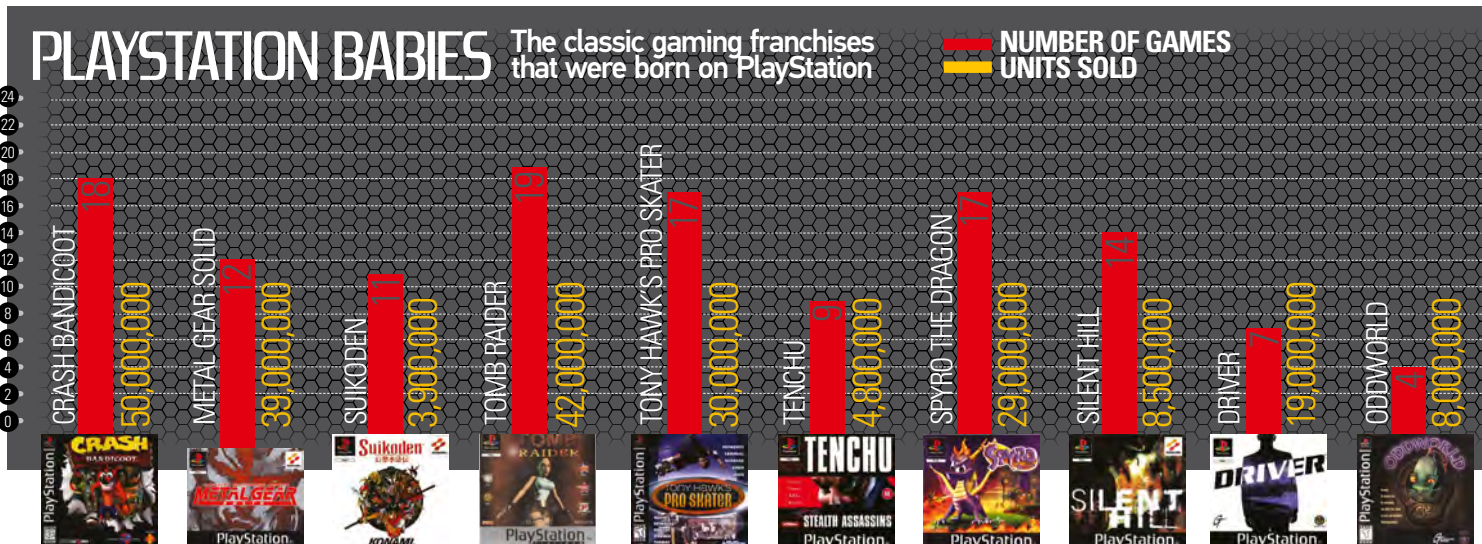
» The PlayStation's CD-ROM-based media ensured far higher capacity than cartridge-based consoles.

DARREN FALCUS
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF
HIPPO ENTERTAINMENT
"The 3D technology and internal structure meant that it was a much easier technology to develop for."

» Games required a memory card for saving, something that meant an additional cost for gamers.

» That's right, even the power button managed to look sexy on Sony's new console.

» PlayStation's additional ports let Sony add various peripherals to the console.

Game	Units
WIPEOUT	8,000,000
MEDAL OF HONOR	31,000,000
PARAPPA THE RAPPER	2,200,000
SYPHON FILTER	31,000,000
RESIDENT EVIL	60,000,000
KING'S FIELD	600,000
GRAN TURISMO	70,020,000
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER	86,800,000
MEDIEVIL	2,000,000
TWISTED METAL	70,020,000
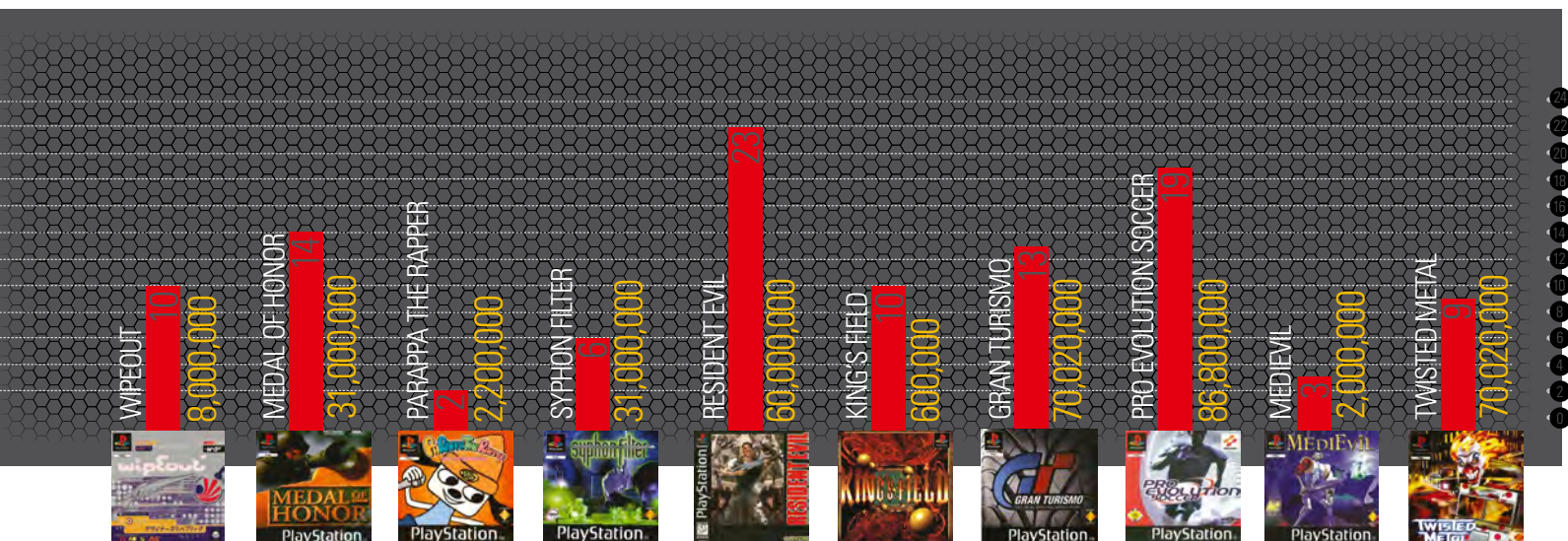
Sony still, overall, reluctant to become a player in the games industry. Yet Ohga's anger at Nintendo was all that was needed to overrule any doubts.

For Sony's president, it was a case of winning at all costs. He kept the project on track, agreed the purchase of British development house Psygnosis (a startling move, given Japan's previous tendency to invest internally) and, with some refinement and a bit of design prodding, the machine was geared up for launch, first in Japan on 3 December 1994 and then in September 1995 in North America and Europe (selling for £299 in the UK). The console turned heads. "Two words: dinosaur demo," remembers Brian Baglow, writer of the first *Grand Theft Auto*, of the 3D graphic display Sony had slapped on a disc for those who had pre-ordered the console. "As soon as I saw the giant walking T-Rex, I was astonished and awed."

But the dino demo wasn't the only thing that stood out. The PlayStation, which would – thanks to a small redesign and relaunch in 2000 eventually become

DAVID DARLING
KWALEE CEO & FORMER CODEMASTERS BOSS
"It was the first proper 3D games console to gain significant market share and [Sony was] very active in supporting and encouraging developers. It was fun making games with 3D models and polygons rather than the 2D games we'd made for years on machines like the Sega Mega Drive."

known as the PSone – had a shapely, comfortable games controller which did away with the flat design of other machines and replaced letters with shapes. It had external memory cards with 15 save blocks that added up to 128k (an idea copied from the Neo-Geo). It also had a slick appearance. More than all of that, though, it had games. Stunning games. And people wanted to play them.

Eight games were available for the PlayStation on the first day but one truly stood out: Namco's *Ridge Racer*. It was an arcade driving sim with chunky 3D cars, wide tracks, catchy tunes and equally memorable speech; it was a title that laid down an ambitious marker and showed games could have just as much impact as music or film.

It was also a near-perfect version of the hit that had been attracting coins at the arcades and it helped ▶

» There was no doubting the significant role that the tomb-raiding Lara Croft played in pushing *Tomb Raider* high in the charts.

UNDER THE HOOD
The components that made the magic happen

RAM
■ The PlayStation packs a whopping 2MB of RAM, which might be next to nothing by today's standards but it proved to be more than enough. An additional 4k data cache meant that lesser commands could be handled elsewhere, freeing up a little more memory, while 1MB of graphics RAM also exists for visuals.

LASER
■ Consoles are never built using top-end tech and the PlayStation was no exception. While certainly fit for purpose, the disc-reading laser used in its CD drive was the cause or some of the most common hardware failures. It could be replaced, but enterprising gamers often instead resorted to the cheaper option of balancing the console at all kinds of precarious angles to make it read discs.
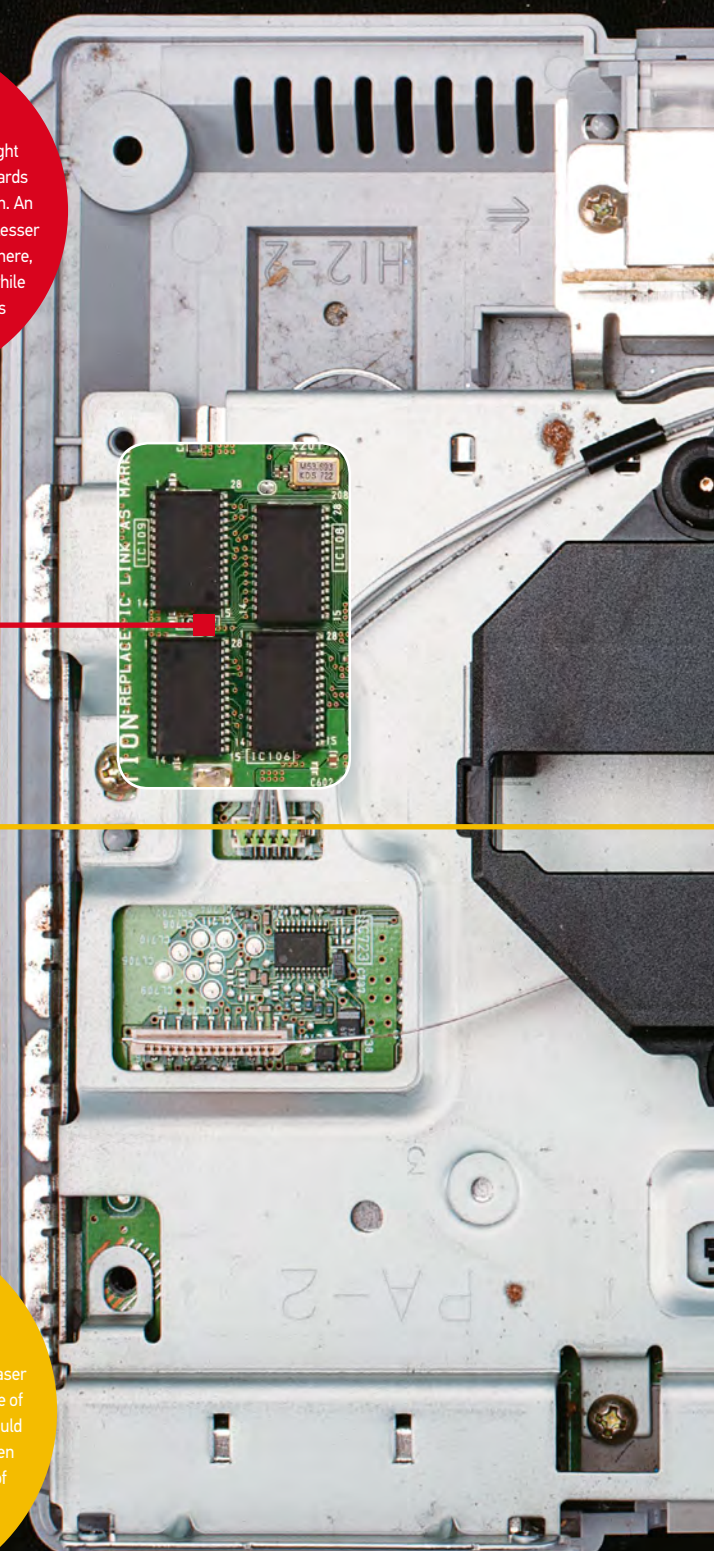
MOTOR

■ That satisfying whirring sound when booting up a new game came from this x2 bad boy, capable of transferring data at 300kb per second. After extended use, the motor could wear out and result in disc read errors, while overuse of the swap trick (to play import games, naturally) could weaken and break the plastic spindle.

CONTROLLER/ MEMORY CARD SLOTS

■ Four front-mounted slots allow for up to two controllers and a pair of memory cards. The controller ports are capable of relaying information and commands from multiple controllers and not just one, as evidenced by the existence of the Multitap. Despite the existence of a second Memory Card slot, some games only allow use of the first.

TRANSFORMER

■ Some consoles use external transformers to keep both size and heat down, but the PlayStation had it all on-board which helps explain its size. Sony was able to shrink the console down for the PSone model in part by moving to an external power transformer on the plug lead rather than having it in the box.

CPU

■ Rocking a 32-bit R3000A processor clocked at just over 33MHz, the PS1 is capable of rendering around 360,000 polygons per second. It serves just as well for 2D games, mind, but few would deny that 3D was what made this console so exciting.

CHARLIE CHAPMAN
NET YAROZE PROGRAMMER

"There's no doubt that the move from cartridges to a CD format reduced the barriers to entry and led to the release of more games which perhaps wouldn't have made it before."

HOW SONY MADE GAMING COOL

The reasons PlayStation was such an important console

NIGHTCLUBS

■ Placing consoles running stylish and exciting games like *WipEout* in bars and nightclubs taught an entire generation one very important lesson – games aren't for kids any more, and there's a lot more to gaming than you might have thought.

Healing Wind

PIRACY

■ What better way to hit the mainstream than to have games available for free? With the web in its infancy, blank discs constantly falling in price and several simple solutions for running unsigned code on PlayStation, piracy was undeniably a huge part of the PlayStation boom.

GAMES OF SUBSTANCE

■ With so much more storage space, it wasn't just visuals that could be more impressive – worlds and mechanics could be far more intricate than ever before. Only a handful of 16-bit games lasted upwards of 20 hours, but PS1 RPGs would commonly come in closer to 100 hours.

MATURE GAMES

■ The better graphics got, the more developers were able to use games to tell grown-up stories and faithfully cover topics that simpler visuals perhaps wouldn't do justice. Between visuals, audio and scale, we finally entered an era where games could move and affect players on a similar level to movies. This more emotional connection to games meant that they could be taken a lot more seriously as an entertainment medium.

ADVERTS

■ It used to be that advertising agencies would target the same demographic as toy retailers when producing campaigns for games. But by making interesting and original shorts that broke free from that, Sony's marketing proved to generate both conversation and interest in the brand.
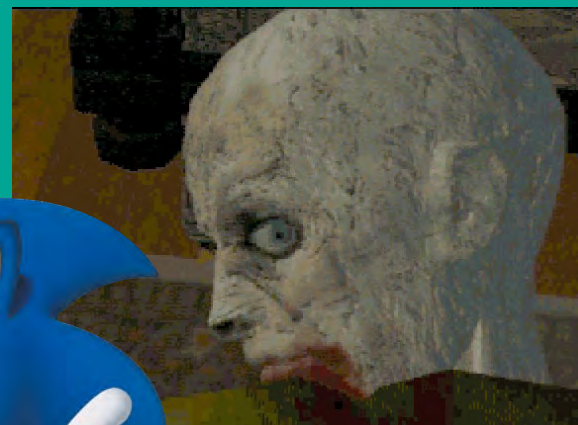
NET YAROZE

■ The Net Yaroze provided students and hobbyist programmers with a chance to make PlayStation games, opening up the traditionally closed console development scene. A small community of bedroom coders sprang up as a result.

CD FORMAT

■ It used to be that taking a few games around to a friend's house would involve lugging around a bag full of chunky cartridges. With the rise of disc-based media, one game case could hold a collection, plus the format also allowed for better audio quality than older hardware could manage.

NINTENDO/SEGA

■ A lot of Sony's success came down to a fresh approach to gaming – its competitors had been butting heads for years, leading them to contest the same market. But this just allowed Sony's new audience to appreciate something new even more.

3D GAMING

■ Clever coding allowed 3D (or 3D-style) visuals on some of the oldest hardware, but it was the scale on which the PS1 hardware was capable of rendering 3D worlds and environments that really blew us all away. Early polygon visuals haven't aged well, but it was so impressive at the time.

» With the tunes from *Parappa The Rapper* staying with players forever, little wonder it helped kickstart the whole rhythm-based genre.

» With a gorgeous opening that showed the power of the PlayStation and great moves, *Tekken II* was a revelation.

» Although it was an below-average release, *Porsche Challenge* didn't half look good.

▶ Sony shift 100,000 PlayStations on the first day in Japan. Before long, impatient punters were splashing out £700 or more to import the console into Europe and the US and the momentum began to build. Those 3D capabilities were a major draw and suddenly gaming began to look more mature, moving away from the perception of kids playing in their darkened bedrooms to something trendy adults wanted to share while sitting on their sofa.

"The PlayStation introduced the idea of true 3D gaming to the living room and, beyond that, the mass market," says Cliff Bleszinski, whose first game *The Palace Of Deceit: Dragon's Plight* was released in 1991. "The PlayStation shifted the console from having an almost toy-like quality into the consumer electronics that are just as desired by 12-year-olds as they are by 35-year-olds."Key to this was getting developers on board and helping them through the transition from 2D to 3D. Before the PlayStation, creating 3D on consoles was no easy task but the PC had shown the possibilities with *Doom*, *Wolfenstein* and *Descent*.

The SNES, for instance, had a Mode 7 playfield which allowed for some pseudo-3D with games such as *Mario Kart* and *Pilotwings* but it could only simulate a single flat-textured plane. "There were a handful of games using the SuperFX chip for SNES, which was a coprocessor that accelerated 3D rendering on the SNES, but it wasn't a fully featured GPU as found in the PS1, and it was quite limited," explains Michael Troughton, who worked on the *Destruction Derby* games for the PlayStation while at Reflections.

"The consoles that were appearing weren't making life any easier. Sega Saturn was a powerful machine with 2 SH2 RISC CPUs and a number of dedicated coprocessors to handle audio, video, sprites and polygons but it was notoriously difficult to program for," says Michael. "Programmers had little experience with multi-processsing and it hindered them. The PlayStation suddenly opened 3D up to a much wider range of developers, with its custom graphics processor and geometry engine in hardware.

"In fact, I remember thinking it was amazing that the PS1 had the same CPU as the £5,000 Silicon graphics workstation we were using to build the 3D environments. Now almost any programmer with a minimal amount of basic maths knowledge could write a 3D game."

MARTIN HOLLIS
WORKED ON
GOLDENEYE:007

"Sony cultivated the machine's association with music and club culture. Without this it is difficult to imagine *Dance Dance Revolution*, *SingStar*, *Guitar Hero*, or *Rock Band*."

Fuelled by Namco's racer, sped along by *WipEout* and propelled to a higher platform by *Jumping Flash* (which Cliff Bleszinski says remains his favourite game), 3D became the PlayStation's hallmark and it led to an insatiable demand for three-dimensional titles. Most releases for the console were 3D (the occasional *Oddworld* game aside) and the likes of *Tekken* and *Battle Arena Toshinden* continued to feed the appetite.

This changed videogaming in another way. Given that 3D was more complex, larger development teams were needed. Programmers and artists who struggled to work with 3D found themselves floundering as the new way of presenting games became expected on all platforms, and not just the PS1. "The switch to 3D was a ton of work and it required the relearning of new skills," laments one half of the Pickford Bros development team, Ste Pickford, who designed a kids cartoon game called *DragonTales: Dragon Seek*. "The massive 512 MB CDs we had to fill meant tons more graphics. It was more a feeling of 'Aaargh!' than being blown away."

Sony initially refused to grant concept approval of any 2D game, in its bid to use the beauty of graphics to attract a new breed of gamer. "It meant all game developers had to make 3D games when we were all new to it. I think this sent games backwards for a while because the PlayStation had power to burn for 2D stuff and there could have been some amazing 2D games as we all had the skills and tools to make them," continues Ste.

But as time went on, developers picked up the skills. "I've definitely experienced the hard work that comes with adapting game development to each new generation of consoles," says Michiteru Okabe who produced the art and graphics for *Armoured Core: Master Of Arena* in 1999 and has, more recently, been the producer on *Resident Evil Revelations 2*. He recalls trying to reuse textures to make a massive stage, running out of memory and redesigning it all at the last minute.

Indeed, Paul Hughes, who was working for EA when the PlayStation was launched, tells of Sony's excellent tools, documentation and all important development kit. Sony also revolutionised the technical requirements checklist and this helped to ensure a solid

barrier to entry from a quality perspective.

"I found the initial transition pretty painless," he says. "I'd been writing 3D engines since the late Eighties, so I had a reasonable grasp of rendering pipelines – if anything, it was mind-numbing that it had hardware that would draw textured and lit triangles for me rather than having to obsess about every clock cycle of a software triangle rasteriser. From a visual effects perspective, it had proper, honest-to-goodness alpha blending which really helped up the ante for particle/trail/post effects."

Despite the advancements, however, the mainstream press cast doubt on the companies that were newly emerging to take a slice of the digital pie. In May 1995, the *New York Times* ran with the headline "Video Game War Looms In Hardware" and it spoke of the challenge to be dominant in the $4 billion videogame market by "introducing better, faster machines with 32-bit microprocessors that can deliver three-dimensional graphics and quicker and more intricate action than the current 16-bit machines."

Sony, the 3DO Company, and Sega were scorned for offering what were now seen to be comparatively expensive machines. "Nintendo of America and the Atari Corporation are producing machines that retain the familiar cartridge format and sell for considerably less," the piece continued, neglecting to focus on what was really important…

It was the CD-ROM drive that was so important for Sony (which, after all, had invented the CD format in 1982 in collaboration with Philips) and it was, as we saw, the entire reason the company had got involved into the videogame industry in the first place. "Sony was our key partner when we were developing the first CD-ROM games on Genesis," Tom Kalinske, the former CEO of Sega of America tells us, "Back then, none of us knew how to develop on the optical disc media but we all thought it could be great – the future for game machines." It helped to lower the cost of game production, ensuring huge amounts of cash was not tied up in pre- ▶

JAMES RUTHERFORD
NET YAROZE PROGRAMMER WHO LATER WORKED ON STUNTMAN AND DRIV3R

"Net Yaroze added a whole new dimension to the PlayStation and it was great to be able to create games on something that was current and powerful. Having the games on a magazine cover disc was a major incentive for us."

"You'll have to remember that 20 years ago games simply didn't do 3D at home, at least not as well as the arcades did. So when we got our Japanese import PlayStation at launch with *Ridge Racer*, we all sat around with the joypad in our hands, loaded it up, and raced like we were playing the arcade version. *That* blew us away."

» The PlayStation's pad went through numerous revisions in its live, this one introduced analog sticks.

DUALSHOCK AND AWE The evolution of the PlayStation pad

PLAYSTATION CONTROL PAD
■ The original controller and our first taste of those iconic button symbols. Also notable for popularising the use of four shoulder buttons, where most major pads would only use two.

DUAL ANALOG
■ With players wanting more precise control for 3D gaming, the Dual Analog was a prayer quickly answered. First-person games could finally be played with tight movement.

DUALSHOCK
■ Effectively the same as the previous controller, with motors fitted into each handgrip for vibration. It also brought two additional buttons, namely L3 and R3 mapped to clicking the analog sticks.

DUALSHOCK 2
■ While cosmetically and technically very similar to the original DualShock (to the point where originals would work on PS2 as well), there was one major change: every major button was analog rather than digital.

DUAL ANALOG
■ With players wanting more precise control for 3D gaming, the Dual Analog was a prayer quickly answered. First-person games could finally be played with tight movement, while inventive devs could create quirky uses for a pair of sticks, as seen with launch title *Ape Escape.*

▶ booked cartridge stock that may well not have sold. "The move to disc was a huge but natural and necessary change," says Dave Ranyard, the current London Studio boss of SCEE. "Prior to that, we had cartridges and before that dedicated machines, but the ability to store tons more data for our games improved them no end, graphically, musically, and in terms of scope. Disc is a very cheap and efficient method of distributing lots of data."

The disc also allowed for the streaming of a lot of data. Movies could play back in 16-bit colour thanks to the dedicated MDEC hardware. "Then of course you had CD quality audio that you could stream off the media rather than a MIDI track with less than stellar instruments," says Paul Hughes. "Everything about it just oozed quality – right from the boot-up sequence."

PlayStation cemented CD soundtracks as the standard throughout the industry. Until that point most gamers were content with the chip-music that consoles offered, excellent as it was. "But after people started hearing tracks they recognised by the Chemical Brothers and Leftfield in their games, chip-music became unacceptable really fast," says Colin Anderson, who headed up the audio team at DMA Design from 1993 to 2000 before leaving to create Denki, the world's first digital toy company.

"It kicked off some sizeable investment in audio development as teams struggled to switch from chip-music to full CD-quality soundtracks," he continues. "I enjoyed a front row seat on that particular roller-coaster as we were working on the audio design for the game that would eventually become *Grand Theft Auto*. When we started development we fully expected to be using chip-music, but within six months it became clear we needed to up our game if we wanted to compete with all the other great games that were being released. *WipEout* was the straw that finally helped me convince [boss] Dave Jones that DMA needed its own music studio."

The PlayStation tapped into modern-day culture like no other games console had ever achieved before, positioning itself in style mags and persuading celebrities to grab a joypad in the wake of videogames' new cool status. ("I was getting carried away playing *Tekken II* and *Tomb Raider* for hours on end," excused England goalkeeper David James when he conceded three times against Newcastle in 1997.)

But music and the PlayStation, in particular, went

» Some tried to make out that Crash Bandicoot was the PlayStation mascot but, as it turned out, the machine didn't need a Mario or Sonic equivalent.

hand-in-hand. Developers started to experiment with audio, putting it at the heart of titles such as *Vib-Ribbon* and *PaRappa The Rapper* which led to rhythm-based game crazes such as *Dance Dance Revolution*. They also tapped into the Nineties music vibe of techno and house. The PlayStation ingratiated itself with the growing underground club culture and the sound of big names such as Orbital, Leftfield and The Future Sound Of London.

In Liverpool, where *WipEout* was made, the emerging super-club Cream was positively surreal. Bass pounded, strobes flashed, people danced and then, they stopped, they stared, they gravitated towards the PlayStation pods that had been placed there, just as they had in dozens of other clubs up and down the country, and they played. "We knew something significant about gaming had changed," continues Nick Burcombe, who now heads up Playrise Digital. "It was pretty amazing really."

In London, New York, Tokyo and hundreds of cities in between, clubbers were relaxing between DJ sets with a few rounds of *Virtua Fighter* or *WipEout,* which was the first game to incorporate licensed music. "PlayStation was bringing gaming out of the bedroom and into the mainstream in a way no other company had," says Colin. "That's what changed gaming forever. It wasn't the hardware."

Aggressive infiltration of this kind, together with an approach to marketing that was wildly different to much of what had gone before was repositioning gaming as a cool pursuit. "At the time of its ▶

ESSENTIAL EXTRAS
Six of the best Sony peripherals

x5images © Evan-Amos

POCKETSTATION
■ Effectively a portable device akin to the Dreamcast's VMU, PocketStation never saw the light of day outside of Japan. Over 50 games supported this interesting device, which plugged into the console via the memory card port and had its own LCD screen.

MEMORY CARD
■ While cartridges sometimes allowed game data to be saved to internal memory, the CD format offered no such luxury. Sony's solution was a proprietary storage solution – a 15-block 1MB memory card to which game data could be saved.

MULTITAP
■ Two controller ports was enough for most games but to fully enjoy something like *Micro Machines V3* (whose predecessor had additional ports built into the cartridge itself) or Bomberman, you'd need more. Enter the Multitap.

GUNCON
■ Light gun arcade games were all the rage around the time the PS1 rose to power, and this accessory, originally released to allow *Time Crisis* to be played at home, proved to be one of the most accurate home approximations of the arcade experience.

GAMESHARK
■ Plugging into the console's parallel port, these cheat devices allowed game code to be modified to activate cheats, alter elements of a game or even to access content that wasn't in the final build, including additional scenes in *Final Fantasy VII*.

DUALSHOCK 3
■ As costs fell and tech improved, Sony was soon able to reintroduce rumble to the Sixaxis template and the DualShock 3 was born. It quickly superseded its forerunner as the PS3 standard and Sixaxis was discontinued in mid-2008.
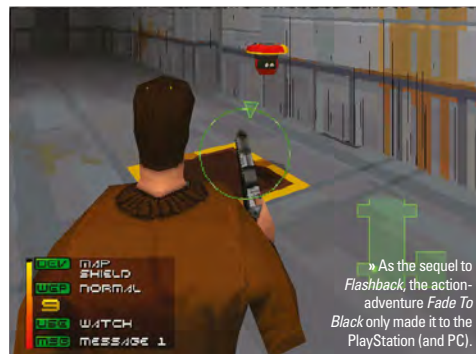
DUALSHOCK 4
■ The first full evolution in the life of the DualShock, the PS4 pad adds many new features. Sixaxis motion control remains, with a rear-mounted light bar allowing a camera to better place the handset for accuracy. It also adds a touch pad and Options and Share keys.

» *WipEout* was one of the UK launch titles for the PlayStation and it took both the gaming and the wider world by storm.

00:16.8

» As the sequel to *Flashback*, the action-adventure *Fade To Black* only made it to the PlayStation (and PC).

▶ launch I was a student and I'd always been into videogames from the early days of arcades," says Dave. "I would hang around playing *Space Invaders* and *Galaxians* and until the PS1 came out, that kind of thing made me a geek. But this console changed all that – suddenly videogames were cool – not just acceptable, but actually club culture cool. With a soundtrack from the coolest techno and dance DJs, videogames became a part of sub-culture. And it led to a more mainstream acceptance of consoles in general."

It helped the console to continue to attract adults, a strategy that Sega had already begun but Sony seemed to perfect. One of the keys to this was Steve Race, boss of Sony Computer Entertainment of America. Race had worked under Kalinske at Sega and he had no problem competing with his former workers (indeed, he infamously took to the stage at the inaugural E3 in Los Angeles just after Sega had announced the Sega Saturn at a price point of $399, muttering one word – "$299" – and walking off to great applause).

"Steve knew our strategies of going after an older audience and being edgy and competitive in advertising," continues Tom Kalinske. "He knew we would do everything we could to come across as the superior 'cool' brand, and he did this very well. But I don't think Sony did anything other than copy lots of aggressive marketing that we had done at Sega initially with Genesis." And yet, Sony took its marketing to a different level.

Although ads did target children (*Croc* was plastered on bus shelters near schools) titles like *Resident Evil* were certainly aimed at an older audience and developers did all they could to grab their attention. The disgraced former publicist Max Clifford used the tabloid press to whip up a publicity frenzy for controversial titles. Games such as *Grand Theft Auto* and *Cool Boarders 2* made the papers by talking of "having to get higher than last time" in ads (Darren Carter, the then senior product manager at SCEE, defended this move, saying, "the wording is genuinely how snowboarders talk").

One of the most memorable adverts, though, was *Double Life* which had been created by ad agency TBWA. Written by James Sinclair, it became a classic, its lengthy monologue showcasing eccentric individuals describing what they did in their free time. "I won't deny I've engaged in violence, even indulged in it," says one, to the tune of Fauré's *Requiem* as he describes – the viewer discovers later – his fantasy PlayStation life. In 2007, the advert, directed by Frank Budgen, was accepted into the Clio Hall of Fame.

Sony's brief was to the point. It wanted to "break out of a core consumer base of geeky pubescent teenage boys by bringing a broader acceptability and dignity that was absent from the sector." Sinclair cross-cast the advert, showing policemen breaking the law and vicars committing all sorts of sins ("this got softened somewhat – inevitably," he tells us). The idea was to put people at the centre of gaming. The advert contained no gameplay footage or screenshots.

"People's imagination is the most powerful element of the gaming experience, more than the graphics, sound effects, atmosphere and so on. That's what really puts them in the moment," James says of the ad that was shot for television and cinema. "I'd thrown in some off-the-beaten-track words and phrases like

'hoi polloi' to give the piece a sort of anachronistic vibe. It gave it a timelessness that has served it well over the years."

And yet, away from the camera, Sony was putting games centre stage, signing exclusive deals for the best games, among them *Tomb Raider*. The second and third titles in the series made the PlayStation their console home and it led to increased sales. "I remember getting our hands on the original *Tomb Raider* when we were working on the original *GTA* and thinking, 'Oh f***'," says Brian, on the impact the game had.

But it wasn't hard to persuade companies to climb aboard. "Behind the scenes, Sony offered developers a better deal than its competitors," says David Banner who worked on *Tomb Raider* as a tester. "It gave better royalties and it promoted games well. It understood that having the best console relies on having content so the more developers it got on board the more titles it'd have for the customer to digest. Nintendo and Sega primarily relied on their titles being developed in-house, whereas Sony saw the potential of opening up development to third party developers."

Those third-party developers seized this opportunity, understanding what a console with such a large user base could offer. Programmers and artists looked for new ways to take advantage of 3D and they also sought to tap into current trends such as extreme sports, generating games like *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* and leading to many a big budget PlayStation event. Over the course of the PlayStation's lifetime, the age of developers also began to rise, with graduates seeing a stable career path in the industry. "Two of the guys on the *Destruction Derby* team were still in their teens – that would be unheard of today," says Michael.

That said, Sony also came to embrace smaller, independent developers by releasing a development kit called the Net Yaroze. The problem with previous consoles was the cost of developing for the systems. They were, by and large, closed shops. But with Net Yaroze, a small outlay was enough to bag a kit and start making games, some of which ended up on the cover disc of the *Official PlayStation Magazine* which,

STEVE LYCETT SUMO DIGITAL

"To understand the impact, you've got to remember that when we first got our hands on the PlayStation hardware it was a revelation on a number of fronts. First, it was the first proper dedicated 3D console – this is in a pre-3DFX/PowerVR accelerated PC graphics era, too. So the results you could achieve quickly and easily were way in front of anything else. Next, having spent so long working with limited cartridge budgets, having a whole CD you could fill and plenty of memory (2MB was a lot back then!) opened the door to bigger levels, better audio, cutscenes and really going to town on the presentation as much as the game. You could say any one of those components existed individually, but it was the PlayStation that pulled it all together in one powerful and complete package."

» *Ridge Racer Revolution* was the chunky car sequel to *Ridge Racer* but the gameplay remained entirely unchanged.

THE 20 MOST IMPORTANT MOMENTS IN PLAYSTATION HISTORY

SONY GOES IT ALONE

1 After talks with Nintendo to develop a disc-based add-on for the SNES, Nintendo shockingly revealed a partnership with Philips, which ultimately came to nothing. Sony's work was not in vain, however – the groundwork for PlayStation had already been done.

ARCADE-PERFECT PORTS

2 Flick through old magazines and you'll find the term 'arcade perfect' applied in so many inaccurate ways. With *Ridge Racer* and the many coin-op ports that followed, though, it really *was* true a lot of the time.

CD CAPACITY = BIGGER GAMES

3 Cartridges could only allow a certain amount of data to be stored, with no easy way of swapping between them. The compact disc medium changed this, allowing for console games that spanned as many as five discs.

PLATINUM PRICING

4 With gaming growing more popular, Sony made the smart move of adding its most successful games into the Platinum range, slashing prices to help them shift more copies.

ANYONE CAN MAKE GAMES

5 The Net Yaroze remains one of the coolest hardware iterations ever, a developer console that effectively anyone was able to create games for. The best of these would be showcased via the official mag's demo discs.

FINAL FANTASY JUMPS SHIP

6 The only way for something as epic as Square's RPG series to evolve was to go 3D and to go bigger, a combination not possible on carts. With Nintendo still backing the old format, Square had little choice, and it was a

MARKET AWARENESS

7 Smart advertising made PlayStation the coolest brand in gaming in the space of a few relatively simple campaigns – Sony managed to build the idea of gaming being something more than just a nerdy pastime in mere months.

JUST DANCE

8 Cheap plastic dance mats are nothing compared to the glorious coin-op stages (assuming they work properly) upon which the best perform, but bedroom pop stars didn't care. It just felt good to step on arrows.

SWAP TRICK

9 Who *didn't* know the method of getting import games and even illegal copies running on a PS1? Broken spindles and motors were common, but you could play whatever you wanted.

SMALLER, YET SMARTER

10 A revised PlayStation known as the PSone launched in 2000, with its little form and more cost-effective use of components allowing Sony to sell it for less than the original console. It also did away with many popular piracy methods.

GTA3 INVENTS A GENRE

11 DMA's silly crime sprees were fun, but *GTA* only really shot to notoriety when contained realistic and free open-world sociopathy.

DON'T HATE THE PLAYER, HATE THE GAME BOY

12 Sony's plan for Vita was simple – take on Nintendo's handheld dominance by offering console-quality games on the go. Despite huge *Monster Hunter*-fuelled success in Japan, neither PSP nor Vita really managed to break the western market, but Sony still

DVD READY

13 Choosing DVD as a primary format for games was risky, but it also placed the PS2 among the most affordable DVD players available during the format's boom. Want a DVD player? Might as well get one that plays games too...

LEAP YEAR BLUES

14 Original PS3 models were hit by a bizarre bug on 1 March 2010 when an error on the console's internal calendar assumed incorrectly that 2010 was a leap year and proceeded to implode on itself.

LIGHTS, CAMERA...

15 The rise of EyeToy led many (including the other modern major platform holders, apparently) into believing motion control was the future. At least everyone got that wrong, but it was fun while it lasted.

$599

16 The announcement that the PS3 would be worth getting a second job to pay for didn't do all that much to help its early performance – Sony had to do a lot of work to get it even close to the 360 in terms of units sold.

PSN HACKED

17 In April 2011, Sony's PSN network was hacked and the details of around 77 million users compromised in the process. The downtime lasted for several weeks and while something of a disaster, it clearly taught Sony some valuable lessons as it hasn't fallen foul to a similarly devastating attack since.

PS PLUS

18 With Microsoft hiding online play behind a paywall, Sony played it smart – keep online play free (at least on PS3) and instead offer free games for recurring subscribers. The model works, and even third-parties are getting involved now.

ANYTHING YOU CAN DO...

19 Sony's confidence in countering every poor decision made by Microsoft was an easy highlight of E3 2013, but the brazen approach to everything – including pricing – easily explains Sony's return to prominence for this new generation of consoles.

LOVING THE INDIES

20 Whatever you think about Sony's triple-A PS4 line-up, its selection of indie and retro titles is superb. From *Resogun* and *Oddworld* to *Grim Fandango* and *Final Fantasy VII* (a PC port, sure, but it's better than nothing, right?), Sony is doing its bit to keep old-school gameplay alive.

LAUNCH GAMES REVISITED

Sony's PlayStation launch games are now two decades old. We were keen to see how they still fare…

KILEAK: THE BLOOD

"This failed to impress gamers 20 years ago, and it's still a shambles today. The lo-fi visuals and clunky controls are rather charming, but the deathly dull gameplay creates a miserable gaming experience" **DARRAN**

NBA JAM: TOURNAMENT EDITION

"Visually, this isn't too much of a jump up from the previous generation, but as far as gameplay goes, this still stands up today as a great game to play with friends, even if I am still terrible at it even all these years later…" **JON**

STREET FIGHTER: THE MOVIE

"This is a great game for all the wrong reasons. The animation is laughably poor, while the difficulty level is all over the place. It's nowhere near as dull to play as *Toshinden*, but it remains a disappointingly average brawler" **DARRAN**

RAPID RELOAD

"It's not quite as good as *Gunstar Heroes*, which it is clearly trying to imitate, but it's still a great blaster that's probably more appreciated now than it was back then" **NICK**

LAUNCH GAMES*

- **A-TRAIN IV EVOLUTION** JAPAN
- **BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN** US/UK
- **CRIME CRACKERS** JAPAN
- **ESPN EXTREME GAMES** US
- **GOKUJŌ PARODIUS DA! DELUXE PACK** JAPAN
- **KILEAK: THE BLOOD** US/UK
- **MAHJONG GOKU SKY** JAPAN
- **MAHJONG STATION MAZIN** JAPAN
- **NBA JAM: TOURNAMENT EDITION** US/UK
- **NEKKETSU OYAKO** JAPAN
- **POWER SERVE 3D** US
- **THE RAIDEN PROJECT** US
- **RAPID RELOAD** UK
- **RAYMAN** JAPAN
- **RIDGE RACER** US/UK
- **STREET FIGHTER: THE MOVIE** US/UK
- **TAMA** JAPAN
- **TOTAL ECLIPSE TURBO** US
- **WIPEOUT** UK

*IT'S WORTH NOTING THAT EVEN SONY UK DOESN'T HAVE COMPLETE LISTINGS, BUT RESEARCH SUGGESTS THE ABOVE LIST IS CORRECT

CHARLES CECIL
REVOLITION SOFTWARE BOSS AND CREATOR OF BROKEN SWORD

"The PlayStation oozed sex appeal. Sony's inspired marketing quickly made videogames hip. And the team at Sony were amazing – a small team of inspirational, creative people who were re-defining the industry: re-writing the rule book. The two *Broken Sword* games were incredibly well received, being voted amongst the top ten best PlayStation games by *Official PlayStation Magazine* readers. PlayStation launched a new epoch."

BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN

❝ I'd probably have been thrilled at the time with this, but while it looks the business it just doesn't play that well. It's easy to see how *Tekken* became more popular... ❞ **NICK**

▶ thanks to the number of demos it would give away, began to reach a sales figure of over 450,000.

"We used the Net Yaroze to teach console programming at the University of Abertay in Dundee at a time when educational establishments could not get their hands on the full development kit," says Professor Ian Marshall, whose department at the Uni received a staggering 40 Net Yaroze kits for its computer games technology Masters and Undergraduate students. "It was close enough to the real thing that transferring from Net Yaroze to the full dev kit did not take much re-learning."

As a result, scores of student programmers were able to write tight code to run on a PlayStation and it opened up a vibrant community of home developers across the world. Just as the Spectrum and BBC Micro created many of the leading UK games developers of the Eighties, so the Net Yaroze contributed to the development of the independent and studio developers we have today. Mitsuru Kamiyama created the RPG *Terra Incognita*. He ended up working on the *Final Fantasy* series which, despite having made its debut on the NES, became one of the PlayStation's most popular titles.

Final Fantasy was one of a large number of games that made the PlayStation such an iconic hit. While Nintendo continued to concentrate on Mario and Sega

PATRICK BUCKLAND
CEO, STAINLESS GAMES

❝I was actually involved with them pre-launch. Sony was determined not to fall into the same trap as the CDi and the 3DO and try to be everything to all men. They were clearly a games console through and through, not a multimedia device. They also took the start that Sega had made with the Mega Drive and made the PlayStation a games console that you didn't feel embarrassed of."

on Sonic, Sony had no real mascot despite desperate attempts by some players and media to intrinsically link Crash Bandicoot to it. Instead it heralded an eclectic era of massive franchises that ran and ran, from *Resident Evil*, *Tomb Raider* and *Tekken* to *WipEout* and *Grand Theft Auto*.

In May 1998, Chris Deering, then president of Sony Computer Entertainment Europe, said five or more games were being sold per PlayStation – "at least 50 per cent better than it ever got on 16-bit". Then, the average age for a PlayStation gamer was 22. It was keeping the Eighties kids playing while attracting brand new audiences.

Sony continued to tinker. It advanced on the N64's Rumble Pak with the DualShock pad in 1998 bringing vibration feedback and it introduced a Platinum budget range for older games that had sold more than 150,000 copies, which included the likes of *TOCA*, *Die Hard Trilogy*, *Fade To Black*, *Time Crisis*, and *V-Rally*. The PlayStation was also keeping pace: games made at the end of the PS1's life were far more visually stunning than those at the start.

"Sony jumped into the games business, disrupted it and succeeded in much the same way that Apple jumped into the portable music business and took over," says Michael Troughton. "The branding was cool, the device was powerful, the technology was good, the business model was better and the timing was right. All of these things made it successful." ✱

RIDGE RACER

❝ Riiiiiidge Raaaaaaacer! Yes there's only one track, but what a track! It still controls exceptionally well, while the jaunty music and challenging track design will keep you chasing those top times ❞ **DARRAN**

JUMPING FLASH

❝ This was probably just as odd a game back then as it is now, but I can imagine that for its time it really stood out from anything else. The soundtrack is definitely worth a mention as well ❞ **JON**

TOP
25 PLAYSTATION GAMES

The classic library of Sony's world-conquering console is overwhelming – readers provided over 150 nominations for its top 25 games. Join Nick Thorpe to see if your favourites made the cut…

Gran Turismo 2

■ **DEVELOPER:** POLYPHONY DIGITAL
■ **YEAR:** 1999 ■ **GENRE:** RACING

24 **It can be** hard to follow up the phenomenal success of a game like *Gran Turismo*. Polyphony Digital's approach was to retain the gameplay of the original and massively increase the amount of content available, including over 600 cars and 27 tracks. The game also widened in scope, with the new additions including off-road tracks and rally cars. The scale of the game required it to be split across two discs, with the arcade and simulation modes now contained separately.

ISS Pro Evolution

■ **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI
■ **YEAR:** 1999 ■ **GENRE:** SPORTS

25 **Konami's** *International Superstar Soccer* had long been a fantastic choice for gamers looking for an alternative to EA's *FIFA* series, and this game represents the transition from the *ISS Pro* series to the modern *Pro Evolution Soccer* line. *ISS Pro Evolution* introduced club teams and the Master League mode, bringing it closer to audience tastes while evolving the series' trademark simulation gameplay with additional dribbling tricks and an extremely potent one-two pass.

Einhänder

■ **DEVELOPER:** SQUARESOFT
■ **YEAR:** 1997 ■ **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

23 **Shoot-'em-ups are definitely** outside of Squaresoft's RPG comfort zone, but you wouldn't have known it when playing *Einhänder* – the game was pretty conventional, but of a very high quality. The gameplay was enhanced by the combo-based score system and modular Gunpod power-ups, useful for taking down the big bosses. It's the only import game to reach your top 25, and we can only imagine how high it would have climbed if it had received a UK release. We're hoping for a PSN release to correct the injustice.

Time Crisis

■ **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO
■ **YEAR:** 1997
■ **GENRE:** LIGHTGUN SHOOT-'EM-UP

22 **The first of** Namco's arcade conversions to make our list, *Time Crisis* provided an excellent rendition of the rescue mission that had enthralled arcade gamers in 1995, including all of the incredible set pieces and secrets. It's easy to take the game for granted now, but the action pedal was a revolution in lightgun game design – the ability to take cover allowing the player an additional means of avoiding damage beyond simply firing faster than the enemy – though the constantly running timer means that you'll rely on your sharpshooting frequently.

But Namco didn't stop there – the game included an exclusive home console mission that featured entirely new stages and boss battles. In the new mission, protagonist Richard Miller is tasked with infiltrating a hotel which happens to be a front for an illegal weapons factory, run by the villainous Kantaris. The new mission changed the dynamics of the game, introducing a grading system which determined the route players took through the game, offering players the chance to visit different locations and fight different bosses on each playthrough. The inclusion of the extra mission massively extended the lifespan of the game and gave arcade veterans a key reason to pick the game up.

The story of *Time Crisis* on the PlayStation is as much about the hardware as the software. The game was incompatible with previous lightguns, and came bundled with Namco's new lightgun. The G-Con 45 featured extra buttons along the barrel, acting as a substitute for the arcade game's foot pedal, and plugged into the console's video output to enhance accuracy. Other developers adopted Namco's gun as a new standard, as thousands of players picked up the hardware and its bundled killer app.

> "A great shooter with music to die for"
> **gmintyfresh**

Resident Evil

■ **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM
■ **YEAR:** 1996 ■ **GENRE:** SURVIVAL-HORROR

20 **Capcom's survival-horror game** made a huge impact on its debut, popularising survival-horror and shifting over 5 million copies. Locked inside a deadly mansion filled with mutated monstrosities, your goal was to take control of special forces agents Jill Valentine or Chris Redfield and get out alive – along with as many of your comrades as you could save. With limited ammunition, there was no hope of laying waste to every zombie you could find – a tension-building approach which was novel in 1996. The fantastic 2002 GameCube remake means that the original *Resident Evil* doesn't have the impact it once did – but just remembering those dogs crashing through the window easily justifies the game's place in this list.

PaRappa The Rapper

■ **DEVELOPER:** NANAON-SHA
■ **YEAR:** 1996 ■ **GENRE:** RHYTHM-ACTION

19 **The game that** popularised rhythm-action as we know it today, *PaRappa The Rapper* is one of the PlayStation's more offbeat hits. The core gameplay in *PaRappa* is simple – each of the game's six stages involves PaRappa rapping with an instructor, whose lines he must repeat by following the button prompts at the top of the screen. While the game received some criticism for its brevity, *PaRappa*'s charms won over gamers. The use of paper-thin cartoon characters in a 3D world is unique, the raps are memorable and PaRappa finds himself in some amusing predicaments, including queuing for the toilet. For that alone, PaRappa is possibly the most relatable character in any videogame ever.

Alundra

■ **DEVELOPER:** MATRIX SOFTWARE
■ **YEAR:** 1997 ■ **GENRE:** ACTION-RPG

21 **The PlayStation is** renowned for its excellent selection of Japanese RPGs, but few of them took the action-RPG approach. Of the ones that did, *Alundra* was the best, which comes as no surprise. While Matrix Software isn't the most well-known studio, it was founded by staff from Telenet Japan and Climax Entertainment – the studio that was responsible for *Landstalker* on the Mega Drive. *Alundra*'s plot revolves around the titular elf who has wound up shipwrecked in a strange village. He has the ability to enter the dreams of others, which he needs to employ in order to work out why the inhabitants of the village are having dreadful nightmares. Standing apart from its contemporaries with great 2D artwork and a long, satisfying quest, *Alundra* is a classic that fans of the 2D *Zelda* games will particularly appreciate.

> "Stupidly addictive once you know what you're doing, and the songs are great too."
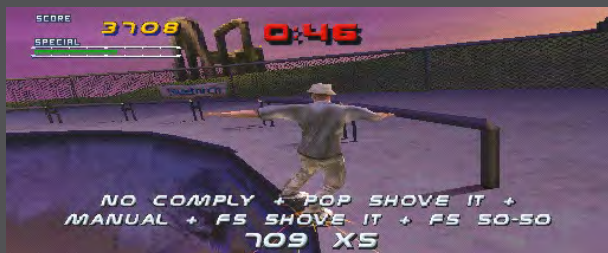> **TwoHeadedBoy**

Tomb Raider

■ **DEVELOPER:** CORE DESIGN
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1996 ■ **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE

18 While *Tomb Raider* is one of the PlayStation's most iconic series, the annual sequels meant that voting was divided between five games and the series had a tough time in this poll as a result. The original is the game which makes your final cut, and a fine choice it is – its mixture of platforming, puzzle-solving and gunplay was groundbreaking in the mid-Nineties, a time when developers were still finding their feet when it came to making 3D games. The first game in the series has a heavier emphasis on puzzle-solving and exploration than its PlayStation sequels, and is packed with memorable moments including an encounter with a Tyrannosaurus Rex. *Tomb Raider*'s success was phenomenal, catapulting Lara Croft to stardom as one of gaming's first female protagonists and launching a series that has seen myriad sequels as well as movies and merchandise.
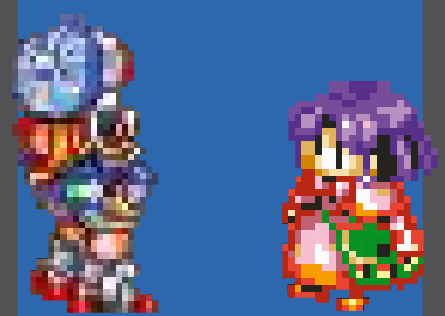
Silent Bomber

■ **DEVELOPER:** CYBERCONNECT2
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1999 ■ **GENRE:** ACTION

17 This futuristic action game takes the classic top-down shooter format and introduces its own twist – instead of shooting your targets, your method of attack is to lay down bombs and detonate them from afar. This is complicated by a whole host of extremely aggressive enemies, ensuring that your protagonist Jutah is constantly in motion. The result is a unique game featuring a high level of difficulty and satisfyingly fast-paced action. It's not uncommon to find yourself fighting multiple enemies while avoiding the fires emerging from recently destroyed targets, which could have proved technically challenging. CyberConnect 2 managed to get the PlayStation to handle this visual overload admirably, and provided an appropriately energetic electronic soundtrack to accompany the carnage.

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2

■ **DEVELOPER:** NEVERSOFT
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 2000 ■ **GENRE:** SPORTS

16 *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* was one of the most well-timed games ever – when it launched in 2000, you couldn't walk around town without seeing skateboarding teenagers. The original *Tony Hawk's Skateboarding* had been a surprise hit for Activision in 1999, meaning that *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* had a lot to live up to. The basic goal of the game hadn't changed, however improvements could be seen in almost every area of the game. Stages were larger, with twice as many objectives and more secret areas to find. Most importantly, players could now perform manuals on flat ground, allowing for continued combos. Better yet, the game included two new user creation modes, which allows players to design their own custom skaters and stages, massively expanding the lifespan of the game. The soundtrack pleased the aforementioned skating teens and the improved visuals rounded off a top-notch game.

Grandia

■ **DEVELOPER:** GAME ARTS
■ **YEAR:** 1999 ■ **GENRE:** RPG

15 *Grandia* took ages to arrive in the UK but was worth the wait. Ported from the Saturn original, this RPG avoided the genre archetypes of random encounters and turn-based actions. The combination of 2D sprites on 3D backdrops has aged well, too.

WipEout 2097

■ **DEVELOPER:** PSYGNOSIS
■ **YEAR:** 1996 ■ **GENRE:** RACING

14 Psygnosis's sequel took everything that was great about the original and improved on it, introducing one of gaming's greatest power-ups – the Quake Disruptor. The more forgiving level of difficulty helped the game to reach a wider audience.

Tekken 3

■ **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO ■ **YEAR:** 1998
■ **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP

13 A refreshed cast and improved visuals took *Tekken 3* to the top of the 3D fighting scene in the late Nineties. The game also introduced the Eddy Gordo, a favourite of button-mashers worldwide – perhaps explaining why it didn't place higher.

Die Hard Trilogy

■ **DEVELOPER:** PROBE ENTERTAINMENT
■ **YEAR:** 1996 ■ **GENRE:** VARIOUS

12 Probe made the best of this movie licence by designing individual games for each of the three films represented. Packed with irreverent humour and buckets of blood, the only thing it's missing is support for the G-Con 45 lightgun.

Gran Turismo

■ **DEVELOPER:** POLYPHONY DIGITAL
■ **YEAR:** 1997 ■ **GENRE:** RACING

11 Seeing *Gran Turismo* in action for the first time was mindblowing – console racing games had never looked so realistic. It provided long-term value too, featuring 140 cars and 11 tracks. Little wonder it sold over 10 million copies, becoming the best-selling PlayStation game of all time.

TIME LIMIT
8'14"

Rage Racer

■ **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1996 ■ **GENRE:** RACING

10 *Rage Racer* **marked** the point at which the PlayStation entries of the *Ridge Racer* series were no longer tied to the arcade offerings. The game offered a new take on the series, with the scenery being more muted in colour than in previous releases. However, it was still spectacular scenery – new to the series was the emphasis on courses with great height variations, leading to memorable sights such as the waterfall on your climb towards the first track's tunnel and plunging downhill straights. The move to console exclusivity brought a main game with more depth, as you competed to earn cash with which to upgrade your vehicle to your liking. You needed the upgrades too, as later stages became very tricky to pass – especially given that you were limited to three retries. It wasn't the best-selling game in the series, but proved to be a key influence on its successors.

Final Fantasy VIII

■ **DEVELOPER:** SQUARESOFT
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1999 ■ **GENRE:** RPG

9 **For gamers whose** *Final Fantasy* experience began and ended with *VII*, *Final Fantasy VIII* came as a shock – but even those who had followed the series from its days on Nintendo consoles were in for some surprises. While the complete refresh of cast and plot was a series tradition, Squaresoft's decision to overhaul the visual style of the series wasn't expected by many gamers. The gameplay was also overhauled. Magic was now drawn from enemies, and summoned creatures played a far more crucial role in the game. The new Junction system allowed players to tie magic to stats for boosts – a deep but initially overwhelming addition. The changes weren't to everyone's tastes, explaining its lower position relative to its predecessor, but *Final Fantasy VIII* maintained the high quality associated with the series and ranks as one of the PlayStation's most visually stunning games.

> "I realised that console gaming had surpassed PC gaming when this was running fullscreen, with a controller"
> **SeanR**

Doom

■ **DEVELOPER:** GT INTERACTIVE
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1995 ■ **GENRE:** FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

8 **This classic first-person** shooter might have appeared on every system under the sun, but that doesn't diminish the impact of the PlayStation release one bit – quite the opposite, in fact. Prior consoles had struggled to handle *Doom*, dropping enemies, windowing the action and even removing the music to get everything to fit. While PlayStation *Doom* didn't contain everything from the PC version, it was easily the most complete and playable console version available. The game includes over 50 stages taken from *Doom* and *Doom II* on the PC, as well as levels exclusive to the PlayStation, and the addition of a new ambient soundtrack further intensifies the fear factor that *Doom* is famous for. Best of all, it includes support for Sony's oft-forgotten link cable, allowing two players to have a deathmatch or team up to battle the monstrous hordes. First-person shooters evolved rapidly over the life of the PlayStation, but the quality of *Doom*'s conversion secures its spot.

Tekken 2

■ **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1996 ■ **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP

7 **The original** *Tekken* became the best 3D fighting game on the PlayStation almost by default – it was clearly better than the likes of *Battle Arena Toshinden*, but was still in need of refinement. *Tekken 2* provided the tune-up that saw the series become a serious contender in the 3D fighting world. Staple moves such as reversals and back throws were introduced here, as well as competitive modes like Team Battle and Survival which cemented the game as a multiplayer favourite. *Tekken 2* introduced a range of new characters, from series stalwarts such as Jackie Chan homage Lei Wulong to comedy characters such as the boxing kangaroo Roger. Additionally, unlocking the sub-bosses was now a much more rewarding endeavour, as the returning characters were fleshed out to match the standards of the new sub-bosses, greatly expanding the cast's variety and giving the game increased long-term appeal.

STAGE 1 00'09"02 31 PUSH P2 START
HEIHACHI   LEI

> "As much as I loved the first one, this just fleshed out the shell of a game it was"
> **Droo**

Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night

■ **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1997 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

5 **Konami's platformer was** overlooked on release but has gained a thoroughly deserved reputation for excellence over the years. *Symphony Of The Night* moved away from the linear template of previous *Castlevania* games, opting instead for a single, massive map that opened up as new abilities were gained in a manner similar to Nintendo's *Metroid* games. The game provided huge scope for exploration, especially given that when you think it's all over, Dracula's castle inverts and provides you with even more to do. It's an expensive PlayStation game, but fan demand has seen it ported elsewhere since.

Ridge Racer Type 4

■ **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1998 ■ **GENRE:** RACING

6 **Towards the end** of the Nineties, it was clear that trends in the gaming market were changing. The colourful visuals and hyperactive soundtrack that had served *Ridge Racer* so well at the PlayStation's launch were out of fashion, and players increasingly demanded longer games with more content. Luckily for Namco, somebody had a finger on the pulse of gaming because *Ridge Racer Type 4* shifted effortlessly to match contemporary tastes. The game adopted pastel-coloured skies and a more relaxed soundtrack, while the racing – as excellently drifty as ever – took place across more tracks and cars than ever before in the new Grand Prix season mode.
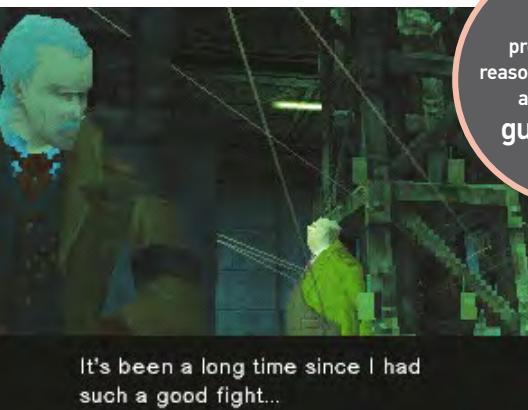
Tenchu: Stealth Assassins

■ **DEVELOPER:** ACQUIRE
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1998 ■ **GENRE:** STEALTH ACTION

4 **Ninjas had been** the subject of countless games before *Tenchu*, but they were primarily action games. *Tenchu* explored a more authentic ninja experience, by requiring the player to exercise caution and stealthily assassinate targets. The game offered a great deal of freedom in terms of carrying out your objectives, but was not for the impatient – observation was key as you tried to identify the perfect time to strike. We have to admit to being surprised by just how high *Tenchu* placed, but it's well worth revisiting – dropping from the roof and slicing up an unsuspecting guard is a thrilling experience.

Metal Gear Solid

■ **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1998 ■ **GENRE:** STEALTH ACTION

3 **The technology of** the 32-bit era gave ambitious developers the tools they needed to provide cinematic presentation – and none were more ambitious in that regard than Hideo Kojima. *Metal Gear Solid*'s high quality cut-scenes provided a lesson in bringing the big screen experience to consoles. But *Metal Gear Solid* wasn't just great to watch, as it featured tightly designed gameplay that inspired a number of stealth imitators. However, none of them could match its creativity, as the game's ingenious design leveraged everything from the contents of your memory card to its own packaging.

"This was pretty much the reason I even BOUGHT a Playstation"
gunbladelad

It's been a long time since I had such a good fight...

Final Fantasy VII

■ **DEVELOPER:** SQUARESOFT
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1997 ■ **GENRE:** RPG

2 **Before 1997, publishers** were under the impression that Japanese RPGs just weren't where the big money was to be made. Squaresoft's *Final Fantasy VII* changed that perception forever, selling over 9 million copies and causing a boom in RPG localisation. The game introduced a generation of gamers to the genre and spawned a variety of sequels, as well as a movie. *Final Fantasy VII* was an epic on an unprecedented scale. The game's use of pre-rendered backgrounds allowed the game a visual impact unique within its genre, combining with Nobuo Uematsu's incredible soundtrack to aid the story in emotionally affecting players. And boy, what a story – with a memorable cast of heroes, as well as an iconic villain involved in one of gaming's most notoriously shocking moments, it lingers in the memory long after completion.
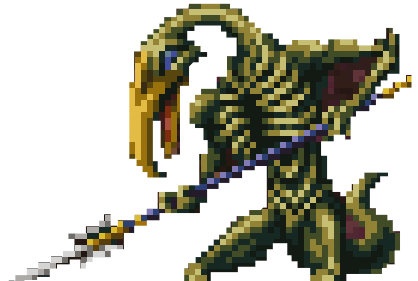
> "Any game that rewards an insane amount of practice and time spent with the chance to play as a block of processed soya curd must be the best of its generation"
> **earlymodernsteve**

READERS' CHOICE

Resident Evil 2

■ **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM ■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1998 ■ **GENRE:** SURVIVAL HORROR

With the success of *Resident Evil*, a sequel was inevitable. After briefly planning a spin-off set in the ruins of the first game's mansion, Capcom put plans into place for a new game set in and around Raccoon City's police department, starring rookie cop Leon S Kennedy and student Elza Walker. If the latter name seems unfamiliar, your memory isn't failing you. *Resident Evil 2* had a lot to live up to – and Capcom knew it. A year into development, the new game wasn't living up to the team's expectations. Rather than trying to fix the game's problems, Capcom took the bold decision to scrap the game and start again. The number one spot achieved here just goes to show how well that risk paid off.

Now starring Leon and Claire Redfield, the sister of Chris from the original game, the *Resident Evil 2* that made it to market retained the basic setting of the scrapped sequel but little else. While the basic idea of the game remained much the same as the original – escape with your life, as well as any survivors you find – the new setting made for big changes. Where the original game turned up the heat slowly by introducing a single zombie after a few scenes of build-up, *Resident Evil 2* drops you straight into the fire, placing you on the already infested streets of Raccoon City.

Resident Evil 2 employs many of the same mechanics as the original game – the same controls, the limited saves and those item storage chests all make a return. However, it improves on the original in a variety of ways. Characters now respond to damage visually, clutching wounds and even limping as their health drops, and a variety of mini-games are provided for players who have finished the game, including the brilliantly ridiculous Tofu Survivor mission.

But the biggest improvement was the 'zapping' system, which allowed the two characters to experience each other's scenarios. Actions taken with one character will affect the other character's experience – defeating an enemy during your first run may well remove it for the second, while using up items during the first run can make it harder to get through the second. This feature gave the game massively improved replay value over its predecessor.

Resident Evil 2 was a narrow winner in the voting, but it's a worthy one which represents Capcom at its absolute best. The game's mechanical improvements were subtle enough to keep things immediately familiar to fans of the original game, but the new setting allowed the game its own distinct identity. Refusing to compromise on quality caused short-term strife, but the resulting game has stood the test of time.

Five Reasons Why It's Great

1 It brilliantly handled the diminished shock value of zombies by introducing iconic enemies like the Licker.

2 The plot doesn't spiral into the complex nonsense of later games in the series.

3 It introduced Leon, who also starred in the excellent *Resident Evil 4* as well as the best bit of *Resi 6*.

4 Raccoon City is the perfect setting for *Resident Evil*, which is why it's so frequently revisited.

5 How many other games let you run around as a giant block of tofu?

FINAL FANTASY VII

In the mid-Nineties, Square's flagship franchise abandoned Nintendo's hardware and embraced the PlayStation, a move that would lead to Final Fantasy VII, an ambitious, refined and enormously influential RPG. Director Yoshinori Kitase and art director Yusuke Naora discuss the creation of this masterpiece with us in unprecedented depth. Steven Spielberg's Jaws fits into it somewhere, as Retro Gamer discovers…

Without hyperbole, *Final Fantasy VII* is the RPG that changed the genre. Opening the Western floodgates to Japan's own style of role-playing and popularising the entire sub-genre, the 10-million-plus-selling game was, for many players, their introduction to the potential of interactive storytelling and the first videogame narrative to leave a mark on them. It's also divisive, anecdotally referred to as the most returned game of all time and often criticised by Western RPG veterans – yet such cynicism can't mask the impact it had upon release in 1997. Along with *Gran Turismo*, *Final Fantasy VII* shifted millions of PlayStation consoles by demonstrating the machine's capabilities, captivating gamers with a fictional universe of unrestrained scope and style that would govern an entire corner of the industry. Back when the game was being created, Square (today known as Square Enix) was a company in transition, and the influx of talent that brought *FFVII* into being, as well as a development culture that fostered creativity, was ultimately responsible for this deservedly celebrated RPG.

At the 1995 SIGGRAPH computer graphics convention in Los Angeles, the company formerly known as Square presented an interactive demo to the world that showcased its *Final Fantasy* property in unprecedented fashion. This project ☞

depicted three characters from *Final Fantasy VI* fighting a Golem enemy in full 3D, a jaw-dropping contrast to the SNES-based 2D roots of the game, complete with visual effects and cinematic in-battle camera angles that implied a future beyond the static staging of the series' stories up until that point. When you look at the tech demo now, you can absolutely see the founding technical conceit of *Final Fantasy VII* embedded within it. Squaresoft saw that *Final Fantasy* could be so much more on a platform that allowed the company to experiment with such high-end technical ideas.

The SIGGRAPH project would form the 'seed', as producer and creator Hironobu Sakaguchi dubbed it on a promotional video for the game, of *Final Fantasy*'s move into the next console generation. To any seasoned gamer, the most well-known part of the development of *Final Fantasy VII* is the defection that started it all. Long considered a Nintendo stalwart since the original *Final Fantasy*'s release on the NES in 1987, Square shifted to the PlayStation for its CD-ROM capabilities over the N64's comparatively limited cartridges. This fit the grand ambitions of this new sequel.

"We were fans of Nintendo's hardware, although in order to use CG movies in the game like we intended, we needed a lot of storage space, and for that reason decided on a platform

that used the higher-capacity CD media," director Yoshinori Kitase tells us.

How ironic that this franchise would soar on a Sony platform, given that Nintendo publicly broke away from a CD-enabled SNES collaboration with the electronics giant earlier in the decade. The emerging disc format enabled *Final Fantasy VII* to be far more cinematic than its forebears – an important factor, especially to Sakaguchi. Yet an interesting factor in all this was the set of technical influences on the team, many of whom were from Western game development, as Kitase explains to us: "We looked at trends in the foreign-made PC games of the time, such as *Alone In The Dark* and *Heart Of Darkness* [and so on], and made it our objective to combine together smooth action sequences using polygon-based characters and clever camera work with the insertion of effective CG movies at a high level. I believe that we pretty much achieved our goals in this regard."

When it came to setting and story, *Final Fantasy VII* would similarly be a departure from series convention. While the previous entry in the series had a pronounced steampunk theme, the set of environments in the seventh game would vary massively from continent to continent, from a vast, polluted metropolis to backwater towns;
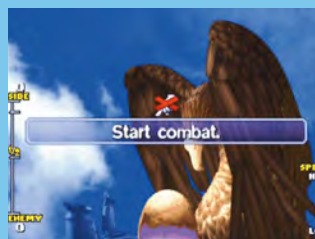
DISTRACTIONS

The best of Final Fantasy VII's many extra tasks and mini-games

☞ Chocobos
Catching them, riding them, racing them and breeding them – the Chocobo element of *FFVII* is a game in itself, and becomes bewilderingly complex when you're looking to breed that lucrative Gold Chocobo, which can reach parts of the map that even the Highwind cannot.

☞ Snowboarding
On the second disc, Cloud gets the opportunity to snowboard down a mountain. Later in the game, it re-emerges as a tricky arcade game at Gold Saucer's Wonder Square. This mini-game was popular enough to justify a mobile spin-off, which is naturally only available in Japan.

☞ First-person shooting
Visiting the 'Speed' part of Gold Saucer triggers this bizarre but quite impressive first-person shooter section, where hitting a high score lands you a prize. This is notable for its kaleidoscopic visuals, in stark contrast to much of the game.

☞ Battle on Fort Condor
Visiting Fort Condor triggers this intriguing little strategy offshoot, where you fund small skirmishes to hold back Shinra forces from the giant bird perched atop the fort. It's no *Age Of Empires*, but it shows how diverse the ideas are in *FFVII*.

☞ Motorcycle chase
One of the nicest surprises early on is an action-based mini-game where you have to protect your comrades from Shinra soldiers on bikes by ramming them off the road with Cloud's inexplicably large Buster Sword. It's great fun.

☞ Battle arena
The only way to get Cloud's Omnislash Limit Break outside of the finale, and a clever means of extending the combat's appeal, the battle arena on Gold Saucer is a relentless challenge where you have to survive successive rounds of enemies and status ailments.

FINAL FANTASY VII'S UNSUNG HERO

Kitase weighs in on the oddly high popularity of Zack Fair, Cloud's former mentor

As you may recall, the entire flashback sequence where Cloud remembers the events in Nibelheim that led to Sephiroth's transformation into a twisted enemy turns out to be a bit different. Later, we learn that Cloud confused himself with Zack, his superior in the army. Ever since then, Zack has remained a popular figure among *Final Fantasy* fans, which led to the spin-off *Crisis Core*. His role in Cloud's story makes him a unique element in *FFVII*'s tangled web.

"Zack is the vessel onto which Cloud twistedly projects his complexes towards SOLDIER [Shinra's elite fighting force]," Kitase tells us. "He was created by the scenario writer, [Kazushige Nojima], as he was trying to build up the mystery surrounding Cloud's past, and we did not originally think of Zack as a major character, but he seemed to be strangely popular with the fans. Much later on, Zack featured heavily in *Crisis Core*, and Mr Nojima was in charge of the scenario for both titles. When he first created Zack, I doubt that he could possibly have thought that we would be delving into the same character's story ten years on!"

» *Final Fantasy VII*'s Materia system is so deep that it can eventually transform the entire rhythm of a battle, by letting you alter the conditions of it.

» Even though players could avoid him entirely, Vincent earned his own cult reputation.

that clash of futuristic technology against these remnants of a beautiful old world.

We asked Kitase to discuss the inspirations for the planet's creation, and he graciously passed our questions on to *FFVII*'s art director, Yusuke Naora. "Initially we wanted to try something new by having a corporation as the major enemy while still keeping the game broadly in the fantasy genre," he explains, referring to the Shinra Electric Power Company. "Having decided on this concept, we actively included many steampunk-like elements to try to merge the appeal of traditional high-fantasy 'brick-built' structures and sci-fi elements at a high level. However, as there was to be magic present in this world, it would have been hard to have cyberpunk-esque unknown future technology sitting comfortably with the other influences, so we tried to keep that aspect down as much as possible."

Naora continues: "On the design side, we were also very much inspired to mix in things from many different periods in a semi-chaotic manner, including things from our everyday lives such as the newer buildings in Tokyo, the streets of Ginza, and the Shibuya station building." All this led to a laudably diverse set of environments, which still felt like a cohesive part of the same world.

The setting was closely connected to the narrative – the backdrop of *Final Fantasy VII*'s story is that the planet is suffering, being mined of resources by the ruthless Shinra, which is also a prominent military force. Yet the central conflict of the story is actually smaller-scale than

that. For the developers, it was more about the symbiotic struggle between the hero, Cloud, and the calculated villain, Sephiroth, that drove the game forwards, as Kitase explains: "Throughout the story I really wanted to depict Sephiroth as an overwhelmingly powerful threat. However, if you have a villain as an actual opponent who appears before the heroes then however strong or charismatic you make the character, he will still feel very much 'life-sized' and limited in scope, reduced to another minor evil."

What source of inspiration helped the team tackle this issue? You'd be surprised. Kitase continues: "To solve this problem, I decided to present Sephiroth indirectly, making the player aware of his existence through hints and stories but not having him show himself before them much. The player sees the aftermath of his ruthless deeds but does not arrive at the source of the evil for a long time. This was the same method used by Steven Spielberg in the film *Jaws*. Finding the butchered President Shinra on the top floor of the Shinra building and the impaled body of the Midgar Zolom are moments symbolic of this approach."

Players don't properly encounter Sephiroth until they're around ten hours in, and even then it's in fleeting glimpses – we see him prominently in flashbacks, leading to the discovery about his sad origins and subsequent breakdown. He, along with the attached musical theme, *One-Winged Angel*, would become iconic aspects of *FFVII* upon release. Cloud, the amnesiac hero trying to piece his distressing memories back together, was an equal point of fascination for players. It's this dynamic, with their subsequently explored ☞

"WE MADE IT OUR OBJECTIVE TO COMBINE SMOOTH ACTION SEQUENCES WITH CG MOVIES AT A HIGH LEVEL"

THE GREATEST MOMENTS OF FINAL FANTASY VII

Not featuring Cloud in a dress

THAT DEATH…
You knew it would be this – shocking, sad and brilliant on the part of the Squaresoft team, a certain character is murdered by Sephiroth at the climax of the game's first act. It's notable because it is so brutal, but this brave move to take the character out of the story meant *Final Fantasy VII* would be forever remembered by players.

OMNISLASH
The entire game builds to this final conflict between Cloud and Sephiroth, where the hero slices down the grey-haired villain in spectacular fashion, using his final Limit Break, Omnislash. All right, so it isn't necessarily the first time you use Omnislash, but it's still a thrilling component of the game's conclusion.

THE WEAPONS EMERGE OUT OF THE CRATER
Sephiroth unleashes Weapons on the planet, giant boss-style creatures that, when put together, look like something out of a Japanese monster movie. The idea of the optional super-boss is a *Final Fantasy* staple – here, they're made a key turning point in the story, in another example of Square's pioneering FMVs.

500 YEARS LATER…
After the credits, we're treated to this brilliant but somehow chilling scene, 500 years into the future. We see Nanaki and his children running through a canyon, before emerging onto a vista that shows an abandoned Midgar, overgrown and free of the technology that drained the life of the planet.

THE PRESIDENT IS DEAD
When Kitase alludes to *Jaws*, he's referring to this scene where the player reaches the top of Shinra Headquarters and finds the President dead, impaled by Sephiroth's katana. It's a brilliant way to bring the villain into the story, having him lurk just out of reach.

SUMMONING KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND
Knights of the Round was easily the most lavish summon spell in the entire series up until that point. The animation for the attack, Ultimate End, sees 13 knights battering the enemy with a slew of extraordinarily powerful moves; a just reward for the exhausting process of breeding a Gold Chocobo to get it.

SEPHIROTH WALKS INTO THE FLAMES
The highlight of the entire Nibelheim flashback, told from the village of Kalm early on in the story, is an eye-opening cinematic where Sephiroth turns away from Cloud into the flames, after the twisted warrior burns the town to the ground. Perhaps the most visually recognisable part of the game.

ZACK AND CLOUD ESCAPE NIBELHEIM
In this flashback, the events of the Nibelheim incident are fully disclosed. We learn that Cloud borrowed Zack's identity, and that this member of SOLDIER was gunned down by Shinra outside Midgar. This sequence is made all the more sad when you've earlier encountered Zack's parents in the town of Gongaga, where both his mother and father are completely unaware of his tragic fate.

EMERALD WEAPON SWIMS OUT OF THE DARKNESS
Late into the third disc, heading into the ocean with the submarine gives the player a few surprises, including the final whereabouts of the Turks, Shinra's agents whose paths cross yours throughout. That's before you see bubbles emerge out of the black, though – when the fearsome Emerald Weapon drifts towards you in terrifying fashion. Brr! It's an absolute bitch to kill, too.

GETTING THE HIGHWIND
Final Fantasy as a series is ingenious in the way it lets you manoeuvre around the world. When you get the Highwind, you can go almost anywhere in the entire world, a gloriously freeing reminder of the diversity of locations within the game.

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history of bloodshed and trauma, that players hadn't seen before in *Final Fantasy*. "Furthermore, however far the player pursues him, Sephiroth is always just out of reach, and because of this our image of him becomes more and more idolised and idealised," explains Kitase. "This story structure also overlaps with the reasons that Cloud has such a complex about his own past, and I believe it is an effective tool for showing the relationship between the two characters."

All the character designs and their personalities were left in the hands of the designers, a break from previous games, where Sakaguchi would oversee their conception. This was also the first project where Tetsuya Nomura would be the sole character designer, who, having contributed work to *Final Fantasy V* and *VI*, replaced Yoshitaka Amano from the previous titles. A *Famitsu* interview with Nomura (translated by Andriasang) explains that Cloud was essentially his creation, yet Kitase told us that determining both the looks and personalities of every one of *Final Fantasy VII*'s iconic cast of characters was "largely the responsibility of [Nomura]". It marked a sea change for the series. Gone were the primarily medieval, dreamy heroes of Amano, and in came a fresh, exciting array of heroes that would have an extensive impact on Japanese popular culture – not to mention birth a string of ideas that would be appropriated into character clichés, like spiky hair and giant swords. Amano would still contribute character sketches and the iconic meteor logo, however.

The immense back story for these heroes and villains was fine-tuned by scenario writer Kazushige Nojima, while many of the actual narrative ideas came from a unique exercise that once again showed Squaresoft's experimental approach. "When designing the game, we asked all staff on the *Final Fantasy* team to submit possible episode ideas for character back stories and created the overall stories by putting these together," says Kitase. "It was the scenario writer, Mr Nojima, who managed to put together a complete and detailed story from this massive pool of ideas, a process that was much like putting together a jigsaw puzzle."

This exercise led to an intriguing collection of stories across the cast of heroes, with one main plot driving it all: the planet's impending destruction at the hands of Sephiroth, where he would harness the world's natural defences – known as the Lifestream – for himself. The cast of *Final Fantasy VII*, including the tortured, unfocused Barret; last of an ancient race Aeris (or Aerith – a misspelling in the game's translation, as you probably know); and down-and-out pilot Cid Highwind; as well as more esoteric faces like the tomb-dwelling, optional companion Vincent Valentine, struck a chord with gamers, as their stories dovetailed skilfully with the main narrative.

These small tales, even Sephiroth's, traced back to the all-encompassing Shinra plot device – this corporation that is draining the planet of its resources. Given that *Final Fantasy VII* was made in the mid-Nineties, you could draw obvious

parallels with the real-world environmental issues at that time. Yet environmentalism, surprisingly, was not part of the team's storytelling agenda, Kitase explains: "We did not particularly plan on bringing out environmental destruction as a major theme of the game but rather intended the story to depict the internal struggles of Cloud and Sephiroth.

"However, if pushed I would say that this theme was not so much that of concern over destruction of the environment but more about how we wanted to show how civilisation and the environment coexist. Cloud and his companions first appear in the game as a group trying to take down the Mako reactors, but in the end we see them getting help from the Lifestream that is the source of that energy, and going forward into a future of coexistence with the planet. I believe that this theme of how we can strike a balance and live in harmony with the environment is one that is shared by all of us."

The Lifestream is the literal embodiment of the planet's energy, where all life emerges from and where it returns to with death. Its genesis came from Sakaguchi, who had come up with the

» [Top left] Catching and breeding Chocobos is one of the true tests of *Final Fantasy VII.*
» [Bottom right] *FFVII* is a high point for the series' stunning creatures, with Bahamut being a decent means of lazily dispatching enemies.

"SEPHIROTH IS ALWAYS JUST OUT OF REACH, AND SO OUR IMAGE OF HIM BECOMES MORE AND MORE IDOLISED "

idea as a reaction to tragic events in his own life. "When we were creating *Final Fantasy III*, my mother passed away," he said in a video to coincide with *FFVII*'s release. "And ever since, I have been thinking about the theme of life. Life exists in many things, and I was curious about what would happen if I attempted to examine life in a mathematical and logical way; maybe this was my approach in overcoming the grief I was experiencing."

With that delicate balance in mind, an antagonistic force like Shinra seemed suitable – it also presented a fine opportunity to go against the curve of the last six games. "We had a feeling that ideas for villains in RPGs had kind of become stale and repetitive, with it always being something like a massive dragon or an evil ruler who had acquired an ancient power," says Kitase. "When we asked ourselves what a more modern take on a powerful evil would be, we came up with the idea of a corporation that pollutes the environment for excessive profit."

The most talked-about moment in this complex tale, though, would be the death of a major character. One of the conditions of running our exclusive interview from Square Enix was that we wouldn't reveal this character's name – but you know which 👉

RANDY PITCHFORD
CEO, Gearbox Software

" Obviously, role-playing games were a huge influence on *Borderlands*. *Final Fantasy* offered many of the standards and tropes that are borrowed by many role-playing games of today. The engagement and motivation that comes from levelling up and the draw of collecting loot first became clear to all of us when we did such things with pencil-and-paper games. While many PC games applied these principles, *Final Fantasy* managed to capture the design in a most accessible way at a time when our controllers had only a D-pad and two buttons. The elegance of the *Final Fantasy* approach to role-playing has inspired a generation.

In fact, the very first videogame that my wife and I played together from beginning to end was the first *Final Fantasy* game on the NES. To this day, we have fond memories of that experience and an irrational loyalty to the franchise. I know that many people see *Final Fantasy VII* as the high-water mark for the series, but for me it was the earlier *Final Fantasy* games on the NES and Super Nintendo that have had the most impact. "
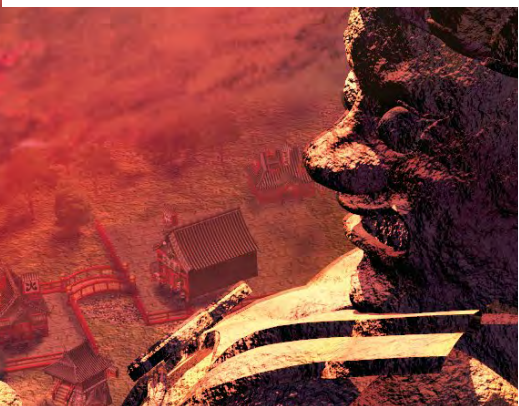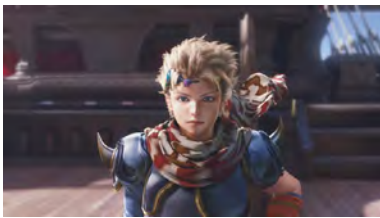
WHAT HAPPENS NEXT…

SEQUELS IN FINAL FANTASY

☞ FINAL FANTASY X-2

Solid and technically superb but tonally misfiring, *Final Fantasy X-2* took *FFX*'s timid protagonist, Yuna, then popped on some hot pants and gave her a couple of guns. The game's 'Perfect' ending is almost worth playing through it alone for fans of the first game, though.

☞ FINAL FANTASY IV: THE AFTER YEARS

Originally released on mobiles in Japan, then through WiiWare and again on the PSP with *Final Fantasy IV: The Complete Collection*, *The After Years* is a direct sequel that is built with the look of the original SNES title. The PSP version presents it in the most coherent, beautiful form.

☞ DISSIDIA 012[DUODECIM] FINAL FANTASY

Forget the stupid title. Aside from the unfortunate shortage of new content, this sequel to the fan-service-packed original is a top-notch action RPG that was snubbed last year, no doubt affected by the PSP's atrocious piracy rates. Nevertheless, it comes packaged with the first game, so get it if you have the chance.

☞ one we're talking about. Everyone knows it. You might have spent hours training this character up before the event occurred. It didn't matter. This character was wiped out of the story. Such a brave decision would be the defining moment, and it stunned this new generation of JRPG fans, and is still the subject of much conversation today.

It is odd that Square Enix declined to comment on the sequence, having done so in the past – even Kitase himself, back in 2003. It could be that the company is hoping new gamers discover *Final Fantasy VII* through the PlayStation Store, or that something new involving the game is in the pipeline. Either way, that moment was designed by Square to create a sudden void in the player, to make them think they'd have acted differently were they to know it was coming.

There are more surprises besides, though. A major plot point some way into the game sees the

Japanese RPGs from there on, was the product of a talented group of people, sharing a potent creative culture. We asked Kitase about the team's dynamic at the time.

"Before *FFVII* we only really had 2D pixel art designers, but for this project many 3D CG specialists and designers came in from outside the company, leading to an interaction of various working cultures that was very stimulating," he says. "All the in-house designers also started to learn to use CG tools, and we held a lot of seminars and explanation meetings. I personally received instruction in how to use Alias PowerAnimator, and around a tenth of all the character motions seen in the game's event scenes were actually created by me!"

We had to ask Kitase if anything changed in development – and, as it happens, Square had a relatively airtight vision of *FFVII*, with only

66 WHEN THINKING ABOUT A MODERN TAKE ON A POWERFUL EVIL, WE CAME UP WITH THE IDEA OF A CORPORATION 99

threat level raised significantly as giant creatures, a super-boss motif of the series known as Weapons, march into the overworld and heighten the drama of the closing act. The Emerald and Ruby Weapons are especially tough to beat, yet incorporating these powerful entities as part of the Sephiroth storyline imbued them with a new importance. Kitase explains why the team opted to do this: "In all *Final Fantasy* games, we always put in very powerful monsters in the latter parts of the game to challenge dedicated players and to deepen the gameplay experience, enhancing the longevity of the title and giving something to do aside from the main quest. We had already got the concept of the Weapons as defenders of the planet for *FFVII* and so decided to tie that together with these play-enhancing features."

But the story, despite forever being the guiding light for the *Final Fantasy* series, was matched by *FFVII*'s immense technical and mechanical advances. Creating a masterpiece of this calibre, with such scope in setting and the jaw-dropping amount of iconography that would define

one change that fans will definitely have noticed. "The only thing that we had to change during development was the level of deformation on the characters. The fact that the characters are depicted at different levels of deformation in the field, battle and CG sections is a remnant of these changes." Whereas field characters ended up being blocky 3D models, the characters in battle had far more detail. As Kitase mentions, too, you can see this difference in CG movies – some depict the characters in blocky form, while others, like Sephiroth before the flames of Nibelheim, are more impressively realised. It's a curious inconsistency, but of course forgivable in the face of the finished product's other achievements.

The locations have aged better, thanks to the heavy use of prerendered backgrounds. Yet part of *Final Fantasy VII*'s appeal to long-time fans was the introduction of a fully 3D world map. Despite the cinematic touches present in other parts of the experience, the world map was seen as an updated version of the SNES overworld. "This part of the game was not actually all that much of a challenge," says Kitase. "It goes without saying that, at the time, creating data for a 3D map was hard work, but for better or worse we decided to do the map along pretty similar lines to a 2D world map from the *Final Fantasy* games of the Super Famicom era, so there were not a lot of ☞

» The game's early Tifa/Aeris choices give you an opportunity to damage a girl's self-esteem.

THIS PLANET AS MY VESSEL

With insight from Final Fantasy VII's art director, Yusuke Naora, we pick out key locations from the story

THE NORTHERN CRATER

DEVELOPER COMMENTARY
MIDGAR

"The overall silhouette of Midgar was inspired by looking at a pizza I was eating with friends while I was stuck for design ideas. For the Shinra building, the overall sense of scale came from looking up every day at our company offices and also had features taken from structures where practicality influences the design, such as the bridge of a battleship and industrial furnaces."

DEVELOPER COMMENTARY
FORGOTTEN CAPITAL

"As this was to be the location for some of the most important scenes, it needed to be eerie, spiritual and made up from a more limited number of elements. In order to convey the idea of long dead civilisations, we used the motif of the fossilised prehistoric sea bed, with architecture based on giant shells."

WUTAI

FORGOTTEN CAPITAL

ROCKET TOWN

COSTA DEL SOL

COREL

MIDGAR

NIBELHEIM

JUNON

COSMO CANYON

GOLD SAUCER

DEVELOPER COMMENTARY
COSMO CANYON

"The concept of this area had been finalised as a valley and observatory like the Grand Canyon, so I had the designers put in more of a medieval feel, with fantasy elements such as the clockwork 'cosmic spheres' planetarium and the gyroscope compass."

GONGAGA

DEVELOPER COMMENTARY
GOLD SAUCER

"As there were a lot of mini-games in the title, I set the question of, 'What would an amusement park in this world be like?' and made sure everyone had fun when designing this area."

☐ JUNON
A port town that is also a military base, Junon is attacked later on by Sapphire Weapon, where the giant Junon cannon ceremoniously takes it down.

☐ THE NORTHERN CRATER
This is where Jenova landed about 2,000 years before the start of the story – a creepy, expansive crater where the climax of the game takes place.

☐ NIBELHEIM
As more observant players will know, after Nibelheim was burnt down by Sephiroth, the entire town was rebuilt by Shinra and the citizens replaced with its employees in a cover-up.

☐ COSTA DEL SOL
An utterly bizarre, Spanish-style holiday town with a relaxed atmosphere, players could later buy an overpriced house in this pleasantly different part of the world map.

☐ GONGAGA
This sad little town is the location of an exploded Mako reactor, with the citizens mourning their lost. Like a sister town of Nibelheim, in a strange way.

☐ WUTAI
A more culturally differentiated locale to everywhere else, Wutai is the sole town on the far western continent, and marks the only location where the heroes team up with the Turks.

☐ COREL
Barret's hometown-turned-post-Shinra-wreck, this is where you can catch the lift to the far more jolly Gold Saucer. There's a ruddy superb chase sequence here later in the game, too.

☐ ROCKET TOWN
Built around a launchpad, this is where one of the more interesting characters, foul-mouthed pilot Cid Highwind, hails from. It's a cheerful moment when they finally get the rocket into space.

» *Final Fantasy VII Remake*'s combat is massively different to how it was on the original PlayStation.

CONSTANTIN JUPP
Assistant producer, Media Molecule

" *Final Fantasy VII* made me realise that games were so much more than just running or shooting or fighting. Far from mindless entertainment, they could actually stir emotion within the player. It's the game that inspired me to join the games industry and help create those experiences for others. "

problems with the overall vision."

Instead, the team had to spend more time worrying about the individual locations themselves, which were significantly more imaginative than their cartridge-based forebears. "It was actually a lot harder and took much more work realising the fully rendered backdrops for the towns and dungeons, as nothing like these had ever been done before at the time. Having said this, the world map in *FFVII* did play a very important role in the game. After the first part, which is spent in the oppressive and cramped environment of Midgar, the feeling of liberation and freedom at the moment when you step out

between generations. "We had decided on the idea of battles in 3D, with the camera panning and zooming around the action, from before beginning development on *FFVII*. In 1995, we created a prototype game based on doing the battles from *FFVI* in 3D and showcased it at the SIGGRAPH convention that year. This test game was made with an eye to perfecting the idea for the battles in *FFVII*."

Aided by the straightforward yet endlessly customisable Materia-based ability system, as well as visually extravagant Limit Break attacks, the combat in *Final Fantasy VII* would never become a chore. This title also saw the best work of composer Nobuo Uematsu, building on his incredible music in *FFVI* with a series of stunning and highly memorable themes and leitmotifs. Any poignant, dark or pleasant instance is helped along enormously by his work, and he made an easy collaborator for Square. "We basically just showed Mr Uematsu the character designs and the scenario, and had him familiarise with the overall themes and images of the game before letting him loose. There were no specific detailed

" IT TOOK A LOT OF WORK REALISING THE RENDERED BACKDROPS, AS NOTHING LIKE THEM HAD BEEN DONE BEFORE "

onto the world map is one of the game's most memorable highlights." That's completely true, and this was a stone's throw from making it into our list of favourite moments. *FFVII* progressively puts more power in the player's hands through the way they interact with the world.

Random battles would remain part of the series, but as directed by the SIGGRAPH presentation, the actual look of them marked an exciting leap

requests, and he was allowed to create the score comparatively freely," says Kitase.

While HD technology and high-capacity storage media has let Square Enix realise the most elaborate of visions with *Final Fantasy*, there is something pure about the seventh game. It's such a well-rounded experience that it's obviously the product of a developer at a peak of creativity. Being the first *Final Fantasy* released in Europe, and armed with a slightly misleading marketing campaign that focused on FMVs over gameplay, it turned a historically marginalised genre into an international phenomenon.

That's why there's always talk of a remake. Yet gamers clamouring for this must surely realise the potential for disappointment – *Final Fantasy VII* was a product of the CD-ROM era, and everything was built on that foundation. To try to replicate that in today's HD landscape would be a fun curio, sure, but we're almost certain that it wouldn't surpass the original.

We'll now be able to find out though, as Square announced a brand new version of *Final Fantasy VII* at E3 in 2015. It promises to be a high definition remake of the original game, although Square recently mentioned that it would follow an episodic format. It also makes a huge move away from the combat of the PlayStation origina, discarding its turn-based combat in favour of a fighting engine similar to *Kingdom Hearts*. Despite this rather fundamental change, we're hoping that *Final Fantasy VII Remaster* will recapture not only the spirit of the characters, but the themes of identity, life and death that no other entry in the series has matched. Like the original game, this remake seems a huge risk, but hopefully Square will do it the justice it deserves.

» **[Top right]** The Forgotten Capital is a bizarre locale, and is still the most atmospheric part of this world.
» **[Bottom right]** Cloud as he appears in the incoming HD remake of *Final Fantasy VII.*

"Listen, the Don's not interested in men. So just get the hell outta here."
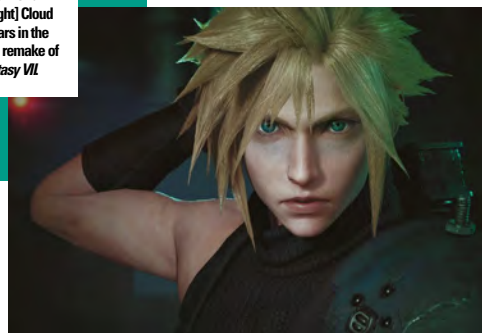
The Anatomy of
CLOUD

He carries a big sword and always seems miserable, but just how much do you know about Final Fantasy poster boy Cloud?

SWORD & SORCERY

Though there is a whole load of swords for you to equip to Cloud that you gather throughout the game, none are as iconic as his famous starting weapon, the gigantic Buster Sword. It'd never work in real life, of course, but then never would Cloud's unfeasibly pointy hair. Besides, *Final Fantasy VII* is a game about a half-alien madman trying to destroy the planet being stopped by a magic wielding team that includes a man with a gun for an arm and a talking cat. In other words, forget about realism and embrace that badass sword.

TROUBLE & STRIFE

A poster boy for angst, Cloud's sullen demeanour early on in *Final Fantasy VII* has earned him a not-undeserved reputation as being a bit of an arse. As the game progresses, however, Cloud softens up a little as we get to know his backstory and the arrogant, uncaring front he puts up is broken down. Cloud begins as a former member of elite military unit SOLDIER, working as a mercenary for freedom fighters AVALANCHE. However, there's more to Cloud's past than meets the eye…

JACK OF ALL TRADES

Cloud is unquestionably the best character in *Final Fantasy VII* from a gameplay perspective, in part because he's an all-rounder with high stats in all categories. He's got good attack power, meaning you'll probably want him in the front row to dish out damage. But he's also the second best magic caster after Aeris, so you can focus on magic with him if you choose. If that's not enough, Cloud's got the most powerful Limit Breaks in the game, his signature move and final Limit Break being the devastating Omnislash.

SUPERSTAR

As well as being the protagonist of *Final Fantasy VII*, Cloud has made a number of other appearances. He appeared in the *Final Fantasy* themed fighting game *Dissidia Final Fantasy*, *Kingdom Hearts* and *Kingdom Hearts 2*, *Theatrhythm Final Fantasy* and *Chocobo Racing*, amongst others. He's even made an appearance in a film (albeit a rubbish one) in the form of *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*.

PaRappa The Rapper

"KICK! PUNCH! IT'S ALL IN THE MIND"

Masaya Matsuura may not have created the rhythm genre when he unleashed his cute rapping puppy, but he arguably popularised it and brought it to the attention of the gaming masses.

The core mechanics of *PaRappa The Rapper* are still widely used today, but in 1996 they were incredibly innovative, fusing gameplay to music in a way that few previous games had been able to successfully manage.

Matsuura's game is ridiculous fun, telling the tale of our titular hero who wants to steal the irresistible Sunny Funny away from his canine rival Joe Chin. What follows is a genuinely hilarious adventure that sees PaRappa rapping his way through karate lessons, a driving test and even a toilet queue, before finally making his debut on stage in an attempt to win Sunny Funny's flowery heart.

Gameplay is fairly basic and revolves around hitting buttons in time to the music's beat. There are only six stages, but *Parappa*'s clever ranking system – you'll drop one of four ranks if you mess up two lines in a row and must then play well for two lines to reclaim it – ensures that the game has plenty of replay value. And that's before you even delve into the freestyling that's unlocked after completing the game.

Brought to life by the distinctive artwork of Rodney Greenblat – Matsuura and Greenblat insisted it retained its 2D look – and featuring a range of superb tunes, *PaRappa The Rapper* is as entertaining as it is innovative. ✱
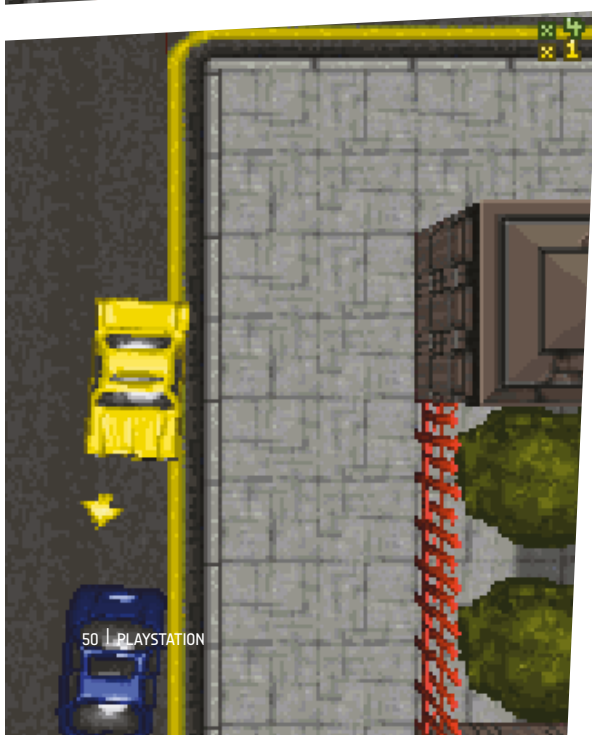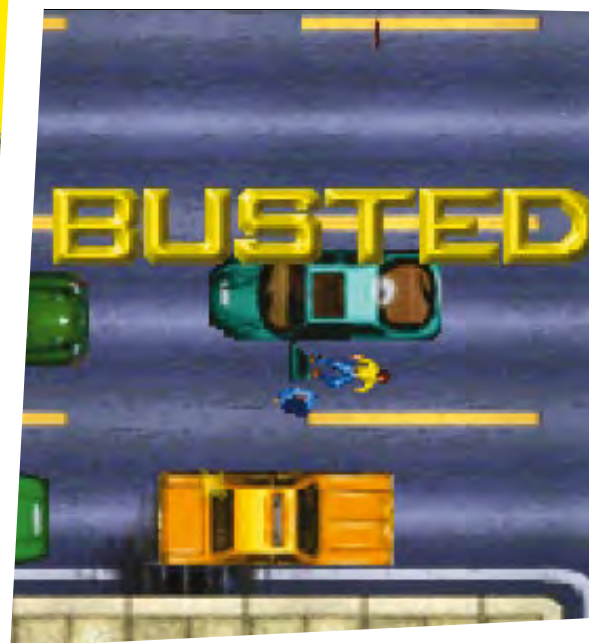
» RETROREVIVAL

BUSTED

LEAD PROGRAMMER
KEITH HAMILTON

GRAND THEFT AUTO

Grand Theft Auto, inevitably branded an "evil game" by the Daily Mail, needs little introduction. But, as David Crookes discovers, what has grown into one of Britain's greatest gaming exports was never initially intended to shock

I t was 1997. The UK was on a high. The general election that year had brought about the end of a Conservative government and the beginning of what was said to be a new era. British music was thriving to the point that a fresh movement – Britpop – had been created, with the UK even winning the Eurovision Song Contest. JK Rowling released the first of her *Harry Potter* novels, *The Philosopher's Stone*. The phrase 'Cool Britannia' may have become rather tiresome, with *The Economist* saying the following year that the public had grown sick of it, but it sure encapsulated the mood of the time.

Gaming formed part of this British creative wave. *WipEout* was enthralling clubgoers, boys were lusting after Lara and, fresh from releasing the classic *Lemmings*, DMA Design was sensing a change in the way games were being perceived. Dave Jones, DMA's co-founder, felt gaming should tap into the wider world of entertainment. He wanted people with an interest in film, music, books and a broader sense of popular culture to play. More than that, DMA wanted people to forget that they were playing a game and immerse themselves into an environment instead.

The DMA team cracked on with a city simulator. Programmer Mike Dailly produced a prototype on his 486 PC, working with an isometric viewpoint and all of the action on foot due to issues getting vehicles around the city. But when it came to actually playing this early prototype, it was deemed too slow. It didn't help that *Syndicate Wars* looked similar, so Mike went back to the drawing board and created a second prototype, this time from a side-on perspective.

A short while later, Mike spoke to John Whyte, the lead programmer of *Body Harvest* for the N64. Whyte had wanted to create a top-down racer but Jones wasn't interested, yet it got Mike thinking. Adding a floor to his side-on demo, he turned his second prototype from a side-on view to a top-down perspective. Then, using the first prototype as a base, he built perspective points using cubes to produce a pseudo-3D effect. DMA's management team loved it, and the new game, entitled *Race'N'Chase*, was given the go-ahead.

In 1995, DMA drew up design documents for the title. Aiming "to produce a fun, addictive and fast multiplayer car racing and crashing game which uses a novel graphics method" and set in the present day, the developers had an idea for three cities, each with their own graphical style. The game was to be packed with missions. There were, the document detailed, to be pedestrians. Such bystanders could be run over by cars. Players could also get out of cars and steal other. And this would attract the attention of any nearby police.

The initial meetings about the direction of the game turned out to be somewhat chaotic. "The only agreed direction was that we were basically writing a game that we would want to play ourselves," says lead programmer Keith Hamilton. "Everything had to be interactive. The player had to be able to drive any vehicle he could find. Nothing was to be off-limits. We wanted fun situations to present themselves just by all the elements coming together, not necessarily in ways that were specially designed."

About the only thing they could decide upon at this stage was that the top-down view was the best way forward, nixing suggestions of using full 3D from a very early stage. DMA wanted whatever game was made to be delivered over multiple platforms – the PlayStation, PC and, originally, the Saturn – and while it was theoretically possible to do 3D on the PC, the console versions simply wouldn't support it. "The choices were to more or less develop two different game engines, or focus on making the game as rich and deep and fun as we could on an engine that would run across all of the platforms," recalls writer Brian Baglow. "So we did that. I think it was the right decision."

Although design documents existed, much of the game was made up on the spur of the moment. "The

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** BMG INTERACTIVE
» **DEVELOPER:** DMA DESIGN
» **PLATFORM:** PC, PLAYSTATION, GAME BOY COLOR
» **RELEASED:** 1997
» **GENRE:** ACTION-ADVENTURE

» The phone boxes enabled the many missions to form a seamless part of the gameplay.

game evolved," explains Mike. "It was a true 'team-designed' game." Each design decision therefore became an experiment. The 'eureka' moment came when the team thought about the player leaving their own car and getting into a different one. They realised that, because the other car wasn't really the player's, they must be a criminal, and so the infamous *GTA* theme was born.

"We envisaged a straight cops-and-robbers driving game," recalls Brian. "But it went from that to a car-based crime sim and wild sandbox adventure. We initially had the player as a good guy, and it was a long way down the line before the decision to try playing as the criminal was made. And at that point, we could see that there was something in there. Something fun and unique."

As the months went by, DMA's new game, which changed its name to *Grand Theft Auto* mid-project, started to grow. A lot of fresh talent was hired to work on the game, resulting in a very young team.

Despite the inexperience, the ambition remained. The simulation aspects of the game continued to be important, especially for Keith, who felt it was crucial to create a city that the player could see in action and then enjoy interfering with. For this reason, police cars drove all the way from the police station to a crime, while ambulances motored from the hospital and contained little characters with stretchers to pick up bodies. "If

you followed them, you could see that they actually went back to the hospital," says Keith. The team also planned to have teams of traffic light repairmen who would drive out and fix any traffic lights if you broke them. "We dropped that because it was getting a bit too anal and because players just ignored the traffic lights anyway."

The levels were designed by just three people: Stephen Banks took on San Andreas, Billy Thomson looked after Vice City, and Paul Farley was responsible for Liberty City. Paul had quit a degree in architecture and only envisaged being with DMA Design for six months while he figured out what he wanted to do with his life, and when he started on *GTA* it was little more than an ugly-looking and rather rough demo. Yet while it wasn't the game everyone on

the team wanted to produce – "I think most of us would rather have been working on one of the sexier Nintendo first-party games," says Paul – those working on it soon recognised the game's potential.

"The actual level design was fairly straightforward in the most part," says Paul. "At the time I came on board there were some rough guidelines to the possibilities and limitations of the game engine. The head of art had already written down some core design considerations regarding the flow of space within the game. This helped communicate to the team some of the fundamental aims of the driving part of the game."

The team were big fans of top-down racers like *Super Sprint* and *Micro Machines*, and these games informed some of the vehicle-handling objectives in the game. "Even from an early stage, we were looking at how to make the driving flow well and be as forgiving as possible – the geometry of the levels plays a huge part in enabling this," continues Paul. "I think we did a good job of both allowing the player space to express themselves and their driving skills, while providing contrasting spaces to support gameplay focused on pedestrian play. A real difficulty was the lack of diagonal road or sidewalk tiles. I know I struggled with some

aspects of Liberty City because of that [very] limitation."

The team was given a lot of freedom on the game's direction. Remarkably, only one person on the team had ever shipped a game before, but despite that, they were handed a huge amount of responsibility and ownership over the title and, says Paul, it helped them make clear and quick decisions. Each of the three level designers took one of the city maps each. "You can clearly see the different approaches coming through both the level design and missions across the three maps," explains Paul. And they had a laugh doing it. "Quite early on, the sense of humour in the team was becoming evident in the game. In keeping with this cheeky nature, it seemed natural to take real-life American cities as our inspiration and send them up a little. I'm sure there are kids that fly into New York for the first time and are more familiar with it as Liberty City. I hope they aren't disappointed; it's an amazing city but not quite like it's portrayed in-game."

The criminal aspects let the imagination of the team run riot. It was possible to mow down a line of Hare Krishnas to earn a 'Gouranga' bonus, for instance. "We could also use the pager and text to tell the players about things that didn't really happen, like with bomb shops and respray shops," adds Brian. "Some cars wouldn't remap, so the idea was going to be dropped. It was suggested giving the player a message saying the plates had been changed instead. Simple, fast and it worked."

Some ideas didn't make it, however. Vehicles, characters, missions and city locations all

## ****ING READ THIS!

⊠ *GRAND THEFT AUTO* sparked a wave of controversy when it was released, and it seems that a penchant to shock ran deep within the team. David Cowan, the lead engineer at Visual Science, was amazed at the text files he received from DMA Design, upon which he was to base his work.

"The PC text files contained all of the mission information and strings that the user would see," he explains, "and they were originally absolutely filthy and full of profanity. I don't know if the PC version shipped with that, but the PSone version was very much sanitised for Sony at the time."

But how bad was it? "One of the lines was something like, 'Look, you stupid mother****er – get your ****ing ass over to the phone booth to get your next ****ing mission,'" he says.
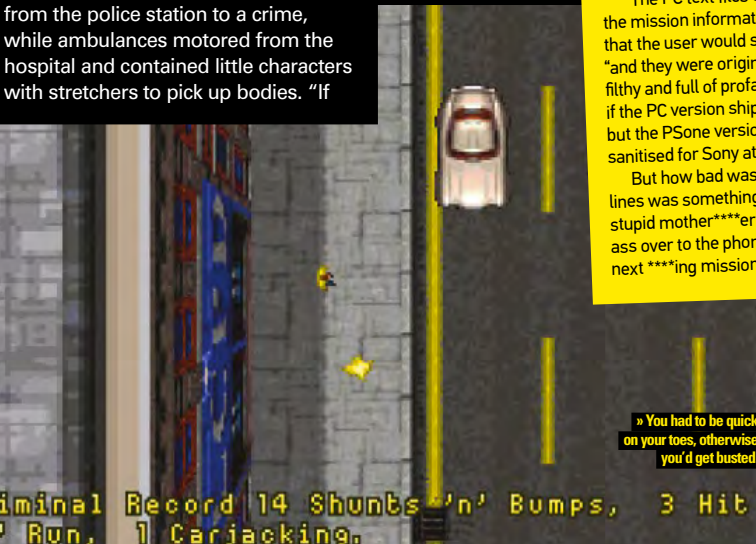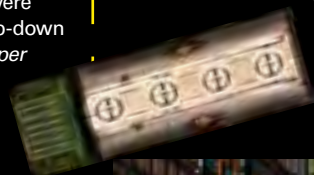
» You had to be quick on your toes, otherwise you'd get busted.

Criminal Record 14 Shunts 'n' Bumps, 3 Hit 'n' Run, 1 Carjacking.

writing reflect the 'living, breathing city' thing that the whole game embodied," muses Brian.

The non-linear mission system came later in the game's development. At first, the game had players returning to a sub-menu to select their next mission, but the level designers felt this broke the immersive nature of the game and that the front end was too boring. Coming up with the idea of spawning missions from payphones, characters, vehicles and other in-game elements was groundbreaking at the time, effectively building the level selection into the game itself, and it made a huge difference to the player's suspension of disbelief. "I don't think the code team were initially very pleased at this because they had never designed the engine to run indefinitely," says Paul. "The new mission structure certainly created a number of new issues for them to solve, but I'm glad they did."

The key to this was the level-scripting system. The programmers invented a language that the level designer could use to set up the

CHASING CONTROVERSY

⊠ *GRAND THEFT AUTO* wasn't originally going to be an adult game. "The decision really came quite late in the day," recalls Paul. BMG Interactive hired Max Clifford to whip things up and it worked a treat. Not only did he deal with the fallout from the controversy, but he gained the game acres of column inches.

"I still feel quite bemused about it all, frankly," says Paul. "The game, while having some strong content, had a very obvious tongue-in-cheek sense of humour. This cheeky schoolboy humour combined with the cartoon top-down graphics really made it rather difficult to understand how the game could ever be seen as pushing the boundaries of taste and decency. It was very mild compared to content on TV, film, music and other entertainment media at the time. We knew we had created a great piece of art, an innovative and entertaining game that stood proud on its own merits. We didn't add the mature content to make it successful; it was core to the entire experience and helped it stand out from a crowd of competitors. We were the bad boys, and in a competitive market like videogames, sometimes it pays to be a little nasty."

got cut along the way. "We wanted combine harvesters to mow down pedestrians. We never quite had time for it, so never had to consider the issue of whether that might have been taking things too far," says Keith. As a result, cut-scenes, voiceovers and cinematic sequences were also axed, with the game having just one cut-scene per city for the main bad guys.

"We also ended up losing the original maps, which is a tragedy," continues Brian. "We had created full maps for each town and around the border of each were adverts for local businesses, vouchers and tourist destinations, all made up and in keeping with the style and feel of each city. It's one of the few things I never managed to get a copy of or find when the company became Rockstar North. In my imagination, they were awesome. In real-life… well, we may never know."

Other ideas were in the PC version but dropped for consoles due to hardware limitations. "Speaking for the PlayStation version, we had big problems with the trains mainly due to the way they were implemented on the PC. They used a lot of memory and were only used properly in a few missions, so we had to drop them. It was unfortunate, but we had to live with the realities of the situation," explains PlayStation programmer Russell Kay.

According to Paul, however, the team was fearless. It wasn't scared of failure and it was open to new ideas. Some of the team even wanted missions involving burning churches but, above all, they wanted to give the player a sense of right and wrong. "The player could choose not to act in a certain way if they didn't want to. If we had included missions where you were forced to single out certain groups of people to kill or abuse based on race or religion, that would have been a step too far, and it would

have devalued the player's sense of choice to the detriment of the game and its subsequent success."

One of the problems that faced the team was how best to integrate the missions. The level designers were using fairly complex tools to create fun, challenging and exciting activities for the player, but it ran as a series of challenges

that were fundamentally unconnected. The game essentially ran along the lines of 'go here, steal this car, drive to this point, leave it, get on a bike, take it to this point' and so on.

So once the missions were in place, it was up to Brian to come up with the specifics of what exactly the player was doing and why.

"This 'plot' or narrative had to be delivered," he explains. "There were no voiceovers, animation or cut-scenes featuring a rich variety of protagonists. Instead we had around 120 characters on a 'pager' at the top of the screen. This was years before Twitter too! Everything had to be scaled back and written for the maximum amount of information in the smallest amount of space."

But that wasn't the only problem he faced. "The missions could be played in pretty much any order within each city, so there was no real way of doing any sort of linear plot within a single city. Putting together little self-contained missions was a definite challenge. There was a lot of allusion and implied action taking place elsewhere, just to make the

> ❝ **We wanted combine harvesters to mow down pedestrians. That might have been taking it too far** ❞

missions so that they would all be different. But although this brought great freshness to the game and the title was starting to come along at a cracking pace, with the 20-strong team working hard to perfect the gameplay, the whole project came close to cancellation on a few occasions. It was DMA's first game with a million-dollar budget and it was much bigger than anything the team had previously attempted, but when a group of high-ranking American executives from DMA's

» This early prototype of *Race'N'Chase* was produced by Mike Dailly. He explains: "After the initial code was implemented in the game, *Syndicate Wars* appeared in a magazine. It was a little too close for our liking. On top of this, Keith [Hamilton] was also having some problems with his version of the engine, since he had to rewrite it in C and the speed wasn't holding."
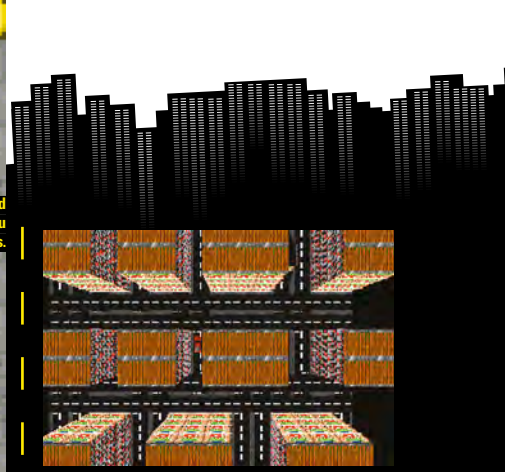
HITTING THE STREETS

THE *GTA* DEVELOPMENT team liked to muck in. They provided all of the game's voices, and there were also frequent rows. "The team was always arguing about something," laughs Paul. "There was a lot of positive friction on the team, but also some negative stuff from time to time." But it speaks volumes that many of them are still in touch with each other.

The sense of togetherness and fun meant they took risks, and this was evident early on. Usually a developer would put out a demo in order to attract the attention of a publisher. Not DMA Design. When it tried to get a publishing deal for *Grand Theft Auto*, it decided to shun the normal prototype material and get out on the streets of Dundee.

The team produced a live-action video, with a story of someone getting shot – played by lead programmer Keith Hamilton – and then a crazy car chase put together with some careful editing using a company car and an old banger that the team bought specially.

"There are shots of us driving along, hanging out the windows with guns and doing handbrake turns," says Keith. "This wasn't done on officially closed roads – just quiet industrial estates. Unfortunately, I don't have a copy, and I don't know if any copies still exist. I'd love to see one."

BUSTED!

publisher, BMG Interactive, arrived, it almost killed the game. "They came to the studio, bizarrely wearing shorts, and they really didn't 'get' the game, with its outdated visuals, loads of bugs, and no clear genre," remembers Keith. "Fortunately, Dave Jones worked his magic and we were given a stay of execution."

GTA was released before Christmas and didn't appear that special on the face of it. It was brought to the table at a time when gamers were becoming used to playing in 3D and some reviewers reported drab, lifeless visuals and awkward driving dynamics. This, however, told only half a story. Here was an expansive, mould-breaking, free-form game with a compelling plot that also allowed for freedom and exploration. It had driving, shooting, chases and theft. It had all of the basic elements that have made the series so incredibly popular.

And while the missions lent purpose, the audio brought the city to life with its seven radio stations and police band track that boomed from car stereos and encouraged players to try different vehicles to see which tunes they got. There was a great sense that you were a criminal let loose on a metropolis, and you were not only up against other villains but the police too. It was a chance to run wild as the game car-jacked your mind and drove away with it.

A PlayStation version was essential, and it was created by Visual Science. Russell Kay had been the head PC programmer at DMA Design but left to form the new firm, which was located a short walk away. Visual Science worked with Psygnosis on several projects and so gained PlayStation experience, and when DMA realised that it couldn't deliver the PlayStation version in time, it called on Visual Science to assist.

The team consisted of four people, plus two programmers from DMA for a couple of months to help with some of the missions. They created a very rough port to the PlayStation devkit, which had much more memory than a retail machine. This allowed them to see it all working, albeit very slowly – less than a frame per second. "We then profiled the code to see where the slowdown was, and it was pretty much where we expected it to be: the rendering and the AI code," says Russell. "Over the next few months we optimised those areas while refining the control scheme. We had to completely rewrite the front end for the system, as the control mechanism and Sony's Technical Requirements Checklist were so different. It took quite a while to get right. We spent around eight months on the conversion overall."

The biggest problem was taking the PC version, which used around 16MB of RAM, and squeezing it into 2MB on the PlayStation. "The other challenge was the audio," admits Russell. "The rich PC audio had to be squeezed into the minuscule RAM of the PlayStation. We used CD audio for the radio stations and made all of the other sound effects and police chatter as standard audio."

David Cowan was the lead engineer on the port. "I remember nothing on the PC version being documented very well. Most of the docs were very out of date, so the only references we had were the code and assets themselves," he says. "We didn't have access to the original assets either because they were spread al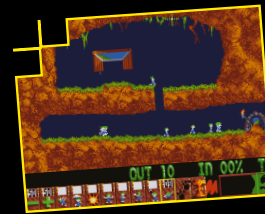l over the DMA network and no one knew how to bring them all together, so we ended up writing a tool that read in the finalised PC retail packages and converted them back to individual sprites, sounds, levels and so on so we could convert them."

David remembers the code for the pedestrian system being horrendous, and he had to significantly modify it so that it wouldn't store the state of every pedestrian and car in the game. On the PlayStation, the state of each of these things was cached only for a short time and was randomly generated within 20 or 30 metres of the edge of the screen, which quartered the memory requirement. "Dead bodies disappeared after 30 seconds or so, and vehicles were randomly generated as you were driving or walking around. Skid marks on the PC version were also stored indefinitely but 'evaporated' on the PSone," says David.

GTA went down a storm on release, and it caused an inevitable wave of controversy. Politicians began to debate the game and there were calls for it to be banned. There was talk of videogame censorship. But Brian says the team didn't realise how contentious it would be.

"I think some of the team were a little shocked by the tabloid response, questions in Parliament and getting the game on *Question Time*," he says. "But once everyone realised that this was just the way the media works, they all settled down a bit and started to enjoy it. After all, we'd made a game that gamers, critics and the people actually playing the game all thought was pretty bloody good. The controversy and hysteria was nothing compared to the satisfaction of having made a game that I think everyone involved can be justifiably proud of."

Grand Theft Auto was a chance to run wild as the game car-jacked your mind and drove away with it

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

LEMMINGS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMIGA, PC, ST, SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD, LYNX
YEAR: 1991

GRAND THEFT AUTO: LONDON, 1969
SYSTEM: PC, PSONE
YEAR: 1999

GRAND THEFT AUTO 2
SYSTEM: PC, PSONE, DREAMCAST, GAME BOY COLOR
YEAR: 1999

GRAND THEFT AUTO III
SYSTEM: PS2, XBOX, PC
YEAR: 2001

GTA's ROADMAP TO SUCCE$$

GTA: LONDON 1969
Year Released: 1999

After parodying New York, DMA Design turned its attention closer to home with London, and this time it visited the actual city. The end result is a game rife with cultural references that pay homage to everyone from the Kray twins to Sid Vicious and the Sex Pistols and James Bond. It featured over 30 new missions and introduced an additional 30 vehicles. Another mission pack, *Grand Theft Auto: London 1961*, was released two months later.

GTA 2
Year Released: 1999

DMA's sequel was business as usual, although it did introduce a number of new mechanics. The biggest difference was that you could now do missions for separate gangs, affecting your relationship with others, while the saving system was greatly improved, allowing you to save the game whenever you entered a church. The side missions that would become a staple were also introduced, letting the player take on jobs like a taxi or bus driver.

GTA III
Year Released: 2001

DMA Design returned to Liberty City for its first 3D *Grand Theft Auto*. The results were spectacular, further expanding the sandbox approach that had been hinted at in earlier games, while the likeable characters and well-plotted story gave it an epic scope that past titles simply couldn't match. You could argue that it was simply a better version of DMA's earlier *Body Harvest*, but *GTA III* was on a far larger scale, and all the more impressive for it.

GTA: VICE CITY
Year Released: 2002

In its new Rockstar North guise, the former DMA followed up its 2001 hit with the excellent *Vice City*. Set in a pastiche of Eighties Miami, it's a marvellous game and amazingly nostalgic due to the many film and cultural references packed into it. It's also loaded with recognisable voice talent, including Ray Liotta, Robert Davi, Danny Trejo, Tom Sizemore and Dennis Hopper. *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* is one of our favourite games in the entire franchise.

VICE CITY STORIES
Year Released: 2006

Vice City Stories is a similar retread for the PSP and is another prequel story. It's a far better game, though, thanks to a more interesting lead character, a better story and several new gameplay mechanics. The most interesting is empire building, which is a combination of *Vice City*'s properties and *San Andreas*' gang war systems. The multiplayer features additional modes, while load times are generally faster than its predecessor.

LIBERTY CITY STORIES
Year Released: 2005

Another *GTA* game set in Liberty City. Released for the PSP and later ported to the PS2, it's another prequel to *Grand Theft Auto III*, but feels cut down after the epic scope of *San Andreas*. While it's now possible to ride a motorcycle, your character can't swim or climb. It's a lot smaller than *San Andreas* as well. It's still an enjoyable addition to the franchise and far better structured than *GTA Advance*, but it doesn't feel like it's bringing anything new to the series.

GTA: SAN ANDREAS
Year Released: 2004

Everything about *San Andreas* is epic. It's huge, featuring parodies of San Francisco, Las Vegas and Los Angeles. It has a great plot and enjoyable characters. The voice cast is also brilliant, with turns from Samuel L Jackson, Ice T, James Woods and Peter Fonda. It's the scale that most impresses, though, with clever RPG mechanics, numerous new activities, burglary, car modification and huge gang wars all adding to the appeal. Quite easily *GTA*'s finest hour.

GTA ADVANCE
Year Released: 2004

GTA Advance was an attempt to cram the winning formula into a handheld. Sadly, it was a pretty disappointing effort that wasn't able to re-create the same magic that made the original games so enjoyable to play. Created by Digital Eclipse, making it the first *GTA* game not handled by Rockstar, its events take place a year before those of *GTA III*. While it once again takes place in Liberty City, many of the locations for popular secrets have been changed.

GTA IV
Year Released: 2008

We were disappointed with *Grand Theft Auto IV*. Yes, it featured a strong story and interesting characters, but it felt lacking somehow – especially after *San Andreas* – as if the technology wasn't completely ready for Rockstar's vision. Fortunately, things picked up significantly with two digital add-ons, *The Lost And Damned* and *The Ballad Of Gay Tony* (later released together as *Episodes From Liberty City*), which added a lot of fun elements that hadn't made it into the original.

GTA: CHINATOWN WARS
Year Released: 2009

First released on Nintendo's DS and developed by Rockstar Leeds, *Chinatown Wars* remains the best handheld *GTA*. Sporting a new viewpoint, crisp visuals and great use of the DS's touch screen, it's a fantastic game that implements many of the mechanics of *Grand Theft Auto IV*. By far the best part of the game, though, is its drug-dealing mini-game, which allows for an insane amount of strategy as you go about, dealing to the scum of the city.

GTA V
Year Released: 2013

Rockstar promised that Grand Theft Auto V would be "the largest and the most ambitious game Rockstar has yet created", and a "radical reinvention of the *Grand Theft Auto* universe". It wasn't wrong. While the controls still feel clunky, the actual game world is incredibly immersive and really pushes both the PS3 and Xbox 360 to their limits. Our advice is to pick up the stunning next gen ports or the recently released PC version.

THE LEGACY OF
RESIDENT

EVIL

IT MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN PATIENT ZERO IN THE HORROR EPIDEMIC, BUT RESI SUCCESSFULLY MUTATED THE GENRE INTO THE TEMPLATE WE KNOW NOW. NICK THORPE SPEAKS TO HORROR DEVELOPERS TO ASSESS THE SCALE OF RESI'S SPREAD ACROSS THE GAMING WORLD...

MASTERS OF HORROR

The developers we spoke to…

MASACHIKA KAWATA
Producer, **Capcom**

CORY DAVIS
Cocreative director, **Tangentlemen**

THOMAS GRIP
Creative director, **Frictional Games**

WRIGHT BAGWELL
CEO, **Outpost Games**

SAM BARLOW
Independent videogame director

There's a famous saying which states that there are only two certainties in life, and while death and taxes are both inevitable, we're convinced that there's at least one certainty too few accounted for. You see, there's always a pedant out there ready to pop up when you least desire it, and we're about to lure them all out of hiding with the following statement: *Resident Evil* defined survival horror. "But **RG**," they cry, "there were horror games before *Resident Evil*! And really, didn't it just do a lot of what *Alone In The Dark* did?"

They key difference is in that little term 'survival horror' – nobody was using that before 1996, but it was the single descriptive phrase Capcom would return to. Upon loading *Resident Evil*, you'd be informed that, "You have once again entered the world of survival horror." Go back and take a look at the front cover of *Biohazard* (*Resident Evil*'s Japanese name) for the PlayStation, and the words 'survival horror' are right there on the cover. So the term survival horror is very much a *Resident Evil* invention – and within just a few years, the entire genre was being called by the name Capcom had given it. So while *Resident Evil* didn't invent survival horror, the series most definitely defined it and inspired a whole host of imitators.

Yet survival horror doesn't necessarily define *Resident Evil*. The series managed to reinvent itself

» This ominous shot shows crows perched, waiting for you to fail at this room's puzzle.

so drastically with *Resident Evil 4* as to be considered more of an action game, and that game's influence has been primarily felt in this genre. So when we talk about the legacy of *Resident Evil* here, we're talking about the first age of its design – fixed camera angles, tank controls, limited inventory and all.

As is commonly known today, *Resident Evil* was originally conceptualised by general producer Tokuro Fujiwara as a spiritual remake of *Sweet Home*, a Famicom RPG based on a Japanese horror film, to be directed by Shinji Mikami. That game had included many elements that would later make it into *Resident Evil* – the mansion setting, supernatural enemies, a heavy emphasis on puzzle solving and inventory management, the gradual revelation of the game's plot via diary entries and other notes, and even the opening door scene that serves to transition between rooms. Despite this, the original plans for *Resident Evil* didn't have a tremendous amount in common with the final game. Initially, the game could be played co-operatively, and the cast was comprised of cyborg protagonists, including the hulking Gelzer and diminutive Dewey as well as the eventual protagonists.

Realising that you wouldn't feel much of a sense of fear for cyborgs, especially given the original plan for a lone mastermind as the antagonist, writer Kenichi Iwao rewrote the game's scenario. What he came up with was the concept of a mansion in a remote forest, ▶

» Secondary protagonist Barry Burton is a beloved character, and emblematic of *Resident Evil*'s B-movie appeal.

CORY DAVIS

Here They Lie's codirector on the impact and reach of Capcom's masterpiece

When did you first encounter the original *Resident Evil*, and what impression did it make?

Resident Evil came out when I was a sophomore in high school, and I remember it having a big impact on me. I was a huge fan of horror in general, but specifically of horror games like *Doom*, *Splatterhouse*, and *Castlevania*. *Resident Evil* felt different. Instead of a horror-themed carnival ride, the entire experience came together as a device for creating realistic tension and dread in unpredictable fight-or-flight scenarios. *Resident Evil* stuck with me when I wasn't playing it – this mechanism for creating fear… haunting me until I had the courage to jump back in for more.

What design choices heighten the feeling of dread in *Resident Evil*?

The apparent roughness in the design choices really made *Resident Evil* feel antagonistic to me as a player, and that was very attractive to me. The game mechanics themselves remind me of the way I feel in real life when presented with a frightening scenario. Even the limitations of the camera add to the heightened tension as you are constantly trying to get a better look at the threat that is coming at you.

What stands out as the most memorable moment from the first *Resident Evil* to you?

This is probably a cop out, but those damn zombie dogs got me the first time, and still get me to this day. The shocking way that they leap into the environment, and the horrifying whimper they make when you finally kill one… it all gives me the shivers.

What elements of *Resident Evil*'s design have you incorporated into your own horror games?

The oppressive feeling I felt in *Resident Evil* is something that I have pushed in some way, in nearly every game I've worked on. The scarcity of powerful weapons and ammunition can really allow you to walk the razor's edge of power fantasy, and anxiety-driven terror. Dangling a power-fantasy carrot just out of reach, and then requiring the tactical, skilled usage of scarce weaponry, ammunition, or other resources in high-tension situations is an extremely effective combo. I've always attempted to be as successful as *Resident Evil* was at creating a peaceful, unassuming lull in the combat, horror, and overall tension – just long enough to lower your defences and open you up for another round of terror.

» *Here They Lie* is a terrifying horror game that's available in VR, much like *Resident Evil VII*.

» Though primitive now, the gore and violence in *Resident Evil* was considered extreme in 1996.

"THE DESIGN OF RESIDENT EVIL IS A STRANGE BREW OF PANIC-INDUCING SURVIVAL MECHANICS"

» Unusual puzzles lead to odd situations like Chris trying, and failing, to read music.

▶ which has recently been the site of mysterious murders. The local police send in their elite S.T.A.R.S. (Special Tactics And Rescue Service) team to investigate, and after Bravo Team disappears without a trace, your job is to take control of an Alpha Team member (Chris Redfield or Jill Valentine) and find out what has happened. Taking refuge in the seemingly-abandoned mansion, the protagonists soon discover that it was secretly a scientific facility operated by the shadowy Umbrella Corporation, and is teeming with zombies and other mutated creatures.

The team's planning process might not seem particularly cohesive, and this is something that has always been questioned by fans. "The design of *Resident Evil* is a strange brew of panic-inducing survival mechanics," says Cory Davis, an accomplished designer of horror games whose work includes *F.E.A.R.*, *Condemned 2: Bloodshot* and VR gem *Here They Lie*. "There's always been a lot of debate around the 'clunkiness' of the movement, camera, shooting, and UI elements in the original design, and whether or not this was intentional."

At least some of it was definitely unplanned. The game was initially intended to be played from a first-person perspective – a feature which had numerous benefits such as a limited field of vision and intuitive movement. However, this was quickly scrapped due to the limited 3D power of the PlayStation. Instead, Capcom's designers adopted the use of polygonal characters over prerendered backdrops, a technique seen in the earlier PC title, *Alone In The Dark*. This enabled the team to use high quality models for the characters and enemies, but stuck them with a fixed perspective for each scene.

Ultimately, the camera was something that the team was able to turn to its advantage. "You have this sort of tunnel vision, and are constantly unsure what things that might lurk around," explains Thomas Grip, designer of *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*. "This means you start to imagine what dangers might be near and eventually you end up scaring yourself basically." Wright Bagwell, a veteran of the acclaimed *Dead Space* series, concurs: "When things get quiet and rooms feel mysteriously empty, people freak out – they expect something to happen, and keeping them in that state of tension is where the real magic of any horror game

BY THE NUMBERS

We take a look at just how successful Resident Evil is

RESIDENT EVIL 1996
PLAYSTATION, DIRECTOR'S CUT, DIRECTOR'S CUT DUALSHOCK

SALES:
5.8 MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL 2 1998
PLAYSTATION

SALES:
5 MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL 3 NEMESIS 1999
PLAYSTATION

SALES:
3.5 MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL CODE: VERONICA 2000
PS2, DREAMCAST

SALES:
2.2 MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL REMAKE 2002
GAMECUBE, PS3, XBOX 360, DL, PS4, XBOX ONE

SALES:
2.7 MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL ZERO 2002
GAMECUBE

SALES:
2.5 MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL 4 2005
GAMECUBE, WII, PS2

SALES:
5.9 MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL 5 2009
PS3, XBOX 360/DL

SALES:
7.1 MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL 6 2012
PS3, XBOX 360/DL

SALES:
**6.6** MILLION

* Source: Capcom Investor Relations

or film happens. Nothing that you put on the screen is scarier than just letting peoples' imagination run wild."

Indeed, Capcom's design for the Spencer Mansion incorporated many short hallways and winding paths specifically to hide oncoming horrors from the player, but the moans of the zombies could often be heard way before you actually encountered them. The oppressive atmosphere proved effective in sustaining tension, but needed to be broken occasionally. "People are easily desensitised to scares and can easily recognise patterns," notes Wright. The *Resident Evil* team guarded against player complacency by mixing regular sections with plentiful enemies, lengthy puzzle-solving sections and the occasional jump scare – most notably, when dogs crash through the windows of a seemingly-empty corridor. This model of pacing is something that Wright has applied in his own survival horror work: "We spent a lot of time *removing* things from the game on *Dead Space 2* so that players didn't fatigue of combat, jump scares, and other surprises."

The effective use of restraint is what made *Resident Evil* so successful. Slightly awkward controls aside, the player is given the ability to run from zombies, or fight them. Healing items are relatively plentiful, and as long as you can make it to a room with a typewriter, you can save your game. But you're subject to a number of restrictions – you can't deal any damage while you're moving, and your ammunition is limited. While you might see multiple healing herbs ▶

» *Resident Evil* was never just about human zombies, as this mutant plant demonstrates well.
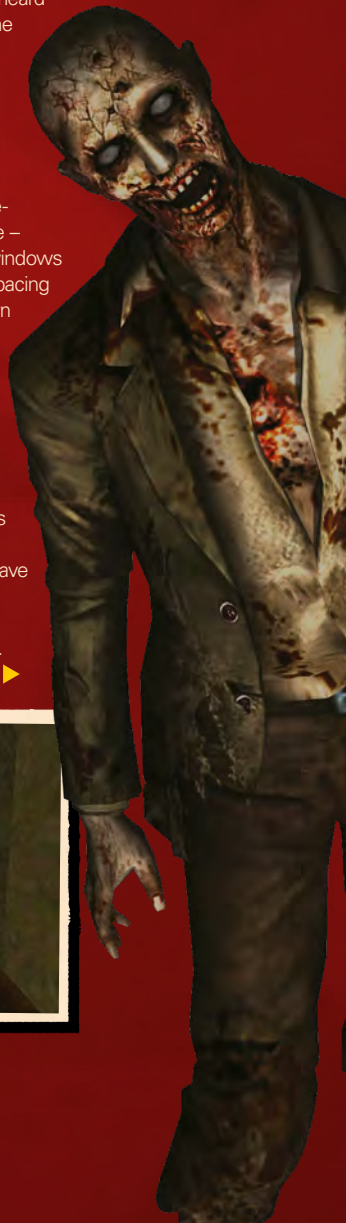
» Camera angles were expertly chosen to avoid showing the player advantageous viewpoints.

» *Resident Evil 2* shifted the setting to the disaster-stricken streets of Raccoon City.

▶ in a room, your limited inventory means that you can rarely carry more than one, forcing you to leave others behind. Even your ability to save is limited by the need for Ink Ribbons. Ultimately, you're forced to eliminate only high-priority threats. "The way the game forces you to traverse the map and learn which spaces are safe or not allows you to really build up some suspense and dread," notes Sam Barlow, whose design and writing credits include *Silent Hill: Origins* and *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories*. "You have to (frequently) backtrack through narrow corridors, where you know there's a good chance of you taking a hit from a zombie you left behind."

The use of zombies as a primary enemy proved to be a great fit for this gameplay template. They're slow enough to avoid, but resilient and dangerous in groups or tight spaces. "They're somewhat predictable and understandable… so it's easy to weigh the odds and feel them tip against you," notes Sam. "Zombies aren't about the primal dread of some horror, but tap into a rising panic that works well with videogame mechanics." For Thomas, the zombies also represent a smart technological choice. "Creatures like zombies are also very good for AI," he notes.

"It makes sense for them to just stand around in a location staring into a wall, if they bump into objects as they try to pathfind towards the player it is just part of who they are and so on."

This what sets *Resident Evil*'s survival horror template apart from other horror-themed games. With more flexible controls, plentiful ammunition and an unlimited inventory, the game would be a power fantasy. However, *Resident Evil* forces the player to cope with strict limitations – you don't want or even try to eliminate every threat, but instead try to make smart use of the resources you have to make it out of your predicament alive.

I wasn't working on the series when the first game came out, but I was working on something else at the time and I distinctly remember the first time I ever saw *Resident Evil*," remembers Masachika Kawata, now a veteran of the series who is currently producer on *Resident Evil VII*. "The bug check QA period for my title and *Resident Evil* were aligned at the same time – and back in those days we didn't have staff that did QA specifically. The dev team just had to do all the bug-checking themselves," he explains. "When I was doing the bug-check on my game I saw the guy next to me was playing what I later knew was *Resident Evil*. Seeing it for the first time, I just thought how amazing and polished it looked, so even though it was before the game came out, that was my very first memory of the series."

Despite impressing their colleagues, the *Resident Evil* team wasn't convinced that the game would do well, with the game pencilled in for sales of around 200,000. If the game had any major weakness other than an unproven market for horror games, it was the

» *Resident Evil 3* kept the urban setting and ramped up the action, adding explosive barrels and better weapons.

THE ORIGINS OF SURVIVAL HORROR

Capcom's game certainly refined the genre, but wasn't necessarily the first game to introduce the genre's key tropes…

SLOW MONSTERS
AS SEEN IN: HUNT THE WUMPUS

■ The use of slow, but dangerous, monsters is crucial in the genre as it gives you a chance to decide whether to combat them or avoid them. Needless to say, the latter is sometimes the best option…

AN UNSTOPPABLE FOE
AS SEEN IN: 3D MONSTER MAZE

■ A good survival horror game normally has an enemy that constantly follows and harasses you at every turn, until it inevitably defeats you or you're able to escape from it.

SAFE ROOMS
AS SEEN IN: RESIDENT EVIL

■ Survival horror games are usually relentless, offering little respite for the player. Some games do offer small sanctuaries where you can save and heal up without fear of getting killed.

PUZZLE SOLVING
AS SEEN IN: HAUNTED HOUSE

■ You'll need to use your wits as well as your brawn in the average survival horror game and that will normally mean collecting various items and solving some particularly brain-testing puzzles.

TANK-LIKE CONTROLS
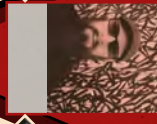### AS SEEN IN: RESIDENT EVIL

■ Protagonists would often feature cumbersomely awkward controls that made them tougher to control. As a result, you could spend as much time combating the controls as you did the monsters.

LIMITED AMMO
AS SEEN IN: THE LAST OF US

■ A great survival horror game will typically limit your frantically searching for every last bullet and then and have you actually use it or not. deciding whether you should

FIXED CAMERA ANGLES
AS SEEN IN: ALONE IN THE DARK

■ Fixed camera angles have several uses. They not only allow for dramatic and cinematic-looking shots, but also they enable developers to sneakily hide monsters off the screen.

MINI MANAGEMENT
AS SEEN IN: RESIDENT EVIL 4

■ Many survival horror games allow you to carry a finite number of items, meaning you'll need to carefully juggle your inventory. Some titles even make the stressful job into a game in itself.

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game's incorporation of human actors. The opening video sequence and overall voice acting carried a heavy B-movie flavour, with some toe-curling dialogue delivered with enough ham to stock the nation's deli counters twice over. It ultimately didn't matter – critical acclaim was widespread and the game went on to sell 2.75 million copies, making it the company's biggest hit since *Street Fighter II*. The game would achieve further success on the PC and Saturn, before being updated on PlayStation in a *Director's Cut* release and a further DualShock-enabled release that achieved over 2.3 million sales combined.

"So there weren't really many horror games back then, so this was maybe the very first game that you could say was truly scary," says Kawata, explaining

the success of the game. "But it also combined these horror features with good, deep, entertaining gameplay and on top of that the game used the then cutting-edge capabilities of the PlayStation to the fullest. So it wasn't a title that had one gimmick and the other features were falling by the wayside – it really hit all those marks so successfully with horror, gameplay and technological prowess. That was such a great combination which made a perfect storm for capturing the minds of gamers back in 1996."

Resident Evil's sales were great enough that Capcom immediately moved into full production of a series, adding new variations on the original theme. *Resident Evil 2* attempted to inject a further sense of vulnerability into proceedings, casting you as a
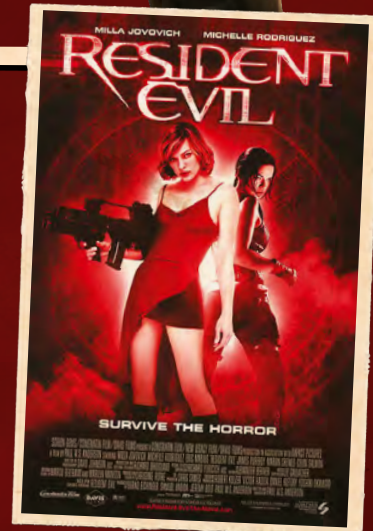
» The movie series, while based on the games, has carved a narrative for itself, setting itself apart from its source material.

HOUSE OF HORRORS

As one of the most iconic locations in videogames, the Spencer Mansion holds some truly memorable moments…

CEILING ROOM
■ You can grab a shotgun in the room next door to this one. However, you can't just pluck it off the wall – unless you replace it with a broken shotgun, this room's ceiling trap will activate. Don't become a Jill Sandwich…

MEDICAL ROOM
■ This room is a safe one – in fact, it's so safe that this is where you'll meet Bravo Team survivor Rebecca Chambers, if you're playing as Chris. She's a key ally in your fight against the biological horrors you face in the mansion.

REMEMBER TO BRING SOME WEED KILLER

L-SHAPED HALLWAY
■ There doesn't seem to be too much going on in this quiet corridor. But as you walk down it, ferocious hell hounds come crashing through the windows, eager for a bite of Redfield rump or Valentine thigh!

WHO LET THE DOGS OUT®

GROUND FLOOR

SAFE ROOM

PIANO ROOM

DINING ROOM

LARGE GALLERY

SAFE ROOM

MIRROR ROOM

GALLERY

MAIN HALL

I HOPE THIS ISN'T CHRIS' BLOOD

DON'T OPEN THAT DOOR! YOU'RE A FOOL IF YOU DARE!

TEA ROOM
■ Here's where you first meet one of the mansion's inhabitants, who appears to be tending to one of your fallen comrades. Oh, never mind – he's feasting on the poor victim's innards. Get your weapon ready!

KEEPER'S BEDROOM
■ The groundskeeper used to live here, but now he's undead, and he will ambush you from the wardrobe as you read his diary! Of course, the real horror comes when you get to read his account of zombification. Itchy. Tasty.

ATTIC
■ We've seen some horrifying things in attics – water-damaged games, dead pigeons, you name it – but we've never come across a gigantic snake. This creature, known as Yawn, serves as the first boss of the game.

TAXIDERMY ROOM

LIBRARY

SMALL LIBRARY

BEDROOM

FIRST FLOOR

ARMOUR ROOM

MAIN HALL

ATTIC

REMEMBER: EYE OF THE TIGER

SNAKES, WHY DID IT HAVE TO BE SNAKES…

DINING ROOM BALCONY
■ This balcony seems safe from below. When you actually arrive there, though, you'll find zombies ready and waiting for you. If you push the statue here onto the floor below, you'll find a blue gem that's crucial to solving a tiger statue puzzle!

BALCONY
■ Here's where you'll find the corpse of Bravo Team's Forest Speyer, pecked to death by crows. His discovery is just a grisly moment in the original game, but in every version since then, he'll revive as a zombie and attempt to attack you.
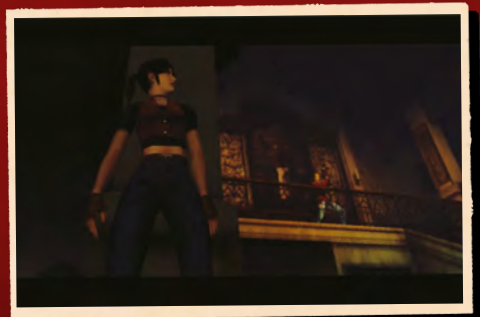
It's Forest…! He's been pecked to death by crows.

» Though dark, *Resident Evil's* remade visuals were astonishing – little polish was needed to put them on modern consoles.

▶ rookie cop (Leon Kennedy) or college student (Claire Redfield) in the virus-infested Raccoon City with no obvious support. Additionally, the game took place across two different scenarios and your actions in one could affect your play with the other character – for example, if Claire grabs the submachine gun in her A scenario, Leon won't be able to take it when he visits the same room in his B scenario. Despite a troubled production in which the whole project was restarted late in development, the game shifted 4.96 million copies when released in 1998, and is arguably the most beloved of the classic games.

By this point, *Resident Evil* had effectively popularised survival horror games and other developers were keen to jump on the bandwagon. Indeed, the dominance of *Resident Evil* "was hugely problematic for the development of the genre moving forward", according to Sam. Early efforts had their own style, but the market soon shifted towards outright clones – the 1998 Saturn game *Deep Fear* is effectively *Resident Evil* underwater, and *Countdown: Vampires* is *Resident Evil* but with (you guessed it) vampires. Of the earlier efforts, *Clock Tower* retains a cult appeal due to its 16-bit heritage and point-and-click gameplay, and Squaresoft's *Parasite Eve* successfully blended survival horror with action-RPG mechanics.

1999 proved to be the year in which competition within the genre really heated up. While the fully-3D Dreamcast game *Blue Stinger* wouldn't provide much to worry Capcom, Konami's PlayStation game *Silent Hill* was much more successful in adopting real-time 3D graphics. The psychological horror of the game was a marked departure from the B-movie themes of other games, *Resident Evil* included, and the game was well-received and successful, kicking off a long-running

» *Resident Evil: Code Veronica* shifted the series to full-3D environments for the first time ever.

> ## " THERE WEREN'T MANY HORROR GAMES BACK THEN, SO THIS WAS MAYBE THE FIRST GAME THAT YOU COULD SAY WAS TRULY SCARY "
> Masachika Kawata

series. Capcom was also taking a bite out of its own market with another real-time 3D survival horror, *Dino Crisis*. The initial game stayed close to the *Resident Evil* formula but provided some terrifyingly quick enemies, allowing the protagonist more mobility to compensate. The game sold over 2 million copies and spawned a series of its own, though the sequels were more regular action games.

Capcom wasn't content to leave the market to pretenders, though, and developed the next two games in the *Resident Evil* series in tandem. The final entry in the original PlayStation trilogy was 1999's *Resident Evil 3*, featuring Jill Valentine's turn to escape from the doomed Raccoon City. This time, the twist was the addition of a smart and persistent enemy named Nemesis, which hunts you down over the course of the game. Capcom also tweaked the movement controls a little in order to better accommodate increased levels of action, adding a 180-degree turn move for quick escapes. Despite a shorter story and no option to choose between protagonists, the game was another critical and commercial success, shifting 3.5 million copies.

On the Dreamcast, *Resident Evil: Code Veronica* teamed up Claire Redfield, her brother Chris and prisoner Steve Burnside in an attempt to escape from the Umbrella-controlled Rockfort Island. For the first time in the series, environments were rendered

» The 2002 remake of *Resident Evil* added new enemies, wrong-footing even series veterans.

in real-time, allowing for some camera movement (although this was still predetermined) and the addition of first-person firing for some weapons. Between its Dreamcast debut in 2000 and the PS2 conversion in 2001, the game sold over 2.5 million copies.

The last two classic *Resident Evil* adventures were released for the GameCube, the platform Capcom had already chosen for *Resident Evil 4*, as part of plans to consolidate the whole series onto a single platform. The first of these was a modern remake of the original *Resident Evil*, created because the team believed that the game's visuals and localisation had aged poorly. The results were stunning – as well as a visual upgrade, the game kept series veterans on their toes with areas that had been cut from the original ▶

BACK TO BASICS

How Resident Evil VII is looking to the franchise's past to reshape its future

MANSION OF MADNESS

■ The vast majority of *Resident Evil VII* takes place in an old plantation mansion, which belongs to the Baker family. It's extremely similar to the original Spencer Mansion, with lots of locked rooms to access via unique keys. It effortlessly captures the same white knuckle tension that gamers experienced in 1996.

SIMPLE, BUT EFFECTIVE PUZZLES

■ *Resident Evil VII* will test your brain as well as your reflexes as it features plenty of effective puzzles to solve as you make your way deeper into the mansion. A videotape being used to ingenious effect to show a hidden room in the building is just one example of the clever puzzles that lie in store for you in the final game.

EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN

■ *Resident Evil* was just as much about exploring your surroundings as it was avoiding its denizens. Amazingly, Capcom has been able to maintain that balance for *Resident Evil VII* – enabling you to examine various objects in your inventory and vicinity. The scripted text does a good job of describing your creepy surroundings.

AN UNSTOPPABLE FORCE

■ The Nemesis was a truly unstoppable force of nature from Capcom's third *Resident Evil* game, which would turn up at inopportune moments and wreak havoc on the poor player. Capcom mirrors this in *Resident Evil VII*, but it's now members of the Baker family who continually show up to terrorise you.

▶ game, as well as the introduction of the dangerous Crimson Head zombies that mutated from any regular zombies killed early in the game. Despite the high quality, sales of 1.35 million was a disappointment.

R*esident Evil Zero* was originally announced for the N64, but moved to the Gamecube due to development issues resulting from the older console's memory limitations. This prequel followed Rebecca Chambers of the original game and escaped convict Billy Coen as they attempted to survive an outbreak of T-Virus infected leeches unleashed by the creator of the virus, James Marcus. The game implemented a new "partner zapping" system, allowing the player to switch between the dual protagonists at will. *Resident Evil Zero* launched in 2003 and retained the amazing visual quality of the GameCube *Resident Evil* remake, but also achieved a similarly-disappointing 1.25 million sales due to the Nintendo platform's weak adoption and the general feeling that *Resident Evil Zero* was ultimately more of the same from the genre.

By this point, even series that predated *Resident Evil* had adopted its conventions – 2001's *Alone In The Dark: The New Nightmare* and 2002's *Clock Tower 3* were now closer to Capcom's series than their own origins.

» Who would have thought that a full bath would be hiding an ugly zombie? Stab it in the head before it can pull you in.

"THE RESIDENT EVIL GAMES WERE ARTFULLY-CONSTRUCTED PUZZLE BOXES"

Sam Barlow

Capcom was aware that the series was in need of revitalisation, if not the entire genre. Despite the ongoing success of *Resident Evil*, the company spared no effort to make sure that *Resident Evil 4* would achieve that, scrapping multiple attempts before hitting upon a radical revision of the formula that ditched the zombies and Raccoon City for a more action-oriented style of game set in rural Spain. The game was an enormous critical and commercial success, but one which moved far away from the original survival horror template. The game created a legacy all of its own, one which further *Resident Evil* sequels have followed.

But while *Resident Evil* left survival horror behind, appetite for the genre remained. It fell to a different generation of developers to drive the genre forward, and each has had a different approach. For Sam, *Silent Hill* has differentiated itself through tone. "*Silent Hill* games are never about the mechanics, whereas the classic *Resident Evil* games were artfully-constructed puzzle boxes," he notes. "*Silent Hill* games are messy and should lack resolution -- they should plant themselves in your head and never let go. Whereas a *Resident Evil* game is something you can solve and win. The characters in *Resident Evil* are ciphers and fantasy costumes, whereas the people in *Silent Hill* are real and it's their stories that are the point of the whole thing." Additionally, the team at Climax was deliberately trying to break the mould. "We tried – as best we could – to try and tear up the rule book with *Shattered Memories* and were, perhaps not explicitly, but at least implicitly trying to *not* incorporate elements from *Resident Evil*," Sam recalls. "It felt wrong that such a specific template had become the dominant form for horror games."

That motivation to move away from the norm also drove the *Dead Space* series. "Glen Schofield

FEELING LIMITED

■ The limited ammo found in the earlier games meant that every shot counted. Fleeing over fighting was always recommended in most scenarios, and ensured you had a good chance of surviving encounters. We've been terrified to discover that ammo has, once again, become a precious commodity.

THRILLS AND SPILLS

■ The original *Resident Evil* was famed for its 'shit your pants' moments, whether it was getting scared from dogs jumping through windows or being terrorised by cantankerous crows. True to form, *Resident Evil VII* is offering similar jump scares, more so if you're brave (or silly) enough to play it in virtual reality.

JUGGLING INVENTORY

■ Jill Valentine and Chris Redfield were constantly juggling items in the first game due to their limited carrying capacities. A similar system is employed in *Resident Evil VII*, so don't assume you can simply walk around the Bakers' mansion and fill your boots with goodies. You'll just end up disappointed.

» *Resident Evil Zero* was good, but formulaic, highlighting the need for Capcom to rethink its own approach to horror.

» *Resident Evil Zero*'s train makes perfect sense as an infection site – lots of people and nowhere to run.

really wanted to prove that his team was capable of succeeding at doing something risky at a company that hated taking risks," Wright recalls. "The goal was to make a game that didn't have to root you in place when shooting to make combat elicit panic and fear, so I think that the game felt a bit more familiar to those who play shooters," he continues. "The team did an incredible job at that. There were sceptics that thought it couldn't be done, and it was one of those great moments when it felt so good to prove old assumptions wrong." Not only did *Dead Space* become one of the most highly-acclaimed horror games of the generation, it spawned successful sequels and spin-offs, making its own mark.

However, for a designer further removed from the influence of the original games, avoiding comparison with a titan of the genre is not so much of a concern. "While *RE* was really influential, I am not sure I see there being any issues with escaping its shadow. There are so many simple things that one can do to be different," Thomas asserts. "If you keep the things that drive the game at a holistic level, such as the mixture of action and puzzles, or how encounters are setup, I do not think that many people will feel it is too *Resident Evil*-like."

It's now Capcom that is looking back to the early *Resident Evil* era for inspiration. "It's hard to work on a series in Japan because there's so much expectation that builds up over time, but you also have these big turning points where you realise that you have to make a change in order to make the series continue," notes Kawata, who believes that *Resident Evil VII* will be one of those major turning points. "The big change from recent entries is definitely that we're taking it away from the action that was becoming prominent with the later games and re-establishing a focus on fear as a key concept of the game." Indeed, like some kind of biological mutation, *Resident Evil* is now feeding off the imitators it spawned – the first-person perspective that has become common in other horror games is now a key part of *Resident Evil VII*, as is VR technology.

Ultimately, the horror of *Resident Evil* and its successors comes down to you – it's your reaction that matters. "Horror works best when you can empathise

with the characters. The key is that you have to relate to them, and they have to be experiencing resource constraints that make them feel out of control," says Wright. This is something that Kawata also believes, and has tried to convey in the latest *Resident Evil*. "Something that can obstruct the player's ability to feel fear for the characters [is] if they feel they can handle the situation, but now you are a ordinary person in an extraordinary situation and it's not a given that they're going to be able to get through this in one piece."

So remember: when you're in an eerie corridor where you're sure that something is lurking in the shadows, you're in desperate need of healing and you're stuck with only a practically useless knife to fight off enemies, it doesn't matter how you're viewing the action or whether you're fighting aliens, dinosaurs or even zombies. What matters is that you're scared – and *Resident Evil* provided decades of inspiration for just those sorts of scares. ✱

The 20 Greatest PlayStation Games

YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

Though it was a hugely successful machine, there's more to the PlayStation than million-selling mega hits. Nick Thorpe leads the expedition to unearth some hidden gems…

Rapid Reload

■ **DEVELOPER:** MEDIA VISION ■ **YEAR:** 1995 ■ **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

20 **This run-and-gunner** made an appearance at the PlayStation's European launch, but it was passed over by a public hungry for the 3D games that were still a huge novelty at the time and that's a real shame. Though its visuals were only slightly enhanced over the capabilities of the SNES, the game itself was a riot. Developers Media Vision were very clearly influenced by Treasure's *Gunstar Heroes (*a fact evident in the original Japanese title *Gunner's Heaven*), and while it's not quite as good as the Mega Drive classic, it packs much of the same appeal with loads of on-screen carnage and some impressive weaponry. PAL copies are scarce, but it shouldn't be too hard to track down the Japanese version.

Kurushi

■ **DEVELOPER:** G-ARTISTS
■ **YEAR:** 1997 ■ **GENRE:** PUZZLE

19 *Kurushi* **enjoyed a** relatively high profile due to its placement on demo discs, but very few people actually appear to have picked it up. Set on a platform of floating blocks, you play as a man whose goal is to survive by clearing waves of massive blocks rolling towards him, while avoiding the black penalty blocks. Failure to do so correctly will result in the platform shortening, giving less room to tackle the oncoming waves. It's a tricky puzzler, which boasts an oppressive atmosphere thanks to its stark aesthetic – it's just you, the blocks and the endless darkness that waits below. There's also a sequel available titled *Kurushi Final*, which adds extra game modes for the most hardcore players.

"Kurushi is a tricky puzzler, with an oppressive atmosphere thanks to its dark aesthetic"
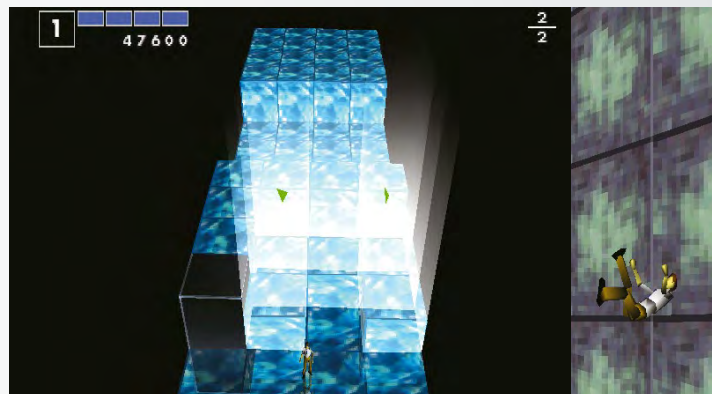
Tombi!

■ **DEVELOPER:** WHOOPEE CAMP ■ **YEAR:** 1997 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORM

17 **The Koma Pigs** have stolen a bracelet from Tombi's grandfather, and that's something he just won't stand for. As a result, our pink-haired protagonist sets out on a quest to retrieve it, while leaping on pigs and chucking them about the place. It's all rather uncivilised, but he is a caveman after all. This adventure platformer isn't divided into stages, but calls to mind the formula of the later *Wonder Boy* games as it takes place as one long quest, in which, you'll always be pursuing multiple goals at the same time.

The high quality of Tombi's first adventure didn't ensure sales success, and the game was overlooked upon release, being seen as outdated due to its 2D gameplay. A sequel with fully 3D visuals was released later on, but it too failed to find a great deal of success and Whoopee Camp disbanded shortly afterwards. As a result, both *Tombi!* and its sequel are rare and expensive games, with the original typically changing hands for £50 or more.

Pepsiman

■ **DEVELOPER:** KID ■ **YEAR:** 1998 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

18 **Many years before** the likes of *Temple Run* popularised the runner sub-genre on mobile phones, Japanese gamers got to experience the genre as a soft drink tie-in. *Pepsiman* sees our near-mute hero sprinting from destination to destination in order to ensure that people get their Pepsi. Thankfully, the game frequently throws up ridiculous situations in order to keep the action fresh – our hero can be found running while stuck inside a bin, or being chased by a giant can of Pepsi. Despite being a Japanese game the voice acting is all in English, so this is a remarkably import-friendly release – but it's tough enough to be unfriendly to players.

World's Scariest Police Chases
■ **DEVELOPER:** UDS■ **YEAR:** 2001 ■ **GENRE:** DRIVING

16 **Though the launch** of the PlayStation 2 in 2000 drew a lot of attention away from its older sibling, the PlayStation still had plenty left to offer players that stuck around through its later years. This excellent and oft-overlooked licensed driving game is testament to that – it plays a lot like *Driver*, but with the player cast more definitely on the good side of the law. Chasing down criminals and ramming them off the road is the order of the day and if they're particularly hard targets, you'll be authorised to use firearms to assist in their capture. John Bunnell, the host of the TV series, provides the voiceover work for each mission in the dramatic tone that has made him famous. It's easy to pre-emptively dismiss the game thanks to its licence, but give it a go – you'll be pleasantly surprised.

Incredible Crisis
■ **DEVELOPER:** POLYGON MAGIC
■ **YEAR:** 1999 ■ **GENRE:** PARTY

14 **You might have** had a bad day at work, but nothing like what poor Taneo has to deal with. Things start going wrong when a massive globe begins to crash through his office, and quickly escalate to plummeting elevators, shocking quizzes from paramedics and more. What's more, this mini-game collection succeeds primarily because it's a lot of fun and packs in a good amount of content – 24 mini-games should provide plenty of variety. However, *Incredible Crisis* also achieves the rare feat of being an intentionally funny videogame thanks to some strong visual gags. The game surprisingly managed to receive a worldwide release, so you shouldn't run into much trouble trying to acquire it.
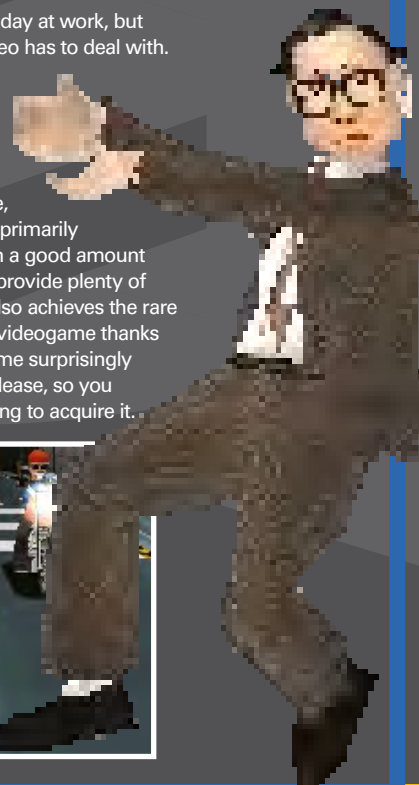
Suzuki Bakuhatsu
■ **DEVELOPER:** SOL■ **YEAR:** 2000 ■ **GENRE:** PUZZLE

15 **Sometimes, it's hard** to be a woman in Japan. You wake up, thinking it's going to be a relatively normal day, and then you try to eat an orange – but it turns out that the orange is a bomb. Luckily, our protagonist just happens to be the daughter of a bomb disposal expert, which is a good job because she runs into disguised explosive devices *all the time*. Yes, it's another odd game in which heavily stylised cutscenes meet bizarre objectives, as our protagonist has to defuse devices concealed as guns and even the moon.

The actual gameplay involves deactivating bombs by carefully removing screws and cutting wires. Devices gradually become more complex, and certain moves will make others inaccessible so you have to consider your options, while also being mindful of the game's time limit. Further complicating matters, you'll often come up against dead ends and traps, meaning that one wrong move can see you rest in pieces. As you might have guessed, *Suzuki Bakuhatsu* is an import game. The screen text is all in Japanese but the game is generally intuitive enough to be playable without knowledge of the language.

"There's a lot of depth to Devil Dice. The main puzzle mechanics are well constructed and the puzzle mode delivers lots of challenging problems"

Tobal 2
■ **DEVELOPER:** DREAMFACTORY
■ **YEAR:** 1997 ■ **GENRE:** FIGHTING

13 **While its predecessor** gained a worldwide release, *Tobal 2* was unfortunately confined to Japan. That means that most gamers haven't experienced one of the most interesting fighting games of the 32-bit era, which features some interesting innovations from *Virtua Fighter* and *Tekken* director Seiichi Ishii. Chief amongst these is a complex grapple system, which is unmatched in most one-on-one fighters due to the increased prominence of clinch strikes and transitions more common in pro wrestling and MMA games. Another factor setting the game apart is its RPG-style quest mode, a huge addition to the game, which grants access to dozens of unlockable fighters. All of this is represented with high-resolution visuals at 60 frames per second, which show off Akira Toriyama's outlandish character designs. There will never be another fighter like it, so be sure to give it a try.
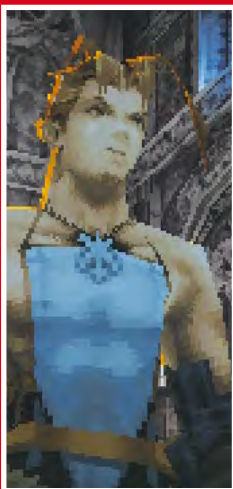
Vagrant Story

■ **DEVELOPER:** SQUARESOFT
■ **YEAR:** 2000 ■ **GENRE:** ACTION-RPG

12 ***Vagrant Story* is** an odd one – it received overwhelmingly positive reviews upon release, but never achieved the fame of Squaresoft's *Final Fantasy* series. The later years of the PlayStation's life saw a trend for cinematic storytelling in videogames develop, and *Vagrant Story* excels at this. However, it's actually a decidedly old-school game – you won't find any tedious "Find The NPC" quests or dull shopping here, just action and adventure. The adventuring elements of the game call to mind classic isometric adventures such as *Landstalker*, while the in-depth combat allows targeting of individual limbs, allowing you to strategically disable your enemies.

Devil Dice

■ **DEVELOPER:** SHIFT
■ **YEAR:** 1998 ■ **GENRE:** PUZZLE

11 **We're prone to** describing puzzle games as devilishly challenging, and this one doesn't even attempt to hide its satanic allegiances. This is a block-matching puzzler, in which the goal is to match faces on six-sided dice by running them around the grid. While you're on top of the dice, each step rolls them over – when you're on the floor with them, they'll slide around on the bottom face instead of rotating. Each face needs to be matched with the appropriate number of its counterparts – twos are easy to clear but sixes are much harder. However, higher numbers bring higher rewards.

There's a lot of depth to *Devil Dice*. The main puzzle mechanics are well constructed and the puzzle mode delivers lots of challenging pre-set problems featuring variant rule sets, such as different floors and immovable metal blocks. If you enjoy it, there's an even more obscure PS2 sequel called *Bombastic*.

Power Diggerz

■ **DEVELOPER:** TAITO ■ **YEAR:** 2000 ■ **GENRE:** PARTY

10 **No, we haven't** got the genre wrong – in a just world, *Power Diggerz* would be remembered as one of the best mini-game collections ever to hit the market. The game sees you placed in charge of some heavy-duty construction equipment, performing tasks like scooping sand, tearing down buildings and clearing paths blocked by volcanic rocks. However, the serious stuff isn't the reason why *Power Diggerz* is so appealing – the real joy lies in the mini-games, in which you perform bizarre tasks like scooping turtles from a swimming pool and serving curry onto giant plates. If you can think of a bizarre way to utilise a power shovel, it's probably in this game.

The game is put together fantastically well, and offers the multiplayer mode required to become a proper party classic. Unfortunately, there is one particular flaw that keeps it from reaching its full potential – the control system. While intuitive and responsive it uses every button on the pad and thus requires players to spend some time learning to play properly. It's clearly been done for the love of heavy machinery, which the game exhibits in spades – all the vehicles are licensed Komatsu models. You certainly can't accuse Taito of failing to make the most of the game's subject matter.

Power Diggerz seemed to have everything going for it upon release – it went down well with the press, earning scores as high as 92% in Play, and hit the shelves at a budget price. It's even got the universal sign of high quality: an intentionally misspelled title which uses Z to pluralise a word. Unfortunately, by the time the game made the journey to international audiences in 2001, much of the gaming market had already moved on to newer consoles. Go back and pick up a copy, because you'll really *dig* it.

Aquanaut's Holiday

■ **DEVELOPER:** ARTDINK
■ **YEAR:** 1995 ■ **GENRE:** SIMULATION

9 **Artdink was unafraid** to experiment with Sony's console, leading to this undersea exploration game. Much of the action involves simply exploring the ocean, searching for fish, crabs and the like as well as occasionally finding unusual landmarks, such as ruins of sunken cities. As you explore, you gain more resources in order to build an artificial reef to attract marine life, with the ultimate goal being to gather as much stuff as possible in one area. It's a very slow-paced game with little in the way of traditional structure, but the experience is worthwhile – there really isn't much like this on any console, and it serves to highlight the diverse range of software available on the PlayStation.

Vib Ribbon

■ **DEVELOPER:** NANA ON-SHA
■ **YEAR:** 2000 ■ **GENRE:** RHYTHM ACTION

8 **While it's likely** that you've heard of *Vib Ribbon* thanks to demo discs and the cult classic status it has attained, far fewer of you are likely to have played it – particularly readers in North America, who didn't receive the game the first time around. Your goal is to guide the rabbit Vibri over obstacles in time to music, as she skips merrily down the line (a literal line, as this is a black and white wireframe game). That's standard fare for the rhythm action genre, but what sets *Vib Ribbon* apart is the option to generate stages from your own CDs. Much of the fun comes from simply seeing how the game reacts to your musical tastes – fans of speed metal and hardcore techno be warned, your CD collection might just cause blistered thumbs.

Sanvein

■ **DEVELOPER:** SUCCESS
■ **YEAR:** 2000 ■ **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

7 **This kind of** shoot-'em-up wasn't the most popular type of game on the market by the time it reached the West, and it was pushed out by budget publishers as a result. While the game offers a decent weapon choices, *Sanvein*'s stark blue aesthetic and simplistic arena shooting might feel off-putting, as it's quite easy to bumble along for a while and eventually die without ever quite knowing why. However, spending some time with the game reveals its hidden depths.

The trick is that each stage is only meant to last for a very brief time – get in, blow things up, then get back to the hexagonal stage map. It's an important feature of the game, as your progress through the map determines your power for the next stage, so it's imperative to clear around bosses before you take them on. However, you're up against the clock and each hit takes away precious seconds, and beating bosses is the only way to recover time. The result is that a seemingly brainless shooter actually offers an exciting strategic balance of risk and reward, for those who are willing to find it.

"Harmful Park is a comedy shoot-'em-up in the same manner of Konami's Parodius series"

Harmful Park

■ **DEVELOPER:** SKY THINK SYSTEMS
■ **YEAR:** 1997 ■ **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

6 **The PlayStation isn't** as well-recognised for its 2D games as the Saturn, but games like this prove that its non-polygonal offerings shouldn't be discounted. *Harmful Park* is a comedy shoot-'em-up in the same manner as Konami's *Parodius* series. The well-designed stages see you fighting off diverse enemies including gorillas, inflatable dinosaurs and gigantic women. This appears to have been the final game produced by Sky Think Systems, and as a Japan-only release it's not easy to get hold of – original copies regularly sell for over £100. Thankfully, for those of you with access to a Japanese PSN account, it's available digitally on PlayStation platforms for a lower price of ¥600 – less than £5.

iS: Internal Section

■ **DEVELOPER:** POSITRON
■ **YEAR:** 1999 ■ **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

5 **The most immediately** striking thing about *iS: Internal Section* is its visuals. While the PlayStation's hardware allowed for diverse approaches to 3D visuals, most developers stuck with the standard texture-mapped polygons – not so *Positron*. The abstract flat-shaded polygon visuals of *Internal Section* allowed the developer to crank up the resolution and frame rate, creating a game that has aged remarkably gracefully. The game itself is a tube-based shooter in the same manner as *Tempest* and *N2O*, with some interesting twists including a selection of 12 unique weapons and boss battles in which you can adjust the size of the tube. It's another Japan-only release, but screen text is predominantly in English so don't worry about the language barrier.

Guardian's Crusade

■ **DEVELOPER:** TAMSOFT
■ **YEAR:** 1998 ■ **GENRE:** RPG

4 ***Guardian's Crusade* is** an RPG that takes aim at a slightly younger age group than most on the PlayStation, but one which keeps you playing thanks to a solid grasp of the genre's fundamentals. The most obvious concession to the younger audience, other than the relatively light tone, is the monster-raising aspect. If you put in the effort, your companion can be moulded into a formidable fighting partner to aid you on your journey. The game is also renowned for its high-quality translation, besting others of its era by managing to retain much of the humour inherent in the original Japanese script.

Kula World

■ **DEVELOPER:** GAME DESIGN SWEDEN AB
■ **YEAR:** 1998 ■ **GENRE:** PUZZLE

3 **This abstract puzzler** is a real gem, and one of the best mental workouts available on the PlayStation. Each stage takes place in a floating structure comprised of interconnected cubes, and your goal is to guide a beach ball around them, in order to collect keys before reaching the exit. This sounds simple, but is made much more complex by the game's convenient physics – rolling over the edge of a cube won't result in an untimely plummet, but instead a reorientation of gravity. This means that each stage has six different floor surfaces and can be approached in a number of different ways, but the area you want to be in will always be tantalisingly difficult to actually reach. With over 150 stages, *Kula World* will keep you occupied for a long time.

Kula World is an uncommon release, meaning that many of the players who were interested in the full game never got to try it. That rarity meant that copies used to change hands for as much as £50, but it's now much easier to obtain thanks to cheap digital re-releases. Even original copies shouldn't set you back more than around £25 now, with US imports coming in even cheaper.

LSD: Dream Emulator

■ **DEVELOPER:** OUTSIDE DIRECTORS COMPANY
■ **YEAR:** 1998 ■ **GENRE:** SIMULATION

2 *LSD* **is one** of the weirdest games on the PlayStation. It tries to simulate the experience of dreaming, and requires you to wander around surreal landscapes. These settings range from realistic historical landscapes to completely abstract dreamscapes, and are populated by characters ranging from humans to ghostly apparitions, animated teddy bears, and more. In any case you'll want to interact with discretion – touching walls and objects will move you to a new environment instantly. *LSD* was a title that exceeded the inaccessibility of most import titles, in that was beyond the reach of most gamers due to its high price – you'd be lucky to find a copy for less than £150. Thankfully, a release on the Japanese PSN has made it more accessible to gamers with a modern console.

No One Can Stop Mr Domino!

■ **DEVELOPER:** ARTDINK ■ **YEAR:** 1998 ■ **GENRE:** ACTION-PUZZLE

1 **Laying a great** line of dominoes is a tricky job at the best of times – one false move and all your time is wasted. So you've got to feel for poor Mr Domino, our titular hero in this game, who has to do so while avoiding obstacles and laying the dominoes from his own back. Yes indeed, it's another weird one – which is perhaps no surprise, given that Artdink's other game in this list is *Aquanaut's Holiday*.

At its core, *Mr Domino* is a score attack puzzle game – your goal is to lay trails of dominoes leading to trick points while you run a predetermined circuit. When you hit your second lap, you'll be able to knock down the previously-laid dominoes and set off the tricks. If you started your chain from the right place, you can even perform trick combos! Of course, as you try to set up your lines you'll be accosted by cats, vegetables and even the odd sumo wrestler. You also have a limited number of dominoes to work with and strict time limits to adhere to, making this a trickier game than you might imagine from just looking at it.

While the gameplay is perfectly good, much of Mr *Domino*'s appeal comes from just how weird it is. Your protagonist's tricks quickly escalate from knocking down towers of cards to causing a housewife to discover a bomb in her oven, and later causing a meteor strike. While it's all played off as humour, we do wonder how sympathetic this protagonist is really meant to be…

SILENT HILL

Haunted House, Alone In The Dark, and Resident Evil – three major survival horrors which birthed and evolved the concept. Then suddenly in 1999, some viewing it as bandwagon jumping, Konami gave the genre a darker shade of depravity through Silent Hill. Let's return to that town, a nightmarish place of burned children, satanic cults, and a malevolence which lurks behind the shadows

» Masked bodies suspended, almost crucified on wires, is a recurring theme in *Silent Hill*.

The first *Silent Hill* is the best and the scariest in the entire series. Some controversial statements are opinion, others, such as the one which started this article, are fact. The original's superiority over its follow-ups is the direct result of its limitations; it joins the short list of retro games which are excellent mainly by virtue of their age, and the ingrained facets which result from this. The restrictions of the hardware are what today put this game above its rivals. Let's be crudely blunt here, the grainy, dirty polygon-textures of the first game are honestly more likely to scare the shit out of you than the smoother refined visuals of the sequels. It's one thing to see clearly-defined super-shiny monsters, but it's far more unnerving when the thing you're looking at appears as if it's washed its face with a bundle of rusted razor wire.

Another result of the technical limitations was fogging, even indoors – which was maintained for the sequels despite more powerful hardware. Everything in the original *Silent Hill* is swathed in either grey mist or darkness. The fog exists in the "real" world, hiding the roaming skinless dogs and other enemies from view, while the inky black of night occurs in the nightmarish alternate reality of the town. It is this other world where most people's fear comes from, as the protagonist, Harry Mason, again and again has to force himself through the horrors of this most unnatural of places. Every surface is encrusted with what appears to be rust, or blood, and the walls are often replaced with barbed wire and chain link fences.

For those that have seen it, the depraved filth-saturated atmosphere, plus other elements of *Silent Hill*, are taken directly from the film *Jacob's Ladder*. Watching this flick, which stars Tim Robbins, it's quite astounding just how much Team Silent borrowed. But there's no attempt to hide various influences, and in fact *Silent Hill* openly boasts of its source material by naming various streets after horror writers and other things connected to surreal and scary forms of media (there are several *Twin Peaks* references, which, along with several of Lynche's creations, was also a major influence for the games).

Another of *Silent Hill*'s strengths was its use of sound and audio cues – this again follows the limitations theme. Enemies could not easily be seen, because of the limited draw distance, and so to alert you to their presence a special radio was available. Later games reused the idea, but at the time it was an ingenious decision, and the sheer terror created by the white noise that crackled

» A tank of gasoline! A tank of gasoline! My kingdom for a tank of gasoline!

THE FIRST SILENT HILL IS THE BEST AND THE SCARIEST IN THE ENTIRE SERIES. IT'S BECAUSE OF THE GRAINY, DIRTY POLYGON-TEXTURES

» What the hell is happening? This hideously deformed and crucified figure marks the opening of the game.

» This opening scene in the diner sets up and reveals the importance of the radio.

» Suddenly, whilst in the mall, these TV screens come to life and echo the cries of Harry's lost daughter. It's quite chilling.

THE KIDS AREN'T ALRIGHT

Censorship of the media. It's a practice employed by tyrannical governments and nefarious agencies wishing to control and manipulate the public consciousness – keeping us passive, and receptive. Pushing us ever deeper into the Orwellian dystopia we are currently in, is the UK version of *Silent Hill*. While both the US and Japanese releases retained all their original content, as its creators intended, when the game hit Britannia's censorship-besieged shores it lost one of its main monsters. The Grey Children (pictured), which inhabit the school, were removed. They were ungodly-looking monsters which wielded knives, and apparently the ominous noise they make is the sound of children laughing, digitally slowed down. They freaked the hell out of us. They were replaced with Mumblers, strange brown dwarven monsters with claws, which weren't nearly as disturbing. So if you're going to play *Silent Hill* (and you really should as it's an amazing experience)make sure you get the US version. It's not only free of all that nasty censorship, but also runs at 60Hz, which instantly improves the gameplay.

» This is the deformed serpent boss. But look to the right. Notice the human body engulfed in flames? Creepy.

TERROR IS ALWAYS MORE COMPLETE WHEN COUPLED WITH THE UNCOMFORTABLE REALISATION THAT THERE IS NO HOPE

out of it was palpable. The sound nurtured a Pavlovian response, where even if enemies can't (or don't exist) the sound of the radio causes an adrenaline spike; at one curdling point, there are invisible ghost children which, while not causing any actual harm, cause the radio to scream static wildly. There is also the sound of random banging and scraping on the walls, as if the abyss' unnatural spawn were trying to break through, into your mind. It's deeply unsettling.

At every opportunity it evokes powerful negative emotions in the player. Later on when discovering a motorbike, shrouded in darkness, and

finding that it's out of petrol, you want to fall to the ground crying, screaming at the TV, begging for just one canister of gasoline so as to escape the nightmare. Faced with such hopelessness and despair, you instead hold the sawn-off shotgun close to your chest and, with a demented glint in a twitching eye, vow that if hell is about to consume you, you'll go down firing and laughing like a deranged psychopathic madman on the edge. Terror is always more complete when coupled with the uncomfortable realisation that there is no hope. *Silent Hill* is always bleak, even with its happiest of endings, and the fact the main protagonist seems trapped in a looping never-ending nightmare (not to mention being on the verge of insanity) makes it seem all the more futile. The inescapability of replayed scenarios lends things a gloriously abhorrent kind of nihilism. Playing it today it's

slow, linear, has convoluted puzzles, and is very clunky. Combat is imprecise, difficult, with limited ammo and too many melee weapons. The whole thing has a giddy surrealism to it, as you fight moths, slugs and giant lizards. But these things must be accepted as intentional and, once acknowledged, the game is still as terrifying and disturbing as it ever was. It was never about combat; Harry Mason is a writer and it's logical that he would have more success running from, than confronting evil. The vague and disorientating puzzles were needed; they helped convey the otherworldly location you had descended into.

The same goes for the bosses, which were a stark contrast to the demonic "general enemies" found throughout. While games like *Resident Evil* had a cohesive internal logic with regards to puzzles and bosses, *Silent Hill* meandered about like a chimpanzee drunk on meths, nauseas and dizzy, forcing you to stumble without being able to catch your balance afterwards. The bosses did not appear as if they belonged, which was a jolt to the system, confusing, unnatural in a world which was already an aberration – it begged the question, was Harry Mason simply going insane? It of course has problems, but *Silent Hill* uses such a focused (though admittedly borrowed) visual style, and carries it off with such momentum, that it makes for a thrilling dip into chilling and murky waters. And, as we've said, the first is still the best.
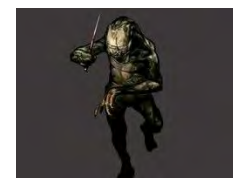

» This is precisely what we mean. Large, chunky and pixelated visuals. Filthy and rust-covered, everything conveys a sense of foreboding.

» We've always found the unsanitary conditions of the hospital to be deeply unsettling.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

GENSOSUIKODEN(PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: PS1, SATURN
YEAR: 1995

LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA
SYSTEMS: SNES
YEAR: 1991

TOKIMEKI MEMORIAL
SYSTEMS: PC ENGINE
YEAR: 1994

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

A precursor to the Jackass generation headlined by an upcoming sports icon, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater not only heralded a new type of videogame genre but signalled the arrival of an entire culture. Looking back at where it all began, Neversoft co-founder Mick West discusses the humble origins of one of the biggest franchises of all time

» Neversoft didn't completely abandon the idea of linear downhill courses. Two of the main stages – Mall and Downhill Jam – retain the original concept inspired by Sega's *Top Skater*.

I n 1999, as publisher Activision was circling the idea of an extreme sports title, pro skaterboarder Tony Hawk peered over the edge of a half-pipe at the X-Games tournament in San Francisco, bracing himself as he prepared to attempt one of the sport's most complicated tricks: the 900. An aerial spin involving two-and-a-half turns, this was skateboarding's Holy Grail at the time, residing just out of reach even to the sport's most distinguished competitors.

When the 32-year-old Hawk landed the trick, in an instant it became one of the most talked about sporting moments of the year. It successfully raised the global profile of both Hawk and skateboarding overnight. The world took notice. Activision had found its next sports game.

Sensing the impending boom of extreme sports culture and identifying a niche in the games industry, several marketing executives at Activision came to the conclusion that a skateboarding game would be a sure-fire hit with a young demographic. What it didn't have was a studio to make it a reality.

"We were the natural choice to do it," responds Neversoft co-founder Mick West when asked how the studio got involved with *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*. "We were just finishing up *Apocalypse* and they wanted to use us for something else. Pretty much straight away they approved us to make an exploratory game prototype and it worked out well."

However, before Neversoft was given the greenlight it was another studio that had originally pitched the idea of a skateboarding game to Activision. The format didn't quite click with the publisher but it liked the concept, so it turned to Neversoft – a studio that had recently helped them out of a bind by turning around the Bruce Willis-starring action game *Apocalypse* in nine months after its original developer dropped out – to make it happen.

"It was attractive to them because we were a team ready to go and we had a lot of skill in getting out a game quickly," says Mick. "They weren't thinking that *Tony Hawk* was going to be the huge seller that it was. They wanted to get a game out on the market by next Christmas and we were the team that could do that." ▶
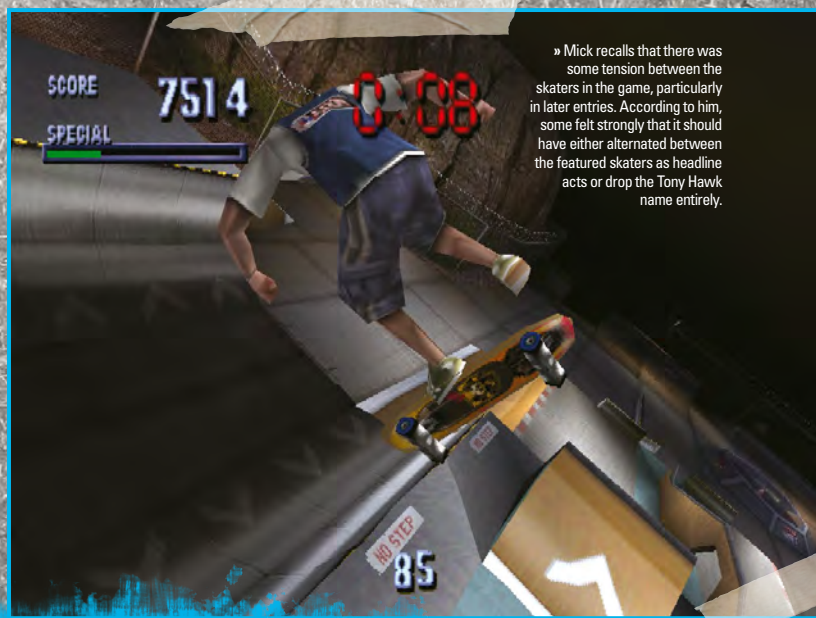

» Tony Hawk has appeared in eight sequels since the 1999 original.

IN THE KNOW
» **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
» **DEVELOPER:** NEVERSOFT
» **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS
» **RELEASED:** 1999
» **GENRE:** EXTREME SPORTS

SKATER PROFILES

A closer look at the roster of characters

TONY HAWK
■ The world's most famous skateboarder retired his board in 1999 but continues to promote skating worldwide.

BOB BURNQUIST
■ Still an active pro skater, in 2010 Burnquist was the fifth person to pull off the infamous 900.
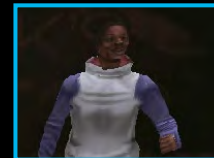
KAREEM CAMPBELL
■ Campbell has become one of the most successful skaters to come out of the US.
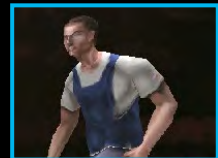
RUNE GLIFBERG
■ Hailing from Denmark, he remains an active skater and recently released a line of signature Converse shoes.
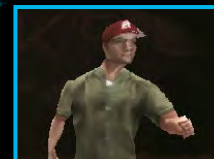
BUCKY LASEK
■ Alongside his professional skateboarding career, Lasek is also a professional rallycross driver.
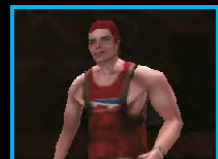
CHAD MUSKA
■ One of the most influential skaters, Muska's recent achievements include opening an alternative clothing store.
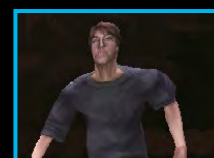
ANDREW REYNOLDS
■ As well as his board prowess, Reynolds is a successful entrepreneur.

GEOFF ROWLEY
■ Liverpool-born Geoff Rowley was given *Thrasher* magazine's coveted Skater Of The Year Award in 2000.

ELISSA STEAMER
■ The first professional female skater, Steamer was last awarded Bronze at the Summer X-Games 2009.

JAMIE THOMAS
■ Nicknamed 'The Chief' Jamie Thomas performed the infamous 'Leap Of Faith' down an 18-foot, 8-inch drop.

» Mick recalls that there was some tension between the skaters in the game, particularly in later entries. According to him, some felt strongly that it should have either alternated between the featured skaters as headline acts or drop the Tony Hawk name entirely.

» If you look very closely in the Mall level you'll notice a reference to Neversoft's previous game, *Apocalypse*.

" The mo-cap session was never actually used – it was more of a publicity thing "

Mick West

▶ There was one small problem, though. Neversoft had never made a skateboarding game before – it hadn't even made a sports game before. Where did the relatively unknown studio start when it came to creating one of the most popular gaming franchises of all time?

"The thing about Neversoft was there was a bowling alley opposite the offices," remembers Mick. "We'd go there for lunch sometimes and it had a *Top Skater* machine which was popular with members of the office and that influenced the original thinking."

Created by *Crazy Taxi* creator Kenji Kanno and released by Sega in 1997, *Top Skater* featured a skateboard controller that players stand on to guide skaters down a linear course, performing tricks to get a high score. "We enjoyed playing that game so we tried to make something similar to that," reveals Mick. "You'd go from the start to the end and when you got to the end you'd stop and get a score. It was like a racing game, really – you're basically trying to get around or along a track."

A part of this original thinking remains in the game: two of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*'s courses are downhill with a finish line at the end. However, the idea evolved after the team began studying real-life skaters.

"Things changed drastically when we tried to incorporate elements that we saw in the X-Games," recalls Mick. "People doing tricks in a half-pipe; you can't really get that half-pipe vibe on a downhill course – a half-pipe is going back and forth, over the same spots again and again. So the [original] idea ended up not being as much fun to play as we first thought and the whole game changed over time."

What became obvious was the necessity to enable players to concentrate on and express themselves through the tricks system. Neversoft poured over professional tapes, scrutinising the movements and style of top skaters, and began to integrate boardslides, nosebones and heelflips into the game (which was currently using the existing player model of Bruce Willis from *Apocalypse* as an avatar) understanding that authenticity would be needed to legitimise the concept. But it quickly became apparent that they would need a pro skater to help guide the rest of development.

By the time Tony Hawk signed on to headline the game, Neversoft had already been using the skater as a basis for some of the animations and moves featured in the game, helping to inform the direction of the title. However, with Hawk's star rising, confirmation of his involvement shined a spotlight on the game's development.

"Tony was wildly popular at the time because he got a lot of coverage for doing the 900 for the first time at the X-Games," remembers Mick. "It was an epic thing and he was instantly the most famous skateboarder around. His persona really was a huge part of the publicity for the game. You can see some of the other games suffered from that. Competing skating games were just 'Skating' or something like that and didn't have the same star power, so it certainly helped."

» While most of the environments were complete inventions, Burnside was based on a real skatepark in Portland, Oregon.

» Players could customise their character by choosing different boards, handling and wheel colour. It didn't make much difference to performance but added a touch of personality.

5 EXTREME SPORTS TITLES

We present a selection of other celebrity-endorsed extreme sports games

DAVE MIRRA FREESTYLE BMX 2000
■ Dave Mirra's inaugural videogame effort rides on the coattails of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* somewhat, using it as a template for its own trick-based BMX gameplay. It was nowhere near as impressive as its inspiration but put amazing ragdoll physics to good use to make its crashes all the more brutal.

SUNNY GARCIA SURFING 2001
■ Veteran surfer Sunny Garcia headlines this extreme sports sim that trades realism for wish-fulfilment. Instead of utilising real-world locations, *Sunny Garcia Surfing* invents its own island that boasts the largest waves in the world. Although, it's also teeming with sharks, jet skis and other hazardous objects to avoid.

MAT HOFFMAN'S PRO BMX 2001
■ Hoping to strike gold twice, Activision's *Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX* is, as you can imagine, an adaptation of the publisher's own *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*. Using a modified version of the *Tony Hawk* engine, the carbon-copy gameplay involves passing a series of objectives in each stage to progress to the next level.

KELLY SLATER'S PRO SURFER 2002
■ Another entry in Activision's Pro series of extreme sports titles, *Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer* involved stringing tricks together to achieve the highest possible score. Unfortunately, the concept was nowhere near as polished as *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, with clunky animations and a noticeable lack of depth.
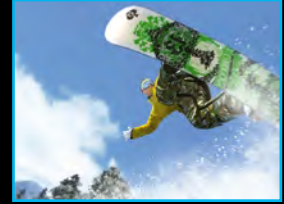
SHAUN WHITE SNOWBOARDING 2008
■ While the original multiformat release garnered a lukewarm reception, it was the Wii version – titled *Shaun White Snowboarding: Road Trip* – that received the most favourable critical reception. Using the Wii Balance Board to cut through the slopes, White's first game was decent if not particularly remarkable.

Instantly Activision used Tony's involvement to make the wider media aware of the game's production. Journalists from around the world were invited to watch a mo-cap session, where Tony (dressed in a lycra suit covered in white balls) would perform a series of signature moves to be translated into the game. The event was a huge success, but as Mick remembers it wasn't particularly helpful to the continued development of the game. "The mo-cap session was never actually used," he states. "It was more of a publicity thing."

Activision was never under any false impression that the mo-cap data would prove useful to Neversoft. In fact, the studio warned the publisher that it was almost certain the data would be useless. "Activision was going to do it regardless for publicity," continues Mick. "Our animator couldn't really do anything with [the data] because it was not something that we were familiar with using and we had a lot of the animations coming along anyway. We ended up doing everything animate by hand using video reference."

Interestingly, Hawk wouldn't get involved in the design – he offered his thoughts on a few occasions when he visited the studio. When it came to replicating the style and movements of skaters, it was all down to the team figuring it out as they went along. Flip tricks off quarter-pipes, the satisfaction of holding a handstand off the lip, or just perfecting a grind along a handrail – this was new territory for the team and it all had to feel intuitive.

Having taken over player control halfway through development on the first game, Mick implemented the physics and control scheme that would be fundamental to the title's accessible nature. It was a major turning point in development. "In the first game [player control] was quite simple," he says. "You had a table mapping button presses to tricks. It got a lot more complicated in subsequent games. One of the key things about *Tony Hawk* is that it feels very nice to play. It's very responsive. You hold down the X button to crouch and you release to jump. It's very tight, you feel like you're controlling it. It's not like you're pressing it and something happens a tenth of a second later. That's one of the factors that contributed to the success of the game. It was fun to simply skate around and jump off things without really doing anything because it felt so responsive."

Mick ironed out a lot of the bugs – one particular problem involved skaters falling through the level – while adding features such as grinding on rails and wall riding. But it was becoming clear that if it truly wanted to push significant boundaries in the sports genre then the studio would need to look further afield for influence.

"*Super Mario 64* had been out for a while and the concept of open-world games was becoming popular," he continues. This was part of the drift away from the mould of *Top Skater* towards an open-world game. The first level in *Pro Skater*, Warehouse, was fairly basic in terms of level design; a box-like shape with ramps, half-pipes and destructible objects grafted to the scenery. While rudimentary by today's standards, even this fairly limited layout offered a ▶

SCORE 375 0:46
SPECIAL
725 X2

» Everyone knows the first game featured the unlockable character Officer Dick. But did you know there was another character, Private Carrera, which was only attainable through a cheat code?

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

APOCALYPSE
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1998
SPIDER-MAN
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 2000
**GUN** (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 2005

▶ rare sense of freedom for the player. "The original *Tony Hawk* starts with the Warehouse which is a small level, while the second is the School level, which is much more open," considers Mick. "In the first game we weren't using that much reference, so they weren't really based on real places as they were on later games. You sit down and think off the tip of your head 'what environments does a skater skate in?' An empty school is an obvious one, as is a city. We were thinking of areas off the top of our head and trying to think of the real-life things that would be in those levels. In a school, you can go down the railings of steps – that would be a real-life thing. You had to make it a lot more fun as well so you'd stick a lot of quarter-pipes everywhere and let people grind along the tops of walls or phone lines that aren't very real at all. You've got this mixture of reference to real things with other elements that make it more fun."

Pro Skater isn't a realistic game, and Neversoft prioritised fun over simulating skating to a precise degree. After leaping in the air 30 feet, grinding along phone lines and jumping from roof-to-roof, it's fair to assume that the studio wasn't aiming for realistic physics. This approach matched with the open layout of the level design impacted how progression would be defined within the game.

"Collecting the tapes is analogous to collecting the stars in *Mario*," says Mick, once again referencing the seminal Nintendo 64 title. "Each level had five things to do to complete that level and we just brainstormed them. We sat in front of a whiteboard and I drew a level and said 'what can we do?' and we would start throwing out ideas and writing them down."
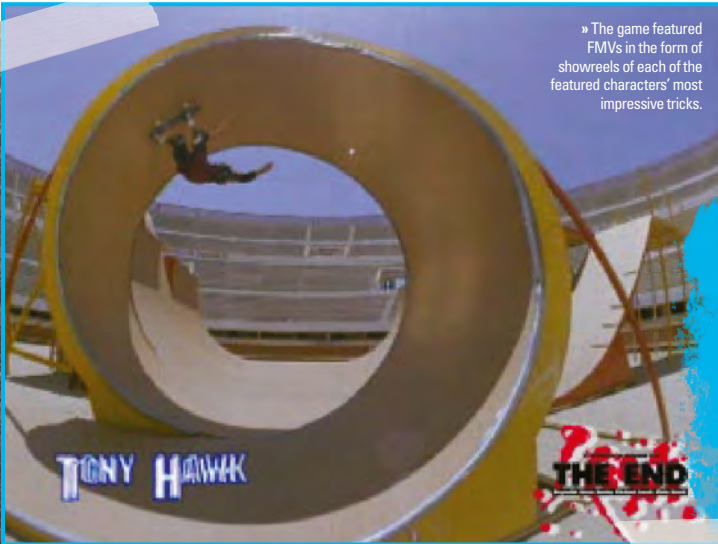
» The game featured FMVs in the form of showreels of each of the featured characters' most impressive tricks.

> "It had to have a more open world, a trick system where you could score points and an open design"
>
> Mick West

THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE TONY HAWK FRANCHISE

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2X

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 4

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2

TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND

There were some abandoned concepts, not to mention a few levels (one based along a pier, another on a freeway) that didn't make the cut. The process was collaborative, however Mick reiterates that the team always prioritised fun over gratuitous realism.

"People were always coming up with silly ideas that wouldn't work," he says. "People would say 'what if one of the wheels on your skateboard falls off and you have to skate around on three wheels leaning to one side to go back and get another wheel?' That would be no fun whatsoever. The fun factor is a big consideration in any game idea – people seem to miss that. They think realism is more important than fun. It's not really fun to fall over and break your leg in real life so we didn't simulate that."
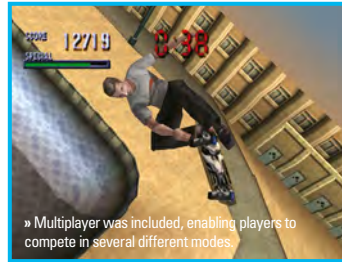
Mick reflects on how the studio approached creating a brand new type of game. "The biggest challenge was learning how to do it. We didn't know what we were doing and therefore there was a lot more experimentation." The team had been familiar with the genres it had explored in previous titles. *Apocalypse* was a third-person shooter, which was also similar to a prototype the studio had worked on before getting the job. When it came to *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, the studio had to think on its feet and adapt to the challenges it faced as it cut its teeth in the sports genre. "Skating was very new," says Mick. "It had to have a more open world, a trick system where you could score points and an open design. The concepts were alien to people working on the game. It was a new type of game."

That sentiment was shared with consumers upon the game's release. Few games have ever penetrated the cultural zeitgeist quite like *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* at the time. Before the *Jackass* generation had ever peeled their first Band-Aid, Neversoft had managed to encapsulate both the incipient prominence of extreme sports and the rebellious, carefree counter-culture of an emerging youth scene. Unsurprisingly, Mick cites the iconic soundtrack as integral to this: "The music was a big thing," he says. "It's not like it's authentic hardcore skating music of the time but it was novel to have a game that had such an interesting soundtrack of music playing in the background all the time. For a lot of skateboarders music is very important to them."

Mick had no idea how important the soundtrack would be to the game's legacy. Its initial implementation was a matter of convenience – the existing engine could support music tracks and video walls (the latter featured heavily across the levels). All that was left was for Activision to pick the tracks.

"It was also capturing skate culture with logos, stickers and using concepts like videoing the moves and collecting tapes, things like that," explains Mick. "They were all taking from skate culture. We tried to do as much things that directly reflected or referenced skating culture as possible."

But what Mick didn't expect was how it would contribute directly to the boom in skating's popularity. Ultimately, with the accessibility of the control scheme matched with a huge amount of depth made it was an essential gaming experience, but Hawk's endorsement gained it a far-reaching appeal. Even though there wasn't anything quite like it on the marketplace, Mick remembers his confidence in the game's success.

"My defining memory was just before the first game was released and I was going out to lunch with the chief executive of Activision at the time," he says. "He was talking about the game and he said something like 'I think this game is going to do fairly well' and I said 'I know it's going to do well. It's going to be a million-selling game.' He said 'we'll see'. And then of course it was. He didn't know what he had at the time and I felt strongly that it was going to be huge," concludes Mick. "I look back at the conversation with particular fondness." ✱

» Multiplayer was included, enabling players to compete in several different modes.

» The main campaign is divided between objective-based courses and competition stages. The latter involves scoring a certain amount of points to gain medals.

» Rather than hire external developers with experience working in the sports genre, Neversoft felt there was no game comparable and therefore it was the same team as *Apocalypse* that worked on the game.

SWITCH 50 50 GRIND + FS BOARDSLIDE
700 X2
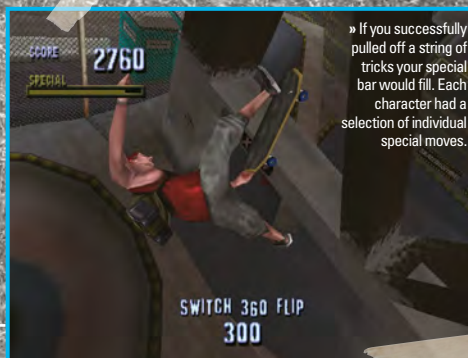
» If you successfully pulled off a string of tricks your special bar would fill. Each character had a selection of individual special moves.

SWITCH 360 FLIP
300

» Each level has a set of objectives to complete. Some were as simple as scoring a set amount of points, others were more arbitrary.

TIP.
EARN TAPES
BY COMPLETING
LEVEL GOALS

360 SHOVE IT + 50 50 GRIND + GIMME GAP
1680

TONY HAWK'S
DOWNHILL JAM

TONY HAWK'S
PROJECT 8

TONY HAWK'S
PROVING GROUND

TONY HAWK'S
MOTION

TONY HAWK:
RIDE

TONY HAWK:
SHRED

TONY HAWK'S
PRO SKATER HD

CR

BAND

Nintendo had Mario, Sega had Sonic, Namco had Pac-Man. As the dawn of the PlayStation era began to rise it was clear Sony needed its own mascot, and it found one in the unlikeliest of marsupials

» Crash bares a striking resemblance to *Looney Tunes*' Tasmanian Devil.

ASH

ICOOT

If you stop and think about it, there's quite a large number of PlayStation icons from the PSone era. Lara Croft, Cloud Strife and even the colourful beanie of PaRappa will likely come to mind when you consider the marketing pieces of the time. But among the numerous new faces of this exciting, upstart of a console none were so prevalent as *Crash Bandicoot*, an immediately eye-catching character whose frantic behaviour and Nineties cool charm was practically imprinted on his skin in his various posters, CD booklets and in-store banners. All the other characters needed context to stand out, while Crash landed in the 32-bit generation perfectly. In many ways he was decrepit, of a 16-bit age where bipedal animals with extraordinary abilities was the norm. The PSone had already been moving the industry far beyond that, and here was Crash – yet one more platforming creature that should, by rights, have been left to fail like so many before him. But Crash actually epitomised everything about the PlayStation at the time; he had attitude, he was unique and his game helped to bring the platforming genre

kicking and screaming into the 3D generation. Crash was to cutesy platformer mascots what the PSone was to the videogames industry: a swift kick to the balls and a middle-finger to the status quo.

Today, most know the creative minds behind the original *Crash Bandicoot*, Naughty Dog might be a powerhouse developer these days, but prior to its seminal PlayStation game it wasn't quite the significant name it is now. In fact, it's output prior to *Crash Bandicoot* had been insignificant at best, awful at worst. The developer was just two people at the time, close friends Jason Rubin and Andy Gavin. While the pair had worked on projects before, it was their 3DO title *Way Of The Warrior* that would turn Naughty Dog into the established name it would go on to become. "I'm sorry, those guys were lucky as shit," says David Siller, one of the key producers on *Crash Bandicoot*. "They had done some real so-so products – *Keef The Thief* and other stuff that they had done, some of it published at EA. They'd invested in their own 3DO development system and those two guys developed a game on the 3DO. We used to call it *White Trash Warriors*, but it was a fighting game like *Mortal Kombat* called *Way Of The Warrior*." David goes on to explain that 3DO had a booth at CES one year and, by chance, Naughty Dog would be placed right next to Universal Interactive Studios who was there showing off its first videogame, *Jurassic Park Interactive*.

"Apparently in the course of the three or four days [Jason Rubin and Andy Gavin got to know] Mark Cerny and Rob Biniaz who were running Universal Interactive and needed developers, so they struck a deal with these guys. They said, 'Look, we'll move the two of you lock, stock and barrel to Los Angeles and we'll give you ▶

» Bonus stages were integral for 100 per cent completion in later games. In the original, they were just a bonus.

» Though it wasn't the first game to feature a chase, it did popularise that style of platforming gameplay.

» The opening stage of *Crash* might not be the toughest, but it certainly is memorable.

MEET THE CAST

CRASH BANDICOOT
■ The eponymous hero, once an ordinary bandicoot before an experiment by Dr Neo Cortex gave him exceptional abilities and a lust for crate destruction. Originally named Willie The Wombat.

AKU AKU
■ A mysterious floating tribal mask and a penchant for the force of good. As a companion to Crash, he keeps him safe from danger and can even empower the bandicoot with invulnerability.

DR NEO CORTEX
■ This big-headed (literally) evil scientist is the central antagonist for Crash's adventures, often building nefarious contraptions as part of his experiments to create an army of mutant animal warriors.

N. BRIO
■ The original assistant to Dr Neo Cortex and a returning character throughout the series. N. Brio's crazed and insane remarks are a good suggestion of his mental state (note the loose screws in his head).

RIPPER ROO
■ The second boss encounter in the original *Crash Bandicoot*, and one of the more recognisable, too. The straightjacket highlights just how crazy he is, a side-effect of prolonged exposure to Cortex's Evolvo Ray.

» There were many *Mario Kart* clones at the time, but *CTR* stood out as a challenger to Nintendo's throne.

» There were a number of new features added into *Crash Bandicoot 2*

▶ offices at Universal.'" And with that, Naughty Dog was locked in: it was to produce a 3D platformer with the backing from Universal as part of a three-game deal.

With the deal in place it was time for Naughty Dog to get to work, and new hires were brought in to bulk out the team and get the project underway. David – who had been working at Sunsoft – was brought into Universal Interactive where he was to be a producer, overlooking the development of key titles. Immediately David was put to work with Naughty Dog, on a title that was then known as *Willie The Wombat*. "I was told that I would be the producer of those guys," recalls David. "There was a six-page story that had been typed up in a nice font, I think by Jason Rubin. And it told the story of Willie The Wombat, and it talked about how the game was going to play. It would be third-person, camera-behind-the-character, and there would also be some side view and it would transition from one to the other."

With Andy Gavin working hard on the technology of the game, Jason Rubin – alongside David Siller – would begin creating the characters, the setting and the story

for *Willie The Wombat*. We're told of different milestones the team was given, the initial being where the technology side of the software is proven to be up and running. "But the next objective is first-playable," David states, "and what that really was as far as the contract meant was that they needed to have Willie The Wombat running around in some kind of environment." This particular milestone is common in games development, and gives the publisher an early sign of the game's progress and potential. "Well, they failed that milestone," says David, "and Mark Cerny came to me and he said, 'Look, I want you to now design levels and you come in and show them how the game needs to play.' So I did that. I designed the levels that ended up being at the end of the game."

With the game now up to scratch and Universal's milestone met, David Siller, Mark Cerny and Rob Biniaz – founding president of UIS – went to show the game to Sony, a meeting that proved to be a huge success for the trio. "We took the prototype to get concept approval and Bernie Stolar saw it. The man is brilliant, he saw it right away – called people into the little conference room to get them to look at it, and he had his assistant go and get paperwork that he would sign immediately." *Willie The Wombat*, it would seem, was set to be an early PlayStation title. Except, by that point, this acrobatic mammal had already encountered a name change.

COCO BANDICOOT
■ Originally appearing in *Crash Bandicoot 2*, Coco is Crash's sister. The complete opposite to her brother, she's a level-headed whizz-kid with a computer and fond of riding jet skis and tigers.

UKA UKA
■ The Yin to Aku Aku's Yang, this mask represents the forces of evil and is the driving force for many of Cortex's bumbling plans. His eternal battle with Aku Aku is the foundation for *Crash Bash*'s minigames.

N. GIN
■ If the pun here wasn't enough, then the working engine attached to this scientist's is in fact from an experiment gone wrong. He managed to stabilise it as a life support machine, but it cost him his sanity.

TINY TIGER
■ Irony clearly wasn't lost on Cortex when he named this minion. Supposedly the first of Cortex's experiments in genetic mutation, Tiny is a significant boss character throughout the series.

> ❝ **Mark Cerny came to me and he said, 'Look, I want you to design levels and you come in and show them how the game needs to play'** ❞
> David Siller

But what happened to turn the name from *Willie The Wombat* to the more marketable, more catchy, more 'PlayStation' name of *Crash Bandicoot*? "*Willie The Wombat* was what Jason and Andy loved," David says. "They wanted that name. Trademark searches were done by Universal to try and trademark *Willie The Wombat*." What they found was a trademark by Hudson for its action-RPG released in Japan on the Sega Saturn also named *Willie The Wombat*. Though the game rose to little prominence, it was enough to dissuade Universal from running with that name. "We had everyone in this huge room at Universal and we put a list together," says David. "We said we have to have another name, we have to have it now." During this meeting many names were thrown about until someone suggested Crash Bandicoot. The name stuck and the name was changed; *Crash Bandicoot* was born.

It's interesting to consider that, without the forceful hand of copyright law holding the original name back, *Crash Bandicoot* could've suffered a different fate. *Willie The Wombat* sounded ancient, the sort of title you'd see on the front of a cartridge, not on the CDs of the then-modern-feeling PSone. Even now, it's easy to see the importance of that name change, even if the name alone had no effect on the punkish attitude we've come to love Crash for. *Crash Bandicoot* was released in September 1996, almost a year to the day since the launch of the PlayStation itself. And, as it would turn out, it was an instant success for all involved.

Since Universal had signed Naughty Dog up for a three-game deal it was clear what the next ▶

CRASH BY NUMBERS

40.38 MILLION
Copies of Crash games sold

52
Characters featuring across the series

18
Different games released since 1996
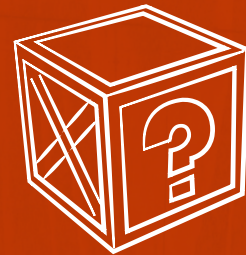
6,344
Crates in the original trilogy

20:26
Fastest completion time of Crash Bandicoot: Warped's Time Trial stages

16
Different dangers Crash has had to run from, including a dinosaur, sharks and a tsunami

AS SEEN IN...

The wily bandicoot has spun his way off into other games, let's take a look…

SPYRO THE DRAGON: THE ETERNAL NIGHT

■ Spyro and Crash share many similarities. Both are stars of platforming games, both began on PSone and both were designed by Charles Zembillas. It's no surprise, then, to see Crash cameo in the *Spyro* game *The Eternal Night*, where he can be spotted in the frozen waters of the Celestial Caves.

UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END

■ This was perhaps the most unexpected cameo, with Naughty Dog paying homage to the famed character it created in its epic *Uncharted* adventure. It was done in such a classy way, too, introduced with little fanfare as Nathan Drake teases his wife Elena as he tries to beat her score on the "TV game thingy".

SKYLANDERS: IMAGINATORS

■ Rumours and speculation of a new *Crash* game have been popping up for years. One example came via a photo of *Skylanders* developer Vicarious Visions where a poster of a redesigned Crash was spotted in the background. Well, as it turns out, this developer is including the bandicoot in the upcoming *Skylanders* game, *Imaginators*.

TY THE TASMINIAN TIGER

■ While not a cameo in another game, Crash Bandicoot was used – alongside Spyro and Sonic – in an advert for *Ty The Tasmanian Tiger*. In the advert, the three stars are seen in a hospital battered, bandaged and sporting boomerangs lodged into their bodies. It was a result of aggressive marketing from EA, of course.

» *Nitro Kart* was at least a very good-looking game, but that's really all it was. It was a modern version of *Crash Team Racing*, and that was it.

▶ game was to be, and so work on *Crash Bandicoot 2* began almost immediately. Though David would leave Universal and go on to work at Capcom, many of his earlier gameplay designs and sketches would come to be used in the *Crash* sequel. "Well, I left a lot of design stuff that was revamped," says David, detailing boss encounters in particular that they couldn't include in the original game. He had even previously created design specs on new elements for *Aero The Acro-Bat 3D* – a game series that David had worked on and brought the rights over to Universal with him – and many of these were used in Naughty Dog and Insomniac's games. "Mark Cerny had that copied and circled to both Naughty Dog and Insomniac to see where they might be influenced or wean ideas off of it since I was leaving it and *Aero* was going with me. They took whatever ideas they could."

With the popularity and success of *Crash Bandicoot* secured, Universal set about making sure this was a title worth holding on to. It increased the budget to $2 million dollars to bring on talented programmers and additional artists. Before long, Evan Wells – now copresident of Naughty Dog – would be brought into the team. The two sequels released within a year of each other, with *Cortex Strikes Back* releasing in October 1997 and the third game developed by Naughty Dog releasing in November 1998. In both cases, the increased manpower and budgets made for significant improvements. With *Cortex Strikes Back* a new Warp Room was added, providing a more non-linear format to the game's progression, while improvements to the graphics, the save system and variety of the levels all

helped to improve on what was an already stellar first release. Then there was *Warped*, which introduced underwater levels, motorbike stages and made Coco Bandicoot a playable character. Both were well received, and established themselves as PlayStation classics.

Yet if we're complaining of the familiarity that these games came with, the next and final game in the series to be produced by Naughty Dog would offer something a little bit different. The fourth game began development at the same time as the third game, and utilised the new *Warped*'s motorbike levels as a template. That's because this new game was to be a racing game, utilising the colourful cast of characters for head-to-head vehicular carnage. "When it got to *Crash Team Racing* I would have done *Crash Team Off-road Racing*," explains David. "Instead of doing a derivative *Mario*-type game I would have had these suspension-like little vehicles and lots of rolling mountains that you could fly through the air on like an off-road vehicle does and if you land on someone you destroy them and score and so on." While David is correct – *CTR* was very much a clone of Nintendo's insanely-popular *Mario Kart* – it was a rare example among the copycats, it was a kart racer that stood out and could hold its own against Mario and friends. It was familiar to anyone lucky enough to have both the N64 and the PSone, with myriad weapons (many of which were copies of *Mario Kart*'s equivalent), tournaments and a battle mode. It did have its innovations, though: collecting the maximum number of Wumpa Fruit in a race would unlock an enhanced version of whichever weapon you picked up; and the time trial-mode included boxes with numbers on, that would freeze the clock and persuade the player to race down a specific route. Despite starting development at the same time as *Warped*, *Crash Team Racing* wouldn't be released on PSone until September 1999. The change in genre didn't affect the franchise's popularity; *CTR* went on to sell well over 5 million copies and received incredible praise from critics. Yet, although the Crash had already set himself in the halls of videogame fame, this would be the last time the franchise would be released with such confidence.

» New gadgets were introduced into the franchise with *Wrath Of Cortex*, but they were mostly superficial.

» While Coco was a playable character in *Crash 3*, she was restricted to the vehicular levels.

» The minigames available in *Crash Bash* are entertaining enough, but it had neither the quality of *Mario Party*.

"We put a list together and we said we have to have another name, we have to have it now"

David Siller

Naughty Dog ended its affiliation with *Crash Bandicoot*, and as the series began the transition to PlayStation 2, it would struggle to find the same level of appreciation.

Before the PS2, however, Sony and Universal looked to squeeze as much as they could out of Crash and company, releasing *Crash Bash* on PSone in November 2000. This four-player party game was different, to say the least, pitting the characters of the franchise in arena battles. It was a set of minigames in an attempt to leech ideas from *Mario Party*, the first of which having been released two years prior on the N64. While Eurocom's effort on the title was commendable, it lacked the quality of similar titles while the limited popularity of the PSone's Multitap meant the game's potential only appealed to a small audience. It ended up passing many people by.

It's at this point where the history of *Crash Bandicoot* becomes messy. Having built a solid foundation, all the hard work of Universal and Naughty Dog would unravel. It's hard to point the finger in any one direction, but many will agree it all begins from one source. Universal Interactive Studios had been bought out by Seagrams at this point, but it was at the end of 2000 where the company switched hands again, this time to the ▶

SLAPSTICK DEATHS

Crash is known for losing his lives in many hilarious ways

BIFF!
■ The classic death animation. Crash spins around before tumbling down.

BOOM!
■ Looks like our hero got too close to some TNT, all that's left is his footwear and eyeballs.

BURN!
■ One charcoal bandicoot – it's what you'd expect from landing on some fire.

CRUSH!
■ Not outrunning the boulder in time, Crash experiences what it's like to be a piece of paper.

SPLASH!
■ Like most heroes of the time, Crash didn't graduate from swimming school.

SQUISH!
■ Similar to the boulder death, only this time Crash tries to save face by doing a sit-up.

CHOMP!
■ This dangerous plant like to exclusively eat early PSone mascots, back luck for Crash, eh?

ZAP!
■ Like most things, Crash doesn't like being electrocuted. Who would've thought?

YIKES!
■ Crash's nightmares of being caught with his pants down come true, thanks to this swordsman.

SMOOCH!
■ We'd die of embarrassment if we were to be kissed by a frog too, to be honest.

MAKING A MASCOT

All the ingredients that went into Crash's design

■ At first, *Crash* was jokingly named *Sonic's Ass Game* due to the camera being behind the character, the character was then named *Willie The Wombat*. This was the case throughout development until a licensing search revealed that a little-known action RPG made by Hudson and released only in Japan forced a name change.

■ Besides for a handful of, 'Woah's', Crash doesn't speak. This was intentional from the start, since Naughty Dog believed that videogame characters that were voiced at the time usually only added negatively to the experience and distracted from players identifying as the character.

■ Crash doesn't have a neck, a facet that Jason Rubin and Andy Gavin had gleaned from Warner Bros' Tasmanian Devil. Naughty Dog was inspired by Taz and his crazy, destructive attitude; the Tasmanian Devil also performs an aggressive whirlwind spin.

■ The colour for Crash's fur was decided first by listing popular mascot characters and their colours, then excluding those colours. Other earthy colours were discarded so he would be discernible in-game. Other colours – like red – were excluded due to how they interacted with old TVs. Orange was the only colour left.

■ Elements, such as Crash's gloves or the lighter patches of fur, were added to the in-game model to help the player distinguish which direction the character was facing at any given time. The gloves were changed for his Xbox 360 games into tribal tattoos.

■ Crash was always planned to be a marsupial. The options at the time included bandicoot and potoroo. The opening for *Crash Bandicoot* pans into Dr Cortex's laboratory, if you look at the cages on the left of the lab you'll see other marsupials are being tested on.

■ Despite his three-quarter length jeans and Converse-style shoes being very much a part of the American punk/skateboarder scene during the Nineties and the original game's conception, this combination has actually stuck with the character throughout the decades – and it still works for him, too.
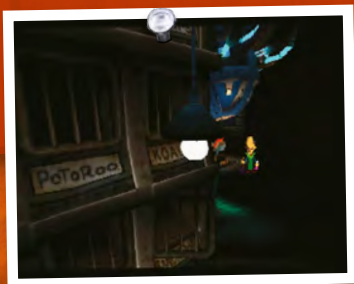
» *Crash Of The Titans* focused more heavily on combat, rather than the classic platforming gameplay of old.

▶ media powerhouse Vivendi. Almost immediately priorities changed, and with Naughty Dog busy developing *Jak And Daxter*, *Crash Bandicoot* would go on to be put in the hands of a number of developers in the hopes of creating something that could stick.

The first of the PS2 games would be *Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath Of Cortex*, with new developer on the franchise, Traveller's Tales. It was to be a true open-world title and would incorporate puzzle elements. Universal, however, sought a new publishing partner and, in doing so, made an agreement with Konami to publish the game across multiple platforms, breaking its obligations with Sony. The result would be a separation between Sony, Mark Cerny – who had been designing the open-world gameplay – and Universal. While *Crash* was now open to a wider number of people, this decision had an unexpected knock-on effect. With Mark no longer on the project, Traveller's Tales was forced to return to a similar system used in the last traditional *Crash* game, *Warped*, with a system of individual stages rather than an open environment. This shift did not correspond to additional time to complete the game, and Traveller's Tales was given only 12 months to complete development. And it showed. Many ironically drew attention to the unchanged *Crash* formula, while others criticised load times and frustrating gameplay.

What followed was a barrage of titles, each failing to utilise the character in any significant way. Vicarious Visions was given control over its handheld outings, releasing *Crash Bandicoot: The Huge Adventure* in 2002, *N-Tranced* in 2003 and *Crash Bandicoot Purple: Ripto's Revenge* – a crossover with *Spyro The Dragon* – in 2004. Meanwhile, Traveller's Tales would return with *Twinsanity*, another platforming outing for the bandicoot that did little to mix things up, aside from pairing the hero and the villain (Dr Neo Cortex) together. Though it would be one of the better-received titles of the generation, it

» *Crash Tag Team Racing* continued to rip-off *Mario Kart*, this time it was *Double Dash*.

» It has a few quirks with its physics, but the recently released remaster of the first three games is pretty good fun.

» Crash and his nemesis, Dr Neo Cortex appear exclusively in the PlayStation 4 version of *Skylanders Imaginators*.

suffered in comparison to *Jak And Daxter*, which had already been dominating the genre at this point.

There was still *Crash Bandicoot*'s spinoff to consider, too; *Crash Team Racing* had proven so popular it was believed the gold vein could be mined some more. Vicarious Visions would be given control of development of the next kart racer that would become *Crash Nitro Kart* and release in 2003. It gave the classic kart gaming a PS2 overhaul, but offered very little new. Then there was *Crash Tag Team Racing* in 2005, developed by newcomer to the series Radical Entertainment. As you'd expect from the title, *CTTR* wasn't original, mimicking the very same two-characters-per-kart gimmick that *Mario Kart* had implemented with *Double Dash*. *Crash*'s kart series had always been a little *too* much of a clone, but this was taking it a bit far. This, combined with poor controls, led to *Tag Team Racing* getting very little praise.

"It was a good kart racer," says Joe McGinn, key designer on *CTTR*, before admitting that it wasn't a "great kart racer". "I think we took on a bit too much, the scope was too much because this was a 12-month project. [The publisher] liked the idea of integrating this platformer component as well, so it was not only a kart racer but there was this theme park where you were jumping around, collecting things, interacting with characters and stuff. It wasn't bad per se, but it did add a lot to it and it did take up a lot of our resources."

Up until this point there hadn't been much in the way of 'true' oddities for the franchise. The first and only would come from Dimps, a developer which had success making *Sonic Advance* titles for the GBA. Its game, *Crash Boom Bang!*, would be the second and final party game in the series, and launched on Nintendo DS. It flopped, and was criticised for everything from its controls to its skin-deep use of the characters.

But time had come for *Crash* to move over to the next console generation, and though *Crash Tag Team* Racing hadn't been well received, Radical Entertainment would be put to task on the next two platformers – and, as it would turn out, the last two core *Crash* games. *Crash Of The Titans* would launch in 2007, bringing a feature that allowed Crash to ride on the back of beasts. *Mind Over Mutant* would release a year later, this time becoming even more of an action game as Crash could now take control of mutants and use them to dodge, counter, and even choose between light and heavy attacks. Neither game sold well. The initial high of *Crash Bandicoot* had waned and there wasn't much call for a new *Crash* game. "At that time, it wasn't old enough to be retro," says Joe. "What I mean by that is that adult gamers weren't interested in *Crash*. I think if you made a *Crash* game now, you would have more of that. Adult gamers were all playing *GTA* or *Halo*, and so it was targeted kids."

There was one more significant change for the series though that has meant we've not seen another *Crash Bandicoot* game since 2010 (*Crash Nitro Kart 2*). Around the release of *Mind Over Mutant*, Vivendi merged with Activision and with the publisher now in charge, its ruling eye would fall on Crash. As fond as many would recall the PSone era, it was clear it was an underperforming series and Activision isn't a company to back products that won't appeal to a mainstream audience. *Crash* has, as a result, sat barely used for more than half a decade.

Until now, that is. Sony has recently teamed up with Activision to create *Crash Bandicoot N.Sane Trilogy*, which is an impressive remaster of the first three games that has been developed by Vicarious Visions. It's been incredibly well received by both the press and consumers, suggesting that there's still plenty of love for the crazy marsupial. Depending on the sales of the remaster, we may see Crash return properly. For once, it seems, the future of this iconic character could be the hands (or wallets) of gamers. ✱

Time Crisis

» PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION **» DEVELOPER:** NAMCO **» RELEASED:** 1995

The arrival of powerful 3D boards in the Nineties allowed arcade game designers to exercise their cinematic skills, thanks to the range of camera angles that were now easily available. However, many games only employed these techniques sparingly in attract modes – after all, directing cinematic action means taking control from the player. *Time Crisis* was already on rails due to being a lightgun game, so there was no such restriction – and Namco made the most of it.

One of the best examples is a particularly exciting scene late in Stage Two. The player's character, Richard Miller, is running through a corridor. He catches sight of himself reflected in a mirror at the end of the corridor, but that's not all he sees – an enemy guard rounds the corner shortly after him and lets off a shot, narrowly missing Miller and shattering the mirror directly in front of him. Miller then swings around, allowing the player to shoot the enemy. The scene lasts only a few seconds, but leaves a permanent impression on players and spectators alike. ✱

MORE CLASSIC TIME CRISIS MOMENTS

Explosive arrival

Continuing the cinematic theme, Richard Miller's arrival in the first stage is full of action. Sliding down a zip line into the enemy base, the carnage escalates quickly – as enemy troops scramble to deal with the intruding secret agent, a submarine in the background explodes and begins to sink as red warning lights illuminate the area. You don't spend long in this first area, but it makes a huge impact.

Secret agent

Finding secrets in arcade games is always satisfying, just for those moments when you get to impress a spectator who hasn't yet seen them. Early in Stage Two of *Time Crisis* you'll come across some girders. If you shoot the wrap that's holding them together a few times, they'll fall and send all the enemies fleeing, saving yourself valuable seconds in the race to rescue the President's daughter.

Backpedal

Time Crisis doesn't just throw gun-toting bad guys at you – the entire environment can be called into action as a hazard. A battle amidst a group of parked cars quickly takes a turn for the worse for our hero as a car comes sliding around the corner and begins to drive straight towards him, requiring quick release of the pedal in order to avoid eating bumper.

Unfriendly dialogue

Part of the charm of *Time Crisis* is that the dialogue is hilariously bad. Lines like "How could you? You killed my boss!" wouldn't make the script of even the cheapest of cheap B-movies. The character who best combines hammy voice acting and risible writing is Sherudo Garo, the second stage boss, who decides that you need to be 'entertained' – so he slings throwing knives at you. Obviously…

Racing By Design - The Complete

Arguably the PlayStation's most iconic racing franchise, buckle up and hold tight as Stuart Hunt recounts the history of WipEout, Sony's most enduring racing series

65

(IN>TRO

W'0"

WIPEOUT IS SPONSORED BY

QIREX   AURICOM RESEARCH   FEISAR   AG SYSTEMS™
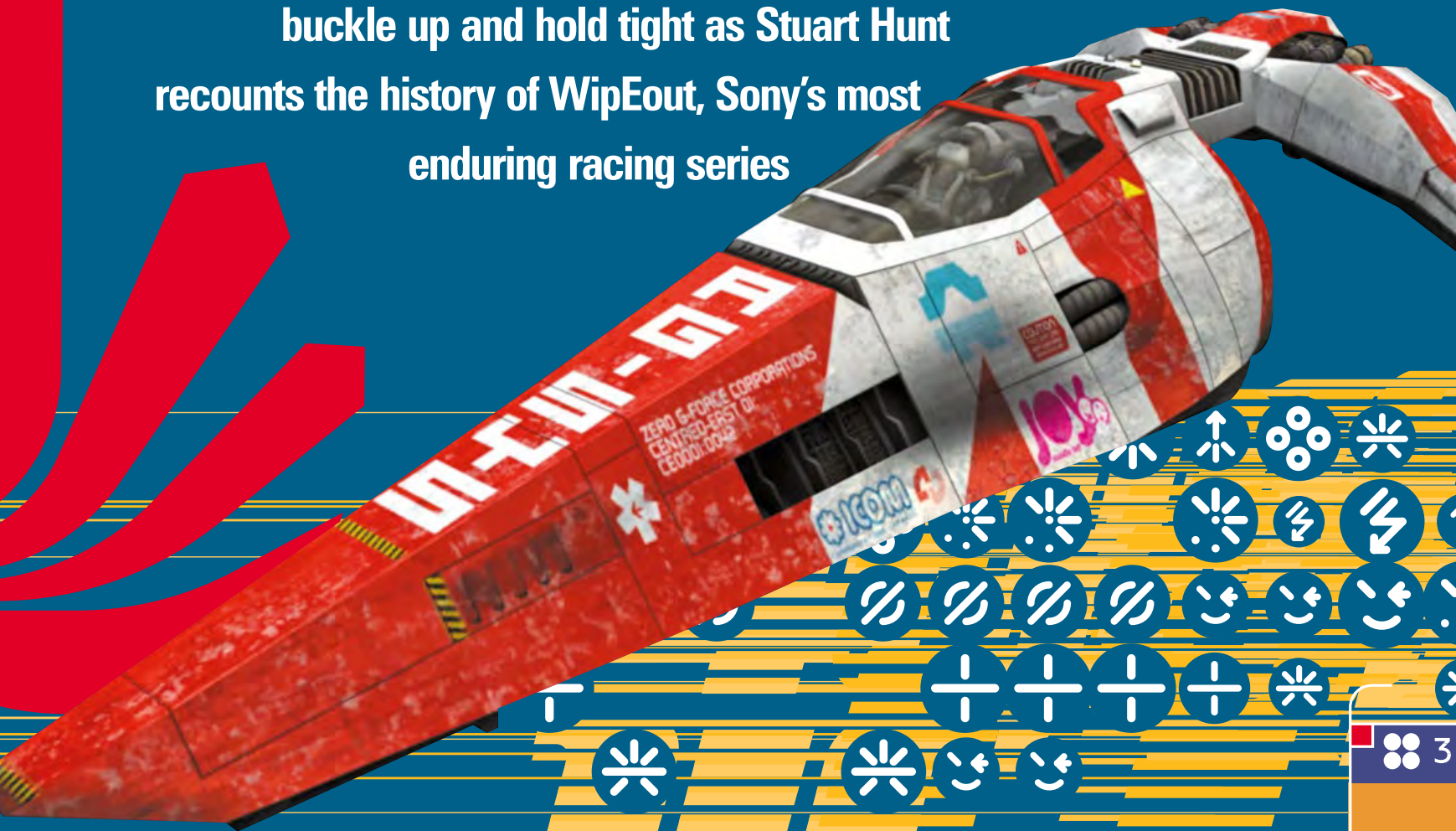
History of Wipeout

Game designer Nick Burcombe, graphic artist Jim Bowers, The Surfaris, beer, and the Amiga game _Matrix Marauders_ are all to be thanked for jumpstarting _WipEout_.

After seeing an animation for _Matrix Marauders_, which artist Jim Bowers was working on, showing two _WipEout_-style ships from the game racing each other, Nick was hit with the inspiration to create a futuristic racing game. The two men got together and fleshed out the idea between gulps of ale and excitable chitchat in their local pub, and came up with a title inspired by The Surfaris' hit song _Wipe Out_. An enthusiastic Jim got to work on creating a concept demo, soon taking the idea to his

colleagues at Psygnosis. _WipEout_ was quickly thrust into production, with Nick as lead designer.

As well as _Matrix Marauders_, many other games would influence _WipEout_'s design, including _F-Zero_, Michael Powell's 3D futuristic racer _Powerdrome_ and Psygnosis' _Infestation_. But, as Nick revealed in our making of _WipEout_ feature in **Retro Gamer** issue 35, it was _Super Mario Kart_'s battle-themed racing antics that provided the largest portion of the roadmap that _WipEout_ would follow. As work progressed, the small team of ten faced a tight deadline. It was a schedule made even tighter when well into production it was decided that the code should be restarted from scratch. Despite the interruption, the team, which was comprised mostly of artists, still completed the game in 14 months.

Considering its strong artistic direction, it doesn't seem surprising that the ratio of artists to designers was so high with _WipEout_. Of course, Psygnosis wasn't entirely responsible for coming up with _WipEout_'s strong aesthetic, as it would enlist the help of acclaimed graphic design studio The Designers Republic (tDR) to sharpen its vision for the game.

Originally hired just to design _WipEout_'s box art, tDR went on to have a bigger role in its development after key artist Lee Carus (now art director for Sony's Studio Liverpool) spotted a fax from the company and liked the design of the company's header. Splashing it across the side of one of _WipEout_'s ships in the game's intro to see how it looked, he and the team were in agreement that it suited _WipEout_ perfectly. From

6K A-G RACING

>>)

(WIPE'OUT" 1745ff)

DR"

デザイィナーズリパブリック
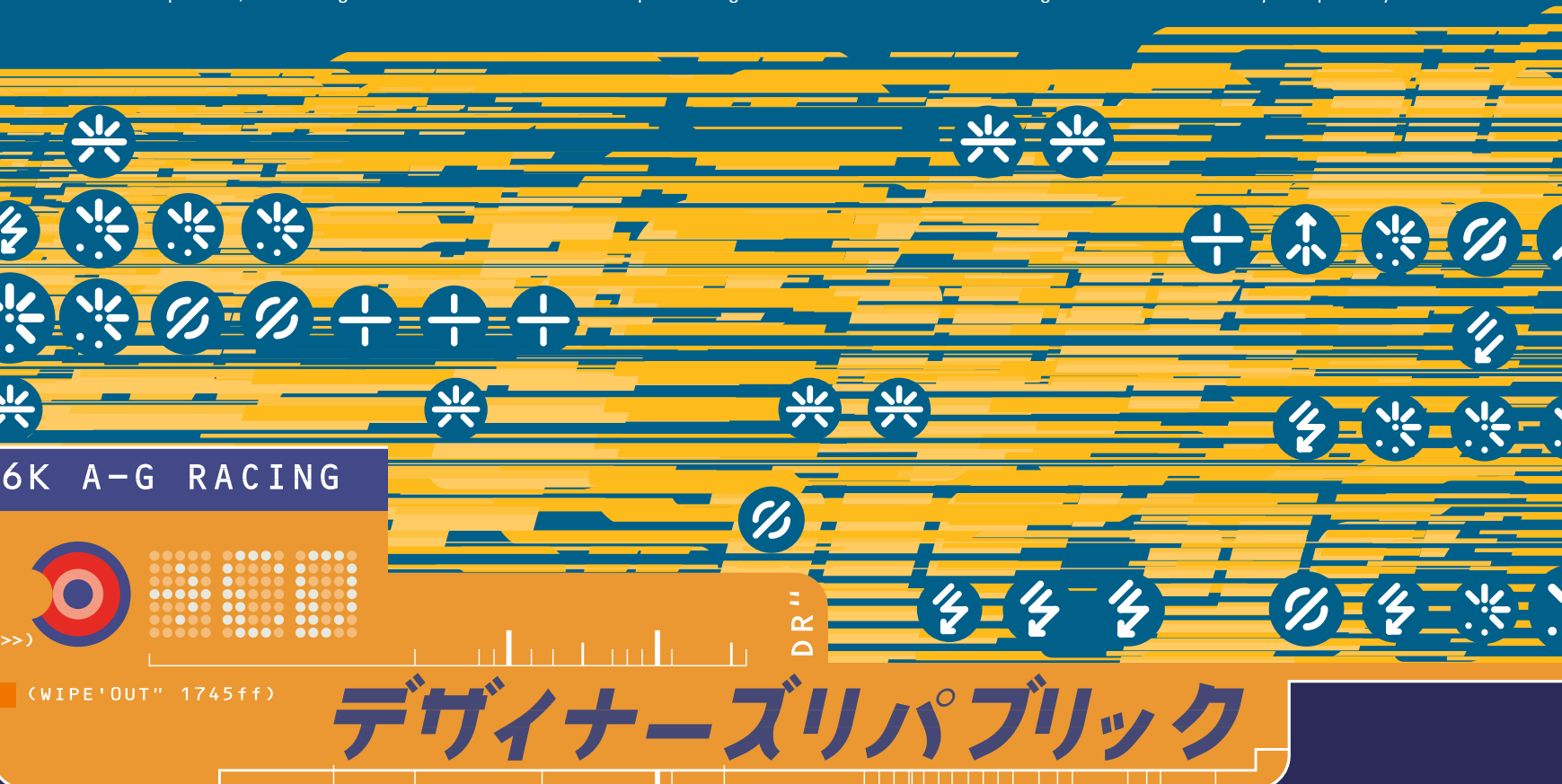
FILE UNDER: ADRENALIN RUSH

that moment, as Carus tells it, "tDR became more heavily involved."

Of course, a futuristic racing game needed a fitting soundtrack, and for this the team hit all the right notes. A mixture of well-known and up-and-coming dance and electronic artists contributed music to its soundtrack, including the likes of Orbital and Leftfield. Any gaps were filled in with a collection of brilliant compositions by acclaimed Psygnosis musician Tim Wright (aka CoLD SToRAGE).

While today licensed high-quality music tracks can be heard in everything from *FIFA* to *Tony Hawk's*, at the time of *WipEout*'s development the games industry's relationship with the music business was still very much in its infancy. *WipEout*'s success, and also that of the popular CD soundtrack that sprung from it, proved the two industries could be mutually beneficial to one another. Kids purchase both videogames and music, and so a good game can offer musicians a captive audience. Similarly, a videogame, particularly a racing game, could be enhanced with a banging soundtrack.

Released in 1995, *WipEout* is notable for being the first non-Japanese game released for the PlayStation. It was also a launch game for the machine in Europe, sharing shelves with the likes of *Rapid Reload, Jumping Flash!, Battle Arena Toshinden* and Namco's anticipated *Ridge Racer* home conversion. *WipEout*'s combat racing and sci-fi setting worked in its favour. Indeed, had it been a 'pure' racer, it may well have been forced to inhale Namco's dust come launch.

» *WipEout 2097* was a great follow-up that ironed out many of the gripes fans had with *WipEout*. The difficulty was smoothed out and the handling improved.

But *WipEout* was very much a game for its time, and this was also a contributing factor to the success it enjoyed. Its appearance on an exciting new 32-bit console and the popular club and dance culture of the period undoubtedly helped push WipEout to the huge popularity and success it saw, further assisted by a canny marketing campaign that saw PlayStation booths installed in nightclubs all across the country. *WipEout,* of course, was a perfect dance partner.

Though *Wipeout* was certainly a strong debut for a new racing franchise, and an appropriate showcase for the PlayStation's audio and visual capabilities, it wasn't perfect. Its sensitive steering mechanics and punishing collision detection, which caused your ship to stop dead in its tracks, combined to make a pretty unforgiving racer, particularly on later circuits.

This was something that didn't go unnoticed by the team when creating the sequel, *WipEout 2097* (aka *WipEout XL*). "The original *WipEout* was very punishing on the user," says Studio Liverpool's Graeme Ankers, game director for *WipEout 2048*. "On *2097,* Stewart Sockett did a great job working with the designers to improve the wing-tip collisions, and irritating weapons were removed – this really opened the game up and the additional speed classes made the game a little more accessible and a lot more skill-based at faster (Phantom) speeds."

But there was one other way the team sought to improve the experience. In the original, a lot of the weapons and power-ups could almost be regarded as *Mario Kart* equals: Mines were essentially Bananas, Rockets were Green Shells, and Missiles were Red Shells. For *WipEout 2097,* as Graeme explains, this was addressed by adding more imaginative weapons.

"All of the weapons were revisited on 2097. Rockets were beefed up, rear-firing missiles were added, and the plasma bolt, minigun (only accessible as a cheat) and quake were added by Chris Roberts, who was working on the weapons at the time. Quake was quite an obvious one because the track has such a simple structure on PS1 it was easy to manipulate the geometry to produce the quake effect, so the idea came from the way the track was made rather than from any specific design."

Offering a more creative array of weapons, dropping any that proved unpopular and improving those that were well loved, *2097* enhanced both sides of *WipEout*'s core gameplay. And to complement the refined weaponry, and give each a sense of unique worth, crafts were fitted with destructible shields and could be eliminated from races. Of course, this also worked against players as they had to be conscious of their own craft taking too much damage and being retired from the race. This was offset somewhat by the inclusion of pit stops, which allowed players to replenish shields but at the cost of losing time.

For *2097*'s design, Psygnosis reteamed with tDR, and the success of the first title meant that soundtrack contributions came from more revered dance artists, including The Prodigy, The Future Sound Of London, and The Chemical Brothers. As a result of the popular changes, tweaks and refinements made, *2097* is regarded as the pinnacle of the series by many fans. It certainly marks the moment the franchise edged from *Super Mario Kart*'s slipstream, found its own

Work Buy Play Die Reborn

The Designers Republic was responsible for *WipEout*'s strong design direction, and as such it could be argued it was as much a contributor to the franchises' success as Psygnosis. Based in Sheffield, tDR was established by Ian Anderson in 1986 to originally design posters for a band he was managing. The studio's success grew, particularly in the Nineties, though its strong brand of graphic design, which combined ironic messages and hyper-consumerism with minimalist and constructivist art influences. It brought tDR to the attention of large corporations such as Coca-Cola and Adidas as well as notable British bands including Supergrass and Pulp. In the field of games, tDR has also worked with the likes of Gremlin Interactive, DMA/Rockstar Games and Electronic Arts.

But its most notable collaboration was with Psygnosis on the *WipEout* series, which came about after tDR was hired to design the box art for the first game and then invited to have a lot more creative input. Despite its success in 2009 tDR was forced to close its doors. Speaking to *Creative Review* in January 2009, Anderson explained that the company had become insolvent due to a number of factors, but said tDR 'would go forward'. The studio has since been connected with a number of design projects for Warp Records.

» *WipEout* was a fantastic showcase for Sony's grey box, and embraced the club and dance culture of the time.

The Chronology of WipEout

A timeline of WipEout's anti-gravity racing leagues

» The franchise has always served to show off the power and function of the machine it's running on, it's particularly evident in *WipEout 2048*.

WipEout 2048
Takes place: 2048
AG racing league: ARGC
1st season
Number of teams: 5

WipEout
Takes place: 2052
AG racing league: F3600
Number of teams: 4

WipEout 2097
Takes place: 2097
AG racing league: F5000
Number of teams: 4

WipEout 64
Takes place: 2098
AG racing league: F5000
Number of teams: 5

Wip3out
Takes place: 2116
AG racing league: F7200
Number of teams: 8

WipEout Fusion
Takes place: 2160
AG racing league: F9000
Number of teams: 8

WipEout Pure
Takes place: 2197
AG racing league: FX300
Number of teams: 8

WipEout HD
Takes place: 2205
AG racing league: FX350
Number of teams: 12

WipEout Pulse
Takes place: 2207
AG racing league: FX400
Number of teams: 12

identity and became an iconic racing franchise in its own right.

A sign of how popular the series had become, Psygnosis worked on an exclusive *WipEout* sequel for the N64. It was essentially a meshing of *WipEout* and *WipEout 2097*, featuring slightly tweaked mirrored tracks from those two games, but dressing them up in new names and locations. *WipEout 64* also marked the series debut for split-screen multiplayer and the popular Challenge Mode, which allowed players to compete in three different event classes which comprised: Race (place high), Battle (destroy rival racers) and Time Trial (finish in the fastest time).

The next PlayStation instalment was *Wip3out*, released elsewhere originally as *WipEout 3*, though it was also re-released as *WipEout 3* in 2000. Its original European box art is telling of Psygnosis' and tDR's intent for the look and design of the game. The cover image depicts a white stretch of track with the anti-grav crafts distinguishable only by a few coloured shapes. At a quick glance, it seems like nothing more than a nice bit of minimalist artwork, until you take a closer look and release that you're actually looking at a brand new game in a popular PlayStation franchise.

A similar thing can be said of the game itself. Marking the last PlayStation instalment in the series, *Wip3out* was another high-scoring entry, but was criticised for not breaking new ground, something Graeme feels was undeserved. "*Wip3out* criticism is never merited. With each new iteration comes a desire from the team to

"Wip3out looks like nothing more than a nice bit of minimalist artwork, until you take a closer look"

take it to the next level. In the case of *Wip3out*, Nicky Westcott got control and it was the first title out of the new Leeds Studio.

"They were very design oriented and wanted to break it down to its most minimal. The relationship with The Designers Republic was at its height and Mike from The Designers Republic loves to keep things simple. It was a bold approach considering CG was still maturing – everyone was trying to go brighter and bolder – they took a step back and gave us pure design, which worked well given the systems constraints. You couldn't get anything more from the PS1 – so why try? Rather than try anything obvious and new, they stripped it back to what they thought *WipEout* was all about."

Wip3out, despite an erratic difficulty spike, marked another jump up in the quality of the series, although admittedly not as dramatic a leap as with *2097*. *Wip3out* introduced a number of ideas that even elevated it above *2097* in some ways. The most noticeable of which being its visuals; as Greg points out, the approach taken by tDR and the in-house design team was to keep things simple. The teams, realising they would struggle to squeeze any more visual grunt from the PS1 therefore decided to embellish the strong design philosophy of the original, resulting in arguably the best-looking episode in the PlayStation trilogy. It was also one of the few PlayStation games that could be enjoyed in glorious high-definition.

In addition to a few new weapons – notably the Energy Drain and Forcewall – a second speed boost ability was added. Accessible at any point during a race by spending your craft's shield reserve, it provided a fantastic risk-and-reward mechanic. *Wip3out* featured the popular Challenge Mode from *WipEout 64*, and also introduced Eliminator, a last-one-standing deathmatch that could be played by either two players over split-screen, or, by using a cheat, four-players via link-up using a single disc. *2097* supported link-up mode, but required players have two copies of the game. *Wip3out* also marks the final *WipEout* game to have creative input from tDR.

When Sony announced its successor to the PlayStation, a *WipEout* title on the console was

» The team attempted something different with *Fusion*, widening the tracks and making them noticeably more elaborate than previous iterations.

» As well as the PlayStation, *WipEout* also graced the Sega Saturn and PC. The Saturn version (released in 1996) is slightly smoother than the PS version, but lacks particle effects.

"We exploit everything, and we're not just ticking boxes, we do it in a way that's right for our game"

a given. During the interim period between the release of *Wip3out* and the PS2, Psygnosis, which was purchased by Sony prior to the launch of the PlayStation, was renamed SCE Studio Liverpool and the Psygnosis name and Roger Dean's iconic barn owl were both retired.

WipEout Fusion marked a noticeable shift in the series. Good Design was brought in to create the in-game advertisements and menus in the game, and there was a bigger emphasis on weapon use too. Ship upgrades made their first appearance, tracks were noticeably wider and free-form sections added. Arguably the most popular new addition was Zone Mode, which saw players holding their nerve in a tense endurance race in which their craft would gradually increase in speed with each lap.

"We wanted to make new game modes that kept you hypnotised by the game and were super quick – something that you needed to play without wasting time blinking!" Graeme explains, when we ask him where the idea for the mode came from. "As ever we experimented with a few ideas, but Zone Mode was clearly special. We evolved it over the years, with tweaks to the rules, new track graphics and more recently, changing tracks based on your Zone level." Sadly, despite attempts at shaking up the formula, *Fusion* wasn't as well received as previous iterations. And the disappointing reaction it received affected the team's approach to subsequent *WipEout* games.

"The team back then were quite frustrated by it. As a near launch title, it should be a given that the game is primarily a showcase for what is possible on a new platform. We tried very hard to create environments that were more than just the typical trench. The lap times were longer, the tracks more elaborate, but in many instances that wasn't judged to be a good thing. It made us step back from trying anything new with the tracks after that. Something we've rectified in *WipEout 2048,* as it happens."

The second WipEout game to be a launch title for a Sony console was *WipEout Pure*, this time on the Sony PSP. This release marked the first portable iteration of the franchise so far, and would pave the way for more to come. A hypnotic experience that had previously only been designed for the big(ish) screen, we asked Graeme how difficult it was to condense *WipEout*'s gameplay onto a portable.

"The simple nature of *WipEout*'s core DNA meant it translated easily to a handheld," says Graeme. "We just made sure that races didn't last too long and that we could allow the player to save regularly, to help with the 'short bursts of play' nature of a hand-held device."

And was the pressure on to get the game ready for the launch? "We decided to do a new version of *WipEout* for the launch of PSP a long time before we got any PSP development kits. We knew things like screen size, aspect ratio and roughly how powerful the PSP was going to be, so instead of waiting for kits, we started making, running and testing the game on PC.

"We played it via a DualShock 2 to PC converter, and got most of our tracks and handling sorted before the kits even arrived, so we were ahead of the game. By time the kits came in, it didn't take us long to get the game running on them. We found we had to tweak a few things to tailor it more to the PSP's form factor, but there was very little wasted from the PC development that had been carried out."

WipEout Pure was an impressive showcase for Sony's new handheld, and its magazine scores reflected that. As its title implies, *Pure* marked a

HIGH-SPEED REVOLUTION

Wipeinfluences

We examine in more detail the games said to have influenced WipEout

F-Zero

■ Nintendo's anti-grav racing series is perhaps *WipEout*'s biggest racing rival, owing to a comparably-sized fan base and garnering a similar level of success, though *F-Zero* has a comic book aesthetic, and there are no weapons to use.


Powerdrome

■ Michael Powell's *Powerdrome* was another big influence on *WipEout*, but not in the way some might think. It was seen by Burcombe as 'how not to make a *WipEout* game', referring to the games fiddly handling as being an issue.

Infestation

■ One of the more subtle influences is this 3D wireframe sci-fi adventure game with an *Alien*-style premise. Jim Bowers worked as graphic artist on this game as well, and there's undoubtedly a connection to be made with *WipEout*.
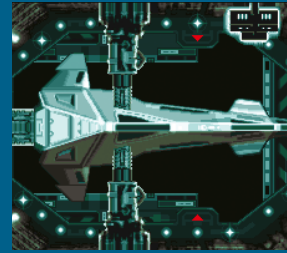
Matrix Marauders

■ Another Jim Bowers joint, *Matrix Marauders* is the spark that set *WipEout* into motion, and also influenced the ship design too. You can clearly see this in the game's intro (seen here). See, looks just like a FEISAR craft.

Super Mario Kart

■ *WipEout*'s combat-infused racing and randomised weapon pads were inspired by the classic SNES kart racer. *WipEout*'s lead designer Nick Burcombe was a big fan, and wanted to channel its brilliance into the game.

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return to the simple, uncomplicated racing action of early *WipEout* titles; pitting was removed and the tracks made shorter and less elaborate. *Pure* was also the first in the series to feature DLC. Allowing fans to expand their game via new tracks, vehicles and artwork, it rounded off an impressive portable debut for the franchise.

This was followed up with the PSP sequel *WipEout Pulse*, which was later converted to PS2. *Pulse* can be seen as something of a fusion of past games, in that it featured many of the best modes of previous entries in the series, including the popular Eliminator and Zone Modes. Some of the notable things it added included a mirror mode, and on-rails track sections that took players around tight corners and through rollercoaster style sections without their craft bouncing around the track like R2-D2 in a magnet factory.

In this current generation there have been two releases in the franchise to date. *WipEoutHD* kicked things off and marked the first digital entry in the series. It also saw the team revisit classic tracks from *Pure* and *Pulse* and remaster them in stunning high-definition, something which worked incredibly well. This was perceived to be a fairly straightforward porting process by the team, but in reality required much more work than was originally first anticipated.

"From an art perspective we were just going to port the game assets from the PSP to the PS3, however we soon realised that when viewed in 1080p the quality of these assets didn't look good enough," Graeme explains. "Geometry, textures, materials and lighting all needed their resolution and quality to be increased by around x10, often more. This led to a complete reworking of each racetrack, environment, vehicles, animation and lighting, using the original PSP version as a block-out guide. The essence of each track remained

» *WipEout 3* would mark the final *WipEout* game to have design partnership with The Designers Republic. The relationship lasted four years.

but the end result was a far richer, complex and visually stunning experience for the player."

The recently released *WipEout 2048* is the latest game in the franchise. A prequel for the franchise and a launch title for the Sony Vita, like *Pure*, it makes impressive use of the console's capabilities, taking full advantage of the machine. Over the years, the *WipEout* teams have viewed each entry in the franchise as a vehicle to really demonstrate the capability of the hardware it appears on. This has never been more evident than with *WipEout 2048*, which practically leaves no stone unturned in Vita's oversized rock garden of controls and functions.

"*WipEout* is very distinct, nothing else really looks, sounds or even plays like it. *WipEout* is always a show-piece for the hardware it's running on, regardless of what hardware that is. We always show off what can be done with a new piece of kit by utilising as much of it as we can. *WipEout 2048* uses pretty much everything the Vita can do – buttons, sticks, tilt, touch,

» *WipEout Omega Collection* was released in June 2017 and is a magnificent remaster of *WipEout HD*, its *Fury* expansion pack and *WipEout 2048*.

cameras, network, near... we exploit everything, and we're not just ticking boxes, we do it in ways that are right for our game. That's why it's a show-piece for Vita."

While the series is one of Sony's most enduring racing franchises and is still arguably the best future racing series out there its future looked bleak due to the closure of Studio Liverpook in 2012. All is not lost however, as Sony recently released *WipEout Omega Collection* to critical acclaim for the PlayStation 4. Featuring remastered versions of *WipEout HD*, *WipEout HD Fury* and *WipEout 2048*, it became the first *WipEout* game to ever reach the number one spot in the UK charts. Hopefully, this renewed interest in the series will ensure that a brand new game gets made, ideally with a VR component for maximum excitement. If *Omega* does mark the end of the line for Sony's franchise, it would be leaving on a high note and delivering the same insane racing thrills and spills that made the original *WipEout* so exciting to play back in 1995.

Metal Gear Solid

SNAKE? SNAAAAAAAAAAAAAAKEEEEEEEE!

**» PLAYSTATION » KONAMI » 1998
For many, the name Metal Gear Solid is as synonymous with the PlayStation brand as *Tomb Raider, Gran Turismo* and *Final Fantasy*.** Though the franchise was already well established before the 32-bit game, the power of the PlayStation let Hideo Kojima take the series in a bold new direction.

This in part is mainly due to the excellent voiceover from David Hayter and the rest of the cast. Unlike many actors of the time, they simply assumed the role they were asked to play was as important as they'd receive for any normal movie and they acted accordingly. It's still a little hammy in places, but it's a world away from the likes of *Resident Evil* and many other talkies of the time and helps *Metal Gear Solid* feel like an interactive movie.

Then of course there are the well-realised stealth components, with Kojima building on the mechanics of his earlier MSX games and taking full advantage of the PlayStation's many buttons - expanding Snake's abilities and allowing him access to all sorts of cool weapons and gadgets as a result. Breaking the fourth wall, creating genuine three-dimensional bosses and delivering stunningly cinematic cutscenes via the in-game engine were just a few of the many things that made Snake's adventure such a joy to play and it cemented Kojima as a developer to watch.

Critically acclaimed upon release, it went on to sell over 6 million copies and helped turn Kojima into one of gaming's most famous developers. It even received an enhanced update for Nintendo's GameCube, complete with *Metal Gear Solid 2* gameplay mechanics and ridiculous over-the-top cutscenes. *Metal Gear Solid* wasn't the most original of games (Kojima borrowed heavily from both pop culture and his own earlier titles) but that didn't stop it from being an essential addition to any PlayStation owner's library. ✱

Minority Report

SLAP HAPPY RHYTHM BUSTERS

■ DEVELOPER: POLYGON MAGIC ■ YEAR: 2000

PLAYSTATION

With over 4000 games released in the console's lifespan, there was a lot of games that were forgotten. Jonny Dimaline tries to fix that injustice and give some of those games a chance in the spotlight

■ On first sight, it's clear to anyone that *Slap Happy Rhythm Busters* is an amazing looking game, easily among the top ten great looking games for the PlayStation, in fact. This is mainly thanks to the excellent graffiti-punk aesthetic that permeates every part of it, from the characters designs and stages, right down to the menus and comic strip loading screens. There are very bright colours, and a kind of 'chunkiness' to everything that makes the game and its world radiate a feeling of energetic fun. The game that this style is often associated with is the Dreamcast's *Jet Set Radio*. Amazingly, Sega's game and *Slap Happy Rhythm Busters* were actually released in Japan on the very same day.

The character designs are all very appealing and mostly manage to avoid being variations on generic fighting game stereotypes, with the only exception being the very Chun Li-esque chinese kung fu fighter, Mia. Among them there's Vivian and Roxy, two short girls who count as a single character that take turns riding on each other's backs and throwing each other at their opponents. There's also Trash, who is some kind of rockstar binman, and Oreg, a sort of enormous man/taxi hybrid. Though the character designs are visually original, there are a few concepts that seem borrowed from other games, such as the androgynous Garia and her big floating sword

» The developers definitely never felt any need to hold back on this game's colour palettes.
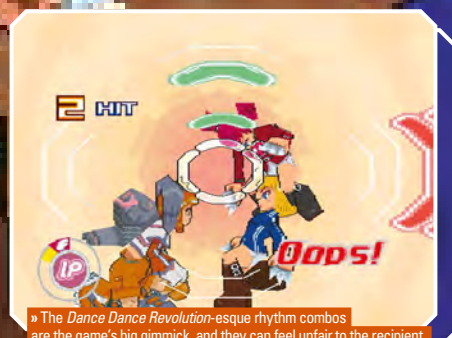
» The *Dance Dance Revolution*-esque rhythm combos are the game's big gimmick, and they can feel unfair to the recipient.

» Garia throws her big sword around in a style not dissimilar to Donovan from the *Darkstalkers* games.

» With the game's cartoon style, even fighting a chainsaw-weilding giant in a butcher's shop looks like fun!

being reminiscent of *Darkstalkers'* Donovan, and another character, a graffiti artist named Tomtom who can summon living graffiti art that looks a lot like the 'Stands' present in *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure*.

The big gameplay gimmick of *SHRB* is that, along with the typical super moves that have been in almost every fighting game since *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*. Each character can, when their super meter is completely full, activate a rhythm combo, that temporarily turns the game into a miniature version of *Dance Dance Revolution*, with the aggressor matching button presses to arrows on-screen to cause more damage. The downside of this is that once it begins, the defending player can't really do much except hope that the other player has poor timing. Despite that, though, we're surprised that it's a concept that hasn't really been used in other fighting games before or since. Rhythm combos aside, the fighting in *SHRB* is generally a lot of fun. Hits are satisfyingly crunchy, combos are simple enough to put together and the general over the top, super-colourful look to everything makes every fight look like a pretty exciting cartoon, with the excellently modelled and textured graphics doing an excellent job of sneakily hiding the low polygon count. This is a game that wouldn't look entirely out of place on Sega's Dreamcast, it looks that good.

You can probably already guess this, but *Slap Happy Rhythm Busters* is a game you should definitely try to get a hold of, should the opportunity arise. It's fun, it looks great and it's pretty unique – which is a rarity in the fighting game genre.

IN DEPTH
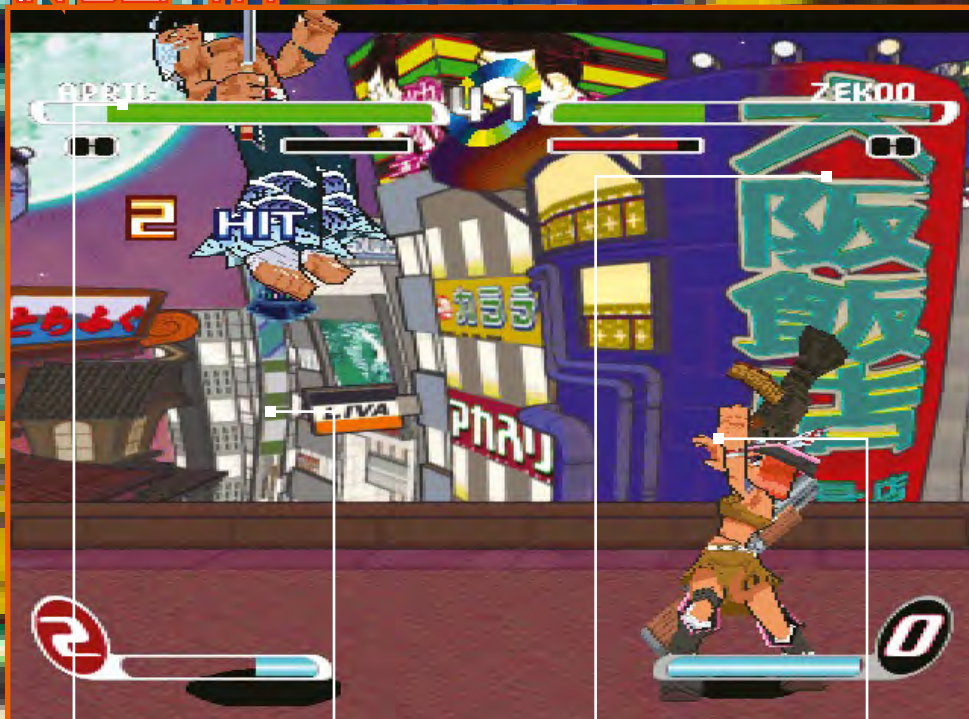
SUPER METER
■ Regular super moves only cost one bar overall, but filling up all three segments allows use of the game's trademark *Dance Dance Revolution*-esque Rhythm Combos.

UNIQUE STYLE
■ A large part of the game's appeal is its looks and art style, both the backgrounds and the characters have a heavily stylised, urban aesthetic to them.

VARIED CHARACTERS
■ The game's roster eschews the typical martial artist, with characters ranging from cowgirls to pairs of twins and a homeless man's dog.

GREAT SOUND
■ Obviously, with the gimmick it has, *SHRB* has an upbeat soundtrack to match, but it's no slouch in sound design with solid and meaty-sounding punches and kicks.

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

RAGUKA KIDS
NINTENDO 64
■ Another quirky and colourful fighting game with a graffiti-inspired aesthetic, though it is childish chalk drawings rather than spray-painted urban art in this one. It's also one of the N64's very few 2D games, let alone 2D fighting games. Amazingly, it somehow managed to get an EU release, too!

JET SET RADIO
DREAMCAST
■ Although it's not a fighting game, Sega's classic was obviously drawing from the same pool of inspiration as *Slap Happy Rhythm Busters*, in terms of its looks, its setting and its music. It's also a much-beloved classic to pretty much everyone who ever played it, too. Check out the cool sequel as well on Xbox.

DRAGLADE
NINTENDO DS
■ Although taking a more traditional anime influence for its aesthetic, *Draglade* does have a similar rhythm-based special moves gimmick with *Slap Happy Rhythm Busters*, with the extra addition of some RPG elements thrown into the mix. An interesting little effort that's worth tracking down.

Minority Report

FOX JUNCTION

■ DEVELOPER: TRIPS ■ YEAR: 1998

■ **WITH ITS DIVERSE** range of robot-inhabited environments seemingly abandoned by mankind, all depicted with a great looking combination of sprites and low-poly 3D, it can't be denied that *Fox Junction* **is an absolutely beautiful game to feast your eyes upon.** But, unfortunately, since it's such an obscure title, with only a tiny cult following drawn in by the game's looks and atmosphere, there's scant information on the internet, or anywhere else for that matter, about how its meant to be played.

All that's currently known is that you play as a young wanderer in this apparently empty world, travelling from place to place – and those places are beautiful and varied, from wind-swept deserts, to standing stone-littered plains, from glowing crystal caves to cosy villages with constellations marked out in the night skies above. Eventually, you'll notice that a tower in the distance is not just a background decoration, but has a fixed position, and can actually be reached.

This is as far as anyone has gotten, on the English-speaking internet, at least. Though a few people have managed to reach the tower without meeting their unseemly end at the hands of the various robots that litter the stages, none have managed to get inside it, or figure out the requirements for doing so, or even found out that entering said tower is the actual goal of the game or not.

If you're lucky enough to find a copy (though it doesn't tend to fetch high prices, *Fox Junction* doesn't turn up for sale often), and you want to play something that is utterly unique and mysterious, we would say that *Fox Junction* is definitely worth taking a chance on.

» The 'Night Town', with its visible constellations in the sky, is a sight to behold.

» Graphically, *Fox Junction* still holds up well, delivering some tasty looking environments to battle in.

» *Fox Junction* is quite a hard game to get hold of, meaning you'll typically have to open your wallet.

MORE GAMES TO PLAY

» CYBER ORG

■ DEVELOPER: SQUARESOFT
■ YEAR: 1999

■ **Squaresoft did a** lot of branching out into genres it hadn't bothered with on the PlayStation, and *Cyber Org* is part of that experiment. It mixes elements of beat-'em-ups, action-RPGs and even roguelikes. You take a team of agents with varied abilities through a series of space stations. It was never going to set the world on fire, but *Cyber Org* is a nice little game, and it's a shame it never came to the west.

» SUPER ROBOT SHOOTING

■ DEVELOPER: MINATO GIKEN
■ YEAR: 1997

■ **There are a** few games on the PlayStation that seem like they existed to provide a substitute for games on Sega's consoles, like for *Gunstar Heroes* there's *Rapid Reload*, and for *Space Harrier* there's *Super Robot Shooting*. You pick from one of a few robots and blast through stages. Each stage is themed, and you can change robots between stages: good news for fans of thematic accuracy.

» EDGE OF SKYHIGH

■ DEVELOPER: MICRONET
■ YEAR: 1997

■ **It's clear that** *Edge Of Skyhigh* was a labour of love for its developers, and that love was aimed at *Afterburner II*. You fly a jet – which can be transformed into a giant robot – and you lock-on to flying enemies, just like *Afterburner*. But now, the sprite scaling of Sega's classic is replaced with texture mapped 3D, and there's more of a sci-fi theme to the proceedings, with stages having the player shoot down giant monsters.

» MAGICAL DROP F

■ DEVELOPER: SAS SAKATA
■ YEAR: 1999

■ **Although it is** unheard of over here, *Magical Drop F* is the pinnacle of the puzzle series. It makes a few tweaks to the core game, like penalty orbs dropping in individual columns rather than solid rows, and though the changes seem small, they add up to a much better game. The graphics also see a improvement with more colours and animation, and there's the addition of a RPG mode, with equipment and *Magical Drop* battles.

SPEED POWER GUNBIKE

■ **DEVELOPER: INTI CREATES** ■ **YEAR: 1998**

■ **THIS GAME IS a bit of an odd one: on first examination, it's a striking title with a cool concept, but a clunky, awkward execution that's no fun to play.** Fortunately it's a game that rewards perseverance, as it gets more fun to play the more that you get used to its odd controls and mechanics. Also, it was made by Inti Creates, who are more associated with excellence in 2D platformers, like the *Mega Man Zero* series, or, more recently, *Azure Striker Gunvolt*.

The main focus of the game is riding at speed down long, futuristic and enemy-littered roads reminiscent of Eighties and Nineties cyberpunk anime, such as *Akira* or *Cyber City Oedo 808*. The vehicles you do this riding in/on are motorbikes that can transform at will into slower but easier to steer buggies, or very slow power armour that's much better suited to combat.

» The transforming aspects of *Speed Power Gunbike*, ensures it stands apart from other racers.

» In tight corners, your bike's robot mode comes in handy for smashing both enemies and walls.

When you first start playing, you'll bump into walls and other objects, running out of time by getting lost and generally having a bad time of it. If you make the effort to practice, though, *Speed Power Gunbike* feels great to play. It's almost like some kind of strange, less forgiving alternate universe *Sonic* game that wanted to make the player earn the feeling of speed and freedom.

RETRO STINKER
» CHAOS BREAK

■ **DEVELOPER: EON** ■ **YEAR: 1992**

■ **Loosely based on** the arcade game *Chaos Heat*, this replaces the pure action of that game with a poor man's *Resident Evil*, with lots of tedious corridor traipsing and even an unskippable sudoku puzzle.

» GERMS NERAWARETA MACHI

■ **DEVELOPER: KEJ**
■ **YEAR: 1999**

■ **With a large** 3D city to navigate, and plenty of buildings to explore and people to talk to, *Germs* is a game that was ahead of its time. Although it was released to no fanfare or acclaim back in 1999, it was rediscovered and gained a tiny cult following thanks to its aesthetic of low-poly buildings, faceless characters and sultry music.

» EXTRA BRIGHT

■ **DEVELOPER: TO ONE**
■ **YEAR: 1996**

■ **Upon first seeing** *Extra Bright*'s narrow, twisty tracks, you could easily mistake it for a futuristic racing game in the *F-Zero* vein, but it's actually a pretty slow paced on-rails shooter. It's a simple one, too, since you can't even move vertically, only side to side. *Extra Bright* looks great, though, all the models are nicely designed, looking both futuristic and cuddly at the same time, with rounded edges and pastel colours.

» KURUKURU MARUMARU

■ **DEVELOPER: JAPAN ART MEDIA**
■ **YEAR: 2001**

■ **Despite its silly** sounding name and colourful, cartoony graphics, *Kurukuru Marumaru* is actually a harsh driving game. It has a control system that uses every button on the PlayStation controller, having the player not only steering, controlling their speed and changing gears, but also starting the engine, using the hand brake and even turning on indicators before turning.

» PET IN TV

■ **DEVELOPER: SCEI**
■ **YEAR: 1997**

■ **Unlike most of** the games featured here, *Pet In TV* did get a release in Europe though without much fanfare. You guide a weird robot around, trying to teach it about the world. The ultimate goal is to build up its intellect so it can solve puzzles with no player input. It's an interesting concept, executed poorly. 'Guide' is an apt word, as you don't have direct control over your pet, as you can only make suggestions.

CROC
LEGEND OF THE GOBBOS

20 years ago, gaming was taking its first steps into 'true' 3D. Mitch Wallace chats with members of the team that helped usher in a new era, and who have remained mostly uncredited for their contribution – until now

CROC 101

■ A cutesy platformer that follows an anthropomorphic crocodile on his quest to rescue his adoptive family. The journey spans five unique worlds and over 40 colourful levels filled with collectibles, interesting enemies and bosses, and countless jumping challenges. A pioneering title that showed off the potential of early 3D technology.

The 1996 release of *Super Mario 64* seemed to open the floodgate for droves of me-too 3D platformers. Mascot characters were finally able to shake their adorable personas in multidirectional space, but one early entry muddies the accepted chronology of technological innovation. *Croc: Legend Of The Gobbos*, a vibrant adventure starring a backpack-donning reptile, unassumingly hit stores almost a year after Nintendo's plumber-led Nintendo 64 masterpiece. An obvious cash-in, right? Not exactly.

The story is a real challenge to platformer lore. But to fully grasp Croc's journey from chirping hatchling to proper scaly videogame hero, it's necessary go back to when Argonaut Software began a successful working partnership with Nintendo. The pairing produced popular games like *Star Fox* and *Stunt Race FX* on the SNES, and Argonaut also built the world's first 3D accelerator chip for gaming consoles. The relationship was mutually beneficial: Nintendo learned how to make 3D software and Argonaut learned how to make meaningful character titles.

It was an idea for one such character-driven game that helped give birth to Croc, who wasn't initially a crocodile at all, but rather a familiar, long-tongued dinosaur. Argonaut founder and executive producer Jez San recalls the genesis of a brand new mascot.

» A level idea sporting puzzles full of batteries, chargers, magnets, and a conveyor belt.

» Croc in various states of Nineties action and attitude, including a rad thumbs-up.

"[Nintendo] had done a game called *Yoshi's Island*, which used our graphics chip, the Super FX chip. An outside company, HAL [Laboratory], had helped it write that. We put two and two together and thought that maybe Nintendo [were] not so jealously guarding their non-essential characters."

Next came the conceptualisation of something completely unheard of at the time. "Nobody had ever done a 3D platformer game before," Jez recalls. "A guy called Marcus Morgan, who was a skilled 3D animator [at Argonaut]. He used to work Autodesk. He kind of visualized what a 3D *Mario* game might look like."

The result was an exciting prototype that essentially mixed together two Nintendo classics, but in a whole new dimension. "We offered them what we called *Yoshi Racing*, which was a 3D *Mario* game with the Yoshi character," Jez says. "It was probably a cross between *Mario Kart* and *Super Mario World*, a hybrid of a racing game and a platformer. It also looked like *Super Mario 64*, only a year or two earlier."

Argonaut would give Nintendo first dibs on the game – not a contractual agreement between the two companies, but an agreement nonetheless. The initial response was enthusiastic, albeit short-lived. "We showed it to Miyamoto-san and he was blown away," Jez says. "It was clear we were on to something – this was special. It was at that point that they kind of said, 'No, we're not doing it.'"

With that, Nintendo closed the door on the 3D *Yoshi* game, and now Argonaut was free to look elsewhere for publishing support. "Now, obviously, we couldn't offer a *Yoshi* game to anyone else, because that was Nintendo's character," Jez says. "So we had to design, from scratch, a character that would have the same

dynamics, that ended up still being green, but otherwise a happy, jumpy crocodile. Not a million miles away from Yoshi, but pretty different."

Helping out with the redesign was asset controller-turned-artist Simon Keating. "While sitting in the render farm I had a fair bit of extra time on my hands," he recalls. "So when I heard that Jez was looking for a new character/IP, I started doodling straight away. I came up with a ton of crazy stuff, but the majority of people seemed to want the design pretty close to Yoshi. Croc had one tooth because my cat at the time had just one fang."

Now that the game had a fitting hero, there needed to be a call to adventure. That came in the form of sinister magician Baron Dante and the Dantinis, who show up and start taking Croc's fluffy, big-eyed buddies – the Gobbos. "We wanted something to save," explains lead designer Nic Cusworth. "A crocodile going after a princess to save seemed a bit crazy, so we had almost this Moses story, this character that arrives on this island. The Gobbos try to raise it, and when Croc's brothers and sisters get kidnapped, there's some motivation there."

Simon adds how the fuzzy creatures changed slightly as development progressed: "The Gobbos were always basically fluffy balls, but they started off pink [instead of brown]. They were later refined by animator Pete Day to adapt to 3D better." The game's basis would go on to be fleshed out in the instruction manual, but the team wasn't involved. "I think [publisher Fox Interactive] paid a *Simpsons* writer a load of money to go and write the backstory," Nic says. ▶

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF CROC

We talk to the creators about Crocs sequel

Did you want to do anything differently with *Croc 2*?
Nic Cusworth: I had this desire for absolute variety. The hub world, kart racing, boat racing, and the hang glider stuff is an echo to the amount of *Diddy Kong Racing* we were playing at the time.

Do you think you accomplished what you set out to achieve with the sequel?
NC: In terms of its ambition, I remember *Croc 2* much more fondly than the first one. It's a flawed favourite. I just wish we could go back and fix the camera.

Was there any talk of a third *Croc* game?
NC: I did propose a *Croc 3*. It used Xbox Live's online functionality; it was kind of a co-op game. People often say to me, 'You should make another *Croc*.' I would only do it if [the original team] came back together.
Jez San: When Argonaut died in 2004, I bought the rights to *Croc*, just to protect it. It would be great to get the band back together to work on another game.

Were there ever any plans to take *Croc* beyond gaming?
JS: There were toys, but they never came out commercially. Little plush Crocs and Gobbos and backpacks. I do have a Croc jacket, though!"
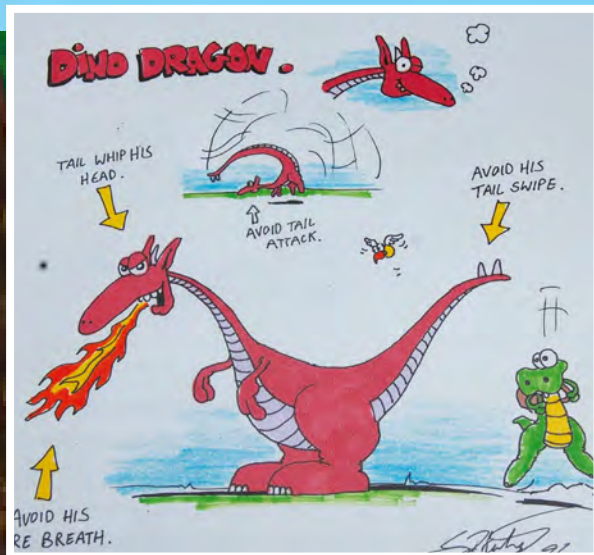
» An abandoned boss concept, complete with possible attacks and means of defeat.

» Slamming the gong will end the current level, though the curious burrowing snake could make matters more difficult.

"Croc had one tooth because my cat at the time had just one fang "
Simon Keating

INTERVIEW: JUSTIN SCHARVONA

We chat to Croc's musician

How did you come to be involved *in Croc: Legend Of The Gobbos*, and in what way did you approach the creative process?
I had worked in-house at Argonaut since 1994, so when *Croc* came along I had already worked on many published game soundtracks since my first in 1988. The soundtrack in *Croc* was rooted in song-based music. The only mantra I used to go by was that people had to be able to whistle along to the tunes. We hired Steve Levine, the record producer, who was the guy that produced all the Culture Club songs from the Eighties.

What's behind the seemingly game show-inspired main title theme?
I wrote the theme tune after hearing a library CD of Mexican music, where one song on it had a rhythmic piano riff. This is why there is a trumpet lead part. It's not meant to be like a game show theme, although the second half ended up being a bit like one. It also has [the music team] clapping around a mic.

And what about the playfully eerie ambience in the cave stages?
That music is based on the *Addams Family* theme, with the harpsichord and finger snaps. The theremin idea was from listening to *The Simpsons* Halloween specials. The songs which have the big Hammond organ chords were inspired by working on a version of *Foxy Lady* which was for a *Wayne's World* game.

» In this rare look inside the studio, actor Jonathan Aris records the voiceover for *Croc*. Kapow! Kersplat!

Any other pop culture nods?
The Flibby boss fight theme was styled on the *Rocky* theme, and it was Steve Levine that told me to make it less like the film theme so we didn't get sued.

Did your creative approach change at all when making *Croc 2*?
The percussion was influenced by listening to *Donkey Kong Country* on the SNES. There is a river race which has *Hawaii Five-0*-style music, and another race which is a bit like the *Knight Rider* theme. The outro final music is a bit like a cross between an Oasis-style *Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds* and Tears for Fears' *Sowing The Seeds Of Love*.

Listening back now, how do you perceive both titles' soundtracks?
There is a element of nostalgia created by the soundtracks to the *Croc* games, I still receive messages from people telling me how much they loved the themes.

» The secret crystal island is only unlocked after finding all the Gobbos and hidden jigsaw pieces in the game.

▶   With art and story direction underway, it was time for the game's mechanics to come to life, which presented a massive challenge. The territory for 3D platformers was completely uncharted at the time. "When we started developing it, there was no reference point at all, other than *Yoshi's Island*," Nic remembers. "We were like, 'We should make something like this in 3D. How the hell do we do that?' It's kind of easy with hindsight, to think it's fairly obvious how you approach a platform game in 3D."

While the game would evolve to include a PlayStation version, it was on the Sega Saturn that the original, humble build took shape. "Programmers Lewis Gordon and Anthony Lloyd had a little chubby crocodile running down what were effectively tubular pipes in snow," Nick muses. "Which made no sense whatsoever [laughs]." Anthony elaborates: "It was white polygons, because the Saturn could only render tiles. Everything was very geometric."

And so the basic foundation for *Croc* was set, but now ideas and concepts had to become coding reality. "We had a great team," Jez begins. "We had very good tools and a good engine that allowed us to tweak the game, make changes and see the changes quickly."

"Most of the game is actually written in a language like BASIC but called Argonaut Strategy Language," Anthony adds. "The editor, CrocEd, didn't even run in Windows. It used DOS!" The toolset used to build

» One of Croc's many tricks is his ability to hang from these trellis structures. Not falling to an untimely death is an entirely different skill.

» The variety of enemies in the game is impressive. Here, a mummy lumbers toward Croc, one clumsy step at a time.

» Our reptillian hero seems awfully calm, especially considering he's being pursued by a giant (and quite angry) spinning cactus.

Croc would go on to help create future Argonaut titles. "We reused the original *Croc* engine on many games," Jez says. "*Harry Potter* and *Harry Potter 2*, the Disney *Aladdin* game, and *Alien: Resurrection*."

Nic, who worked extensively within the editor to create the lion's share of *Croc*'s levels, explains its versatility: "In some ways, it was the most free, creative expression within a box of limitations I've ever had on a game. I'd go home at night and think, 'I can do that,' and then come in [to work] in the morning and build a level that does whatever I thought of. The castle levels particularly are all the result of it getting later in development and just going crazy with all the scripting and what the system could do."

Croc's world was broken up into five themed islands, and while the individual levels in *Croc* allowed for plenty of free-roaming, they were divided into smaller sub-sections. "We didn't want to use any depth cue," Nic explains. "We wanted to draw the whole scene. It was about what we could render and light." But it wasn't just technical limitations. "We wanted every room to be its own little puzzle," Nic goes on. "So it felt like an achievement to make it through each area."

And then there were the classic level names, like 'Be Wheely Careful' and 'License To Chill'. "I think I named all of them," Nic says. "They're all puns. They are awful!" He chuckles, recalling how he named the game's first level. "I remember, '…And So The Adventure Begins', was from a David Lee Roth video collection I had. They introduced the California girls, and it was like, 'Okay, that's how *Croc* starts.'" Another level name would find its inspiration in British comedy *Trainspotting*. "Shouting, 'Lager Lager Lager' became 'Lava Lava Lava'," Nic adds.

While the Nintendo 64 would ship with a revolutionary analogue controller, other input methods of the time were natively digital. It wasn't until almost the end of *Croc*'s development that Sony released the Dual Analog gamepad—a concave-sticked, non-vibrating (at least in the West) DualShock predecessor. "We got that [controller] a couple weeks before going gold and had to try and remap our digital tank controls over to an analogue stick," Nic says. "I wouldn't say it was very successful."

While none of the characters in the game made use of any sort of traditional dialogue, *Croc* himself did have a hilariously memorable voice. "There was a friend of the audio department," Nic recalls. "An actor named Jonathan Aris, a very fine young actor used to doing much more intellectual stage plays, came in and we just let him loose on a microphone. We showed him the game, and he nailed everything in an hour."

As *Croc* neared the end of its development, Nintendo was, unbeknownst to Argonaut, getting ready to release a 3D platformer of its very own. The result was nothing short of monumental. "Little did we know that Nintendo had effectively run with our idea and produced a game that was very similar [to *Croc*]," Jez says. "*Mario 64* was very similar in concept to what we had shown Miyamoto a year or two earlier. And Miyamoto actually came up to me at the launch at the CES show and apologised for not doing *Yoshi Racing* with us and then doing *Mario 64* instead. He said, 'You'll make enough money. You've made enough money from *Star Fox* and *Stunt Race*. You're not going to worry.' It was a bit hollow."

Hollow indeed, because the truth was abundantly clear: "We weren't the first 3D platform game. We were maybe the second one," Jez admits. "We were the first to start, and we were the first to have the idea, but we weren't the first to come out." But Jez notes that, despite the strange circumstances and the teams eventually parting ways, there aren't any sour grapes to be had. "It didn't really matter," he says. "*Mario 64* is a fantastic game. But *Croc* was a good game too. I'm proud of it. And I think Miyamoto is the best guy in the industry. Our time working with Nintendo was some of the best times we've had. We learned how to design 'fun', which is a very Miyamoto thing." ✱

Huge thanks to Jez San, Nic Cusworth, Anthony Lloyd, Simon Keating (for the art), and Justin Scharvona for all their help!

» Croc explores his Rambo side in this early concept sketch.

» Meet Itsy the Ice Demon, a boss composed of innocent animals, all mashed together by Baron Dante.

"We wanted every room to be its own little puzzle"
Nic Cusworth

» An original piece of art just for **Retro Gamer** by *Croc*'s original character artist Simon Keating! Check out his current work at Rule Of Fun game studio (ruleoffun.com).

» Pieces of concept art depicting two bosses that made it into the final game: Fosley and Cactus Jack.

Gran Turismo

s it possible to have too much power? When you first get hold of a fully-tuned Nissan Skyline GT-R V Spec, you might just think so. This is a car that practically protests at being forced below 60mph, and one that exceeds 200mph without issue on a decent straight. It's a capable machine, but one which demands respect and expertise from its driver at all times. Taking the wheel for the first time is a frightening situation – you'll find yourself fishtailing across the track and struggling not to spin out at corners. If you're keeping up with the pack at all, it's purely because of the unhinged speed and power of the machine.

But if you spend a little while in the Skyline you'll come to adjust your braking distances, compensate for the vehicle's heavy frame and stay on the track, bringing your lap times tumbling down. It still seems like you're a long way from fully taming the unstable beast, but you've managed to gain control over one of the best vehicles *Gran Turismo* has to offer. ✱

BIO

Not many games are in the works for five years, but *Gran Turismo* was worth every single day of labour. Having entered development two years before the PlayStation's launch, the game arrived in the final days of 1997 and redefined players' expectations of console racing games. Its packaging proudly declared it to be 'The Real Driving Simulator' and it was hard to argue, thanks to an impressive handling model, a 140 car roaster and stunning visuals. Universal critical acclaim followed, and a staggering 10.85 million copies were sold.

MORE CLASSIC GRAN TOURISMO MOMENTS

Passing Your Test

One of *Gran Turismo*'s quirks is the licence system, which requires you to participate in a series of racing challenges. These can be rather strict, with automatic failure for leaving the track. The A Licence is much harder to obtain than the faintly useless B Licence, but your opportunities to race are much greater once you manage to pass its tests.

Congratulations!

A License Acquired!

Press Any Button
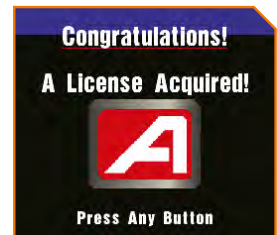
From All Angles

When *Gran Turismo* launched, if you were able to watch one of its replays without being blown away, there was a good chance you were just dead. Visually, the game was peerless. The environments were incredible, every single one of the cars was modelled with care (and oh-so-shiny) and the dynamic camera angles gave the appearance of a televised race.

Petrolhead's Paradise

The range of cars and turning options in *Gran Turismo* was unprecedented for a console game, and it was something of a dream come true for the racing enthusiast. A dedicated player could find hours of satisfaction simply by buying cars and modifying them, in an attempt to extract the maximum performance from every single one of the game's 140 cars.

The Home Straight

You've narrowly held a lead for the last half of the final lap, but could have taken that last corner better. Now it's time to panic. As you near the finish line, beads of sweat form on your forehead, temptation overwhelms you and you hit the rear camera button. Your rival is close, but not quite close enough. You haven't screwed everything up, and victory is assured. *Phew.*

DINO CRISIS

TAKE THE RESIDENT EVIL TEMPLATE, REPLACE THE SHAMBLING REANIMATED CORPSES WITH GIANT LIZARDS AND YOU'VE GOT A FRANCHISE FAR MORE INFLUENTIAL THAN THE BASIC PREMISE COULD EVER SUGGEST. LUKE ALBIGÉS LOOKS BACK AT THE CLASSIC TRIASSIC TRILOGY THAT NEVER QUITE MADE PRE-HISTORY

Capcom has a pretty good knack for knowing when it's onto a winning formula. *1942* was its first big hit in the arcades, and after a few years of trying new ideas, it was back to World War II for a number of quick-fire sequels and updates. *Mega Man*? Yeah, that dude was pretty busy for a while there. *Final Fight* did well and before you knew it, it was scrolling fighters as far as the eye could see. And then it was the turn of *Street Fighter*, the second game being a landmark fighter that saw countless iterations while its template was applied to everything from vampires to superheroes.

So after Capcom found success hidden away behind an eagle-crested panel within the eerie walls of the Spencer Mansion, it shouldn't have come as any real surprise to anyone that the *Resident Evil* formula was next. As well as an ambitious and excellent zombie-packed sequel, Capcom had greater plans for this format. These first came to light with the announcement of *Dino Crisis*. While it's easy to look back and see the game as just a way of making a quick buck by switching out zombies for dinosaurs, there's a good deal more that *Dino Crisis* and its sequel did that make them worth celebrating.

Think back to that famous moment in *Resident Evil*. You edge down a creepy corridor terrified of what might be around the next corner, but manage to reach the end without incident. But then, on a later visit, your over-confidence in your own safety is shattered as rabid dogs come barreling in through the windows. It was ingenious, both as a way of keeping players on their toes and technologically – the problem with pre-rendered environments such as those in the early *Resident Evil* games is that anything that can or will change tends to stick

» The agility of the dinosaurs meant that you'd often find yourself cornered.

"THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN JUST SWAPPING ONE SET OF ENEMIES FOR ANOTHER"

out like a sore thumb, just as it does in old cartoons. This feat could only be achieved so surprisingly with clever camera placement to ensure the windows that would break couldn't be seen. Terror could only come from off-screen, effectively.

So, despite the fact that PlayStation was starting to show its age, Capcom made the bold move of adopting full-polygon environments. It still took pride in its role as camera operator, so the fixed viewpoints remain, though these could sweep, pan and shift far more naturally than a static backdrop. Some overall polish was lost in the process, sure, but this was for the greater good. There would be nothing that you could take for granted as you did those cleverly out-of-shot windows – *Dino Crisis* could terrify from the word go by allowing bad things to happen anywhere, any time. And with this new (well, extremely old) breed of predators more than happy to take advantage of this technological leg-up, the sense of constant unease was one
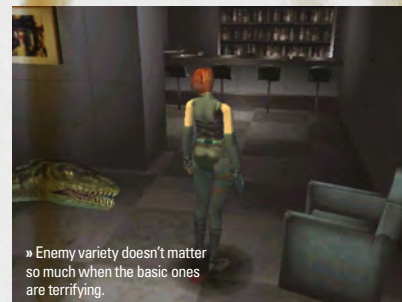
» Enemy variety doesn't matter so much when the basic ones are terrifying.

of the game's most potent tools in separating itself from its spiritual source.

Yet there's far more to it than just swapping one set of enemies for another. Most of *Resident Evil*'s enemies are either lethargic or fragile – it isn't until the Hunters come into play that there's ever that much sustained tension, though their clacking footsteps will admittedly haunt us for life. Going up against the scaly newcomers, on the other hand, is like dealing with an army of Hunters, only ones that can work together, navigate the whole environment and come from anywhere. Where *Resident Evil* used slow plays and suspense to define survival horror, *Dino Crisis* instead had a constant sense of being stalked by something and a far more immediate and deadly threat when it did inevitably find you. This was survival *terror*.

Capcom made as much as it possibly could out of the idea that Regina was being hunted. In *Resi*, you can happily push past a group of brain-munchers and make for the door, safe in the knowledge that they haven't got a clue how to work door handles. One of the first main surprises of *Dino Crisis* comes when you try to adopt the same strategy and, after giving you just long enough to assume you're safe, the raptor that was just chasing you comes crashing through the door or leaps over a nearby fence. Outside of the designated safe rooms (where you save and change up your gear), nowhere is actually safe. The panic is layered on further by some clever and cruel design choices – having to bandage severe wounds so you don't leave trails of delicious smelling blood for the predators to follow, for instance, and having dinosaurs capable of knocking your equipped weapon out of your hand.

Surviving this new nightmare with the STARS team's toolset would be frankly impossible, so Capcom also had to rework its control setup. Classic *Resi* tank controls remain at the heart of the system, though the ability to move and shoot at the same time is invaluable against the far speedier enemies, as is the quick 180-degree turn – both features that have since filtered back into the *Resident Evil* series. The same is true of many features of this so-called palette swap, actually. The persistence of the dinosaurs is mirrored in that of the Crimson Head zombies in ▶

» Don't open that door! No really, the raptor will just follow you anyway.
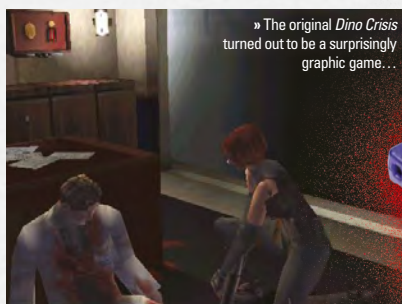
» The original *Dino Crisis* turned out to be a surprisingly graphic game…

THE MISSING LINK
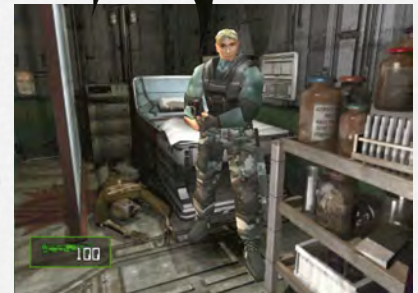### How Dino Crisis nearly made it to Game Boy Color

The *Resident Evil* similarities just keep on coming with this, the revelation of an ambitious yet unreleased Game Boy Color port. Announced in early 2000, a portable version of *Dino Crisis* was in production at M4, the same studio that successfully shipped *Resident Evil: Gaiden* to a lukewarm reception. Whether due to poor performance or reviews for *Gaiden*, or some other factor, the game would never see light of day, although we have it on good authority that fair progress was made on the project. In fact, calling in a few favours, we got hold of ex-M4 chap Tim Hull who told us that there is indeed both a selection of assets of the game and a demo ROM in existence. Sadly, he's off traveling for the foreseeable future and they're buried away in his attic somewhere. If and when he returns from his interesting mission to learn about how different cultures game, we'll try and steal a look at it. Oh, and share it with you guys as well. We're nice like that.

» Coming face-to-face with T-Rex, the sense of helplessness is overwhelming.

» Sorry Dylan, but we never really liked you as much as Regina. Nothing personal.

▶ the GameCube remake and inventory management and puzzles have become increasingly more complex as the horror series has gone on, as first seen in *Dino Crisis*. The very idea of being stalked lies at the heart of *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, a game that was in development alongside this and actually, one to which *Dino Crisis* probably owes a good deal of its success.

Not confident enough that the world had picked up the extent to which *Dino Crisis* was more than just 'Resident Evil with dinosaurs', Capcom elected to bundle it with a playable demo of the third *Resident Evil*. The practice had worked wonders for Square in the US, with commercial gambles such as *Tobal No 1* and *Brave Fencer Musashi* backed up with demos of the latest *Final Fantasy* games to make them that much more appealing. It's certainly one of the first instances in the UK, though it wasn't long before others were following suit – Konami famously charged sneaking enthusiasts 40 notes for the best bit of *Metal Gear Solid 2* and a free *Zone Of The Enders* tech demo – and these days, the practice is commonplace.

It was the right move though, because the majority of gamers to this day still refer to *Dino Crisis* as 'Resident Evil with dinosaurs'. While technically true, it's

"RESIDENT EVIL 4 OWES A DEBT OF GRATITUDE TO DINO CRISIS 2"

more than a little unfair in light of the gameplay and technology innovations that set it apart. If Capcom wanted to truly prove there was a gap between *Resident Evil* and *Dino Crisis*, it would have to make significant changes to the game's fundamental design if and when it came to making a sequel. Which, since the first game sold well, was always going to happen.

And lo, significant changes were made. The survival motif was all but entirely ditched in favour of something more supportive of the original's often frenetic pace, namely the beating heart of an arcade shooter. Ammo was doled out generously rather than rationed, while the game actively kept score as you tore through wave after wave of the

» Unlike many PSone games, *Dino Crisis 2* still holds up brilliantly today.

» Larger dinos are far less intimidating in the action-heavy sequel.

» A solid scoring system laid the foundations for *Resi 4*'s Mercenaries mode.

anachronistic monsters. The two feel almost unconnected outside of the name – and of course returning protagonist Regina, alongside some new guy who also really doesn't like dinosaurs – but some elements remained true, such as having to collect a bunch of disks that somehow open locked doors. And even with this new action-heavy slant, the intelligence, speed and overwhelming force of the reptilian opposition still made it a pretty daunting challenge regardless of how high the mountain of ammo you were sat on was.

Significant change for the better, then, and the reviews reflected this. *Dino Crisis 2* was almost unanimously well-received by critics but, coming so late in the PlayStation's life (it was released the same day PlayStation 2 launched), it managed to do pretty well at retail but couldn't replicate the original's numbers. With no more big PSone games left to come, Capcom couldn't even spice up the deal with an enticing demo disc this time around.

More important than any of this, though, is what a monumental turning point this was for Capcom. Things *could* change, and still be as loved – if not more so – than their predecessors. *Street Fighter EX* was the closest it had previously come to such a monumental design change between iterations, though that was neither well received nor anything more than misguidedly walking the polygon path in a pair of particularly unsuitable shoes. For a company so founded on iterative sequels and gradual improvements, this revelation must have been a hard thing to take on board, but it set the gears in motion for the changes behind one of the greatest games of all time. Reaction to later *Resident Evil* games such as *Code: Veronica* and *Zero* must have caused no small amount of deja vu at Capcom HQ – fans had started to feel the same way about the core games as they did about the dinosaur-themed 'spin-off' when *Resi* was just two games old. And again, simply changing gear wouldn't have been enough. It was time to change the whole damn engine.

Yes, *Resident Evil 4* owes a debt of gratitude to *Dino Crisis 2*. The pack mentality and terrifying pace of the Ganado was a radical departure for the usual lurching and shuffling of the infected, though it was oddly familiar to those who had had a pack of raptors snapping at their heels. With several failed attempts

MIKAMI OF DARKNESS

The horror legacy of one of Capcom's guiding creative forces

RESIDENT EVIL 2
■ As well as directing the original, Mikami also worked on the amazing second game. It's with good reason that many still champion this as the best game in the series – graphics aside, it still holds up brilliantly.

DINO CRISIS
■ Trading zombies for dinosaurs was a great idea in concept, but it would take someone with the horror vision of Mikami to pull it off. It had *Resi*'s cheap scares, sure, but it also had a shed-load of real tension.

DEVIL MAY CRY
■ Another one that owes much to *Resident Evil*, having been born from a failed 3D prototype. We're glad it went wrong, though – the action-packed gothic horror gave us one of gaming's best loved modern characters.
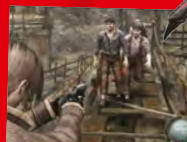
RESIDENT EVIL 4
■ This controversial series reboot changed so much about the standard *Resident Evil* formula but stayed true to its horror roots. Many of Mikami's novel gameplay devices are now par for the third-person shooter course.

SHADOWS OF THE DAMNED
■ With Mikami's horror sensibilities, Suda 51's creativity and EA's money behind it, this should've been huge. Similar to *Resi 4* gameplay-wise and stylish as hell, it deserved to do better.

THE EVIL WITHIN
■ Good to see he's still got it. Mikami's new project looks incredible, very much a traditional horror experience but one where next-gen visuals will be able to genuinely affect and scare players. Gulp.

» They're scary in the first game; here, they're just a points payday.

» *Dino Crisis 3* has what many regard to be the worst videogame camera ever.
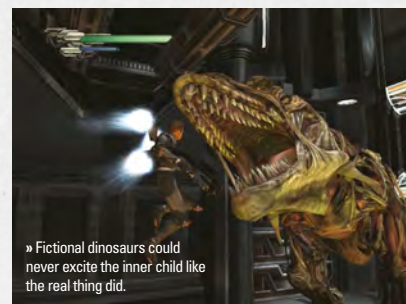
» Fictional dinosaurs could never excite the inner child like the real thing did.

at changing things up in the years prior to *Resi 4*'s release – *Street Fighter EX* and *Devil May Cry 2* being the worst offenders – *Dino Crisis 2* remained a shining example of how going back to the drawing board isn't always a bad move. But it's in the unlockable mini-game *The Mercenaries* that we see most of Regina's influence. The score attack mentality, the insane pace and the retention of horror elements in what is ostensibly a pure action game... it all comes straight from *Dino Crisis 2*. Are we saying *Resident Evil 4* wouldn't have happened had it not been for *Dino Crisis*? No. What we're saying is that it would likely have been a very different game.

There's a chapter missing from this story, though. No, not the one about that awful PlayStation 2 lightgun *Dino Crisis* spin-off. That's not even a chapter – it's just a sentence, and it's right there. We're talking about a part we'd rather forget. The part where a game

that proved to Capcom that change can be a good thing got a sequel that sent the gaming world a very different message. We're talking, of course, about the embarrassment that is *Dino Crisis 3*.

Was it made while the entire creative and technical teams were on holiday? Was it produced during a brief period where perception-altering drug use was mandatory at Capcom? Was it an elaborate yet costly stunt to troll a Western-developed console? Whatever the reasoning behind it (we're pretty sure it was none of those things), the fact remains that *Dino Crisis 3* is one of the worst games Capcom has ever put its name to. Seemingly done with the constraints of planet Earth after just two games, Capcom saw fit to set the third on a space station. And these weren't your run-of-the-mill dinosaurs

like they had in the past either, oh no. These were genetically engineered dinolikes, produced in their thousands so they could be conveniently (and tediously) slain in their thousands. It was even more an action game than *Dino Crisis 2*, with new hero Patrick whizzing around on a jetpack while firing hot laser death at loads of space monsters. Oh God, it was horrible.

It was the camera that proved to be the game's (and perhaps even the franchise's) mass extiction event, though. A hangover from the series' glorious past, the fixed viewpoint system simply couldn't keep up with either

JURASSIC LARKS

More must-play games for those who like their antagonists gigantic and extinct

RENEGADE III: THE FINAL CHAPTER (1989)

■ After huge success with *Target: Renegade*, Imagine Software attempted the same trick again. Unfortunately, its third original *Renegade* game was simply terrible, with stiff controls and dull fighting. Its saving grace is a time-travelling theme allowing you to head back to the prehistoric age and punch dinosaurs in the face.

CHUCK ROCK (1991)

■ Core Design must really love dinosaurs. *Tomb Raider* came later, but this is the story of a cartoon caveman with a penchant for lobbing bloody great boulders, which proves helpful for combat and platforming. The final boss was another T-Rex, albeit one wearing boxing gloves and shorts. He was scarily cheap too, as we recall.

WHERE TIME STOOD STILL (1988)

■ How do you improve on *The Great Escape*? Easy, add dinosaurs. This is a superb isometric adventure with clever gameplay mechanics that had you controlling a group of people, stranded in a strange land. Before long, various dinosaurs are out for your blood and you'll need to do everything you can to avoid being eaten.
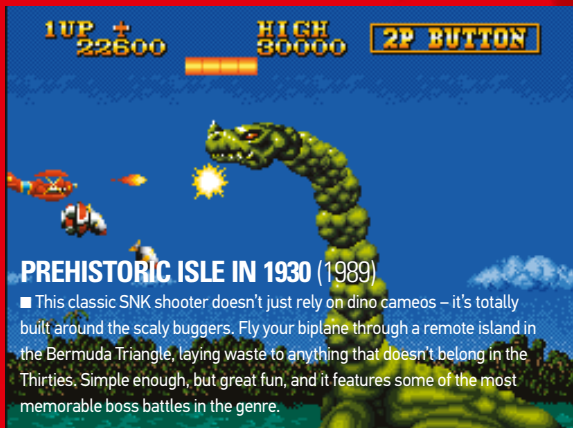
PREHISTORIC ISLE IN 1930 (1989)

■ This classic SNK shooter doesn't just rely on dino cameos – it's totally built around the scaly buggers. Fly your biplane through a remote island in the Bermuda Triangle, laying waste to anything that doesn't belong in the Thirties. Simple enough, but great fun, and it features some of the most memorable boss battles in the genre.

DINOPARK TYCOON (1993)

■ What could be better than *Theme Park*? Easy *Theme Park* crossed with all sorts of different dinosaurs. The end result was *DinoPark Tycoon*, a solid strategy title with an education slant that allowed you to fill your zoo with long-extinct lizards.

TUROK: DINOSAUR HUNTER (1997)

■ It's a dirty word these days but, in the Nineties, *Turok* could do no wrong. Both this and its sequel feature loads of dinosaurs to shoot – some modded in amusing, *Dinoriders* fashion – and *Rage Wars* set a benchmark for console deathmatches. What happened to you, Turok? Sob.

MONSTER HUNTER (2006)

■ Anyone who likes dinosaurs should savour the chance to go toe-to-toe with Capcom's massive line-up of lizards, dragons and horrible beasties. Not feeling it? How about this – when you're done with them, you can carve them up and turn them into new gear and fancy hats. Yeah, we though that might do the trick...

CRASH BANDICOOT 3: WARPED (1998)

■ The time-hopping threequel features an entire set of levels set in prehistoric times, though that didn't seem to change much in terms of game design. Running away from a Triceratops, dodging and spinning your way through jungles... yeah, it was pretty much classic *Crash*. Only with a Triceratops.
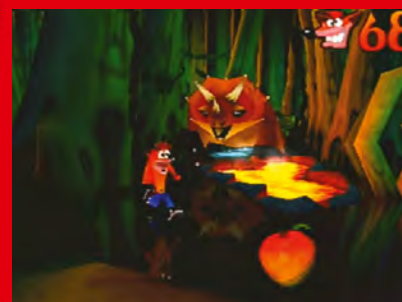
THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI (1990)

■ Why would a ninja fight a dinosaur? We'll answer that question with another question – why wouldn't a ninja fight a dinosaur? What could be more awesome, after all? The New York boss was clearly Godzilla in the copyright nightmare that was the original game (hi, Batman) but was later changed to a skeletal dinosaur.

3D MONSTER MAZE (1981)

■ Ladies and gentlemen, gaming's first dinosaur. Sure, you can outrun the lumbering fool and his gummy grin but don't assume he's harmless – you'll see his teeth if he catches you, that's for sure. Massively pioneering back in the day, it remains a highly atmospheric game of cat-and-mouse.

PRIMAL RAGE (1994)

■ With the iconic *Jurassic Park* theme still echoing around in everyone's heads, kids and grownups alike would bicker about which dinosaurs would win in a fight. We're not sure this awful beat-'em-up is an entirely scientific way to find out, but it might just have settled a few arguments all the same. And then caused a bunch more. Oh well.

SUPER BC KID (1994)

■ Or *Bonk*, if you'd rather. Chuck Rock's younger brother looks to be suffering from rather severe head trauma, most likely caused by his continued use of his own skull as an offensive weapon. Still, at least the platform action games were pretty good, even if the character wasn't.

JURASSIC PARK (1993)

■ Of course. The were loads of licensed games released around the rebirth of dino-cool that was *Jurassic Park*, with this iffy Mega Drive platformer being among the better ones. That tells you pretty much everything you need to know about *Jurassic Park* games. Oh, apart from the fact that *Operation Genesis* was ace.

CADILLACS AND DINOSAURS (1993)

■ Based on comic series *Xenozoic Tales* and tied into a Saturday morning cartoon, *Cadillacs And Dinosaurs* had no right to be as good as it was. Perhaps the most interesting element was the use of dinosaurs as a third faction that could attack both players and enemies, something we don't think we've seen in the genre since.

TRESPASSER (1998)

■ Another *Jurassic Park* title, sure, but this list wouldn't be complete without this inept shooter. After promising the moon on a stick, the only things *Trespasser* delivered were a graphics engine that only about eight PCs on the planet could make look good at that time and accidental hilarity in the way protagonist Anne (voiced by Minnie Driver) interacts with the world. Too bad.

» Thanks, *Dino Crisis 3*. Thanks for killing off a franchise that we really cared about…

▶ the frantic pace or the complex design of the ship, frequently leading to situations where you'd instantly double back on yourself as the viewpoint shifted or find yourself shooting enemies that aren't even on the screen with only the HUD to let you know when they were dead. Capcom, after careful consideration, we have decided not to endorse your game.

So have we seen the last of *Dino Crisis*? It's been a decade now without a new game, and even the most die-hard fans are starting to fear the worst. Capcom's VP of strategic planning and business development Christian Svensson recently spoke with IGN, and it doesn't sound too hopeful. "*Dino Crisis 3* I think is where it went off the rails," he said. "There are discussions, *Dino Crisis* comes up from time to time, but there isn't any burning desire from R&D or the business side to light that franchise back up again." And while we'd love to see some bright spark at Capcom extract the DNA from back when the series was good and bring it back to life, the fear that we could see another *Dino Crisis 3*-level disaster means that it's probably best that it remain extinct. And hey, at least we can still look at the pretty fossils.

HOGS OF WAR

Released in 2000 for the PlayStation and PC, Hogs Of War is a hilarious, charming and mildly insane turn-based strategy game in which warring armies of pigs blow each other to smithereens in the pursuit of swill. Lead programmer Jacob Habgood explains to Phil Locke the method behind the madness gas
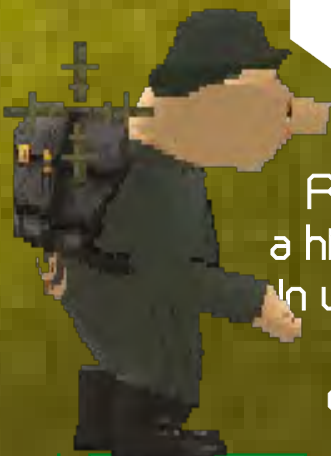
IN THE KNOW

With just ten seconds left on the turn clock, your gamble pays off. Successfully parachuting behind enemy lines, you grab the Super TNT and immediately set about making your friend's life a brief misery. FOOM! "The green team strides the battlefield like a COL-OS-USS!"

There's no point trying to hide it – *Hogs Of War* is very similar to *Worms*. Both games draw from the same well, in that they're best played with friends, and remembered not just as games but as exercises in schadenfreude. However, *Hogs* started out as something different.

"The idea for *Hogs Of War* came from Ian Stewart," explains Jacob Habgood, lead programmer on *Hogs Of War*, referring to the founder and managing director of Gremlin Interactive, the publisher and developer where work on *Hogs* began. "Gremlin, at that stage, was both a publisher and a developer. So, unlike today where I suppose there tends to be a lot of independence between the two, a lot of the old publishing houses had the development side and the publishing side both in one building,

owned by one person – that person, in this case, being Ian Stewart.

"He had been to see *Babe* and felt that we should be making a game based on pigs. At the time, I think the top two games in the chart were *Command & Conquer* and *Worms*. As much as everybody compares *Hogs* to *Worms*, it was actually *Command & Conquer* that was the original brief – a kind of *Command & Conquer* with pigs."

Hogs Of War veterans will be surprised to learn that Chris Noonan's cinematic cute-fest was an influence on the game, and may well now wonder whether *Babe* would have been improved with mortars. The *Command & Conquer* influence also isn't immediately apparent to the player – without being a shameless copy, *Hogs Of War* certainly seems to wear the influence of *Worms* on its sleeve, both in its turn-based gameplay and in its fantastically British sense of humour.

Jacob agrees: "That's definitely what it became, but it started off being a concept based around a turn-based strategy game with pigs." The single-player campaign was actually considered to be more of a priority during a lot of the development period, but the team eventually came to realise what a strong multiplayer title they had on their hands.

Jacob explains it simply: "We thought about single-player more. But, as we got through development, we started to realise that it was the multiplayer that

people were getting very excited about. So it probably was that more effort was invested in the single-player, but a lot of people prefer the multiplayer game."

Hogs Of War isn't by any means an entirely original game, but what it lacks in originality it more than makes up in sheer fun. It's a pants-wavingly mad game, in which you, while being alternately praised and berated by Rik Mayall, control a squad of armed pigs and take them to war in a quest for a thinly veiled metaphor – namely, swill. Alternatively, you can forgo the single-player campaign and receive praise and abuse from Mayall for failing to shoot friends properly.

Surprisingly for such a silly, fun game, the development period was lengthy, with problems involving who would actually end up publishing the game. "It was started under Gremlin interactive," Jacob begins, "then Gremlin floated on the stock exchange. Things didn't go so well… Gremlin ended up being bought by Infogrames, the French company." Along with near cancellations of the game – Jacob remembers "two separate times where we were fighting for the life of the project to continue" – the uncertainty started to draw out the development further and further.

"It was a bit complicated. You were constantly having to re-justify the game's existence to a new set of management. The development time for *Hogs Of War* was probably about three years from

» With the aid of a jetpack, pigs can actually fly.

» It's always good to reach out and touch one of your old friends.

» Although pigs flying isn't out of the question in this game, swimming sadly is.

» *Hogs Of War* shared *Worms'* proclivity for bizarre weapons.

start to finish, which is an insane amount of time. That was partly due to the fact that there were these periods where everything's on hold, when the company gets taken over, things don't move forward, nobody knows what's gonna continue, what's not gonna continue."

However, Jacob doesn't feel that this hindered the game's development much. "Having gone through several periods of this kind of thing, it did enable us to spend that time improving the game. We were

A very creative guy. But towards the end of the project, where it kind of took on a slightly different direction, it was a guy called Phil Wilson who took over as the 'everyday' designer on it, as the guy who actually tweaked all of the levels, and designed the finished version of the levels. He was a very creative guy, very passionate about his discipline. He would go home every night and play the build that we'd created for him, and come back the next morning with a list of changes

Hogs Of War seems to wear the influence of Worms on its sleeve, both in its turn-based gameplay and in its sense of humour

having to constantly re-present the game, and rethink the ideas behind the game, the focus and so on. While it represented a challenge, it probably also benefited the final product because it had been through so much, so many iterations.

"We were lucky that, towards the end, there was a guy who worked for Infogrames called Sean Millard, who is now the creative director of Sumo. He came down and had a look at *Hogs* and thought it was the best game he'd played in ages."

Jacob, who coded the engine for the PlayStation, is quick to praise his colleagues on *Hogs Of War*. "The designer behind the game was a guy called Ade Carless, the guy that invented *Zool* and various other games.

that we needed to make. He went on to work at Realtime Worlds on *Crackdown*."

Part of the appeal of *Hogs Of War* is its charm. There's no hard-nosed realism, nor anything even resembling it. This is a game in which a spy can steal an opposing player's trotter, rendering him armless. Part of this charm is in its anachronistic nature – in a world where universality is everything, it's refreshing to play a game that's so unashamedly local.

"Now," says Jacob, "the big companies, they want global games, built to global audiences. That's why there was never a sequel to *Hogs*. There were several rumours – we started one, and worked on the game for about six months. *Hogs* sold very well, but only in terms of a European phenomenon. It didn't really sell in the US at all. For publishers at the time, that wasn't a viable approach; they didn't feel that was what they wanted. It was too British, too European and too quirky, which I think is a shame."

There's a real sense that the development team were having incredible fun when *Hogs Of War* was being made. "I'd definitely say that one of the things that was so great about working on *Hogs* is that at that stage team sizes were manageable enough that everybody could have a say," Jacob explains, "so more than any of the other projects I've ever worked on, it was a kind of team collaboration, and everybody could have a chance to put their own creative input into the finished game."

ODDWORLD

THE HISTORY OF

The original Oddworld was a surprise PlayStation hit. David Crookes talks to Lorne Lanning about the impact of Abe's Oddysee and the rest of a series that fell short of its fifth planned game

» It's not all about noise. Abe's expressions show emotion and struggle.

A character who can break wind is always a winner. Even if that character is an alien with bulbous, bloodshot eyes, a high ponytail of hair made from feathers and a skinny, almost malnourished torso; the ability to let one go, while undoubtedly disgusting, is yet all too endearing to ignore.

It may not be a tool employed by many other gaming characters, but perhaps Sonic, Mario and even Lara could give it a go. Then again, they have not quite endured the life of Abe, star of the *Oddworld* games, whose backstory would make noises emit from all but the toughest of bottoms.

Abe's days are spent scrubbing floors and suffering heartless beatings from Sligs, the backbone of a repressive society's industrial security team. Things take a rather sinister turn when Abe accidentally discovers that he and his fellow Mudokon workers are not merely slaves, but fodder for the machines used at the vast Rupture Farms food processing plant where they toil each day.

Lucky then that Abe emerges as the 'chosen one' and is able to pursue the ousting of dictator Mulluck the Glukkon and his evil regime, thereby freeing the downtrodden from their horrific plight.

Today, such determination to stick one to 'The Man' and spark an uprising would undoubtedly involve Twitter. Technology-free Abe treads a rather more conventional path, stomping around on foot, meeting other slaves in person and cheerily urging them to "follow me" – but not too closely, you would hope.

"From a story perspective, all of the *Oddworld* stories were inspired from the dirty deeds of the dark side of globalisation," explains Lorne Lanning, who co-founded American developer Oddworld Inhabitants with fellow special effects and computer animation expert Sherry McKenna. "And it was the stories that convinced Sherry to get involved and do this whole thing with me."

Work began on the plot in January 1995. "We took big inspiration from *Flashback*, *Out Of This World* and *Myst*, and it worked well," Lorne continues. "We started to create an intriguing world." Ideas were bounced off designer Paul O'Connor and the crew to work out what would work and what could be altered should production hit any issues.

Originally, the idea was to call the game *SoulStorm*, but other games at the time had the word 'Soul' in them so a new moniker was found to avoid confusion. There were also initial thoughts over making the game 3D, but this was scrapped in favour of 2D, even though the advent of the 32-bit consoles showed a market going the other way.

The game drew on the gaming styles of old – right down to an 8-bit flick-screen mechanic – and that was due to Lorne's belief that there was still mileage left in 2D gaming. Lorne had also been working with 3D for the previous decade and didn't believe the crop of 3D games on the PlayStation were outstanding enough to prompt a switch.

Still, the assets were built in 3D. The bitmaps for the game were pre-rendered and this, in a sense, produced 2.5D with rich
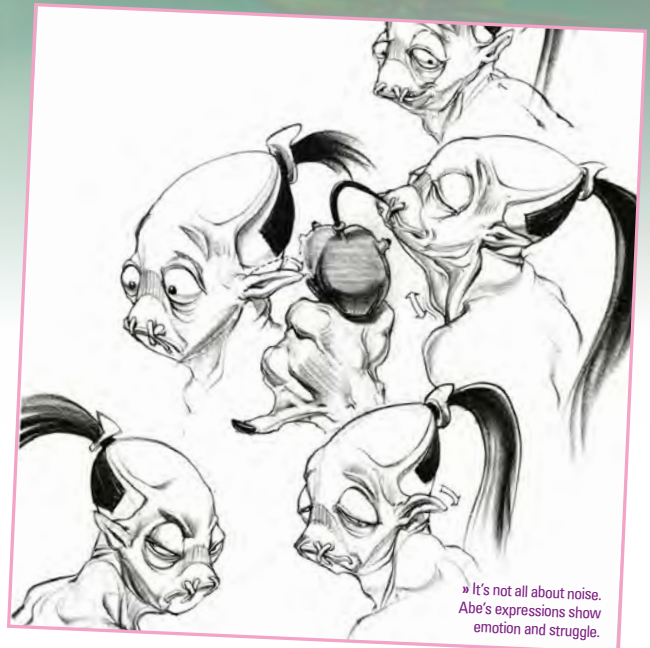
» Lorne Lanning is the driving force behind *Oddworld*.

image depth and detail. "We didn't want to launch 'low poly world' to establish the first impression of the *Oddworld* Universe," Lorne says, revealing that the plan to build a five-part story – *The Oddworld Quintology* – was foremost in his mind.

As well as beautiful visuals and slick cut-scenes that blended into the gameplay, a major part of *Oddworld* was the feature Gamespeak. It allowed Abe to talk, whistle and, yes, fart, and it was crucial for gameplay and for humour. Seldom failing to raise a smile, it was seen as so important that it was included in the demo Lorne hawked around to publishers to whip up interest and investment in the game.

The debut title also had an artificial intelligence routine called Aware Lifeforms In Virtual Environments (or ALIVE for short). This controlled the actions of the game's creatures according to the situation they were faced with and the type of character they were. Abe could therefore decide to solve some puzzles and ignore others, and the player could even trick Sligs into shooting each other.

Abe could also chant and possess other characters, using them to solve puzzles or carry out a killing. Although Lorne wanted shooting in the game he didn't want Abe to have a twitchy trigger finger himself, and this was a way around such a situation (keen watchers will also note, incidentally, that Abe had four fingers in the debut game but only three thereafter – this was to avoid causing offence in Japan where four-fingered characters are banned out of respect for meat-packing workers who often lost fingers in work-related accidents). *Abe's Oddysee* progressed well and was earmarked for a PlayStation and PC release. ▶

» Abe will often have to use others in order to progress.
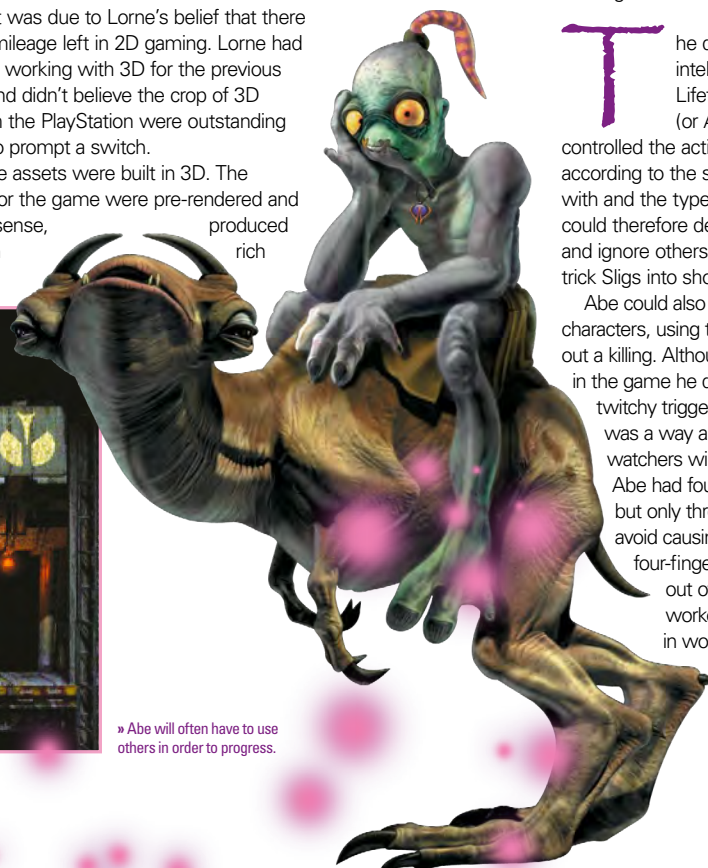
FANTASTIC VOYAGE 1982
■ Zooming through the body of a brain-damaged scientist, this game was inspired by the Sixties movie of the same name. Items of note included a lung, yellow cholesterol and other such inside-of-body organs and happenings.

ANT ATTACK 1983
■ The walled city of Antescher was inhabited by giant ants which would be annihilated by lobbing grenades. Gamers could play as a man or woman and try and rescue hostages. A B-movie of a game.

ANOTHER WORLD 1991
■ Young scientist Lester explores a treacherous alien world with dangerous indigenous animals and humanoid creatures. Cinematic, and with use of the rotoscoping animation technique, players loved the enormous fictional universe.

ODD WORLDS

We examine other games set in bizarre universes

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL 1992
■ Talking pigs? Tick. Or rather, raise eyebrows. A commercial failure it may have been, but the planet Hyllis was under siege and freelance hack Jade was just the sort to go head-to-head with the alien race, Domz.

THE LONGEST JOURNEY 1999
■ Set in a parallel universe, this point-and-click adventure game saw April Ryan shifting between Arcadia and Industrial Stark and all of the various hazards that were present in each of them.

HEART OF DARKNESS 1998
■ The Darklands was a foreboding place with winged shadow creatures and monsters. Controlled by the Master of Darkness, you didn't always want to avoid death given the deliciously explicit meet-the-maker scenes you'd witness.
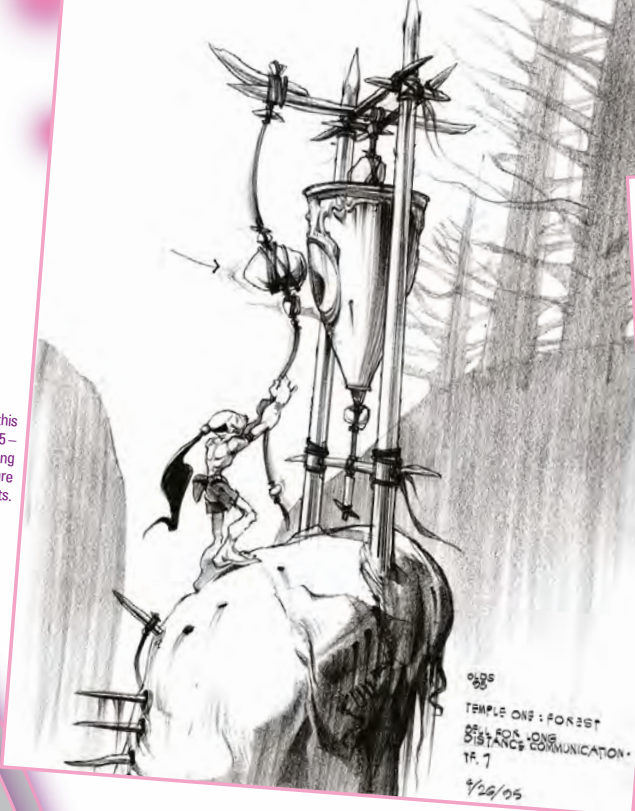
» Early artwork – this from 26 April 1995 – shows the thinking behind the strange nature of the world Abe inhabits.

▶ *Abe's Oddysee* was a huge success and it sold well in the lead up to Christmas, prompting a Game Boy version called *Oddworld Adventures* to be released in 1998. If there was a complaint, it was the lack of a quick-save facility – "It was maddening that we delivered without getting it in the first time," muses Lorne. "Chalk it up to lessons learned." – but the team made sure it was implemented in the sequel.

"We had just nine months to release *Abe's Exoddus* for Christmas following *Oddysee*'s release," recalls Lorne. "It was a super crunch all the way through the entire development, and this was less than half the time that *Abe's Oddysee* took us to develop. But it was more complicated as we also believed we needed 'twice the game' in sheer poundage."

The second game in the series, which was released in November 1998, picked up where the debut game left off. Abe had become a celebrity but was told that the Glukkons, a leading, ruthless, capitalist, industrial race with a disregard for worker rights, was grabbing blind Mudokons and enslaving them to excavate a Mudokon burial site. With a poison being created from the bones of the dead, Abe had to find a cure for the illness and prevent the creation of SoulStorm's brew.

This time out, the characters became more emotionally engaging and the
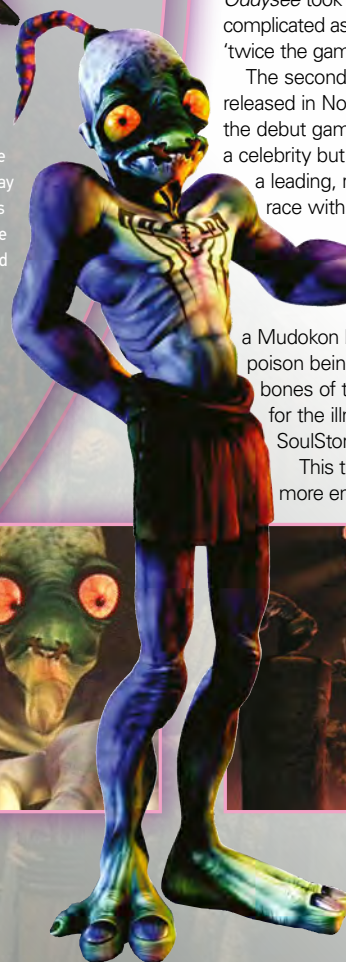
» With a face like that he should be easy to spot…
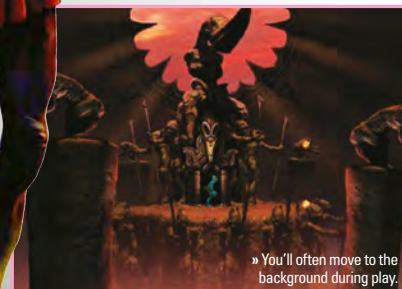
» You'll often move to the background during play.

» Cut-scenes did a great job of conveying Abe's weird and wacky personality.

The first game had a heads-up display, but this was dropped for the sequel. "It was a goal of mine to try to eliminate any menu elements that broke the reality horizon," Lorne explains. "Floating GUI elements reinforce for you 'this is a game' and for the original *Abe* games we wanted to get away from that impression and instead try to instil the sensation of the player being responsible for these people living in this world."

In trying to remove all traces of the traditional heads-up display, Oddworld Inhabitants attempted to find more clever, subtle methods of communicating necessary information, and tried to do it in more logical ways so that it felt more like a film. "We wanted the elements to feel like they were within the world rather than a HUD layered over the world," Lorne continues. "It was attempting to accomplish a deeper impression of a 'living creature adventure', rather than just a 'gaming adventure'."

The emotions helped bring the creatures to life. "The second game had more entertainment value as well as a stronger emotional relationship to these silly little characters," says Lorne. "We always want you to laugh when you're playing our games, regardless of how dark their subject matter is."

And dark is a good description. Much of that is down to Lorne himself. He is a deep thinker who, with the *Oddworld* series of games, was aiming to craft a gameplay and story experience that drew on a sense of injustice. Festering in the back of Lorne's mind was a concern for disturbing human rights abuses by powerful corporations from the shipping docks of Bangladesh to the diamond or gold mines in South America and South Africa. He wanted *Oddworld* to have a dark premise but

follow the lead set by *The Simpsons* and *The Daily Show*, both of which refrain from getting up on a soap box. Like them, he did not want to lose sight of *Oddworld* as entertainment and believed that humour and narrative would combine to raise important issues.

He denies that the series is political. "Personally, I think politics is for chumps," he says. "It's for suckers who still believe they have people fighting for their interests in the greater halls of power and often willingly refuse to see that their would be heroes have been completely compromised." But he talks of an "insane elite class of globalists actively ruining the planet for the rest of us and for their own short-term power gains".

"It was always these practises that inspired the content of *Oddworld*, as these stories started taking shape 20 years ago," Lorne ▶

» Abe's world is a seriously oppressive one. Poor Abe.

pace picked up. Gamespeak instructions were used to command multiple Mudokons at the same time, and Mudokons found it harder to follow Abe because many of them were blind. For Lanning, it was about giving the game a further level of polish, depth and challenge.

"Our approach to the game was pretty much compatible with how you would approach a film," says Lorne. "With both you start with a script, but we then used an additional layer of game mechanics that we knew we wanted to implement or evolve upon.

"So starting with these two key high-level components we worked them up simultaneously. We integrated the script tightly against the ramping of mechanics in gameplay. Our target was continually working to try to find a tighter fusion of narrative that was not only engaging as a story, but was also informative and foreshadowing of new play mechanics that would be coming up next for the gamer."

ODD ADVENTURES
Your guide to Abe and co's numerous retail releases

ABE'S ODDYSEE
DEVELOPER: ODDWORLD INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: GT INTERACTIVE
PLATFORMS: PLAYSTATION, WINDOWS
YEAR: 1997

ABE'S EXODDUS
DEVELOPER: ODDWORLD INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: GT INTERACTIVE
PLATFORMS: PLAYSTATION, WINDOWS
YEAR: 1998

ODDWORLD ADVENTURES
DEVELOPER: SAFFIRE
PUBLISHER: SAFFIRE
PLATFORM: GAME BOY
YEAR: 1998

ODDWORLD ADVENTURES 2
DEVELOPER: SAFFIRE
PUBLISHER: SAFFIRE
PLATFORM: GAME BOY COLOR
YEAR: 2000

MUNCH'S ODDYSEE
DEVELOPER: ODDWORLD INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
PLATFORM: XBOX
YEAR: 2001

MUNCH'S ODDYSEE
DEVELOPER: ART CO
PUBLISHER: THQ INC
PLATFORM: GAME BOY ADVANCE
YEAR: 2001

STRANGER'S WRATH
DEVELOPER: ODDWORLD INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
PLATFORM: XBOX
YEAR: 2005

» *Munch's Oddysee* was Abe's first proper 3D adventure.

» Munch was the main protagonist of the third game.

continues. "So for me, I look deep into the darkest practises of the kleptoclass in a constant search of vehicles to inspire fiction from these practises in an effort to transform that darkness into a launch point for some seriously relevant and deeply ironic modern myth humour."

Lorne's outlook had an effect on the types of enemies in the game that were always designed around how they would play. The Glukkons were inspired by the kleptoclass. "Big shots bossing people around while ultimately being pretty useless parasites. Like bankers," he says. New enemies were also introduced including Flying Sligs, Slugs, Mine Cars and Greeters. "They were all first designed as challenges within our code reach, then we interpreted the mechanics into themed characters," Lorne says.

Following yet further acclaim, Lorne and his team pushed on with the third of the planned five games. The loyalty to PlayStation had gone and *Munch's Oddysee* was being slated for an exclusive November 2001 release on the Xbox.

As with the other games, there were two endings. "We did this because we always wanted empathy to be a major factor in the game, but if you played the game without empathy, we wanted you to get an ending that reflected your personal character," says Lorne. "If you went through our journey as a heartless douche, we wanted to remind you what a schmuck you were being and how it would ruin the fate of those you were supposed to be helping."

But this instalment was the first time *Oddworld* was rendered in three dimensions. "At the time, everyone was enamoured with 3D and the gaming press was speaking of 3D as the only viable way," Lorne recalls. "It was sad to see all the genres being left behind because they weren't using new chipsets. Regardless, if you wanted to keep getting funded, you needed to stay with the chipsets and where the audience interests were heading, and by the time we got to the Xbox it was all about 3D otherwise you probably weren't getting funded."

The added dimension was a challenge to capture what made Abe special in his awkwardness and abilities, yet have that embedded in a free roaming space. There was

" We always wanted empathy to be a major factor in the game "
Lorne Lanning

also a huge real-time 3D learning curve that all of the team was going through. But they made the most of the situation and, with players not only playing Abe but Munch too, the game could enter fresh waters.

"We needed the ability to swap between characters while also dealing with targeting in possession," says Lorne. "In the *Abe* games, they were 2D and so possession was proximity auto-targeting. It was easy for the user to understand who they would be possessing. Once we entered 3D, the auto nature of it needed to change as depth and dimension added new dynamics and required new accuracies to offer the player."

He said it was a case of the player wanting to possess "that Slig over there, not; hopefully that one over there but we'll see what Slig the game chooses for us. That wasn't going to work," he explains, "so we needed possession to be targetable and, being in a 3D world, targeting was as easy as character navigation, so we used the same navigation abilities to control your possession orb. You could then navigate to nail your target."
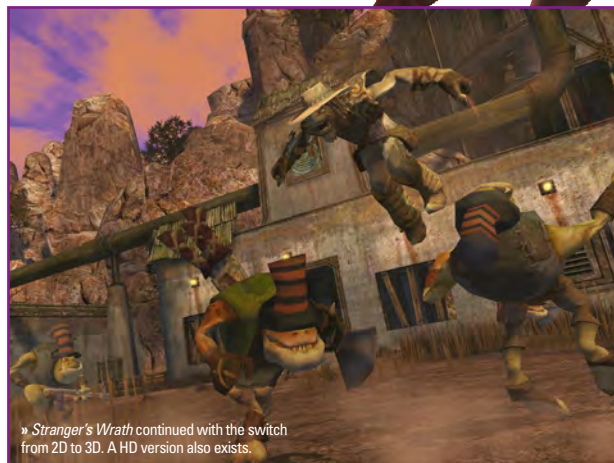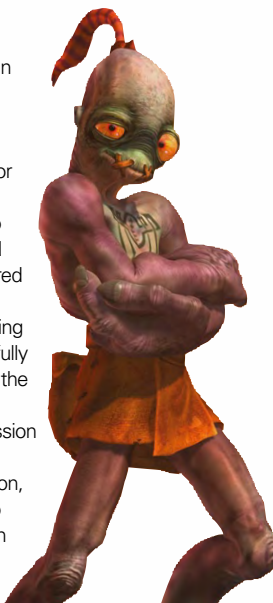
The reviews were not as favourable for *Munch's Oddysee*, with some believing the puzzles lacked variation. Lorne has no complaints. "I always felt all of our puzzles were not varied enough, but these are challenges with puzzle games and the amount of code we were writing for each puzzle," he confesses. "Puzzle games are not very economical with code. Combine that with development environments that were unpredictable in terms of budgeting, and you found yourself in tight spots making lots of compromises."

The fourth game, *Stranger's Wrath*, however, was a superb return to form. Released in January 2005 in America, it was critically acclaimed. It had first and third-person perspectives and was also faster. The team wanted speed to be a factor in the third-person in particular, due to the character's nature and ability to run faster. Stranger could become a ramming melee fighter at higher speeds and, by increasing in speed, his motion ability morphed into a motorcycle mode. He didn't, as Lorne explains, "pivot on a dime with speed". He steered and leaned into turns and it allowed for him to run much faster and feel more like a vehicle when controlled.

"This allowed us to have more 'retreat for higher ground' ability if you were getting overwhelmed in a combat situation," says Lorne. "Now you could retreat, and with enough speed to get past getting shot in the back – something I felt was very much missing out there for character-driven combat games."

Stranger's Wrath had an element of stealth, too. It remained true to the character's nature but also compounded the chemistry of choices that players were able to have at their disposal. It offered the gamer more choices in how to solve any combat situation. But another decision was made: *Stranger's Wrath* contained role-playing elements.

"Action-adventure games seemed inevitably heading toward a role-playing model, at least at an accounting level," says Lorne. "If the game was going to have a persistent economy, and one that your character needed to pursue in the narrative, then it needed to incorporate more modification and purchasability for the main character. Having this inherent in a system gives you many more things that you can make the gamer do for various reasons at

» *Stranger's Wrath* continued with the switch from 2D to 3D. A HD version also exists.
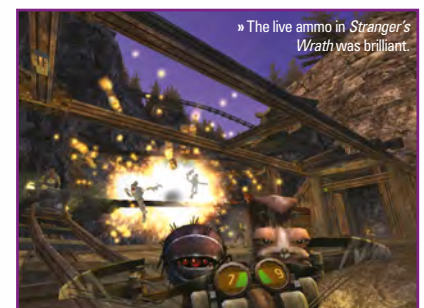
» The live ammo in *Stranger's Wrath* was brilliant.

» Rupture farms has never looked this good.

THE NEW KEEPER OF ODDWORLD

Five years after Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath, the series was given a dust down by developer Just Add Water. We talk to founder and CEO Stewart Gilray about the HD remakes

You began working on the *Oddworld* franchise in May 2010. Were you a fan of the series and how did you get involved?

I'd met Lorne briefly at GDC 2009. He was one of my industry icon legends and someone I'd always wanted to meet. Over the years I'd been asking a mutual friend to persuade Lorne to go back to doing a 2D-type game but with 3D assets – a remake of *Abe's Oddysee* or a game of a similar nature – but in June 2009, Lorne and I started exchanging emails. We spent the next nine months talking about various things and then he asked if Just Add Water could help them out as they'd been let down by another developer. He wanted us to look at *Stranger's Wrath* for the PC and I said yes, as long as we could do a PS3 version. We began to work on *Stranger HD* for PS3 in late September

2009 while still working on the initial PC release of *Stranger,* which was a straight port from Xbox.

By the time of your involvement, the series had been stagnant for four years. Were there discussions about moving the series on?

There were no real discussions. It was a case of 'let's do this project, and see where it leads to', and we've now released the initial PC release of *Stranger's Wrath,* three versions of *Stranger's Wrath HD,* two versions of *Munch's Oddysee HD* and we're working on the multi-platform remake of *Abe's Oddysee, Oddworld: New 'N' Tasty.* We only had two staff when we began the initial version but we have 16 now. The plan is we will continue and work on some proper new projects. We're going through a re-structure at the moment that will help that become a reality.

There were promises of *SligStorm, Fangus Klot, Squeek's Oddysee* and some other games. What was happening and why were these games not getting off the ground?

When the original studio

was closed in April 2005, it was because Lorne and Sherry McKenna had decided enough was enough working with publishers. The primary reason was the difficulty of working on a triple-A title with budgets north of $15m, especially if you're only seeing a small return rate due to publisher/developer agreements the way they were back then. *Fangus Klot* was in development when that happened, so that was the main victim of what happened then. Lorne had been working on the story and design for *Squeek's Oddysee* as well, but couldn't solve a problem he had with it so it kept getting put on the back burner until that thing was solved. And *SligStorm* just didn't happen mainly due to working on *Munch's Oddysee.*

What makes *Oddworld* such a special series of games?

This is pretty easy actually: character, story, the world, craziness but most importantly the humour.

Is there still a place for 2D gaming in the modern era?

Why not? I think both pure 2D art and 3D art with 2D gameplay can still work very well, and we're showing that with *Oddworld: New 'N' Tasty.* I think this need for everything to be in 3D isn't always the right thing to do; there are better solutions if the design requires it.
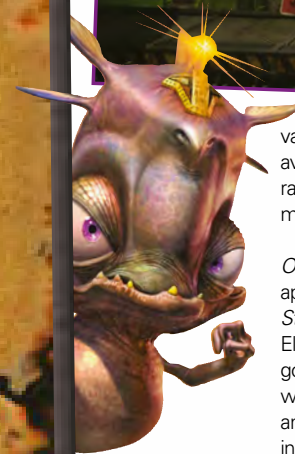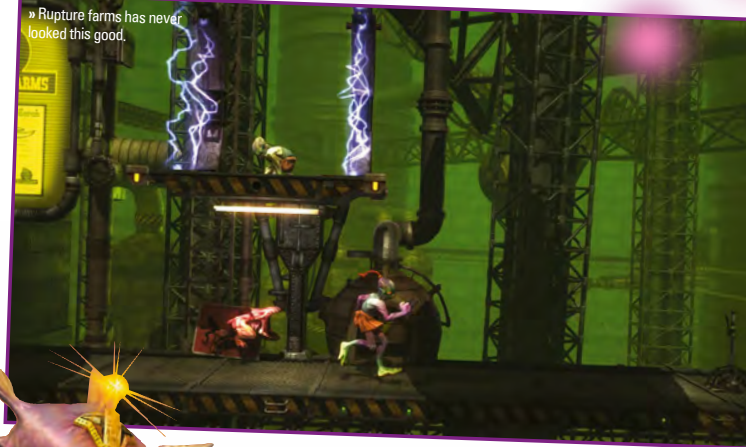
various times, all of which are added tools available to the designers that help overall ramping while helping to decrease a potential monotony that can come with a game."
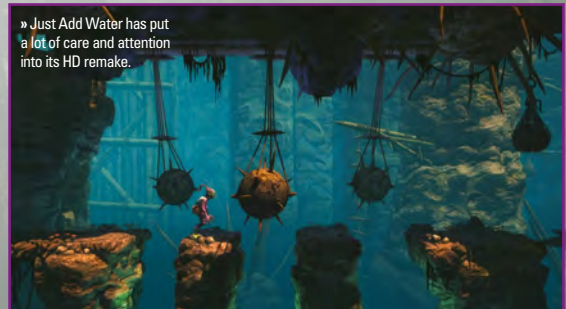
The fourth game became the last *Oddworld* title and the fifth game did not appear, cutting short the original quintology. *Stranger's Wrath* had been published by Electronic Arts and, while Lorne doesn't go too deep, he says, "Our experience working with the last publisher pretty much annihilated any desire we might have had left in continuing to work with big publishers," which points to a potential issue.

Plans for other games came and went. Names such as *Oddworld: The Hand Of Odd, SligStorm, The Brutal Ballad Of Fangas Klot, Oddworld: Squeek's Oddysee, Oddworld: Munch's Exoddus* and *Oddworld: Slave Circus* were put forward over the years. And while a game may well have surfaced around 2008, the Western financial crisis and work on a new project called *Citizen Siege* caused a distraction.

Remakes and digital content appear to be the way forward for now, and the *Oddworld* franchise is being built organically and without financing. But it means that the team cannot spend in the way it did, and it will take a while before triple-A contemporary content is released. "We've talked about a number of games but that was probably a mistake," says Lorne. "It's something I won't be doing until I know they are paid for."

It seems the appetite is still there, however. "We're very grateful for the way things have worked out but, like a lot of artists, we're always wanting to do better," he says, and we pray to hear Abe's farts in a new game sooner rather than later.

» *New 'N' Tasty* was a great HD update.

» Just Add Water has put a lot of care and attention into its HD remake.

★★★

### THE MAKING OF

MEDAL OF HONOR

It is one of the PlayStation's longest running franchises and was overseen by none other than Steven Spielberg himself. Ed Smith talks to the men who proved that it was possible to treat war with the utmost respect
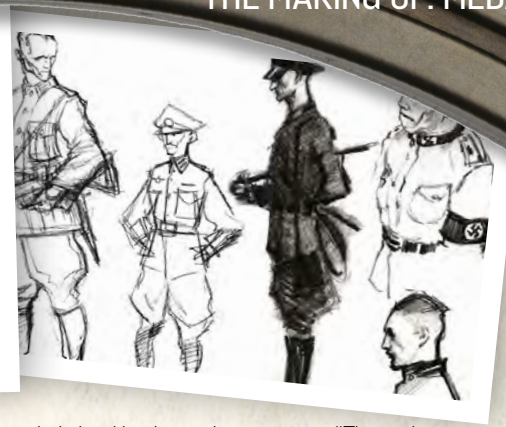
» There's a variety of weapons, so make sure you always have the best one for each situation.

» Being hit with a bazooka shell would spell an instant death.

» Objectives, like sneaking about a U-boat in disguise, were integral to *MOH*'s level design.
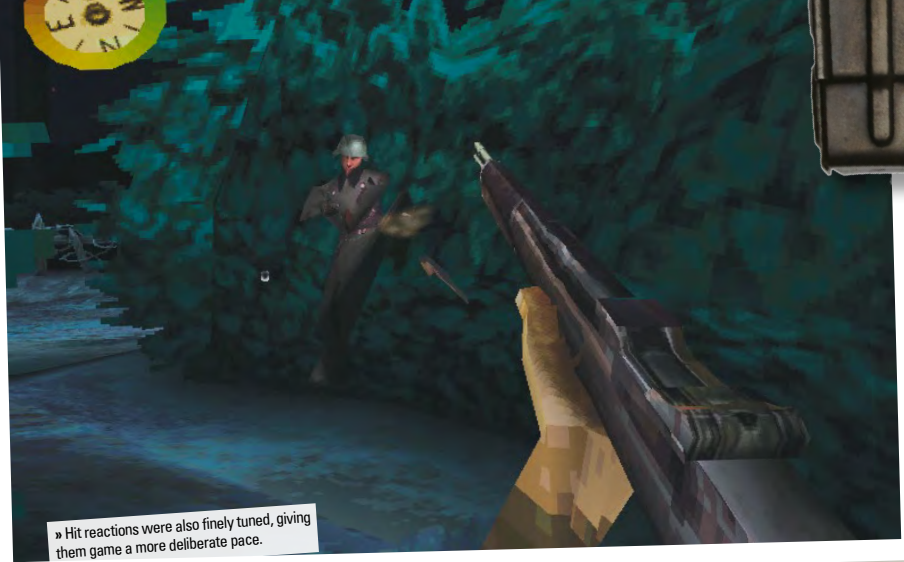
» Hit reactions were also finely tuned, giving them game a more deliberate pace.

By the time work started on *Medal Of Honor*, the Second World War had been over for 52 years. The top-grossing films were *Titanic, Men In Black* and *Jurassic Park: The Lost World*, and the videogame charts were dominated by *Quake* and *GoldenEye 007*. This was before *Saving Private Ryan*, before *The Thin Red Line*. Though war drama was about to have a big resurgence, in 1997, it wasn't in vogue.

Similarly, the PlayStation was still finding its feet. Sony's first console had sold well, shipping around 25 million units worldwide, but the catalogue of games was dominated by just a few genres. *Tomb Raider* and *Final Fantasy VII* were the biggest hits that year, along with *Tekken, Grand Theft Auto* and *PaRappa The Rapper*. A studio called Insomniac had just shipped its *Doom* clone, *Disruptor*, over to Japan, but apart from that, on PlayStation the first-person shooter was yet to break through.

So Dreamworks Interactive, founded by Steven Spielberg and comprised of only 30 people, had a challenge on its hands. Not only did it want to reintroduce war history to the mainstream, but also build a sophisticated first-person shooter on an as yet untested platform. Peter Hirschmann, *Medal Of Honor*'s writer and producer, remembers the early stages of development:

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:**
ELECTRONIC ARTS
» **DEVELOPER:**
DREAMWORKS INTERACTIVE
» **RELEASED:** 1999
» **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION
» **GENRE:**
FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

"*Medal Of Honor* kicked off officially on 11 November 1997, when Steven returned from Europe after wrapping principal photography on *Saving Private Ryan*. He wanted to teach a new generation about World War Two, but knew his movie would be too intense for younger audiences. His insight was to reach young people through a medium they'd embraced: videogames

"Looking back it's ridiculous, but the idea was controversial at the time because he was proposing an FPS that didn't have high-tech weapons or take place on another planet. And this was before WW2 had come back into the public consciousness, before *Ryan* and before Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation*. Plus, we only had 2Mb of memory, so forgetting even the broader context of WW2, we first had to figure out how to deliver a fun shooter experience. Not to compare ourselves to *Jaws*, but Steven said that not having a shark that worked all the time forced him to get creative. The same went for our team."

Nobody was more aware of that than Christopher Cross, *MOH*'s lead designer. To accommodate the scale of *Medal Of Honor* on PlayStation, he and fellow designer Lynne Henson had to pull a lot of tricks, as he tells us. "The idea to do a first-person shooter on the PlayStation was f**king crazy. These days you think of someone using, say, the Unreal Engine and

building a whole level by themselves. We couldn't do that. We had to be very careful with the amount of polygons we used because of the hardware.

"An enemy in *MOH* is maybe 200 polys – today, they don't even make hats that are less than 200 polys. So, we could only have four enemies on the screen at once. We had to work with smoke and mirrors so players wouldn't notice the enemies were backfilling. Also, we had to cut skyboxes. That's why every level takes place at night. In the end, though, that kind of worked out, since you're playing an OSS officer doing secret missions. It added a lot of atmosphere."

That wasn't the only instance where technical boundaries actually aided *MOH*'s development. As design work went on, Christopher, contrary to his initial reaction, discovered the PSone was well suited to a war FPS.

"The analogue controller was announced before we launched but we didn't design around it because we couldn't guarantee it had market penetration, so we were using the D-pad. That gave the games a really deliberate pace, since we were tuning them to the directional buttons. We had to allow time to set up the situation, to show that, say, there are three guys coming, there's cover over here, a gun on that wall. We let players figure out the situation and decide how to approach it.

"Plus, killing enemies was never meant to be an objective, never meant to be something you had to do to finish a level. Modern games have these cardboard cutouts popping up all the time – it's just a test of your switch skills. With *MOH*, you'd need to shoot one guy in the foot, one guy in the hand then one guy in the head, then come back to the other two. It was a much slower paced game. It was a lot more intimate." ▶

» The OSS was used as a backdrop, since it gave *MOH*'s writers context to the send player all across Europe.
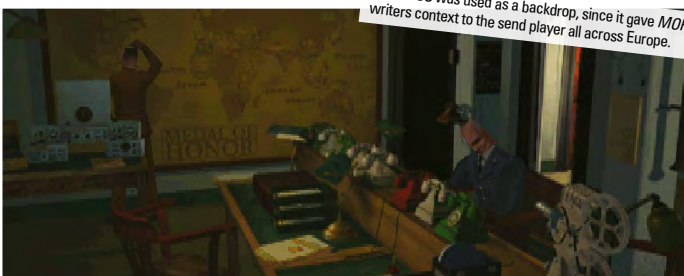
THE REAL MEDAL OF HONOR

Though he now works for Nexon – the free-to-play publisher launching Cliff Bleszinki's next game, BlueStreak – Christopher Cross has a neat idea for a new Medal Of Honor:

"It'd be based on real *Medal Of Honor* recipients, because some of their stories are amazing. There's one guy, John Robert Fox, who was a forward observer during a siege by German troops on a town in Italy. He was calling in artillery and basically, for him to actually stop the advance of the German column, he had to call in an artillery strike on his own position. They warned him that he could die but he did it anyway, and then later they found his body. That would have been an amazing mission, putting you in the position where you realise, off the top of your own head, that you have to do this and you'll probably die."

» Peter Hirschmann wanted to keep the game's briefing sections short but highly informative.

» Sometimes a simple gun isn't enough to get the job done.

▶ Just as Christopher found a way to make the PlayStation hardware work for *MOH*, Peter Hirschman turned the daunting task of creating an educational war game to his favour. With Spielberg's brief in mind, he had the responsibility to make *Medal Of Honor* historically accurate without compromising its entertainment value. The more he wrote and researched, the more he found that one aspect complemented the other.

"It was key to provide as much historical context as possible," he says. "Absolutely, there was a concerted effort to give *Medal Of Honor* an educational quality, but it almost felt subversive. I didn't want to scare anyone into thinking it was anything but a game. First and foremost, *Medal Of Honor* was meant to be entertainment.

"From a story perspective, it was all about backing into it. We needed someone whose initial combat experience matched the player (ie they had none), but yet had a legitimate reason to be in the European Theater of Operations in 1944. So Jimmy Patterson was a C-47 pilot, shot down behind enemy lines. We needed a context to move him all around the continent. So bam, he's recruited into the OSS. That allowed us to cover a lot of ground. To

this day, I imagine we're the only game that had mission objectives varying from sabotaging V2 rockets to saving a rare edition of the Canterbury Tales."

Just as the absent skyboxes and minimal enemies gave *Medal Of Honor* its atmosphere, the authentic World War backdrop distinguished it from other shooters of the Nineties. The game had a distinctive flavour. It lived on the principal that truth was better than fiction. "I think people actually love to learn history," says Peter. "And working with constraints will often push you to a better place. Instead of fighting the limitations, you embrace them and get to work."

But it wasn't all plain sailing. Despite the pioneering *GoldenEye*, objective-

based first-person shooters were still uncommon in the Nineties. *Duke Nukem 3D*, *Doom* and *Quake* challenged players to simply get from one end of a level to another – there was no need to program in things like bombs, collectibles or stealth mechanics.

That put Christopher on the horns of a dilemma. If *Medal Of Honor* was to have this broad, authentic-feeling narrative, he and the other designers needed to find ways to make all these objectives – from sneaking aboard a U-boat to sabotaging it with dynamite – flow together. It meant a lot of scripting work and, again, getting creative with the PlayStation's hardware.

"Lynne did most of the paper designs for levels. I reviewed those, handed them off to the artists then

took them back and started to add in the gameplay elements. We'd walk through the maps saying 'we're going to do this objective here, have the rail-gun here' and so on. It was very organic. But then we had to develop a scripting language that could send messages between objects in the game, something to tell an objective when it was complete or when bombs had been picked up – things like that. Things got complicated. The Wolfram level for example had lots of objectives. That meant the level couldn't exist 100 per cent in memory – it was too much. So we had to stream it all off the disc, which meant breaking the world up into compartments, so that when you walked between areas, parts of the level would load and unload in front and behind you.

"But, of course, all of the scripts still had to be associated with an object, so in that one level on the boat, the key was at the front, the door was at the back and because of the loading and unloading, when you picked up the key it didn't unlock the door because the door didn't exist – it hadn't loaded. The game didn't have an inventory, so we had to come up with a lot

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE NEVERHOOD
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1996
SKULLMONKEYS
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1997
BOOM BLOX (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: WII
YEAR: 2008

"INSTEAD OF FIGHTING THE LIMITATIONS, YOU EMBRACE THEM AND GET TO WORK "
Christopher Cross

» Dale Dye, Spielberg's technical advisor on *Saving Private Ryan*, would later join the *Medal Of Honor* franchise.

of creative ways to get around that."

After almost two years in development, *Medal Of Honor* launched in October 1999. With the fundamentals now in place, Dreamworks was free to follow it up with a sequel, *Medal Of Honor: Underground*, less than 12 months later.

★

Alongside *Saving Private Ryan* and latterly *Band Of Brothers*, *MOH* spearheaded the resurgence of WW2 history in popular culture. Christopher would go on to head up design on *Medal Of Honor: Frontline*, while Peter became EA's project lead on the PC-only *Allied Assault*. Two guys working for him, Jason West and Vince Zampella, would eventually break off and form their own World War Two franchise – *Call Of Duty*.

Now, 15 years and three generations since Dreamworks embarked on its great crusade, Christopher worries that the war game has gone backwards: "In *Medal Of Honor*, you were going into Germany, and you'd find the Germans sitting around a fire or taking a pee, because this was their home – this is where they were stationed. You could see a backpack propped up or something on a bench. We didn't just popcorn-spawn 50 guys.

"The intention was to make you feel like 'I f**ked up that guy's day' or 'those guys were just eating soup, damn'. It had to feel like it was them or you, not that there were ten more things between you and the next movie moment.

"We wanted people to have some connection to the Germans, which in turn would give every situation a sense of gravity. But in modern games, in the interest of speedy asset creation, they put gas masks on enemies and stuff like that. They dehumanise them. To actually do a reboot of *MOH* in the old mould, you'd need storytelling chops. But I think the monetary and market forces on these games now makes something with a bit of gravity destined to fail. This is why World War Two shooters still make sense. You know the Allies win and that the world is a better place for it, and that makes a big change about your attitude towards your own actions. It means more than just watching the Eiffel Tower blow up or whatever." ✱
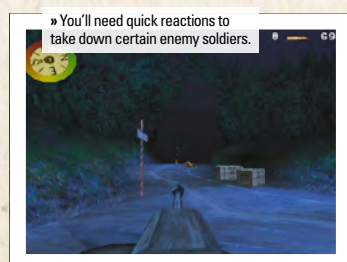
» You'll need quick reactions to take down certain enemy soldiers.

SPIELBERG ON THE SMALL SCREEN
## There are plenty of games based on the movie mogul's films
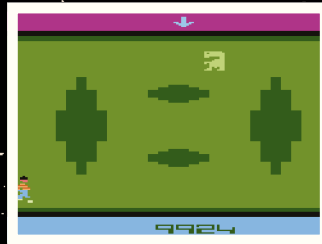
ET: THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL
FORMAT: Atari 2600 **YEAR:** 1982
■ Commonly described as one of the worst games ever made, hundreds of thousands of unsold copies of *ET* were eventually consigned to the Atari landfill site in New Mexico, which was excavated in 2013.


INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM
FORMAT: Various **YEAR:** 1985
■ A rock-hard platformer, *Temple Of Doom* is notable for its licensed John Williams score and voice clips from Harrison Ford. They're digitised, though, so they sound a bit rubbish.
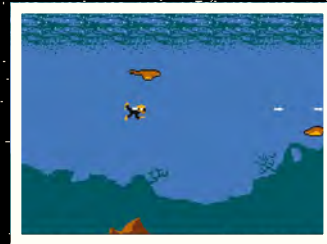
JAWS
FORMAT: NES **YEAR:** 1987
■ This 8-bit adaptation of the original summer blockbuster combines action and RPG-elements, as you kill smaller sharks to upgrade your skills before taking on the daddy: Jaws himself.
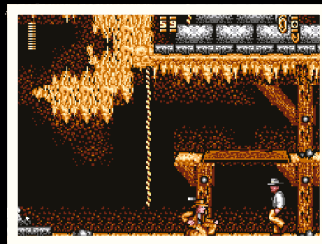

INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE: THE ACTION GAME
FORMAT: Various **YEAR:** 1989
■ One of the earlier LucasArts efforts, this platformer for the Spectrum and various others featured a punishing final level where players had to race to find the Holy Grail.


HOOK
FORMAT: Various **YEAR:** 1992
■ There were several games based on Spielberg's pirate adventure, the most famous being a side-scroller for SNES, Genesis and Game Gear. The publisher, Sony Imagesoft, would later merge with Sony Interactive.
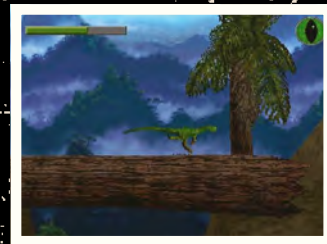

THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK
FORMAT: PlayStation, Saturn **YEAR:** 1997
■ This was the second Dreamworks game based on *Jurassic Park*. Also worth looking up is *Jurassic Park: Trespasser*, which features the most bizarre aiming controls ever.
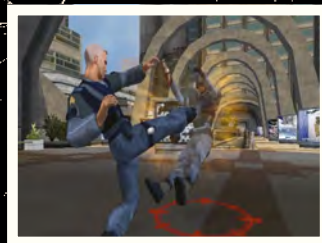

MINORITY REPORT: EVERYBODY RUNS
FORMAT: Various **YEAR:** 2002
■ It's strange this got panned the way it did. Developed by Treyarch, of *Call Of Duty* fame, and published by Activision, it also had an original score by *Hitman* stalwart Jesper Kyd.
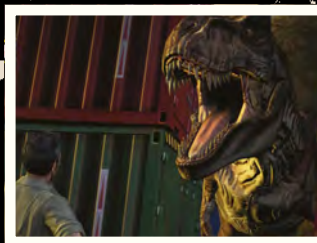
JURASSIC PARK: THE GAME
FORMAT: Various **YEAR:** 2011
■ After securing a licence deal with Universal, Telltale, maker of *The Walking Dead*, produced this four-part episodic adventure game focusing on events before, during and after the 1993 blockbuster.
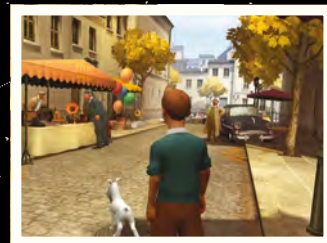
THE ADVENTURES OF TINTIN: THE SECRET OF THE UNICORN
FORMAT: Various **YEAR:** 2011
■ Ubisoft Montpellier launched this to tie in with Spielberg's underrated adaptation of the famous Belgian comic. A sequel to that movie is reportedly in the works.
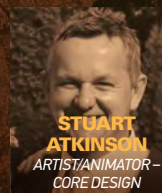
TO[M]
RAI[D]

Few characters achieve iconic status, and Lara Croft ascended to become a superstar. But it takes a lot of hard work to stay relevant over two decades, as Nick Thorpe and Darran Jones learn from the people tasked with bringing Lara to life…

HALL OF HEROES

Everyone we spoke to about Lara Croft

STUART ATKINSON
ARTIST/ANIMATOR – CORE DESIGN

SHELLEY BLOND
VOICE ACTOR – LARA CROFT

WILL KERSLAKE
LEAD LIVE DESIGNER – CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

IAN LIVINGSTONE
CEO – EIDOS

MEAGAN MARIE
COMMUNITY MANAGER – CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

NATHAN MCCREE
COMPOSER – CORE DESIGN

MB DER

In the mid-Nineties, the videogames industry was short on icons, but there were plenty of characters to go around. You were hardly a developer if you didn't have your own 'hero' – and Core Design had just spun the kart racer *BC Racers* off from its *Chuck Rock* series. Save for the loose tie of ancient history, that game might not have much to do with *Tomb Raider* but for a single name: Toby Gard.

As a talented young designer, Toby Gard had moved on from *BC Racers* with the vision to create a project unlike anything else at the time, and something that would become truly iconic. *Tomb Raider* was to be a 3D action-adventure game, distinguished by its female protagonist. Initially conceived as a South American adventurer by the name of Laura Cruz, she would eventually become the British aristocrat Lara Croft, an athletic and independent adventurer with a penchant for collecting ancient artefacts. While Lara wasn't ▶

PETER CONNELLY
COMPOSER – CORE DESIGN
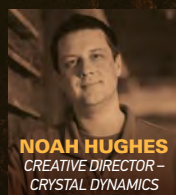
NOAH HUGHES
CREATIVE DIRECTOR – CRYSTAL DYNAMICS
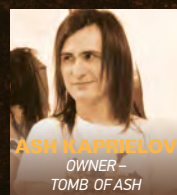
ASH KAPRIELOV
OWNER – TOMB OF ASH
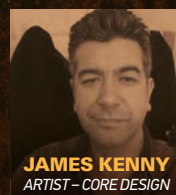
JAMES KENNY
ARTIST – CORE DESIGN

GAVIN RUMMERY
PROGRAMMER – CORE DESIGN

ANDY SANDHAM
LEVEL DESIGNER – CORE DESIGN

MURTI SCHOFIELD
WRITER – CORE DESIGN

HEATHER STEVENS
ARTIST/LEVEL DESIGNER – CORE DESIGN

BRINGING LARA TO LIFE

Shelley Blond on voicing Lara in the very first Tomb Raider game

How did you get the job of voicing Lara Croft?
I was asked to audition for the character after Eidos and Core had been searching for the right voice for quite a few months. I was sent a few sentences from the script, along with a very rough sketch of Lara, and I recorded them into a cassette recorder and sent it to Core. A few days later I was asked to take part in a conference call with a few people from Eidos and Core, including Nathan McCree, and after performing a few more audition lines was told I had the job. It was wonderful to get the role, knowing they had looked for so long and so hard.

How much information were you given about the character before performing the dialogue?
For the audition I was simply given the rough drawing and told she was a girl with a feel for adventure and 'spoke quite well'. I took that on board and read for the part as I felt she would sound. For the actual job, I was given more detail about her upbringing and background. I was asked to perform her voice in a very plain non-emotive manner and in a 'female Bond' type of way. I would have added more inflection, tone and emotion to my voice but they wanted to keep it how they felt it should sound, which was quite right. My job was to bring their character to life.

Why didn't you reprise the role in the sequels?
I was asked to reprise the role for the second game, as the chemistry worked, the game was so successful and reviews for the voice as well as the actual game were great. But by that time I was contracted for other companies and we couldn't make that work. I did give my permission for them to use all my sound bites from the first game for *Tomb Raider II* and *Tomb Raider III*... like the fighting, falling and 'yes' and 'no'. So I am still in the games. Judith Gibbons voiced the game but it's all Lara's original sound bites.

It's such an honour to be the original voice of such an iconic character. There are so many fans of the games, it has touched so many peoples' lives, had such a global impact and I am honestly thrilled to be part of it all.

» Lara's iconography can be attributed to her appeal for both male and female demographics. She is a hero for everyone.

» The infamous T-Rex encounter, as captured from a nice safe vantage point.

> ❝A real buzz was building around Tomb Raider, but we were still prudent with our forecasts❞
>
> Ian Livingstone

▶ the first female protagonist in games, this was still a bold choice – few games included strong female leads. Dwelling on Lara Croft's qualities as a character, however, diminishes the fact that the choice to make a 3D action-adventure game was also bold. Not only was the project unlike anything else available at the time, the lead platform for the game was the Sega Saturn – a machine that would become well-known for its awkward and non-standard handling of 3D visuals.

"We were definitely trailblazing a lot of what we did on *Tomb Raider*," says Gavin Rummery, a programmer on the first two *Tomb Raider* games. "When Toby first described what he envisaged on my first day at Core, I wasn't sure it was possible because nothing like it existed." Of course, had that precedent existed, it wouldn't have been a big deal anyway.

"We didn't think about looking at repeating something that had been done before, so had never considered needing other games for reference," recalls Heather Stevens, a graphic artist and level designer on the first two games.

It was an enormous departure from what Core Design had done before, and the team struggled with it. "What appeared the greatest challenge was how on earth we would create the actual environments and get Lara to interact with them," Gavin recalls. "Heather was attempting to build them directly in 3D Studio which could only edit in wireframe mode, but neither Paul [Douglas, programmer] or I had a clue how we could get a character to interact with freeform environments given the processing constraints of the day."

"The breakthrough was the decision to build everything on a grid," continues Gavin. "To me this was the point *Tomb Raider* became feasible and everything seemed to fall into place. Toby was able to define Lara's moves, Paul could get the control working, and I was able to build a level editor that Neal [Boyd, artist] and Heather could use to build and test the environments far quickly than would've been possible using 3D Studio."

Getting the sound of the game right was important, and this was a task which fell to Nathan McCree – although given the amount of time he had to so, it might have felt rather more like it had fallen *on* him. "The first *Tomb Raider* was such a rush. I think I had about three weeks to compose the music. It was mostly a case of, write something and then figure out a way to use it later," he tells us. "What became apparent during the installation process was that the tunes worked best when placed in specific locations to describe a particular place or feeling at a specific moment in the game. And this gave birth to the idea of location-specific music."

Nathan wasn't the only one feeling the pressure, as the whole team was battling a very tight deadline. "It
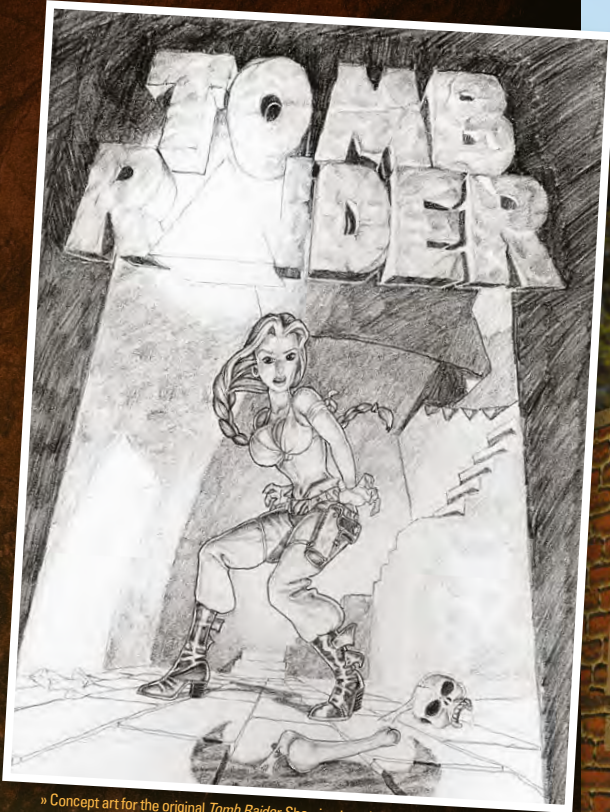
» Concept art for the original *Tomb Raider*. Showing Lara in, unsurprisingly, a tomb.

was tough developing *Tomb Raider* (long days etc.) but very rewarding," Heather confirms. This eventually led to extra staff being drafted in. "I was an animator and model builder working in the room next to the *Tomb Raider* team and also a good friend of Toby Gard," explains Stuart Atkinson, an artist who worked on the earlier *Tomb Raider* games. "He asked if I could help him out with enemy characters, being about four months from the deadline, the pressure was getting pretty serious and his workload was too much. So I jumped at the chance!"

Tomb Raider was released in October 1996 for the Saturn, followed by PlayStation and PC versions in November. It detailed Lara's quest to acquire the Scion Of Atlantis for the mysterious businesswoman Jacqueline Natla. The game was a critical success, and commercial success would follow. But though the team at Core Design was sitting on a hit, it didn't know it. "None of us knew it would be anything like the success it was," says Gavin. "We could tell it was getting favourably received, but it was only when we started seeing the actual sales figures that we realised just how big a success it was." Even the upper management wasn't aware that the game would be enormous. "The preview coverage had been very encouraging. A real buzz was building around *Tomb Raider*, but we were still prudent with our forecasts," says Ian Livingstone, then president and CEO of *Tomb Raider*'s publisher Eidos. "I recall that we put a number in the budget of 100,000 units being sold. Little did we know that the first *Tomb Raider* would go on to sell over seven million units!"

While there's no doubt that the game was a team effort, one man's influence is often cited as a key factor behind the game's success. "Thanks to a very obstinate Toby Gard and his vision of a strong female heroine in a computer game, we can now appreciate the unique Lara Croft," says Heather. "Undoubtedly Lara was a huge aspect in the success of the game and the marketability of the product. She was a character ▶
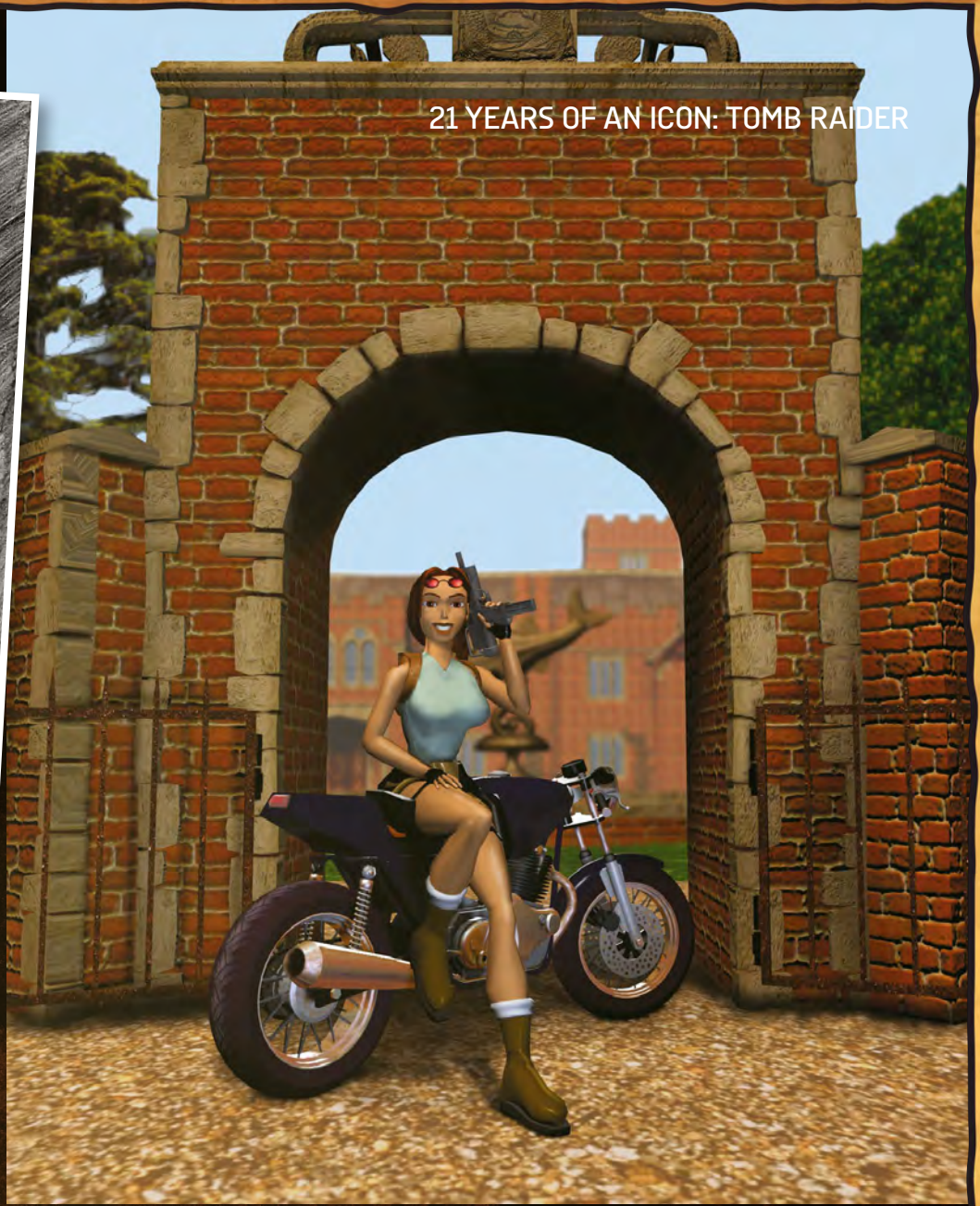
AROUND THE WORLD

Then Tomb Raider games have taken place all over the world. How many of the following exotic locations do you remember?

» Although concept art showed Lara's ponytail it wouldn't appear in-game until *Tomb Raider II*.

▶ that won the hearts of both male and female players. However the game was so much more than the character herself," she continues. "I think the key factor was Toby Gard," Stuart concurs. "It was his vision and he made sure everyone followed it through. He was also lucky with the team he ended up with, not only were they talented, they trusted and believed in him." However, that's not the only factor he credits. "And, of course, how amazing the first game was to play back in the day, it just blew me away."

Unfortunately, Toby Gard would not stick around for the success that followed. Creative differences drove a wedge between him and the management at Core Design, and he would leave the company without getting involved in *Tomb Raider II*, passing up enormous royalties in doing so. Most of the team remained and moved onto the sequel, which had to be ready in less than a year. Surely such a tight deadline was a pain? "Working on the sequel was a natural progression," Heather points out. "We had invested so much time and creativity into *Tomb Raider* that it would have been unthinkable to just walk away from it. It was action stations again for most of the team, and time to get our heads down again."

Externally, Lara Croft was already becoming a crossover star, a fact which brought the success of the first game home to the developers. "On the lead up to the release of *Tomb Raider II*, we had many more press and TV interviews, so things started to hit home for me," Nathan recalls. *The Face* featured a cover story on the character and her popularity. Rhona Mitra was gaining recognition as the 'real life' Lara Croft, and she was already collaborating with Dave Stewart of the Eurythmics on music to be released under Lara's name. This exposure built anticipation for *Tomb* ▶

NEVADA
TOMB RAIDER III

ENGLAND
TOMB RAIDER II, III, LEGEND, UNDERWORLD, ANNIVERSARY, RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

NEW YORK CITY
TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES

LOST ISLAND
TOMB RAIDER

MEXICO
TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

PERU
TOMB RAIDER, TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND
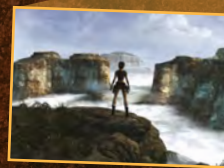
BOLIVIA
TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

ARCTIC SEA
TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

JAN MAYEN ISLAND
TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

SIBERIA
RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

RUSSIA
TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES

IRELAND
TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES

PRAGUE
TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS

KAZAKHSTAN
TOMB RAIDER:LEGEND

VENICE
TOMB RAIDER II

PARIS
TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS

CHINA
TOMB RAIDER II

TOKYO
TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

GREECE
TOMB RAIDER

SYRIA
RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

ROME
TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES

NEPAL
TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

TIBET
TOMB RAIDER II

YAMATAI
TOMB RAIDER 2013

EGYPT
TOMB RAIDER, TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION

MEDITERRANEAN
TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

INDIA
TOMB RAIDER III

CAMBODIA
TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION

ANDAMAN SEA
TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

THAILAND
TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

GHANA
TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

SOUTH PACIFIC
TOMB RAIDER III

ANTARCTICA
TOMB RAIDER III

» Lara's dual pistols are just as iconic as the character is.

» Even the caverns were bigger in *Tomb Raider II*, thanks to graphical advances.

» Ash Kaprielov and several Core Design staff appeared at PLAY Expo's huge *Tomb Raider* celebration, which was organised by replayevents.com.

"I prototyped Lara riding a quad bike using only the animation editor"

Stuart Atkinson

» *Tomb Raider II* added in vehicles, something that Stuart Atkinson was particularly proud in implementing.

▶ *Raider II* to a fever pitch, and Sony took advantage by signing an exclusivity deal with Eidos, ensuring that the PlayStation was the only console to receive it.

Back at Core, the team was busy trying to top what had gone before – even if it meant improving on finer details. "I was pleased to get Lara's ponytail working," says Gavin. "It had been dropped from the original because it just didn't work properly with all the acrobatic moves – it was more like she had an electric eel attached to her head that had a life of its own. But on *TRII* I came up with a way to get it working and was really pleased how natural it looked. The physics were ultra-simple and a complete cheat, but it did the job."

Other additions were far more substantial. Improvements to the graphics engine allowed for wide open outdoor spaces that hadn't been possible in the original game, and Lara was no longer restricted to travelling on foot. "Introducing vehicles was my idea, I'm quite proud of that," says Stuart. "I prototyped Lara riding a quad bike using only the animation editor – I replaced her run animation and attached a quad bike to her bottom – the in-game result gave you a pretty good idea how well it would work."

On the audio front, Nathan was able to make improvements as he was more involved in the development process. "With *Tomb Raider II*, I had a little more development time (about two months) and although I wrote twice the number of tunes, there was a plan in my head about how it was going to piece together," the composer recalls. "I expanded on the themes, establishing new motifs, but mainly focusing on this location-specific idea that had been born in the first game. The implementation improved as I demanded control on how and when each tune would be triggered."

One of the game's most memorable moments was actually born of the tight deadline. "The game was supposed finish after the dragon battle, but it didn't feel like a satisfying conclusion, so we came up with the idea of having an epilogue," Gavin explains. "Due to time constraints the idea of reusing Croft Manor was chosen, with just a pitch battle of Lara defending her home. Then my favourite bit – the 'shower scene' where we got Lara to shoot the player – that was our response to the enquiries about nude cheats!"

Tomb Raider II was another critical and commercial success, surpassing the sales of the original. Plans were set into motion for *Tomb Raider III*, but this time most of the original team opted to move onto a new project. "Knowing you were leaving a big-seller along with the royalty cheques felt a bit of a silly move," Stuart recalls, "but our team wanted at least two years to develop *Tomb Raider III* – to really move it on, but the producers wanted it done in a year. For those who had done that for two consecutive years already it was just too much."

Luckily, the expansion of the team during *Tomb Raider II* provided new blood to carry the series forward. "I was finishing up creating some (unused) multiplayer levels for *Fighting Force* when I heard they needed FMV help on *Tomb Raider II*, so I offered up my services, as I was starting to see multiplayer arenas in my sleep," recalls Andy Sandham, who would follow up this involvement with level design from *Tomb Raider III* onwards. "My task on *Tomb Raider II* was to blow up the Great Wall Of China, if I remember. That was my introduction to the time-honoured *Tomb Raider* tradition of the willy-nilly decimation of historical sites and the laissez-faire gunning down of endangered species."

Another newcomer to the *Tomb Raider III* team was Peter Connelly, who would stick with the series for the rest of the Core Design era. Like many of the newcomers, he was excited to be on the team. "My first real experience [with the series] was playing *Tomb Raider II*," remembers the musician. "I had bought it for someone for Christmas and we were playing it extensively on Christmas Day evening. What I remember most about this was wishing I was working on such a game. Nine months later, I was working at Core Design." Though his contribution to the third game was small, Peter would become the series' main musician from the fourth game onwards.

Tomb Raider III started to branch out into new areas, and particularly more action-oriented gameplay. The addition of sprint button was useful for outrunning enemies, and new enemy AI allowed for the bad guys to call for reinforcements and shut off rooms, necessitating a stealthier approach. Meanwhile, dangerous terrain additions were made including quicksand and water with deadly currents. The other big change was the addition

» The rooftops of London are a dangerous place to be hanging around at night!

of a non-linear structure – while players started in India and finished in Antarctica, adventures in London, Nevada and a South Pacific island could be tackled in any order.

Upon its release in 1998, *Tomb Raider III* didn't fare as well as its predecessors, but remained an high-performing title all the same, shifting well over six million copies – meaning that another sequel was guaranteed for 1999. For Andy, that meant a new opportunity. "When Vicky (scriptwriter on *TRI-III*) jumped ship after *Tomb Raider III*, there was a gap to fill and I jumped into it, with a view to writing 'movie-style' *TR* games."

For story, we'd choose our levels first – for our team, the first and most important part of any *Tomb Raider* game was the 'buying books on ancient civilisations' and phase, to cement ideas that would result in a rough plot that I'd have to shape into something coherent," Andy continues. "I was reminded the other day that the next stage after this would basically be the whole team queuing up at the office scanner, coffee table history books in hand, waiting to digitise our next level texture."

Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation introduced more of Lara Croft's history through a chapter showing a younger version of the protagonist on an early adventure with mentor/rival Werner Von Croy. Though it enjoyed a slightly more positive critical reception than its predecessor, *The Last Revelation* was perhaps the first real indicator that interest in the series was waning – it was the lowest sales tally for a *Tomb Raider* game so far despite the addition of the Dreamcast as a third platform. However, management was concerned about *The Last Revelation* for an entirely different reason.

As the fourth release in four years, it was inevitable that creative fatigue had set in during *Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation*. However, the way it was expressed was a shock to players around the world. "We all wanted to kill Lara," says Andy. "Looking at Lara's avatar all day every day for two years was about as much as some of us could take. Management were pretty hands off, so for two weeks, we hatched this plan to kill Lara, and followed it through to fruition." Indeed, the game ends with Lara entombed under a collapsed pyramid entrance, a dramatic and perhaps poetic end for the adventurer.

Of course, the team wasn't going to get away with killing the company's golden goose. "By 'fruition' I mean [Jeremy Heath-Smith, Core Design CEO] finding out we had killed her and it was too far gone to reverse it, and taking us into his office and shouting at us." Andy recalls. "We backtracked quickly, but not without paying penance by having to make another game set in all the ropey bits we had cut out of previous games, which became *Tomb Raider Chronicles*." In order to tie these pieces together, *Tomb Raider Chronicles* shook up ▶

» *The Last Revelation* is one of the most tomb-heavy games in the original quintet.

LARA'S BIGGEST FAN

We speak to Ash Kaprielov about his love of all things Tomb Raider

What was it about the *Tomb Raider* series that drew you in as a fan?
My teenage years were quite difficult, but *Tomb Raider* provided me an escape. The levels were so vast and challenging that it would take me weeks to finish a game, weeks where I could completely forget all my problems and explore ancient civilisations instead. When I first got an internet connection I started chatting with like-minded people and, since most of the forums were in English, it let me enhance my language skills. I met many of my best friends because of *Tomb Raider* and Lara gave me the courage to move to the UK on my own.

Tell us a little about your website, Tomb Of Ash
When I moved to the UK I decided to help my Russian colleagues at LaraCroft.ru, writing them a number of articles from various Expos. Then I interviewed Andy Sandham, a level designer and script writer for *Tomb Raider 3* to *Chronicles*. The interview was translated into Russian and I realised that I had nowhere to post the original English version of it. I uploaded it onto my personal Tumblr account, received some good feedback and decided to start my own website. I first ran it on my own, but then eventually brought my Croatian friend and fellow *Tomb Raider* fan Tina on to join me as a social media coordinator. [There is also] April and Tatiana, who produce various fan content. We actually helped Crystal Dynamics source interviewees for the *20 Years Of Tomb Raider Book*. Our latest achievement was the co-organising of the largest *Tomb Raider* 20th Anniversary celebration yet, hosted at PLAY Expo.

What's your favourite *Tomb Raider* moment?
My favourite moment happened on 8 October 2016 when Core Design took to the main stage at PLAY Expo. Their realisation that their work is still appreciated 20 years after the first game was out was incredible. I will never forget that day and the emotions that it stirred within me knowing that I helped make that day happen. I have been to many fan gatherings but the PLAY Expo weekend was probably the first time that I felt truly connected with the *Tomb Raider* fandom.

CREATING TOMB RAIDER

A retrospective interview with Toby Gard

Wasn't *Tomb Raider* originally a Saturn exclusive?
Core was in an exclusive deal with Saturn even when [*Tomb Raider*] came out. We were developing the Saturn and PlayStation versions simultaneously, but there was [a] time period that meant that Core wasn't able to bring it out on the PlayStation – it could only have been the Saturn. That was the exclusivity. Actually, it turned out better for PlayStation owners because there were a lot of bugs in the Saturn version. We found that out after it was released, and we managed to fix and tune up the PlayStation version a little bit before it came out, so it gave us a little bit of polish time…"

What challenges did you face making *Tomb Raider*?
It was all new to be honest with you, we were only a small team and none of us had done anything like it before. Every day was a new challenge. Obviously the coders there were superb to pull off *Tomb Raider* – both of the main programmers on the title had never even made a game before. It was pretty impressive.

Was Lara originally going to be a man?
When I very, very first pictured the game of *Tomb Raider*, it was from four drawings, and those four drawings were of a dude, an Indiana Jones-style dude, in a 3D world. When I began to write up the first design document, when I was working out exactly what the character design would be, there was a time when we were thinking about being able to choose from more than one. And so I designed a male and a female character. And then I realised that with the level of storytelling – I was going for a cinematic, movie-directed style – we would end up having to do double the amount of cinematic work, and that was somewhat more ambitious than we wanted to do. I'd already designed Lara and this dude, and I liked Lara more than I liked the dude, so she was the winner. That was that.

Did any films influence you?
There was a mixture of influences. One was the John Woo movies – I'd seen *Hard Boiled* and I wanted to get that in, I was so excited about that film – at the time it was just insane. I wanted to have that kind of dual-pistol insanity going on, with leaping and shooting and stuff. The other was *Æon Flux*. In one of the shorts, she's running around with Uzis, mowing down hundreds of people – and that was pretty exciting, I thought. So for me, it had to be that Lara was a dual-wielding action star, and that became an integral part of the whole costume.

What's the secret of *Tomb Raider*'s success?
Lots of different things, I suppose. It had a really unique character, it had some really memorable moments, it had some pretty clever level design, and it had a good solid platforming mechanic. It was based in the whole history scenario, which I felt was something that was very engaging. And it had a good story.

Interview extract taken from games™ issue 44

▶ the storytelling structure of the series – instead of a linear narrative focusing on a single adventure, the game was themed around Lara Croft's funeral. Gathered mourners recounted tales of her past adventures. By this point few additions were made to gameplay – Lara gained access to a grappling hook, as well as tightrope walking and the ability to swing from horizontal bars.

However, the *Tomb Raider* engine was beginning to feel very dated, as the yearly release schedule hadn't permitted significant alterations. What's more, the team that had seen fit to kill Lara Croft was still in charge and no happier with the situation. "That lack of enthusiasm showed in the final product," Andy notes with some regret. "The only person on the team that was still happy was Phil, the animator, who spent all day animating Lara being slaughtered in new novel traps and enemy attacks." When *Tomb Raider Chronicles* arrived in 2000, it was to the least enthusiastic critical response so far, and sales were drastically lower than those of *The Last*

Revelation at just one and a half million copies. With a burnt-out team having pushed out five games in five years, it's fair to say that the original *Tomb Raider* model had been well and truly exhausted.

However, from the outside the series couldn't have seemed to be in a better position. Angelina Jolie had been tapped up to star as Lara Croft in a *Tomb Raider* movie, and there was a new hope for the games around the corner in the form of the PlayStation 2. With new technology, the team would have a chance to revamp the gameplay of the series. Stealth and hand-to-hand combat would play a big part in the new adventure, as would the new playable character, Kurtis Trent.

Along with the new technology came another set of new staff, with a hunger to work on such a huge project. "I was thrilled, daunted, overwhelmed (almost), delighted, panicked, hyper and exhilarated," recalls Murti Schofield, a writer who had joined Core from Psygnosis. "I was also determined to give this opportunity everything I could. This was a writer's dream. El Dorado. The Alchemists' stone. The Grail. The ketchup on the bun of life. So, how did I feel? Determined."

"My first experience of working on *Tomb Raider* was to be sat with a pencil and paper and to be instructed to simply draw out whatever ideas came into my head as long as they were Lara Croft-related," recalls concept artist James Kenny. "I had at that time zero experience of the game, film or television industries and had been recruited by Core Design straight from studying
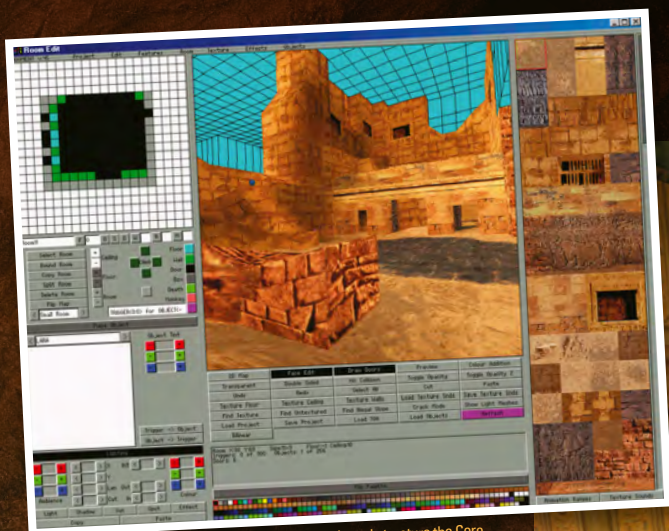
» This level editor for *Tomb Raider IV* shows the grid-based structure the Core Design games were built on.

» Water areas played a large part in the *Tomb Raider* games, acting as a break from climbing.

animation in Ballyfermot Senior College in Dublin."

Initially, things seemed to be going well. "As with most games I've worked on over the years, there are usually delays and issues that contribute to stalling a release and, as *Angel Of Darkness* wasn't like the previous *Tomb Raider* games, i.e. they were released exactly one year apart, I wasn't that phased that things were dragging on," says Peter. Unfortunately, the combination of a large team, an over-ambitious design and a management structure ill-equipped to deal with the task quickly drove the project off the rails.

"The step up to the PlayStation 2 and the complexity that would engender was not properly envisioned by anyone at Core at that time," says James. "Also I think there was a desire to change the direction of the games in a narrative and gameplay sense and there was pressure coming from the developments in other gaming franchises." For Murti, the situation was extraordinary. "There was just so much that went wrong and the pressures were awful; I don't mean ordinary, standard industry pressures but the sense that the ship was slipping into the maelstrom and no one knew what to do. We knew things weren't going well. The game wasn't right. Deadlines kept breaking over our heads and still things were not right."

After many delays, *Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness* arrived in 2003 with much of the intended game design left on the cutting room floor. Despite selling two and a half million copies, it was given a critical kicking and is considered the lowest point in the series. With dissatisfaction rife amongst both fans and shareholders, Eidos took drastic action and removed *Tomb Raider* from Core Design. "As a board of directors, we did not take that decision lightly," explains Ian. "Core Design

> ## "There was just so much that went wrong and the pressures were awful"
> Murti Schofield

had done an incredible job in developing a new title year-on-year from 1996 to 2000. Then along came PS2 and with its new tech challenges which Core Design struggled with for too long. Instead of it being another hit in the series, *Angel Of Darkness* was not far short of a disaster when it came out in 2003. Sales were below expectation and development of *Tomb Raider* was moved to Crystal Dynamics. For a UK company, moving the development of its prized asset from Derby to California was a big decision to make but, as it turned out, absolutely the right one to make."

History has vindicated the decision – under the care of Crystal Dynamics, the series has returned to form critically and commercially. However, from an outsider's perspective it seems like a harsh decision, especially as Core Design had only produced one truly bad *Tomb Raider* game. Surely the tens of millions sales it had generated prior entitled Core to another crack of the whip? "Many on the development team at Core had enough. Some were burned out and wanted to work on new games. It was definitely time for change," Ian responds. "But nobody should ever take away or diminish the contribution that Core Design made in not just creating *Tomb Raider*, but making it an iconic franchise."

Murti agrees. "If Core had been given another chance would it have been different? Who knows," he ponders. "It would have required a restructuring of management practices and a shake-up – which seemed unlikely. And with the benefit of hindsight it *was* time for someone else to take Miss Croft's future in hand."

Over at Crystal Dynamics, the team had been working on the well-regarded *Legacy Of Kain* 3D

» Ancient foes often wield powers that can barely be distinguished from magic.
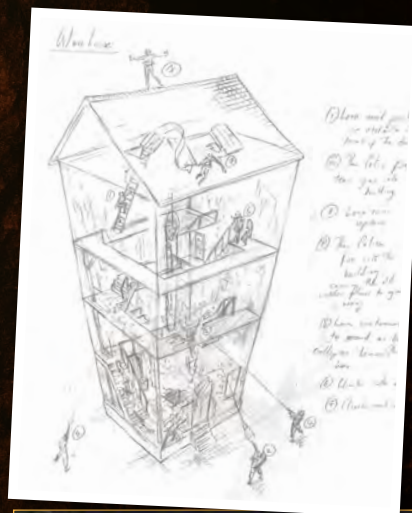
» The concept art for *Angel Of Darkness* shows a stark absence of any actual tombs.

» Though planned as the first part of a trilogy, *Angel Of Darkness* marked the end of Core's *Tomb Raider* timeline.

» The concept art for *Anniversary* shows a new aesthetic design applied to the older ideas from Core Design.

▶ action-adventure games for some time, but getting the *Tomb Raider* job was a big shock. "For us, there was a sense of, 'Oh my gosh!' *Tomb Raider* was such a big franchise with so many fans – if we want to take something like that on, we'd have to do it so right, so it felt very much like a high-stakes proposition" recalls Noah Hughes, creative director at Crystal Dynamics. "But it came up more as an opportunity, with Eidos saying, 'Hey, would you guys be interested in working with this character?' From that perspective it was exciting, as it fit comfortably with our desire to create experiences that blended a lot of stuff – environmental exploration, combat and puzzle-solving."

In developing *Tomb Raider: Legend*, the first game of the Crystal Dynamics era, it was important for the team to establish which aspects of the existing games they wished to retain. "Lara's intellect and puzzle-solving, we wanted to keep both of those," Noah offers as an example. "Additionally we felt that traversal and exploration were important, these platforming elements – how could we provide a traversal toolset to make the world a jungle gym? And, of course, the sense that

around each corner there might be a surprise, even the less noticeable corners could hold a secret. Also a combat system of sorts, the dual pistols are part of Lara's iconography, but focused on agility rather than a brute-force flavour of combat." There was one more significant element that the team homed in on, too. "We called it 'flair' at the time – things like the handstand, so you could express yourself as a character with moves that weren't critical to progression."

During the *Tomb Raider: Legend* era, Meagan Marie was just a fan of *Tomb Raider*, but today she is Crystal Dynamics' community manager for *Tomb Raider* and the author of the official history guide, *20 Years Of Tomb Raider*, giving a unique perspective on the development of the series. "I love Keeley Hawes [as Lara] especially, I love how quippy and sarcastic she was – she might be one of my favourite voice actresses," she notes. "I also enjoyed the fluidity in combat, the acrobatics – that's something that Crystal Dynamics pushed as a way to differentiate itself from Core and leave its mark on the franchise. Moving away from the grid-based movement and moving towards very fluid traversal, fluid combat, and that was something I remember being very impressed with."

In order to make sure the team got things right, Toby Gard was brought into the fold as a consultant. "It was great to have Toby because he was so intimate with her design, and it gave us the ability to be a bit more bold as

we explored different options, but we had insight as to where we were losing that core DNA," Noah explains. "So from a character design perspective he was a great resource, and he became very involved in the story – I'm not sure if he has a writing credit, but I know he and Eric Lindstrom worked closely together. We were trying to bridge two canons, the Core games and the movies which had gained popularity, so it was another case where having Toby's insight into what was 'evolving' versus what was 'breaking' was important. Even to this day I'm grateful for having that overlap with Toby, because it gave us insight and the confidence to find our way without completely copying and pasting."

The results were an immediate vindication of the decision to go with Crystal Dynamics. The critical reception and sales of *Tomb Raider: Legend* were a marked improvement over the last couple of games, with four-and-a-half-million copies sold. That success ensured that two follow-up titles went into production, and Crystal Dynamics began to focus on the past, present and future of *Tomb Raider*. Although it didn't seem necessary at the time, Lara Croft's reinvention was going to become important.

That's something that the team at Crystal Dynamics recognised a lot earlier than most people realise," reveals Meagan. "After finishing Legend the team split, and a small team took *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* and another took *Tomb Raider: Underworld*, and started working on that, but there was also a small group that was two

» Lara's overall design was overhauled for the first Crystal Dynamics game.

people for a couple of years who sat and ideated the future of the franchise, Jason Botta and Tim Longo, before even entering preproduction. They knew that after *Underworld*, which would be considered the end of a trilogy, that something major needed to be done. They recognised after a while of exploration that an origin story made the most sense, and that letting the players see those moments where Lara was forged into the *Tomb Raider* would make her more relatable."

O f course, this reboot was many years away, and the two other projects would arrive sooner. The first of these was *Tomb Raider: Anniversary*. This was in competition with Core Design's final attempt to design a *Tomb Raider* game along a similar premise, though neither team necessarily knew that the other was in the running. Where Core had focused on the PSP, Crystal Dynamics had a multi-platform strategy that ultimately got the nod from the publisher. The resulting game was a loose remake of the original *Tomb Raider* in the new style. However, despite strong critical performance, good reviews didn't transfer into exceptional sales and it remains the series' commercial low point.

For the larger team, *Tomb Raider: Underworld* was Lara Croft's first step into another new generation, this team targeting the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 as lead platforms. "One of the things we did with *Underworld* was that we ended up pushing the technology," recalls Noah. "We had full ▶

» Cinematic scenes were just as important to the Crystal Dynamics games as Core Design's efforts.

BY THE NUMBERS

The sales and Metacritic scores from the main series

TOMB RAIDER 1996
SALES: **7.5** MILLION
SCORE: **90** %

TOMB RAIDER II 1997
SALES: **8** MILLION
SCORE: **83** %

TOMB RAIDER III 1998
SALES: **6.5** MILLION
SCORE: **78** %

TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION 1999
SALES: **5** MILLION
SCORE: **79** %

TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES 2000
SALES: **1.5** MILLION
SCORE: **70** %

TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS 2003
SALES: **2.5** MILLION
SCORE: **56** %

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND 2006
SALES: **4.5** MILLION
SCORE: **82** %

TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY 2007
SALES: **1.3** MILLION
SCORE: **81** %

TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD 2009
SALES: **2.6** MILLION
SCORE: **76** %

TOMB RAIDER 2013
SALES: **8.5** MILLION
SCORE: **86** %

RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER 2015
SALES: **1** MILLION (SO FAR)
SCORE: **87** %

» Here's a piece of early concept art taken from *Tomb Raider Underground*, the third game in the series Crystal Dynamics worked on.

▶ motion-capture actors rather than animation, which we hadn't done in the past, but we ended up with a similar moveset. But in some ways, the gameplay didn't move as far forward as the technology did." Indeed, *Tomb Raider: Underworld* did better upon its release in 2008 than *Anniversary* had managed, but it still didn't live up to the critical or commercial performance of *Tomb Raider: Legend*. Fortunately, the aforementioned foresight of the team meant that new plans had been laid for a reboot.

"We wanted to make sure we weren't falling into a 'myth of the week' pattern – we wanted to make sure our stories were character defining and not just adventures to go on," recalls Noah. "We had also gotten feedback that Lara as a character didn't feel fresh to people, so there was a sense that there could be audience fatigue or a lack of relevance to her as a character, so we took the goal of evolving gameplay and invigorating her character story, but also making sure that on top of all of that, we were recreating a relationship between the character and the audience."

For the first time, we saw Lara Croft not as an adventurer, but as a newcomer to exploration whose experiences would test her very will to survive. "Part of the unrelatability of Lara was that because she had infinite money and was so skilled, of course she was going to win. We felt that we had to place her in a situation where she had to earn her success, and isolate her from the support that she had, to make you believe that she could lose a battle." This led to the introduction of survival mechanics, as well as character development through an experience system.

The reboot, simply named *Tomb Raider*, managed to take cues from popular action-adventure games, like the *Uncharted* series, while retaining the feel of a 'Lara Croft' adventure. The approach worked well, as the game earned a fantastic reception – the reboot became the bestselling game in the series, with over eight-and-a-half million copies sold to date.

A follow-up was inevitable, and the pressure was on following the previous game's high sales. "It's always terrifying to have that amount of success, and we wanted to make sure it wasn't a fluke," Noah confides. "We looked at it as a challenge of how we figure out how to improve on that." *Rise Of The Tomb Raider* charts Lara Croft's growth in confidence following the events of the reboot. "In *Tomb Raider* you look at Lara's transition from being an explorer interested in the world to someone forced to survive," notes Will Kerslake, lead designer at Crystal Dynamics. "In *Rise* we continue that process, but we also see her choose to go on an adventure, so her character continues to evolve."

One of the things that the team was keenly aware of was the need to include more tombs for players to explore. "We did fill [the setting] with history," Noah

» Croft Manor is burning! What has caused Lara's home to end up in such a state?

» Combat now typically takes place using an over-the-shoulder perspective, as is common today.

LOVING LARA

We asked you which iteration of Lara Croft was your favourite

48%
TOMB RAIDER
1996

6%
TOMB RAIDER MOVIE
2001

10%
TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND
2006

36%
TOMB RAIDER REBOOT
2013

» Production art showing off the parachute sequence from Crystal Dynamics' 2013 *Tomb Raider* reboot.

recalls of the 2013 game, "but those layers were, for example, World War II, so they told stories a week before Lara got there, 50 years before Lara got there, and hundreds of years before she got there. But what we found was that because they weren't ancient places with ancient secrets, they weren't scratching that itch entirely." *Rise Of The Tomb Raider* initially launched on Xbox One, Xbox 360 and PC in 2015, and has recently launched on PlayStation 4, to a very positive critical reception that narrowly edges that of the 2013 reboot.

In many ways, Lara Croft's transformation into a survivalist is a fine way to represent *Tomb Raider*'s journey. From a starting point of fame and fortune, the series has had to adapt to survive against a backdrop of sweeping changes in game design and consumer tastes, as well as the occasional misfortune. Against all of that, the people behind *Tomb Raider* have reinvented it over the course of two decades to remain one of the world's most beloved brands, and Lara Croft stands alone as the icon representing that monumental effort.

Indeed, the future looks bright – the Crystal Dynamics team won't speak of any future plans just yet, but with audiences still discovering *Rise Of The Tomb Raider*, an ongoing comic series and a new movie in the works, it's fair to say that Lara Croft is perhaps just as popular as she ever was. "Lara has transcended gaming in a way that I think no other character has – because of the movies, because she was considered a virtual model for a while – so I think she does hold a unique place in gaming history that I don't know if any other character could compete with," concludes Meagan – and it's very hard to disagree with her. ✳

Special thanks to Ian Dickson, Ash Kaprielov, Alex Verrey and the organisers at replayevents.com for making this article possible.

» *Rise Of The Tomb Raider* is one of the first games to benefit from the additional power of the PS4 Pro.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Naughty Dog

From two ambitious school friends to the most creatively significant PlayStation developer of today, Naughty Dog co-founder Andy Gavin talks us through the company's impressive evolution

Whatever you were up to in school at age 12, it most likely didn't lay down your career path for the next 20 years. Naughty Dog co-founder Andy Gavin met his future creative partner Jason Rubin at this age in 1982 and, united by their fascination with programming on the Apple II+, the two learned how to make games through experimentation and collaboration. Naughty Dog is today renowned for its showstopping blend of cinematic storytelling with sharp gameplay mechanics, and the dizzying ambition of its two young co-founders led to those core principles.

"The first game I ever programmed was a crude RPG called *VE2* that I wrote first on my school Heathkit and then on my Apple II+," explains Andy. "It had you wander around a fantasy world and randomly encounter orcs, kobolds and the like. It wasn't so different than a single-player text *Dark Tower*."

When they met, Jason's games looked superior, yet they frequently crashed; Andy's, on the other hand, were better programmed, yet lacked a certain visual flair. These complementary skills encapsulated their creative dynamic. "Fundamentally we shared a very similar vision for game making (make it cool!) and brought overlapping but different skills to the table," says Andy. "I was more technical and he was more artistic, but we were both very motivated and energetic. We used to joke years later that it would be difficult for any would-be third partner to keep up, even if only on account of our intensity."

Andy and Jason finished their first commercial Apple II title, *Ski Stud*, when

» The title screen of *Ski Crazed* with Jam Software logo. Is it us or does he look a little like Crash Bandicoot?

they were both 15 (they'd completed another unpublished title, *Math Jam*, a year before). The duo struck a publishing deal with Baudville worth $250 for *Ski Stud* – renamed *Ski Crazed* for political correctness' sake. Their chosen moniker at the time was JAM Software, which they kept until 1989.

Greater success followed with adventure title *Dream Zone* on the Amiga, Atari ST and Apple II, which sold 10,000 copies and marked their final game to be published by Baudville. "The guys at Baudville were very nice and supportive," Andy explains. "But the company had poor distribution, minor league resources, and a laid-back approach. There was a lot of 'woah, duuuude.' Jason and I were far too ambitious to stick around in that environment."

While selling well, *Dream Zone* was still short of a smash for the pair. "Big hit isn't the word I would use, but it was much more 'real' and substantial than *Ski Crazed*. Signing with EA (right after *Dream Zone*) was a big confidence boost and we had to really take things up a notch (although there were many, many more notches until *Crash Bandicoot*!)."

GAINES 0066 54 0018 **NIKKI CHAN**

WYVERN
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> " **Sega had Sonic and Nintendo Mario, but Sony? We hoped to jump into that slot** "

ANDY GAVIN ON CRASH BANDICOOT BECOMING A MASCOT

Ski Crazed

SLOPE 1
EASY STREET
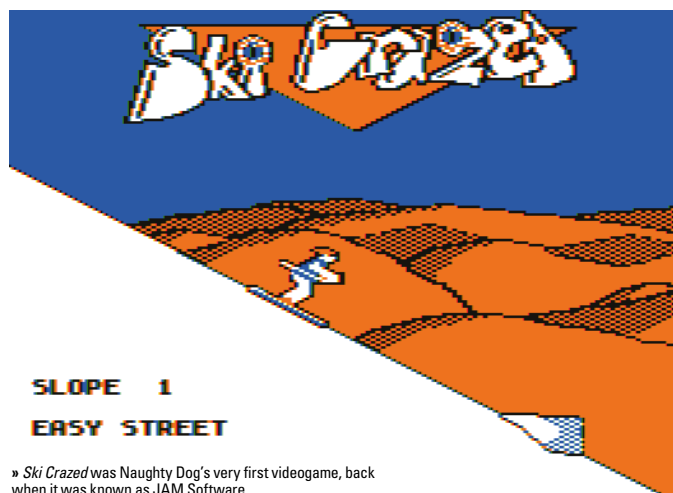
» *Ski Crazed* was Naughty Dog's very first videogame, back when it was known as JAM Software.

Remarkably, cold-calling an EA hotline led to their next gig, *Keef The Thief*, again for the Amiga and Apple II. "We just cold-called EA after *Dream Zone*. They asked for our games. We Fedexed them. They called back and offered us a deal! EA in those days was a lot of fun. Occasionally it was a hair bureaucratic, but Trip Hawkins was a very charismatic leader and an extremely fair guy. The whole company had an open and welcoming California feel."

EA was pleased with the success of *Keef The Thief*, landing the duo a deal for it to publish *Rings Of Power* on the Mega Drive. At this point, however, Andy and Jason were living in different parts of the country as they attended college, so it took three difficult years to get *Rings Of Power* to market. "A big problem with *Rings* was that it was designed as a PC RPG with an odd graphical gimmick (the three-quarter perspective) and then migrated to the Genesis. Really, we should have redone the graphics at that point as a tile-based scrolling world (like *Phantasy Star*). Plus, the sheer scope of the project and the lacklustre treatment from marketing left us a little

burnt." EA chose not to reprint *Rings Of Power*, which disappointed the pair, leading to a brief hiatus for the nascent studio.

Yet it was Trip Hawkins and the promise of the 3DO that reignited their interest. Trip approached the pair, who were given free dev kits, which led to the creation of their self-funded beat-'em-up *Way Of The Warrior*. "We changed our whole philosophy with *Way*. Instead of doing the game we most wanted to make, we looked for an intersection between cool, manageable and popular. Fighting games were really hot in 1992-4 and when we started, no one seemed to be doing them on the 3DO. It seemed a perfect match.

"*Way* was a blast to develop. Jason and I lived together in this shitty apartment and worked on it 18 hours a day – but we had a lot of fun. The campy nature of both the kung fu genre and our take on it made the whole thing hilarious. I think that shows in the finished product."

This change in development philosophy governed the success of what followed for the studio. Universal Interactive published *Way Of The Warrior*, and the duo were ▶

then signed up by Universal in 1994 to produce games on its LA lot, under the guidance of Mark Cerny. "The Universal relationship was a complicated but critical step in our evolution," Andy says. "In 1994-5 they really brought a lot to the table, particularly in the personification of Mark Cerny and in making a minimalist and relatively supportive environment. We learned how to scale to more than two developers and how to take every element of the production seriously."

On their extended car journey to Los Angeles, Jason and Andy conceived the idea of a 3D character-driven action game, informally named 'Sonic's ass', where the player would view the protagonist from behind while manoeuvring through the environment. This was the basis for *Crash Bandicoot*'s creation. We ask Andy if he felt he and Jason had generated an idea that was ahead of its time. "Actually, yes. Even as an idea, it seemed to offer a solution to the 'how to do platforming in 3D' dilemma. In practice, there were *a lot* of details to work out." As relayed on Andy's website, Naughty Dog was worried about the player's depth perception, the potential for dizziness and camera quality. No precedent had really been set, here – yet Universal was as keen on the 'Sonic's ass' idea as Andy and Jason themselves. Plus, *Mario 64* didn't exist yet, either.

The choice of format was easy. In a hardware market burdened by big failures and fragmented efforts from Sega, Sony offered a fresher start with the PlayStation. "It was really the best choice. The hardware was better. Sony seemed organised and perhaps most importantly, didn't have a pre-existing 'mascot' character. Sega had Sonic and Nintendo Mario, but Sony? We hoped to jump into that slot."

Jason and Andy toyed with the idea of a character called Willie The Wombat before settling on a bandicoot. A Warner Bros animation influence hung over the art direction and style of *Crash Bandicoot*, and Mark Cerny employed talented cartoonist Charles Zembillas to do character designs for *Crash*'s cast (Zembillas also created Spyro The Dragon for Insomniac, based on the Universal lot with Naughty Dog).

Released just three months after *Super Mario 64* in 1996, *Crash Bandicoot* was a sales smash. "Fundamentally, *Crash* offered a number of things," Andy says, when we ask about the key to its massive success. "First of all, the character and his world are great, and totally approachable. You can understand him at a glance, and he is highly inclusive. His combination of goofy positivity is very endearing. The world was also very appealing and consistently designed. Second, the gameplay is very fast and furious – if a little hard in *Crash 1*.

» In many ways, *Crash Bandicoot* encapsulated the cooler, alternative tone set by PlayStation when it arrived on the market.

"I wouldn't call it a new engine, but we basically stripped out and rewrote every major system in the engine one by one"
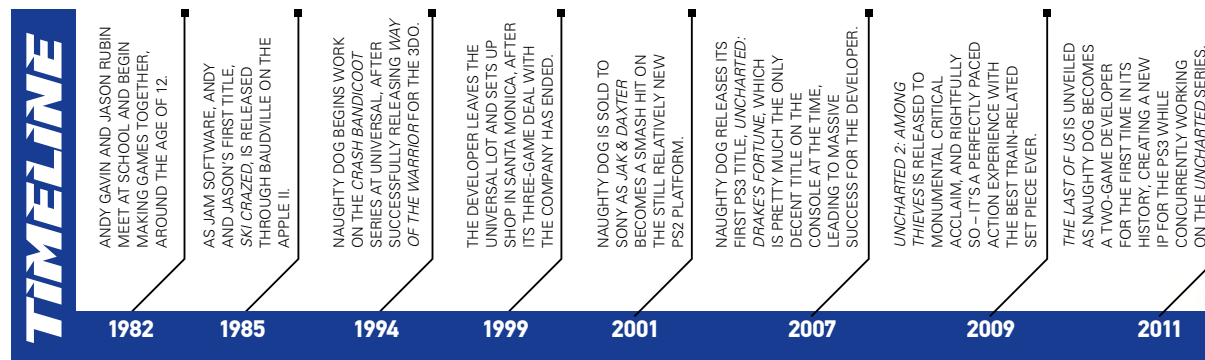
ANDY GAVIN ON MAKING CRASH BANDICOOT 2

It has a measured pace and rewards perseverance. When you get on a roll, it's pretty damn satisfying."

Crash Bandicoot may have conceptually stemmed from the phrase 'Sonic's ass', but Naughty Dog's character became an icon in his own right just as the blue hedgehog's best days were ending. While *Mario 64* became a milestone of action adventure games set in a 3D space, *Crash* offered an edgier counterpoint, encapsulating the cooler attitude that made the original PlayStation such a massive cultural event. There was something fresher in *Crash* and, like the Warner characters it was inspired by, you got the sense that its creators were speaking as much to adults as they were to kids. Naughty Dog had signed a three-game deal with Universal in

» *Rings Of Power* was a complex PC-style game brought to Sega's 16-bit Mega Drive.

» Andy Gavin poses with one of his most famous creations, Crash Bandicoot.

» *Crash Team Racing* was a sharp alternative to *Mario Kart* on PlayStation, with a nicely structured adventure mode.

1994, covering the next two releases: *Crash Bandicoot 2: Cortex Strikes Back* in 1997 and *Crash Bandicoot: Warped* in 1998.

Another unusual part of *Crash Bandicoot*'s commercial performance was its extraordinary sales in Japan, which were unusual for a Western-developed title. It truly was an international phenomenon – and the duo's confidence paid off. "We hoped for it, but I was still surprised it actually happened," Andy reflects on the success. "Enormously pleased though."

"We each had to step into the role of mentoring and advising an ever growing crew of developers," Andy explains about how his and Jason's roles changed as the studio expanded. "Fortunately, we hired really talented people so we also learned a lot from them, but we had to do a lot more producing and managing. On a technical level, Dave and I (the *Crash 1* programmers) combined some of our MIT engineering rigour with game practicality to do some really ambitious engineering on the level with other great (even non-game) software companies. This gave our games a leg up that, when combined with great design and awesome graphics, made them really stand out. A one-two-three punch."

The subsequent titles performed equally well thanks to this combination of qualities and allowed the Naughty Dog team to push the PlayStation hardware's visual capabilities further. "I wouldn't call it a new engine, but

we basically stripped out and rewrote every major system in the engine one by one," explains Andy, when we ask him to discuss *Crash*'s first sequel. "*Crash 2* shares the same architecture, but everything was overhauled and improved!"

The series won more plaudits over the next two instalments, with critics praising the more varied level design, increased fidelity of the animation and the ambition that demonstrated healthy signs of Naughty Dog's maturity as a studio. "*Crash 3* wasn't so much a technical risk like *Crash 2*, it was just a death sprint. We did the whole game in nine months and built *so much* content. The engine itself got a few upgrades, particularly the tech for various kinds of water and the flying, but mostly it was levels, levels, levels and more levels!"

By this point, Sony was funding and publishing the *Crash* titles, and the two co-founders questioned the worth of Universal Interactive's input. As a result of choosing not to renew the latter's publishing deal, Naughty Dog apparently had to make *Crash 3* in the corridors at Universal. For its final *Crash* title, the high-quality karting spin-off *Crash Team Racing*, Sony negotiated the rights to use the licence since Naughty Dog was no longer on brilliant terms with its previous publisher.

"Mark Cerny was there the entire time we worked with them and we had a great relationship with him," recalls Andy. ▶

» *Crash Bandicoot 2* started to have some real fun with the variety in level design.


» A call to the Electronic Arts hotline led to *Keef The Thief*. *Rings Of Power* eventually followed.

☐ WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Andy Gavin

Andy co-founded the company Flektor with Jason Rubin after leaving Naughty Dog, creating a web program that allowed for easy online content mash-ups that quickly grew after its 2007 launch. The duo sold it to Fox in 2009 for north of $20 million, just as the latter was attempting to move into social media territory with MySpace. Andy and Jason left soon after. Since then, Andy has written two paranormal fantasy novels, *Untimed* and *The Darkening Dream*, and blogs extensively about a variety of topics at www.all-things-andy-gavin.com, where he often answers questions about the series he's worked on. He also does some rather entertaining write-ups of episodes of *Game Of Thrones* and documents his memories of working at Naughty Dog, with contributions from co-founder Jason Rubin.
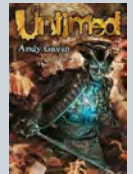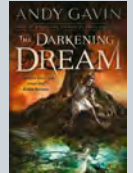
Jason Rubin

Working on Flektor with Andy, Jason Rubin also ventured into comic book writing, creating *The Iron Saint* and *Mysterious Ways* through his company MORGANrose, published by Aspen Comics and Top Cow respectively. He also co-owned a mobile games studio with Andy known as Monkey Gods, which Jason described as an 'experiment'. Jason also recently became president of THQ, which, despite his best efforts to save the company, went bankrupt and had its assets sold off earlier this year. His main focus as president was focusing on stronger core titles, and it seemed like the company wasn't too far off a turnaround, though a few poor releases prior to his leadership left THQ with a lot of financial shortcomings. Anecdotally, we've heard positive things about Jason's leadership at the now-defunct publisher.

» *Way Of The Warrior* had great visuals, enjoyable combat and plenty of gore. Thanks to John Szczepaniak for the images.

» *Jak And Daxter* eliminated loading times from its gigantic overworld, which few other PS2 games could match.

» The *Uncharted* series has been a massive success for both Sony and Naughty Dog. We're still hoping for a fourth PS3 adventure.

» The *Jak And Daxter* series was recently rereleased on Sony's PlayStation 3 in a new HD collection. It's a pretty solid compilation.

» *Jak II: Renegade* made noticeable moves towards modern trends in 2003 when it took the series into *GTA*'s sandbox territory.

▶ "Our relationship with the 1997-1999 management was actually cordial, but we didn't always think they brought a lot to the table. Around the time we were separating, the whole management changed over there again (Jim Wilson came in) and we never really got to know that crew. The company did have a pretty flawed corporate culture, one that didn't always encourage fair play. They stopped paying us… we had to sue them (we eventually won everything)."

After Universal, Naughty Dog set up shop in Santa Monica, and by this point its relationship with Sony was exceptionally strong. Andy says that the developer's choice of hardware was more down to opportunity than any emotional ties – yet in 2000, after beginning work on their first non-*Crash* title in six years, Andy and Jason sold Naughty Dog to Sony, in a move motivated by the console maker's desire to own its next big intellectual property.

"We had a great relationship with Sony from 1996 on," Andy says. "By 2000 when we were discussing the merger, we were not only exclusive in practice but chummy with all levels of the company, from junior producers and QA managers to Kaz Hirai… It is/was a great company, with bright motivated people, a lot of energy, a determination to do things well, and an ethos of fairness and honesty. Companies are like people, and any that has a lot of these things going for it is a rarity."

Jason was confident that Naughty Dog could have functioned independently, but being absorbed by Sony allowed the team to focus on making games. The studio was one of the first to obtain a PS2 dev kit, though working with the new hardware didn't come easy, according to Andy. "The

» *Jak And Daxter* soon turned into a trilogy for PlayStation 2 owners.

PS2 had a very steep learning curve. It was a great machine, but to milk all the power out of it you had to migrate a lot of code onto the vector units. It was vastly more complicated than the PSone. Naughty Dog was one of the few teams that thrived in those early PS2 days because the quality of our programmers and technical artists was so high. Lesser tech guys got dusted."

The team's new title, 2001's *Jak And Daxter*, marked an ambitious turn from the linear platforming of *Crash*. A Nintendo-inspired platform/adventure, it would feature a seamless open world with no loading screens, which caused numerous

headaches for Andy and his team. "Oh, God. The seamless loading was hard. We had been heading in this direction with *Crash*, which featured a very sophisticated streaming system and extremely short load times (3-4 seconds!), but with *Jak And Daxter* we had this early mandate to eliminate loading entirely. It was hard, but very cool in a subtle way. Very few games do it even now."

The Nintendo pastiche was deliberate, too. "There was a lot of *Mario 64 / Banjo* influence in *Jak 1*, as they were the most modern (and best) examples of platforming during the 1999-2000 period when *Jak* was under design."

Jak was another huge hit on PS2, if not quite as commercially gargantuan as *Crash*, and once again gave the PlayStation brand

" **Focus on characters, trifecta of art, gameplay and technology, and massive polish and attention to detail** "
ANDY GAVIN ON NAUGHTY DOG'S DESIGN PHILOSOPHIES

☐ **WHATEVER HAPPENED TO CRASH BANDICOOT?**

Owned by Activision now after it merged with Vivendi several years ago, Crash Bandicoot is MIA while his former stablemate Spyro the Dragon is part of the plastic-shifting phenomenon that is Skylanders. "He isn't really anywhere, which is sad, as Crash is a great character," reflects Andy on Crash's current status. That special quality that defined Naughty Dog's *Crash* titles was lost in the first multiplatform release, *The Wrath of Cortex*, in 2001, which mostly rehashed the ideas of previous *Crash* titles. It was published during the same holiday period as *Jak And Daxter*, and naturally it didn't compare too well. From there, the *Crash* series got progressively worse, though the last instalment, *Crash Of The Titans*, wasn't completely awful. The magic's just been lost a little bit from the series – there's never been a drive to innovate or push the 3D platforming genre forward with *Crash* outside of Naughty Dog's hands, which defined the original games' success.

» *Uncharted 2* introduced multiplayer gameplay, which soon became a staple part of the series.

☐ DEFINING GAMES

Way Of The Warrior

As a viable *Mortal Kombat* alternative on the struggling 3DO, *Way Of The Warrior* was arguably the best known of Naughty Dog's pre-*Crash* titles, with a sense of irony that its contemporaries lacked. This marked the start of the studio's relationship with Universal, which turned out to be extremely fruitful. *Way Of The Warrior* is notable for its gory visuals, diverse characters (portrayed by friends and relatives of the staff) and impressive combo attacks. It features a particularly aggressive soundtrack too, with many of the tracks coming from White Zombie's album *Le Sexorcisto: Devil Music, Vol 1.*

Crash Bandicoot

Arriving on a console without a mascot, *Crash Bandicoot* posited its own solution for the 3D platformer genre that contrasted strongly with Nintendo's ideas in *Mario 64* – Crash was an icon with the complete package from the start, with strong character designs and instantly gratifying platforming mechanics in a game packed with smart level design. *Crash Bandicoot* proved to be a watershed moment for Naughty Dog and, as *Sonic* had done with Sega's Mega Drive before it, helped convince gamers that Sony's new cool console was the machine to own. A superb evolution of the platform genre that everyone needs to play.

Jak And Daxter: The Precursor Legacy

Bearing some resemblance to the *Crash* series in its feel, *Jak And Daxter* exchanged linear levels for a gigantic environment filled with 101 various challenges. *Banjo Kazooie*, *Zelda* and *Mario 64* all inspired its ambitious design, which illustrated Naughty Dog's ability to create a large, cohesive world to rival Nintendo's own properties. *Jak*'s persistent game world and near seamless loading times showed off Naughty Dog's technical prowess, while the clever pairing of the silent Jak and motormouth Daxter was a testament to the studio's keen eye for strong characterisation.

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

While *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* was a highly enjoyable PS3 debut, its ambitious sequel bettered it in every way. It built on the original game's *Indiana Jones* pastiche, setting players up with a gauntlet of ever-escalating set pieces and a rip-roaring tale, marking a new high in pacing for third-person action-adventure games. It's a highly engaging cinematic romp, and still looks incredibly cutting edge. It's also notable for introducing for bringing a slick multiplayer offering to the popular series. While *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception* featured more outlandish setpieces, the gameplay wasn't as good.

» *The Last Of Us* has been a huge success for Naughty Dog. A sequel was confirmed at PSX in 2016 with the focus being on Ellie.

» *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* was released in 2016 and achieved critical acclaim and huge sales.
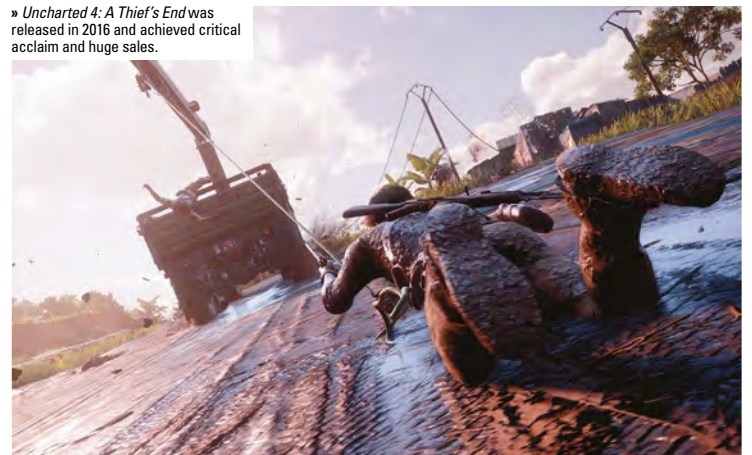
a mascot that it needed. The series moved into an open-world paradigm with 2003's *Jak II: Renegade*, which was clearly a product of its time in a post-*GTA III* world. "We wanted to show that we could go open world with the best of them!"

By the time the vehicle-centric *Jak 3*'s release came around in 2004, the co-founders' contracts were up, and Andy and Jason felt confident about leaving Naughty Dog in the hands of its veteran staff, headed up by Evan Wells and Christophe Balestra; their departure was as much about allowing these new leaders to develop as the desire to have a bit of time off for other projects. "Not only has Naughty Dog survived for 8.5 years since we left, but it has thrived and grown," Andy says. "Evan, Christophe and the whole team over there continue to show their enormous talent and dedication. The games are new, cutting edge and yet still very much Naughty Dog games. They draw

from the same basic philosophical strategy we developed in the *Crash* era: focus on characters, trifecta of art, gameplay, and technology, and massive polish and attention to detail."

The *Uncharted* series does indeed embody those ideals and, particularly with its barnstorming second instalment released in 2009, shows how Naughty Dog's direction has weathered time effectively and allowed it to progress effectively as a studio. *The Last Of Us* is its latest release, a post-apocalyptic thriller that touches upon darker subject matter than we're used to seeing in the developer's releases, which again seems like a natural part of its evolution.

What's reassuring about Naughty Dog's enduring reputation, then, is that those principles outlined by Andy and Jason, back when they made *Way Of The Warrior*, have survived until today – Naughty Dog creates big, fun games with a credible mass appeal, a balance that few developers can equal

with any great conviction. Yet it stemmed from two confident friends teaching each other how to make games, and a mutual loyalty leading to unexpected levels of hard-earned success.

"They feature big integrated worlds, gameplay-first storytelling and all the above stuff," says Andy, discussing what defines a modern Naughty Dog game. "That's what makes them Naughty Dog games. Starting with *Jak 1* and moving into *Jak 2*, we really focused on trying to make the best 'story you play' possible. *Uncharted 2* and *3* take this to whole new levels. The 2004-2013 steps have been just as challenging as the 1994-2004 steps. Same dance, different moves."

Naughty Dog's *The Last Of Us 2* was recently announced for PS4. Andy Gavin is the author of *The Darkening Dream* and *Untimed*. Find out more at the-darkening-dream.com and untimed-novel.com.

Castlevania

Symphony of the Night

Many 3D-obsessed gamers thought Konami was mad when it decided to make a 2D Castlevania for Sony's powerful PlayStation. The Japanese developer had the last laugh, thanks to its genre-busting game. Damien McFerran discovers how it all happened…

» The bat transformation allows Alucard to enter previously inaccessible areas.

» The bells! The bells!

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI

» **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI

» **RELEASED:** 1997

» **PLATFORMS:** PLAYSTATION, SATURN, PSP, XBLA

» **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

Regular readers of Retro Gamer may have noticed that we harbour something of a soft spot for Konami's splendid gothic adventure *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*. We gleefully leap on any excuse to mention it and will happily print screenshots at the slightest provocation, only Capcom's *Strider* features more prominently. In our defence, the blood-sucking platform romp remains one of the most truly essential pieces of 32-bit software and has justifiably attained near-legendary status within the already classic-filled *Castlevania* canon. Even now, nearly twenty years after its debut, it remains not only the best game in the series, but one of the finest Metroidvanias to ever be created. With that in mind, we felt it was the perfect opportunity to speak with Koji 'IGA' Igarashi (who was series producer at the time) about the development of what many deem to be the crowning glory of a highly esteemed franchise.

IGA was responsible for the welfare of *Castlevania* lineage and has recently overseen the production of two excellent Nintendo DS episodes in the shape of *Dawn Of Sorrow* and *Portrait Of Ruin*. He also oversaw the less successful *Castlevania: Harmony Of Despair*. He joined Konami in the early-Nineties and worked on a variety of titles before becoming part of the *Castlevania* team prior to the development of *Symphony*

Of The Night. The game represented a significant turning point for the series. With the exception of the free-roaming *Simon's Quest* on the NES, over a decade's worth of instalments had displayed an unwavering commitment to the fairly straightforward 'platform action' template, which saw the player utilising the legendary 'Vampire Killer' whip to send all manner of nocturnal beasties packing. Contrary to popular belief, IGA was not employed as primary director on the project – that honour fell to Toru Hagihara, who was also responsible for the excellent *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood* on NEC's PC Engine Super CD-ROM system (which incidentally is the direct prequel to *Symphony Of The Night*). However, IGA served as assistant director as well as participating in the writing of the scenario and general programming, so it could be argued that he had the most telling influence over proceedings.

It was apparent from the outset that Konami wished to steer the franchise in a fresh, new direction. "Action games could be cleared in a short time, but I wished to create a game that could be enjoyed for a much longer period," explains IGA. Taking inspiration from Nintendo's SNES classic *Super Metroid,* the team decided to shy away from the stage-by-stage concept of previous titles and cultivate a totally open, free-roaming castle for the player to explore. Hardy adventurers were

initially denied access to every portion of Vlad's sprawling, demonic fortress from the outset, but thanks to a finely tuned drip feed of abilities – ranging from the humble double-jump to unique shape-shifting enchantments – they would gradually gain entry to more sections of the ageing citadel as progression was made. For example, at various points in the castle the way forward would be barred by iron grilles. To continue, the player had to collect a relic that would permit them to alter their appearance to that of a fine mist, therefore allowing them to pass effortlessly through the obstacle. Another area – a tunnel covered in deadly spikes – could only be traversed when in 'bat' form. These puzzles were not particularly demanding but they resulted in a game that rewarded exploration and proved to be a supremely involving and enjoyable experience, while thankfully retaining the classic hack-and-slash action that aficionados of the series held so dear.

» This looks a strange place for candlesticks if you ask us.

"ACTION GAMES COULD BE CLEARED IN A SHORT TIME, BUT I WISHED TO CREATE A GAME THAT COULD BE ENJOYED FOR A MUCH LONGER PERIOD" KOJI 'IGA' IGARASHI

» The epic final encounter with Big Daddy Dracula.

» Flying crucifixes can take your eye out, lad.

» Michiru Yamane and Koji 'IGA' Igarashi.

Another major innovation was the introduction of role-playing mechanics. This particular evolution was borne out of the common perception that the series was something of a tough nut in terms of challenge, as IGA explains: "I wanted to change the impression that *Castlevania* was this difficult-to-access action game. When we decided to adopt RPG elements, we agreed that users should receive something good when beating enemies. So I thought of adding Experience Points to the game." For the first time in the series, players could enhance their chances of victory by levelling up and augmenting their character with a vast array of powerful weapons, armour and spells. The concept of earning experience for every enemy successfully slain also prevented the inevitable back-tracking from becoming too arduous, and in many ways made the game more accessible for less skilled gamers. "I thought that even the users who were not good at playing this type of action game would be able to clear *Symphony Of The Night* if I adopted this particular system," continues IGA. Some fans would later complain that the developer was slightly too successful in this regard and actually made the game too easy, and when compared to the stubborn, almost sadistic challenge represented by previous titles (NES *Castlevania*, we're looking at you), they had a point. Regardless of this, *Symphony* still possessed many hours of playtime within the dank, crumbling walls of Dracula's stronghold. The map screen was massive to begin with, but if certain parameters were met the player could teleport to a second castle – an inverted, upside down version of the first – and continue the valiant quest. This effectively doubled the size of the game and the 'proper' ending – one of several – could only be accessed when this second castle was beaten. The introduction of a multitude of useful items, including healing potions, food and one-shot weaponry imbued *Symphony* with a depth unlike anything else experienced in such a title. The urge to collect every trinket, explore the attack possibilities of every weapon, and cover every inch of the evil stronghold proved irresistible for many.

Not content with shaking things up gameplay wise, IGA also turned a few heads when it came to selecting the lead character for the game. Traditionally, the vampire-hunting Belmont clan took centre stage in *Castlevania* titles but *Symphony* saw the player controlling the half-vampire, half-human offspring of Dracula himself, Alucard. "I decided to choose a character that had a special link to the previous *Castlevania* titles," comments IGA. Alucard (Dracula spelt backwards) had appeared as a secondary character in the brilliant NES game *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse* – which IGA cites as his favourite entry in the entire series – where he fought alongside

"THE WORLD OF THE VAMPIRE THAT I HAVE IN MY MIND IS BEAUTIFUL AND FLEETING WITH BLOOD AND DARKNESS. THE SERIES HAD A VISUAL IMAGE FEATURING HOSTILITY" KOJI 'IGA' IGARASHI

» The map screen takes inspiration from *Super Metroid*.

» **Left:** The abysmal American cover artwork. **Middle:** Ayami Kojima's striking artwork for the Japanese release. **Right:** The Euro release thankfully retained Kojima's stunning work, but sold poorly.

» Who's the man? Shaft! Ahem.

the heroic Trevor Belmont to prevent his patriarch's murderous revival. After sealing this important victory he made the decision to place himself in indefinite hibernation to prevent his cursed bloodline from causing humanity any further mischief. Resurrecting the 'Tragic Prince' for *Symphony* proved an inspired move, but IGA reveals that, at the time, he was concerned that such a sweeping change would anger the fans. "Personally, I liked Alucard very much and it was totally fine with me, but I presumed that those who had been fans for a long time would be angry with our decision since it was the first time the series ever had a non-whip-using character as a hero." In hindsight, he needn't have worried – the fans took to the new lead like a duck to water. "The Japanese title was *Akumajo Dracula X*. I used 'X' to show that it would be apart from the main stream of the series, but surprisingly, it has now become the mainstream," he comments with a degree of satisfaction. Alucard is now regarded as one of the most popular characters in the *Castlevania* universe and IGA is well aware of the contribution he made to the ultimate triumph of *Symphony*. "Alucard was just a really cool hero, and that is why I think *Symphony Of The Night* has been received so favourably by the fans." Nevertheless, in order to appease those few stubborn traditionalists that might have been offended by a vampire taking centre stage, IGA thoughtfully included the option to play as Richter Belmont, albeit as an unlockable extra.

Regardless of the changes being made elsewhere, one aspect of the game retained the brilliance of former titles:

the epic boss encounters. In keeping with the grand vision IGA and his team strived to attain, *Symphony* was packed to bursting point with some of the most creative and visually stunning 2D bosses ever witnessed. Many of these fiendish creations were able to trace their roots right back to the NES instalments of the series – the towering Galamoth previously appeared in the disarmingly cute *Castlevania* spin-off *Kid Dracula*, and hardcore fans should have no trouble remembering which other games Medusa, Werewolf and Frankenstein's Monster have cropped up in before. "My favourite is definitely Beelzebub," replies IGA when pressed about which boss he rates highest. Indeed, this particular enemy proved to be one of the most memorable in the entire game, taking the form of a gigantic, rotting corpse suspended on rusty meat hooks. Victory could only be gained by hacking away at his putrid, decomposing limbs while avoiding the unwelcome attention of several massive mutated flies. When you consider the limited RAM of Sony's 32-bit console and the poor reputation it had for hosting 2D titles, it makes IGA's achievements all the more impressive.

The *Castlevania* franchise has always had a reputation for high-quality musical accompaniment and *Symphony* is no exception. Indeed, Many consider Michiru Yamane's work to be the finest ever heard in the series. With this in mind, did IGA ever feel that the expectation of aural excellence imposed limitations on his development? "The music direction has never led the creation of the game," he states. "I have always asked Michiru to compose music in accordance with the actual game and never the other way around. She always co-ordinated with the development team and composed music from the image of the stages." When asked which tune was his favourite, IGA playfully admits that he's slightly biased: "My favourite is *Castle Dracula* which starts to play when Alucard enters the castle for the very first time. I was impressed with the way the music starts to play once Alucard enters the dark castle, and then suddenly the castle gets bright and zombies start to appear. It might be

because that particular part of the game was programmed by myself." Yamane's soundtrack was a fusion of rock, jazz and classical styles that appeared hopelessly mismatched on paper but worked surprisingly well in practice. Standout tracks included *Strange Bloodlines*, which played over Richter's battle with Dracula in the prelude; *Wood Carving Partita*, a string-based composition that wouldn't have sounded out of place in a Hollywood period piece; and *Requiem For The Gods*, a largely vocal track which accompanied the Church section of the castle. The musical package was rounded off rather neatly by Rika Muranaka's heart-wrenching *I am the Wind,* which plays over the end credits. It was sung by American Cynthia Harrell, who also performed vocal duties on the infamously camp title theme of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*. Unsurprisingly, the soundtrack CD remains popular with fans a decade after it was published.

The introduction of Ayami Kojima's sumptuous artwork was the icing on an already tantalisingly gorgeous cake. Again, a desire to establish a new vision for the series was the main reason behind her involvement as IGA explains: "The world of the vampire that I have in my mind is beautiful and fleeting with blood and darkness. The series had a visual image featuring hostility, but I tried to change the image since the game concept itself

FANGS FOR THE MEMORIES
In 2007, Konami released *Symphony Of The Night* on XBLA. In the same year it produced an updated version of the acclaimed PC Engine instalment *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood* – this will be the first time the game has been officially published outside Japan. Similar to Capcom's PSP game *Extreme Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*, the game uses a brand new 2.5D graphic engine, updated character designs from Ayami Kojima and an all-new soundtrack. Some would argue that the best thing regarding this momentous release was the announcement that the original versions of both *Rondo* and *Symphony* will feature as unlockable extras, which means fans could play *Symphony* on the move for the first time ever. *Symphony Of The Night* was also made available on Sony's PSN service, meaning PS3 owners could also enjoy Konami's groundbreaking adventure game.

» Richter tackles a giant Vlad in the gripping prologue.

was going to change," he continues. Kojima's mature and astonishingly detailed art elevated the game to a whole new level of brilliance, and for once the series was granted a cohesive image that has endured ever since. Her combination of Japanese sensibility with classical painting methods resulted in some of the most breathtakingly stunning artwork ever attributed to a videogame release and it's testament to her truly wonderful talent that when a new *Castlevania* title is announced you can bet that one of the first questions to flash across internet forums worldwide is 'Has Kojima done the artwork?' Just

check out our front cover if you need further proof of her incredible skill.

With this amalgamation of fantastic gameplay, stupefying depth, gorgeous design and a downright brilliant musical score, it's unsurprising that *Symphony* went on to sell thousands in Japan where it was released as *Akumajo Dracula X: Gekka no Yasoukyoku* (*Demon Castle Dracula X: Nocturne In The Moonlight*). Huge sales and heaps of critical acclaim were also prevalent when the game debuted in the US but it perplexingly failed to replicate this success in Europe. Reports vary but it is believed that the initial print

run for the PAL version was around the 15,000 mark and many of these copies had to be heavily discounted by disappointed stores before they eventually sold. It's been argued that lukewarm reviews in the UK press – several magazines dismissed it as a 16-bit game on 32-bit hardware – contributed to the dour performance at retail, but whatever the cause, Konami knew it had a turkey on its hands and consequently didn't produce any more PAL copies. Meanwhile, in Japan and the US the game was reprinted several times in order to satisfy demand and was eventually granted best-seller status in both territories. The low number of PAL units, coupled with the fact that most came with highly desirable limited-edition items (see Bonus Stage) has recently caused prices to soar – it's not unusual for mint and complete Euro editions to fetch three figures on eBay, while the NTSC versions struggle to scrape £10.

A year after the PlayStation release, *Symphony* was ported to Sega Saturn by Konami's Nagoya studio (not the original team, it should be noted). On paper this promised to be the definitive *Symphony* – the raw 2D clout of Sega's 32-bit machine combined with Konami's boast that it intended to add a raft of exciting features (such as an additional playable character in the form of Maria Renard, two brand new castle areas and a smattering of additional items) resulted in fans being whipped into a frenzy of anticipation. Unfortunately, the eventual release was something of a disappointment. The gorgeous transparency and lighting effects so abundant in the PlayStation original had been replaced by unsightly cross-hatch textures (Saturn infamously struggled with these kinds of effects) and the game was afflicted with bouts of crippling slowdown when the on-screen action became too hectic. The much-hyped new levels were also distinctly underwhelming and were populated by some seriously daft new enemy sprites – the deranged horticulturalist in the Underground Garden instantly springs to mind – and consequently the Saturn port remains a purchase only hardcore fans should seriously consider making. Sega's 32-bit machine had all but given up the ghost in the West by the time the conversion was released in 1998 and as a result it never made it officially outside of Japan (although a Western release was mentioned several times in Sega's own promotional material). This has elevated prices to levels that almost rival that of the PAL PlayStation version.

Interestingly, around the same time another conversion was announced for Tiger's ill-fated Game.com handheld platform. Envisaged as a competitor to Nintendo's all-conquering Game Boy, the Game.com boasted rudimentary

» The Sega Saturn version featured some rather silly enemies.

» If dying wasn't enough, these poor skeletons have now been relegated to skull-bearing status.

BONUS STAGE

Two bonus items were produced by Konami and bundled with *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* in varying quantities across the three main territories. The first was a small book, which featured a black-and-white illustrated prelude to the game and some lovely full-colour character artwork courtesy of Ayami Kojima. Initially intended solely for the Japanese market (it reads from right to left, as is Japanese custom, and is entitled '*Dracula X: Nocturne In The Moonlight*') the book was eventually carried across to the American and PAL markets too. The second item is a CD, which contains a selection of tracks from various titles in the *Castlevania* series. Both items are highly sought after by fans and the art book alone has been known to fetch £50 on eBay. Amazingly, these items were bundled with the PAL version from launch but were only available to those who pre-ordered in NTSC territories.

"I WAS NOT INVOLVED IN THE ACTUAL CONVERSION, BUT I THINK IT WAS HARD SINCE I GAVE SO MANY TOUGH REQUESTS" KOJI 'IGA' IGARASHI
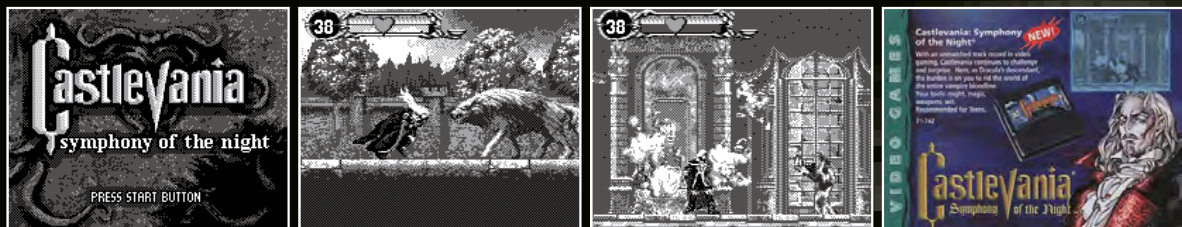
» Screens from the abandoned port for Tiger's ill-advised Game.com console.

» An advert for the cancelled Game.com conversion.

touch-screen technology and basic online functions, but neither of these potentially groundbreaking features were utilised effectively and a flood of lacklustre software resulted in the monochrome console flopping disastrously at retail. Tiger threw in the towel and development on the *Symphony Of The Night* port (which was being handled in-house by Tiger itself) was brought to an abrupt halt. Beyond a handful of screenshots it's not known exactly how far they got – the official line is that it was half finished, but some sceptics have gone as far as to speculate that the screens were simply mock-ups created in order to generate badly needed public interest in the doomed portable. No playable code has appeared in the intervening years so it's unlikely that it was anywhere near completion and the promise of a portable *Symphony* has only recently been fulfilled (see Fangs For The Memories).

Nearly two decades have passed since the world laid eyes on this astounding piece of electronic entertainment, yet interest is still as strong as ever with many devotees adamant that *Symphony* represents the pinnacle of the entire *Castlevania* franchise – no mean feat when you consider the gloriously high benchmark set by past titles like *Super Castlevania IV* and *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood* and more recent entries such the Hideo Kojima produced *Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow*. "I am really proud that it has been evaluated as such," comments IGA with a completely justified sense of pride. However, the man who was once responsible for the future of one of Konami's most valuable franchises steadfastly refuses to rest on his laurels: "I cannot say it was the best since I think I need to always make every endeavour to create better games for everyone to enjoy."

As previously mentioned, the XBLA release of *Symphony* was released in 2007. Programming duties were carried out by emulation expert Digital Eclipse which has previously impressed with several highly accurate and well-received retro compilations. Although IGA is not directly involved, he admits that he has been badgering the developer to ensure it gets superlative results. "I was not involved in the actual conversion, so I don't know much about it, but I think it was hard since I gave so many tough requests to the conversion team when we first handed them the project." There has been talk of various graphical improvements being included and the epic adventure will be the first to break Microsoft's self-imposed 50MB limit for Live Arcade content – an indication of how committed it is to ensuring the port is as faithful as possible. IGA has the utmost confidence in the ability of Digital Eclipse. "I am sure it deserves to be downloaded and played, and hopefully it will reach a brand new audience," he states categorically. Does this brave new method of software distribution intrigue the *Castlevania* producer and does he foresee the possibility of more titles from the series being made available for download? "I am very interested in the online distribution and look forward to it, but that's all I can say for now," he replies enigmatically. One thing is certain – the acclaimed franchise is in very good hands.

AYAMI KOJIMA

Self-taught illustrator Kojima is now so inexorably linked with the *Castlevania* franchise that it's easy to forget that she's only been involved since *Symphony Of The Night*. Kojima started her career by illustrating novel covers, and branched into videogames in 1997 with *Symphony* and the Koei Sega Saturn strategy title *Söldnerschild*. Her contribution to *Symphony* made her something of legend among *Castlevania* enthusiasts and she went on to create further artwork for *Castlevania Chronicles* (PSOne), *Harmony Of Dissonance/Concerto Of The Midnight Sun* (GBA), *Aria Of Sorrow/Minuet Of Dawn* (GBA), *Lament Of Innocence* (PS2) and *Curse Of Darkness* (PS2/Xbox). Her somewhat unique representation of the male form – highly feminine with lithe bodies and long, flowing locks – has caused consternation among some sectors of *Castlevania* fandom as her work has proven especially appealing to female Shonen-ai (young man love) manga addicts.

» Beelzebub is Iga's favourite boss. After fighting against him, it's easy to see why.

» Alucard stops for a quick breather and a lecture from an irate ghost.

THE DRIFT KING

X 1000r/min

6

160 km/h

IT MADE A BIG IMPACT WHEN IT DRIFTED INTO ARCADES IN 1993, BEFORE MAKING AN EVEN BIGGER ONE A YEAR LATER WHEN IT SHOWED OFF THE IMPRESSIVE POWER OF SONY'S PLAYSTATION. RETRO GAMER LOOKS THROUGH A ROSE-TINTED REAR-VIEW TO REMEMBER THE RACING HISTORY OF RIIIIIIDGE RACER

Arcade gaming and arcade ports saw something of a renaissance in the Nineties thanks to the arrival of popular coin-ops such as *Street Fighter II* and *Mortal Kombat*. Their close relationship went all the way when hardware and software developers began experimenting with comparable arcade and console technology, causing a significant shift to occur as the coin-op and domestic game markets never looking so comparable. Reigniting creativity and imagination as limitations lifted, a raft of popular polygonal 3D games emerged as two of the biggest forces in arcade gaming at the time, Namco and Sega, came to dominate the 3D arcade market, sparking an epic rivalry between the two companies that spilled into our homes.

That shift of battlefield came to put a considerable strain on the coin-op market as the popularity of home gaming increased, thanks largely to Sony's canny marketing and positioning of the PlayStation. When the expected finally happened, and console games began matching and later eclipsing arcade games in visual fidelity, many no longer saw the value or need to play games on vend. Piers and holiday camps, formerly the reserves for high-fidelity gaming, became like gaming cinemas, showing us 'coming soon' titles that, in a few short months, we would be able to play nigh-on arcade-perfect versions of in the comfort of our living rooms. But as this entertaining battle for arcade supremacy raged on, it was a pretty fantastic time to be a gamer – an exciting period filled with great arcade releases and arcade conversions.

A game emblematic of this technical gap-bridging between the two markets was Namco's *Ridge Racer*. A racing game designed for and debuting in arcades, it found a welcome home on the PlayStation when it was flawlessly converted as a launch game for the machine in December 1994.

As detailed in our exclusive making of in issue 52, *Ridge Racer* was a concept brought about by brand new PCB technology that Namco had in development, dubbed Namco System 22, that was able to generate striking texture-mapped polygons. Wanting to showcase the technology, Namco turned to the racing genre, this being a common practice by arcade developers – see Sega's *Hang-On*, *Virtua Racing* and *Daytona USA*, and Namco's own *Pole Position*. Incidentally, this is also the reason why *Ridge Racer* has appeared as a launch game for so many machines since.

"In racing games, you can build a vast space structure; create elaborate, realistic visuals; and process a complex, high-speed program," explains Namco's Masanori Kato. "So, I think this is an appropriate subject to first try out the potential of new hardware. Besides, the rules are simple, and no matter the maker of the game, the operations are the same. I think most people don't need to read the manual to understand that they have to race to the finish line. When you get a new piece of hardware, you want to experience something surprising straight away. Isn't it annoying if you have to read all the manual instructions and tips first? For that reason, when you play *Ridge Racer* on a newly acquired piece of hardware, you can enjoy the surprising experience right away, so I think it is the most appropriate launch title."

The original plan was to create an F1 game using the technology, but this idea was soon dropped in favour of doing something far more accessible, based on a trend that was occurring in Japan's booming car enthusiast scene at the time.

"There was a trend among young people in Japan for tuning their cars," Namco Bandai general manager Yozo Sakagami

» *Ridge Racer Revolution* became a popular sequel not just due to having improved visuals and new modes but also thanks to its two-player link-up games only requiring a single disc to work.

tells us when explaining how the concept behind *Ridge Racer* originated, "and they liked to race on winding mountain roads. They didn't want to slow down when they took corners, so they started drifting their cars and crossing over the boundary line of the road. Of course, this is completely forbidden. At that point, we thought: 'Can we make a racing game in which the driver pushes his driving abilities to the maximum and gets a feeling of extreme speed?' So we created a game in which we let the player experience the sensations of manipulating a car at high speed and mastering corner drift."

While realism took a bit of a back seat, beneath *Ridge Racer*'s colourful exterior, brash J-pop techno beats and videogame liveries roared impressive technical grunt and a keen focus on the thrill of the race. Its signature focus on drifting, which remains a staple in the series, allowed racers to experience the sensation of taking corners at breakneck speed while at the same time giving them the unnerving but equally exhilarating sense of momentarily losing control of their vehicle. Proof that *Ridge Racer* was never intended to

released the neGcon controller. Designed for racing games, it featured two twistable halves connected by a swivel joint that allowed the user to rotate each part for precision steering and drifting in the game. In addition to this, two analogue buttons afforded smooth and gradual control over acceleration and braking. A successor to the controller, the Jogcon, was later packed with special editions of *Ridge Racer Type 4*, offering force feedback and a unique jogging dial to mimic a steering wheel.

The PSone conversion of *Ridge Racer* introduced aspects that would become staples in the series, including mirror mode, a means to eke more from the game's single track by having players race it in reverse; a third-person camera; and additional cars to drive over the two in the arcade game. Garnering huge profits for arcade operators before becoming a popular launch game for the PlayStation, quickly sequels followed, beginning with an arcade sequel, *Ridge Racer 2*, in 1994. More an update of the original arcade game, *Ridge Racer 2* featured no new tracks over the first game but added new aspects such as night driving, a rear-view mirror and, most notably, multiplayer.

"I think racing is an appropriate subject to try out the potential of new hardware" MASANORI KATO

be a realistic driving simulator but designed to be a fun and exhilarating racing experience.

It was in April 1994 that work at Namco began on porting *Ridge Racer* to the PlayStation. The two biggest challenges the conversion team faced in porting the game to the machine was how to replicate the 'feel' on the PlayStation's D-pad controller, and also how to alleviate the issue of CD-ROM reading times, with Namco concerned that it would be an issue for console gamers spoiled on immediate cartridge gaming. Aware that it would be unable to fully avoid the latter issue, the team came up with a clever workaround: it would have the majority of the game data recovered at the start of the game, and as this data was being read would entertain users with a playable version of Namco's 1979 classic, *Galaxian*. Furthermore, beating it could unlock new cars in the main game.

Similarly, on the other issue of control, Namco knew that it would have to do the best with the tools Sony had given it, meaning the responsibility to improve the experience of *Ridge Racer* for PlayStation owners was its own. Therefore, shortly after *Ridge Racer*'s launch in Japan, Namco

A proper sequel to *Ridge Racer* came the following year. *Rave Racer* ran on the same hardware as its predecessors but built on the original game brilliantly. Once again, players raced long and short versions of the original track, but this time two new circuits were added. These tracks, City and Mountain, were brilliant additions, with City inviting players to scud along a wide urban overpass embedded in an impressive cityscape, while the challenging Mountain stage could be seen as the opposite: a rural route that snaked through a beautiful rocky vista, decorated with valleys and canyons. *Rave Racer* also marked the first ever appearance of popular *Ridge Racer* race queen Reiko Nagase, though it wouldn't be until the release of *Rage Racer* that the character was officially named.

Considering how great a sequel *Rave Racer* was, it remains a bit of a mystery among fans as to why the game was never ported to the PlayStation. Knowing that a version was mooted and got to tech demo stage for high-performance PCs, we speculate that the reason might lie with technical limitations, but Sakagami puts us straight on the matter.

"Following the first *Ridge Racer*, the objective to convert the games to home consoles during development only came

Mini making of Ridge Racer

after *Ridge Racer Revolution*. *Rave Racer* had already been developed at that time. This being said, it's not entirely true that *Rave Racer* was never converted to home consoles. In fact, we kept in mind the fact that there is a woman in the opening of *Rave Racer*. This was the introduction of Reiko Nagase. Also, the *Rave Racer* circuits were incorporated in the PSP *Ridge Racer* games, so the game hasn't been released for home consoles as a standalone, but over the course of time, all of its content has found its way into the *Ridge Racer* series."

PlayStation owners really didn't have cause to be too disappointed, though, as the console received its own exclusive sequel that same year. Despite improved visuals, two new vehicles and a couple of new tracks, *Ridge Racer Revolution* stuck close to the original template, particularly in terms of how you progressed through the game. The notable new things that Namco introduced in *Revolution* included two-player link-up races, made better by the fact that you only needed one copy of the game to set up a race, and the chance to adjust the speed level of your car, hinting at the customisation elements that would later be introduced. There are a few quirky aspects too, such as buggy mode and squeaky voiced commentary, and *Galaga '88* also replaced *Galaxian* at the start of the game.

In the same year that *Rage Racer* and *Revolution* were released, a third and pretty peculiar *Ridge Racer* game also came out in Japan. Aimed specifically at children, and seemingly inspired by the buggy mode in *Ridge Racer Revolution*, *Pocket Racer* was yet another reworked version of the original arcade game that featured deformed vehicles shaped like Choro-Q toy cars and simplified steering especially catered towards making the game more accessible.

For the next game in the series, *Rage Racer*, Namco swapped out the inviting, colourful aesthetics for more shiny, burnished and realistic-looking visuals. In keeping with this new sense of professionalism, Namco introduced the first ever career mode into the series too, in which players earned credits through winning races to spend on purchasing new cars and upgrading existing ones. Encompassing five different classes with a secret one unlocked at the end of the game, the career mode was notable for giving players three chances to successfully finish a heat, with failure to place third or higher in three tries clearing you of all the trophies you had earned inside that attempt but still allowing you to keep whatever cash and cars you had accumulated up to that point.

This release was then followed up by *Ridge Racer Type 4* the following year, which continued down that same road. The final *Ridge Racer* game to appear on the PlayStation, *Type 4* kept the

Where did the concept for *Ridge Racer* originate?
First of all, it's important to state that *Ridge Racer* was developed to make use of some newly completed polygon-capable PCB technology, albeit in the form of a proper game. I think it's fair to say *Ridge Racer's* concept was an idea born from polygon PCB technology.

Is it true that *Ridge Racer* was going to use Formula 1 cars?
At that time in Japan, the thinking was, 'If you're going to make a car racing game, take Formula 1 as a theme', so at first we considered making *Ridge Racer* with Formula 1-style cars." But the result of that consideration was a number of different concepts which informed the final version of *Ridge Racer*: the game had to be 'on public roads', 'with machines like passenger vehicles', and it had to 'encourage players to use drift techniques'. If we had gone with a Formula 1 style of racing game, would *Ridge Racer* have been so loved by players?

Why did you make an arcade racer?
As people who know the game will appreciate, *Ridge Racer* is not a realistic 'driving simulator. Of course *Ridge Racer* had a high level of programming technology and graphics techniques, but more than that, I think it was a game with a strong sense of good taste. Players back in the day were able to race through the game and enjoy a fun feeling, because it was a first-class racing game. It wasn't advanced simulation programming that made that possible, though – I think it was down to the advanced sense of game design.

Was there any competition with other arcade developers like Sega?
At that time, we were racing against one of our rival companies who also had a 'polygonal racing game' in development, so we were doing our best to make sure that our game was finished

first – even if by just one day – and was more entertaining. I think the other company was probably in the same position, racing against us.

How many people worked on *Ridge Racer*?
I can't answer this in detail, but the number of team members was much smaller than what most people would imagine.

Tell us about *Ridge Racer's* soundtrack.
Can you believe that initially we were planning to have no music in the game? *Ridge Racer's* music was produced at the same time as the game itself. We didn't have time in our schedule for a surplus of tracks to be composed, so that we could pick our favourites at the end of development – that just wasn't possible. We were lucky to happen upon danceable techno music for the BGM, which really helped with the process of creating this atmosphere where players could race through the game and enjoy a fun feeling.

Why did you create the original arcade cabinets?
The theme of the game was to put you in control of a high-power sports car, enabling you to hold the steering wheel to drive through curves and bends while skidding from side to side. Therefore, it was necessary that the steering wheel conveyed the response of the tyres in a way that players could actually feel. We had H-type gears, a clutch pedal, a large seat, and so on, all prepared so that the feeling of driving a real sports car could be conveyed properly."

Did you worry how *Ridge Racer* would be received outside of Japan?
In those days, we didn't really think in terms of 'intended for Japan' or 'geared towards the West'. We were developing *Ridge Racer* to make players experience a happy feeling, and that sense of happiness from playing games we felt was enjoyed by everyone in the global community of players.

more realistic tone and look of *Rage Racer*, but was enhanced by featuring gouraud-shaded visuals and an improved Grand Prix mode in which players got to pick a racing team and car manufacturer, and then competed in a series of races with their team, investing in new cars along the way.

Type 4 also had more vehicles than had been seen in any *Ridge Racer* before: an impressive 321, though made up of only 40 or so models. Unlocked fully by finishing every race in every possible combination of qualifying position, team and manufacturer, filling your garage with them all certainly took quite a bit of work, giving far more longevity to *Type 4* than previous instalments. Additionally, *Type 4* was the first in the series to offer split-screen multiplayer and to allow players to fully customise cars, and also broke tradition by introducing an alternative, more realistic, grip type of handling on top of the classic drift controls. Finally, packed with the game was a second disc that contained an enhanced version of the original *Ridge Racer* port. Dubbed *Ridge Racer Hi-Spec Demo* (or *Ridge Racer Turbo*), it was a truncated version of the game that ran at an impressive 60fps – twice the frame rate of the original – and

"Racing Evolution's silly story spirals into a tale of rivalry, subterfuge and girl power"

featured enhanced visuals. It was a fantastic parting gift for PlayStation owners and made a brilliant sequel even more popular with fans.

From 2000 onwards, *Ridge Racer* received a large number of sequels, went portable, and even dipped its toe in realistic driving simulator waters. But before all that, it went multiformat.

Ridge Racer 64 was not only the first *Ridge Racer* game not to appear on a Sony machine, but also the first game in the series not to be developed by Namco, with the development handled by NST, a first-party developer for Nintendo Of America. *Ridge Racer 64* was basically a blend of *Ridge Racer* and *Ridge Racer Revolution*, as it repurposed the tracks in both games. It isn't a complete two-game facsimile, however, as it adds a brand new track, a new career mode and improved driving mechanics by offering a choice of different drift mode options, one of which allowed your car to perform 360-degree spins. Add in the N64's capacity to offer four-player single-screen multiplayer, and *Ridge Racer 64* certainly lived up to the impeccable standards of Namco's entries.

Around the time that development on *Ridge Racer 64* was under way at NST, Namco was busy getting to grips with the soon-to-be-released PlayStation 2, and once again produced a *Ridge Racer* game to coincide with the machine's March 2000 launch in Japan. Like the N64 game, *Ridge Racer V* also played things close to the first two PlayStation games. It saw a return to the uncomplicated arcade origins of the series, and the circuits harked back to the original game, featuring reworked versions of the Novice and Advanced courses in *Ridge Racer*. Given its clear arcade traits, it's logical that Namco would choose to release a coin-op version of the game, and so *Ridge Racer V: Arcade Battle*, currently the last ever *Ridge Racer* arcade game, was released around the same time.

Following *Ridge Racer V*, Namco then produced a *Ridge Racer* spin-off title designed to subtly test how the series would perform as a realistic driving simulator. *R: Racing Evolution*, which was released for the PS2 in 2003 and later ported to the Xbox and GameCube, ignored *Ridge Racer*'s arcade heritage

by featuring intricate car customisation options, allowing players to alter myriad settings of each car, from body weight to wheels, and also incorporated a story into the racing. In the game you assume the role of an ambulance driver who, after impressing the head of a shady racing team by speeding an injured racer to the hospital, gets signed up to race for them. The story then gets even sillier, spiralling into a tale of racing rivalry, corporate subterfuge and girl power. It then gets a bit *Thelma & Louise*.

In 2004, the series first went portable with *Ridge Racer DS* and *Ridge Racer* for the PSP. The former was a faithful DS port of *Ridge Racer 64* that made use of the portable's touch-screen controls as a steering method, while the latter was something of a 'best of', featuring tracks from previous PlayStation entries, but, most notably, the City and Mountain stages from *Rave Racer*. It also added in new vehicles, and introduced nitro boosting. A sequel followed in 2006, which kept to the exact same formula, once again featuring enhanced, repurposed tracks from the series but this time adding a few from *Rage Racer*.

Between these two PSP games, though, *Ridge Racer 6* became a launch title for the Xbox 360. As well as online racing, the most notable thing the game added was the slightly more autonomous means of progression. The game's terribly named World Xplorer mode was a gradually unfurling career that allowed you to pick and choose the race you wished to enter, some of which featured differing race criteria such as no boosting, as you unlocked new cars and tracks along the way. An enhanced version of the game later appeared on the PlayStation 3 as *Ridge Racer 7*, featuring many of the same tracks but bringing in more vehicles as well as complete vehicle and bodywork customisation options. It also introduced a global ranking system that allowed players to post and compare their best lap times online. Oh, and it's officially the first ever 3D *Ridge Racer* game, as in 2010 Namco released a 3D update for it.

Namco went all aboard with a full 3D game in 2011 with the release of *Ridge Racer 3D*. It's an excellent little racer that once again returns the series to its early arcade and PlayStation roots. This tradition was followed in December when it released *Ridge Racer* for Playstation Vita. The game received lots of criticism at the time due to its tiny track and car selection and a focus on downloadable content. Despite its excellent handling, many critics (including us) felt it was a poor addition to the franchise. Little did we know that we'd still be playing it many years later.

It's sad then that the *Ridge Racer* story currently ends on something of a sour note. 2012's *Ridge Racer Unbounded* instantly turned off many gamers because its destruction-based gameplay meant it didn't feel like a proper *Ridge Racer* game. A selection of middling iOS games have also seen the series

» The *Ridge Racer* series has always been a supporter of reusing and repurposing tracks – it even did so in the games themselves with mirror mode.

» Series race queen Reiko Nagase was dropped for shiny new pit-girl Ai Fukami for *Ridge Racer V.* Ai wasn't popular with fans, and following an online poll Reiko was reinstated.

The games of Ridge Racer

We take a look at all of the Namco games that inspired the racing team names in the original Ridge Racer

RIDGE RACER (ARCADE)
Cyber Sled
Car #9 RT Cyber Sled
Another arcade game that saw early conversion to the PlayStation, *Cyber Sled* was a futuristic vehicular combat game – essentially a polygonal take on games such as *Tank* and *Battlezone* – in which players battled against either computer or human enemies using weaponised hover tanks.

RIDGE RACER (PLAYSTATION)
Solvalou
Car #2 RT Yellow Solvalou
Car #12 RT Blue Solvalou
Xevious fans will be well aware that Solvalou is the name of the ship you pilot in the game, and true fans will know that it is also the title of the third game in the series. Despite its first-person viewpoint and 3D visuals, *Solvalou* sticks surprisingly close to the original 1982 arcade game. The game wasn't a massive hit, though, and so is a rare cab to come by these days.

Mappy
Car #5 RT Blue Mappy
Car#15 RT Pink Mappy
One of Namco's quirkier arcade games, *Mappy* sees you assume the role of a police officer mouse as he tries to retrieve stolen objects that have been hidden around the mansion hideout of a gang of criminal cats. Very likely to have been a game entirely based on that famous idiom, 'a game of cat and mouse'.

Galaga
Car #6 Galaga RT Carrot
Car #16 Galaga RT Plid's
This very popular sequel to one of the most successful coin-ops ever made, *Galaxian*, is a fantastic and tense vertical shooter that improves on the original game in pretty much all areas. Retaining the same insect alien-blasting as before, *Galaga* adds a number of interesting ideas and features to the mix, such as bonus rounds.

Nebulasray
Car #8 Nebulasray
This little-known top-down shooter was notable for using a distinct ray-tracing technique to generate impressive and realistic-looking 3D frigates and enemy vehicles. Gorgeous to look at, fans of the shooter genre should certainly investigate the game – be warned, however, that it can be a pig to emulate.

Bosconian
Car #18 Bosconian
A game that many have heard of but few have actually played, this eight-way shooter sees you steering a ship and trying to destroy a series of fortified bases that look like watermelons while surviving a co-operative onslaught of alien enemies and space rocks. It's notable for being one of the first arcade games to feature continue screens.
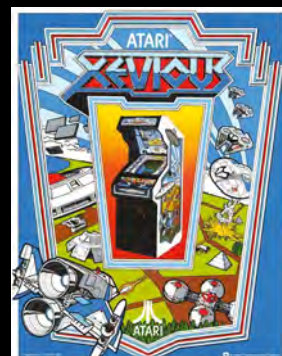
Xevious
Car #7 Xevious Red
Car #17 Xevious Green
Xevious is one of the earliest ever examples of the vertical shooter. It was also famed for its lush, vibrant-looking graphics and clever enemy AI, which allowed the game to be challenging without the need to fill the screen with enemies. In fact, the game is such a classic that it received two mentions in *Ridge Racer*, via *Solvalou*.

Dancing Stage EuroMix

"THIS IS THE BEST SHOW I'VE EVER SEEN!"

NT

The PlayStation played host to a variety of bizarre controllers, from the twisty neGcon to the one-handed ASCII Grip, but the novelty that took the market by storm late in the PlayStation's life was the dance mat. The catalyst was Konami's *Dancing Stage EuroMix*, a localised version of the *Dance Dance Revolution* games that had already taken the world's arcades by storm, including my local Sega Park. It had been a perfect fit in arcades, providing the right mix of broad appeal and a platform for showmanship – people just couldn't resist having a go at *Word Up* or *Video Killed The Radio Star*.

When it finally arrived on PlayStation, I was very excited indeed – after all, the arcade game had proven an expensive habit for my sister and I to maintain at £1 a credit, and that was if we could even get on the machine. When we got it, we were disappointed to learn that the song list wasn't quite the same as that of the arcade machine, but that was quickly tempered by the fact that we could play it whenever we wanted and fail in the comfort of our own living room. We definitely became a lot bolder about picking harder difficulties and faster songs!

While I might have shown my newly refined skills in the arcade, if I was ever any good at *Dancing Stage EuroMix*, it was down to the PlayStation version. Now, if only those soft dance mats didn't break quite so easily… ✱

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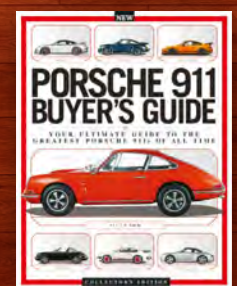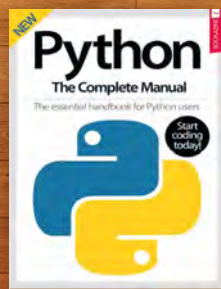
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