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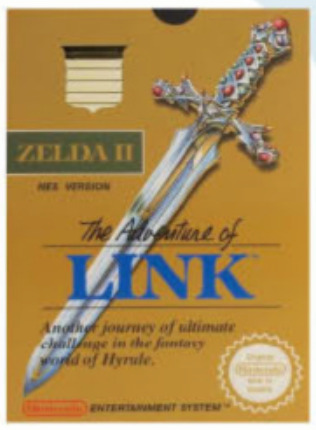
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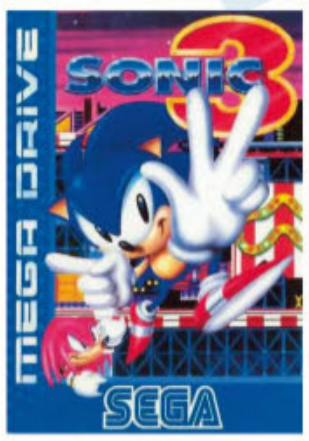
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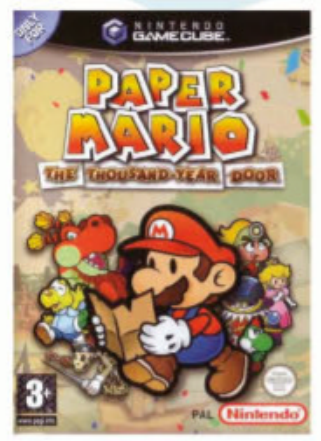
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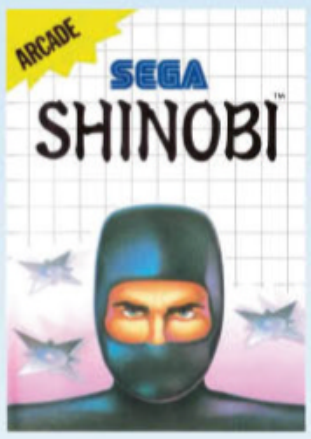
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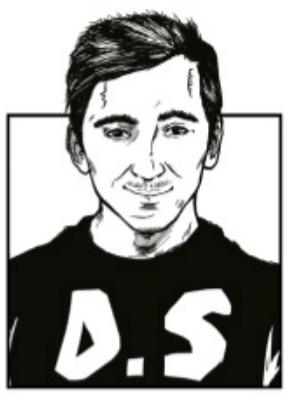
THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MOMENT FROM THE HALF-LIFE SERIES?



DARRAN JONES

Forme it's probably the first encounter with the helicopter in *Half-Life 2*. It's a terrifying thing to endure.
Expertise:
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine
Currently playing:
Rez
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



DREW SLEEP

Letting Barnacles suck up explosive barrels and detonating them is one of life's small pleasures that will never get old.
Expertise:
Bad beards
Currently playing:
Resident Evil 3
Favourite game of all time:
Final Fantasy VIII



NICK THORPE

I was really happy when the unreleased Dreamcast version of *Half-Life* was leaked, even though motion sickness prevented me from actually playing it.
Expertise:
Owning five Master Systems... and a Sega Mark III
Currently playing:
Langrisser I & II
Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog



ANDY SALTER

Mine isn't from in-game. A friend at work came in one day and complained that he had to take his son's PC over to a friend's house in order to install *Half-Life 2* because of Steam... and now no one thinks twice about stuff like that.
Expertise:
Modding games, no 'Vanilla' versions for me, thanks.
Currently playing:
Henshin... again.
Favourite game of all time:
Rome: Total War



IAIN LEE

I don't really have a favourite moment. I just remember it being the first game I ever played online, and it blew my mind that you could actually run around and shoot other people who were playing. It was so exciting.
Currently playing:
Doom Eternal
Expertise:
Buying overpriced stuff on eBay then never touching it
Favourite game of all time:
Elite (BBC Model B)



PAUL DRURY

I've never forgotten that tram ride into the facility at the opening of the first game. It seemed so futuristic in all senses.
Expertise:
Monorails
Currently playing:
Dreams
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



PAUL WALKER-EMIG

I love the introductions to both games, which are both incredible and very influential. But in terms of pure fun, I loved raiding the prison in *Half-life 2* with an army of Antlions at my command.
Expertise:
Pretentious indie games
Currently playing:
Mutazione
Favourite game all time:
Metal Gear Solid



RORY MILNE

Near the start of *Half-Life* when you're running scared in near darkness, everything is collapsing around you, and you realise that this isn't just another FPS.
Expertise:
The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing:
The Questprobe adventures
Favourite game of all time:
Tempest



GRAEME MASON

I'll never forget the ending to the original game: no regrets, Mr Freeman...
Expertise:
Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing:
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2
Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 4

LOADING...



The word 'unprecedented' has been thrown about a lot since we started work on this issue, but few other words are suitable for what's going on in the world right now. These are challenging times for everyone and as a result of the new measures that are happening in the UK, Retro Gamer is having to adapt, just like you are, which is why the magazine is sleeker than usual. Despite this, we're confident that your favourite retro magazine remains what it always has been – an essential guide for anyone that loves reading and learning about classic games. If you don't typically subscribe to the magazine then this is the perfect opportunity to do so, particularly in our current climate, and we've also got a fantastic digital offer available as well which you can read about on page 26.

As I've said many times before, Retro Gamer is nothing without its readers and we'll be doing everything we can to ensure that each issue is filled with all your favourite retro-related content. With that in mind we've put together a doozy of an issue that covers the entire glut of retro gaming from 8-bit budget gems like *Grand Prix Simulator* to stone-cold classics like *Ant Attack* and essential arcade hits like *Special Criminal Investigation*. And then of course there's this month's cover star, *Half-Life*, one of the most important FPS franchises of all time.

Stay safe, take care and we'll see you all next issue.



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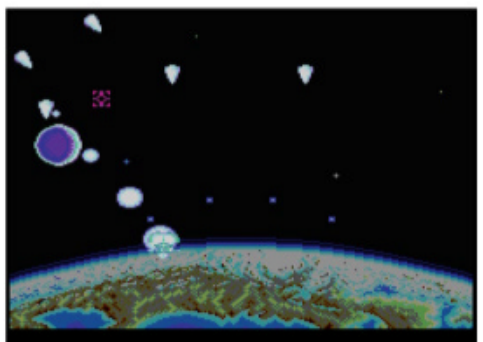
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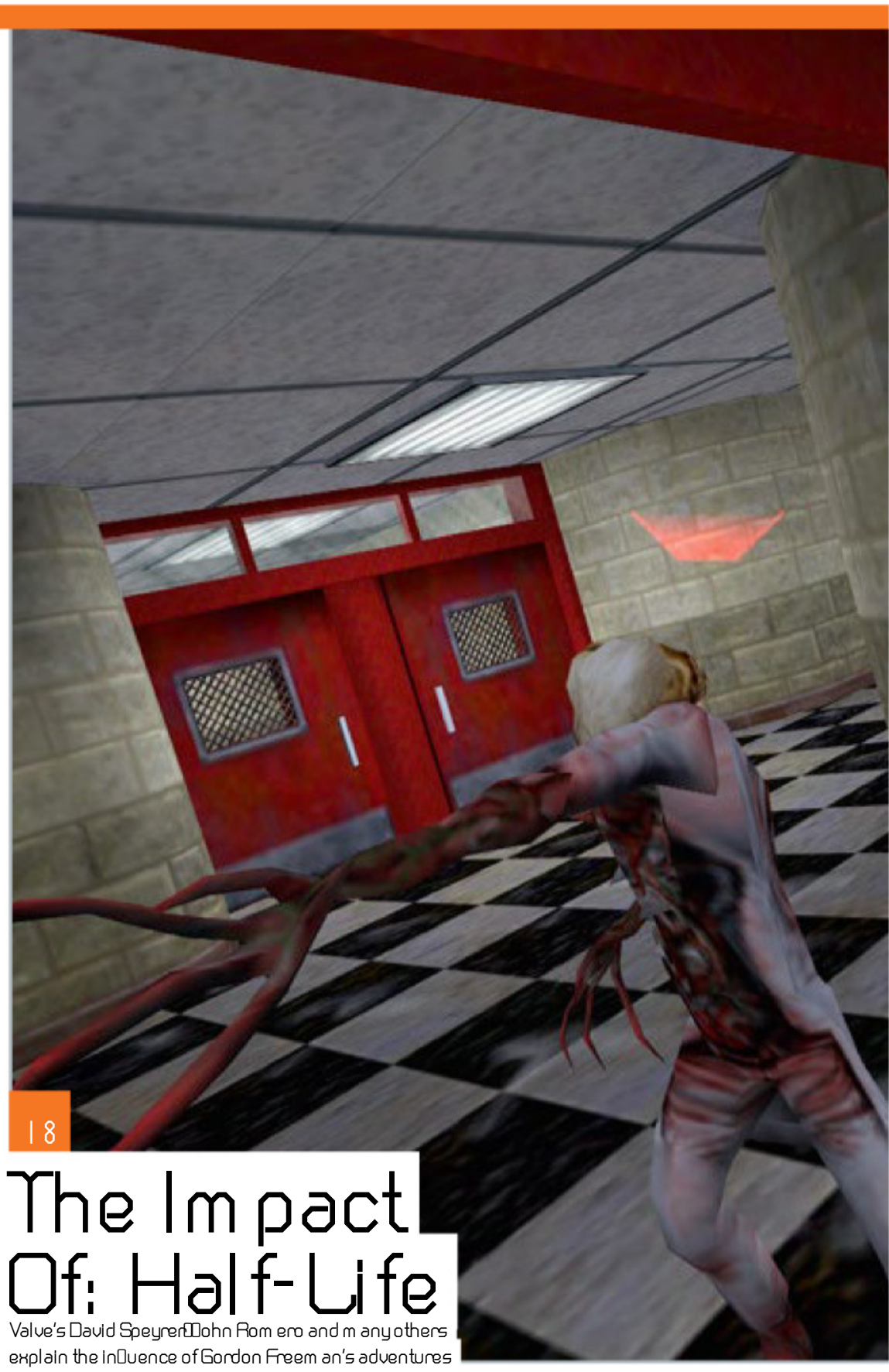
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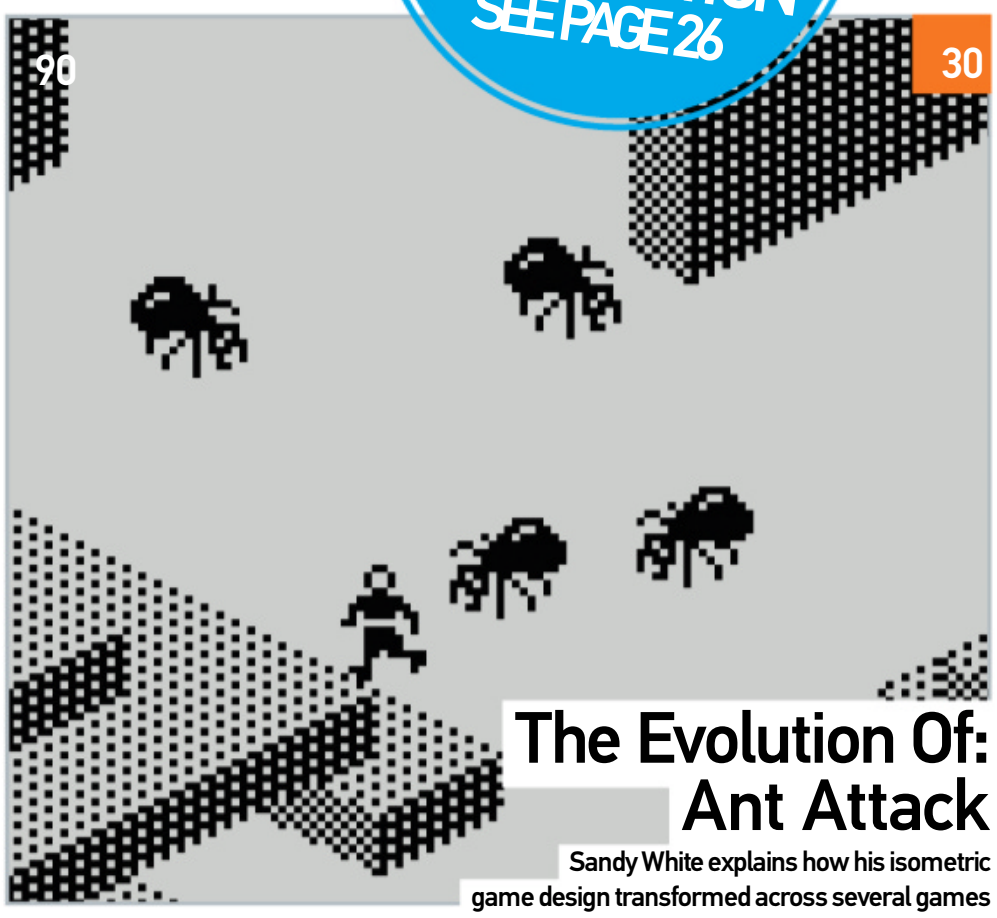


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Ultimate Guide: Special Criminal Investigation
We examine Taito's *Chase HQ* sequel, from its bosses to its many home conversions

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REINVENTING THE ARCADE RACER

[PC] *Hotshot Racing* runs using a modified version of the 'Sumo Engine' which also spawned Sumo's port of *OutRun 2*.

Trevor Ley and Tom Turner on restyling Racing Apex

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Nick avoids the virus of 2020 by travelling back to May 2003. What will he find there?

Few coders know racing games like Sumo Digital, and the Sheffield-based developer is currently working with Lucky Mountain Games to restyle its 2010 Kickstarter project, *Racing Apex*. We were able to chat to Sumo's development director Tom Turner and Lucky Mountain Games' creative director Trevor Ley about *Hotshot Racing*, their exciting new racing game that aims to recapture the brilliance of the Nineties arcade racer.

What Nineties racers has *Hotshot Racer* been influenced by?

Trevor Ley: The visual style was inspired by *Virtua Racing* with the bright colours and blue skies of *Daytona USA*. There are also slight hints *of Rad Mobile*.

How long has *Hotshot Racers* been in development for?

TL: *Hotshot Racing* started as *Racing Apex* back in 2010. Development was self-funded at the time so it was very slow going. [We] started working with Curve Digital and Sumo Digital who have been working for approximately 18 months using the 'Sumo Engine'.

Tom Turner: Sumo Nottingham came onto the project in October 2018 and we had a peak team size of around 25, with a lot of the staff coming directly from the *Team Sonic Racing* project.

What challenges do you face making an arcade-style racing game in today's market?

TL: Generally, racing games in the Nineties arcades were very short experiences, whereas players at home expect something longer. That's why we have additional game modes and online racing.

We're pleased to see you aim for 60fps. Why is it so important?

TT: It was important to us that we offer the same great experience across all platforms, and fortunately the tech/aesthetic choices for *Hotshot Racing* has allowed us to deliver on this.

What kind of options are your providing for multiplayer?

TL: *Hotshot Racing* has local and online multiplayer options, so if you want to



[PC] Both Sumo Digital and Lucky Mountain Games have spent a long time on *Hotshot Racing*'s drifting mechanics.



[PC] *Hotshot Racing* features a local multiplayer mode as well as online multiplayer opportunities.



[PC] As you'd expect there's a large number of available vehicles and they all handle differently to each other.

Tom Turner (top) is Sumo's development director, and Trevor Ley (below) is Lucky Mountain's creative director.





> "It was important to us that we o er the same great experience across all platforms"
>
> Tom Turner

do a quick arcade race or a longer grand prix to the chequered flag with a friend that is definitely possible.

Tell us about the pursuit modes...

TL: The first is 'Cops And Robbers'. If you are a robber, you have to drive and dodge the cops and race to stay ahead of the other robbers to gain the biggest bounty. If you are a cop, catch and ram the robbers to convert them to cops, set up roadblocks or drive at the robbers head-on to stop them! The second is 'Drive Or Explode', where you stay above the ever-increasing speed limit to prevent taking damage – drive too slowly and you'll explode! Both game modes hark back to the takedowns you could do in the old *Burnout* games and the chase action of games like *Chase HQ*.

Why add local split-screen co-op?

TT: I think it's the perfect complement to the social strength of racing games. It's all about the thrill of competition, seeing, hearing that real-time reaction of people you're passing. There's no better way to experience that than locally, like we all used to in the arcades!

How has Sumo Digital fitted into the project?

TL: Without Sumo the game could not have reached the level of quality we have now. All their previous racing game experience has been leveraged in *Hotshot Racing*.

TT: We were very appreciative of Trev trusting us with his baby and it has very much been a collaborative effort from day one. Crafting great racing experiences is a core part of the 'Sumo Digital DNA', having previously worked on titles in the *OutRun*, *Forza*, SEGA/*Sonic Racing* series and we were very happy to continue that legacy here in the Nottingham studio. When we were first approached about codeveloping *Hotshots Racing*, we received the latest preview build from Trev and we basically fell in love with it. The combination of the retro aesthetic and the ambition to provide a deeper driving/handling model was a great opportunity to apply our in-house racing experience.

Drifting looks fun, how much development has gone into it?

TL: From the start, the vehicle designers at Sumo focused on getting the drifting feeling right. We wanted it to be easy to do, but hard to master so that players can always improve. The main reference point was *Split/Second*.

Is it true *Hotshot Racers* uses a modified version of the engine used for Sumo's *OutRun* games?

TT: For *Hotshots Racing*, we made the decision very early on to build the game from the ground up in our in-house Sumo Engine. This gave us the advantage of having a mature toolset that is focused on racing track development/iteration and vehicle handling [...]. The tools have gone through many iterations over the years, but you can indeed trace a lot of the core tech right back to the *OutRun* game we produced in Sumo Digital's early years.



[PC] The pursuit modes have been inspired by franchises like *Chase HQ*.

TIM SKELLY TRIBUTE

VECTOR GAME PIONEER DIES AGED 68



Tim Skelly RIP (1951-2020)

Retro Gamer was saddened to hear of the death of Tim Skelly, who passed away on 1 March after a long illness. "Tim was truly one of the trailblazers of videogame development," says Jeff Lee, who worked with Tim at Gottlieb in the early Eighties. "He was not a man you failed to take notice of, possessing in equal measure style, swagger and self-assurance. He laid claim to those attributes through his keen intelligence, sharp wit and artistic sensibility."

Tim's first involvement with the fledgling games business was in 1977, when he produced some simple games to be played on a bespoke PC in an early example of a cybercafe in Kansas, before joining Cinematronics in Southern California. He had been given the job by Larry Rosenthal, who had produced the company's early hit games, but when Tim reported for his first day at work, he found Larry had abruptly left and taken all the development hardware and software with him. "I know he had just given me my big break but I was still enraged," Tim told us when he was our Desert Island Disks castaway back in 2018. "It was an unconscionable thing to do."

Undeterred, Tim taught himself how to use the complicated and potentially explosive vector technology and managed to produce *Star Hawk* (1978), based heavily on the trench run scene from *Star Wars*, which proved a hit in arcades. He went on to design half a dozen coin-op titles for Cinematronics, including the beautiful *Warrior* (1979), *Armor Attack* (1980) and *Rip-Off* (1980), which pioneered the concept of co-op play.

> "Tim was a rock-and-roll star in a small organ world"
>
> Dave Thiel

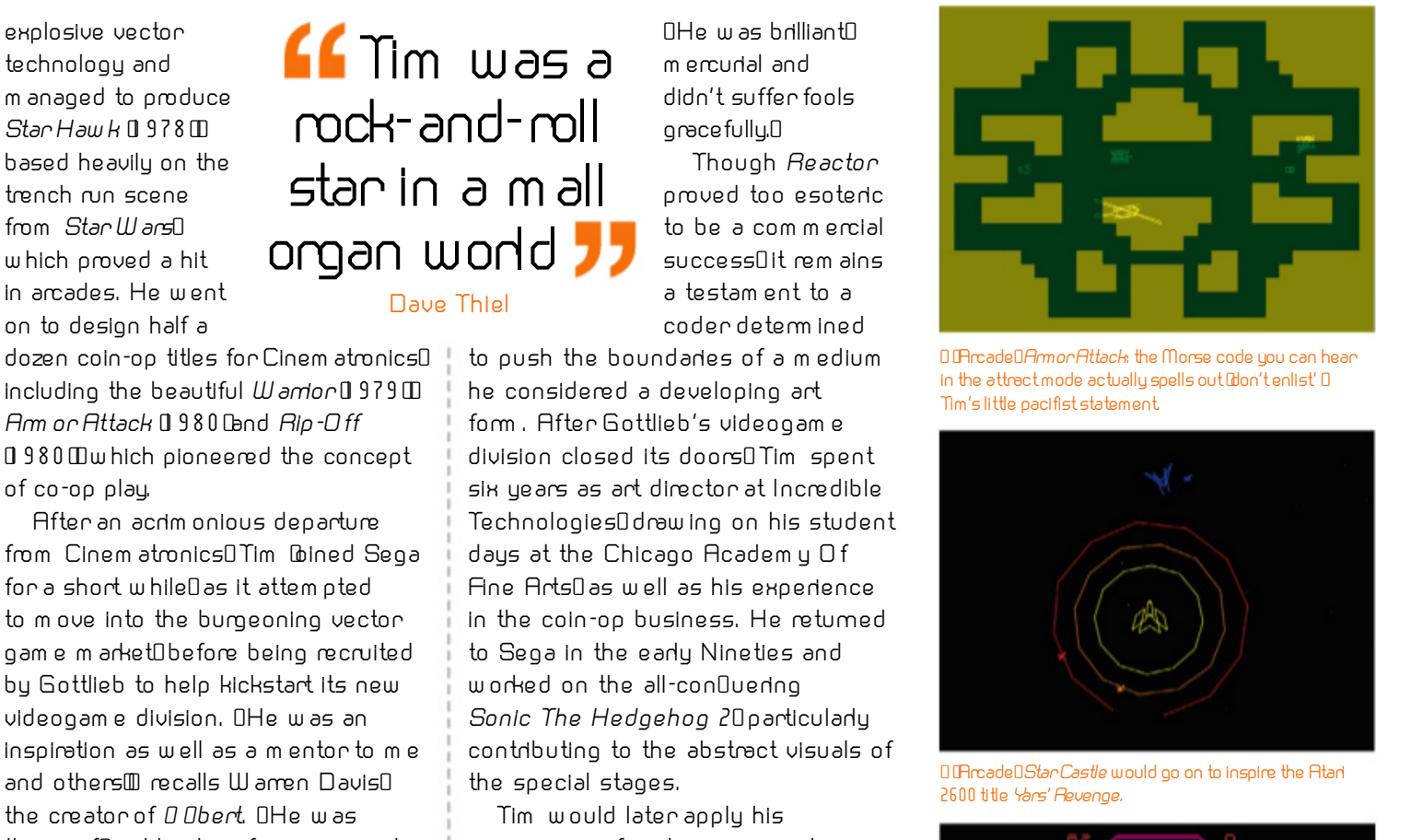
After an acrimonious departure from Cinematronics, Tim joined Sega for a short while, as it attempted to move into the burgeoning vector game market, before being recruited by Gottlieb to help kickstart its new videogame division. "He was an inspiration as well as a mentor to me and others," recalls Warren Davis, the creator of *Q*bert*. "He was the unofficial leader of our group at Gottlieb, simply because of what he'd already accomplished and the fact that we all looked up to him. Despite his rockstar status, he was always generous with his advice and knowledge."

"Tim was a rock-and-roll star in a small organ world," agrees Dave Thiel, who collaborated with Tim on *Reactor*, the first co-op title to officially display the programmer's name on-screen. "He was brilliant, mercurial and didn't suffer fools gracefully."

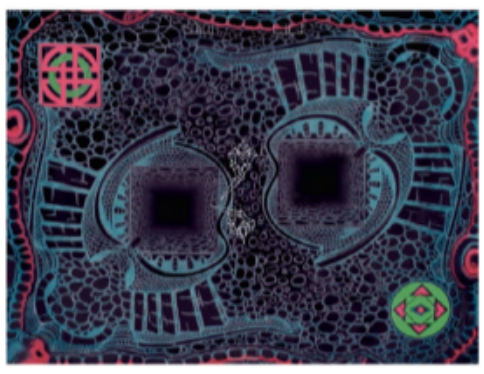
Though *Reactor* proved too esoteric to be a commercial success, it remains a testament to a coder determined to push the boundaries of a medium he considered a developing art form. After Gottlieb's videogame division closed its doors, Tim spent six years as art director at Incredible Technologies, drawing on his student days at the Chicago Academy Of Fine Arts, as well as his experience in the coin-op business. He returned to Sega in the early Nineties and worked on the all-conquering *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, particularly contributing to the abstract visuals of the special stages.

Tim would later apply his experience of making games to developing intuitive user interfaces at Microsoft, but for retro gamers, he will always be remembered for his pioneering work on those early vector games, which still burn with their creator's imagination and technical genius. *

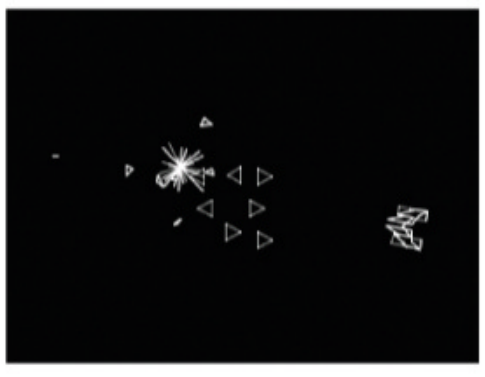
Our thoughts are with Tim's wife, Flora, who kindly provided some of the images for this piece.



Tim draped proudly over a row of *Reactor* cabinets, taken for the back cover of his book of videogame-related cartoons, *Shoot The Robot, Then Shoot Mom*.



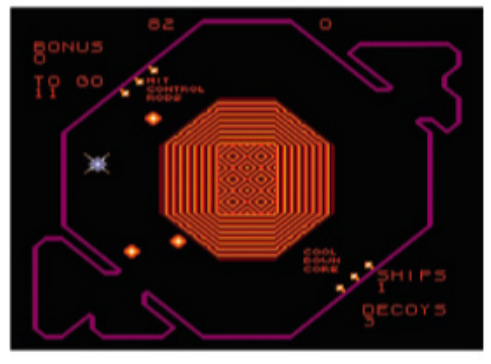
Arcade: *Warrior* was one of the very first one-on-one fighting games and remains a high point of vector game visuals.



Arcade: *Rip-Off* was Tim's favourite of his own games and he was especially proud of how it encouraged cooperation between players.

Arcade: *Armor Attack*: the Morse code you can hear in the attract mode actually spells out 'don't enlist'. Tim's little pacifist statement.

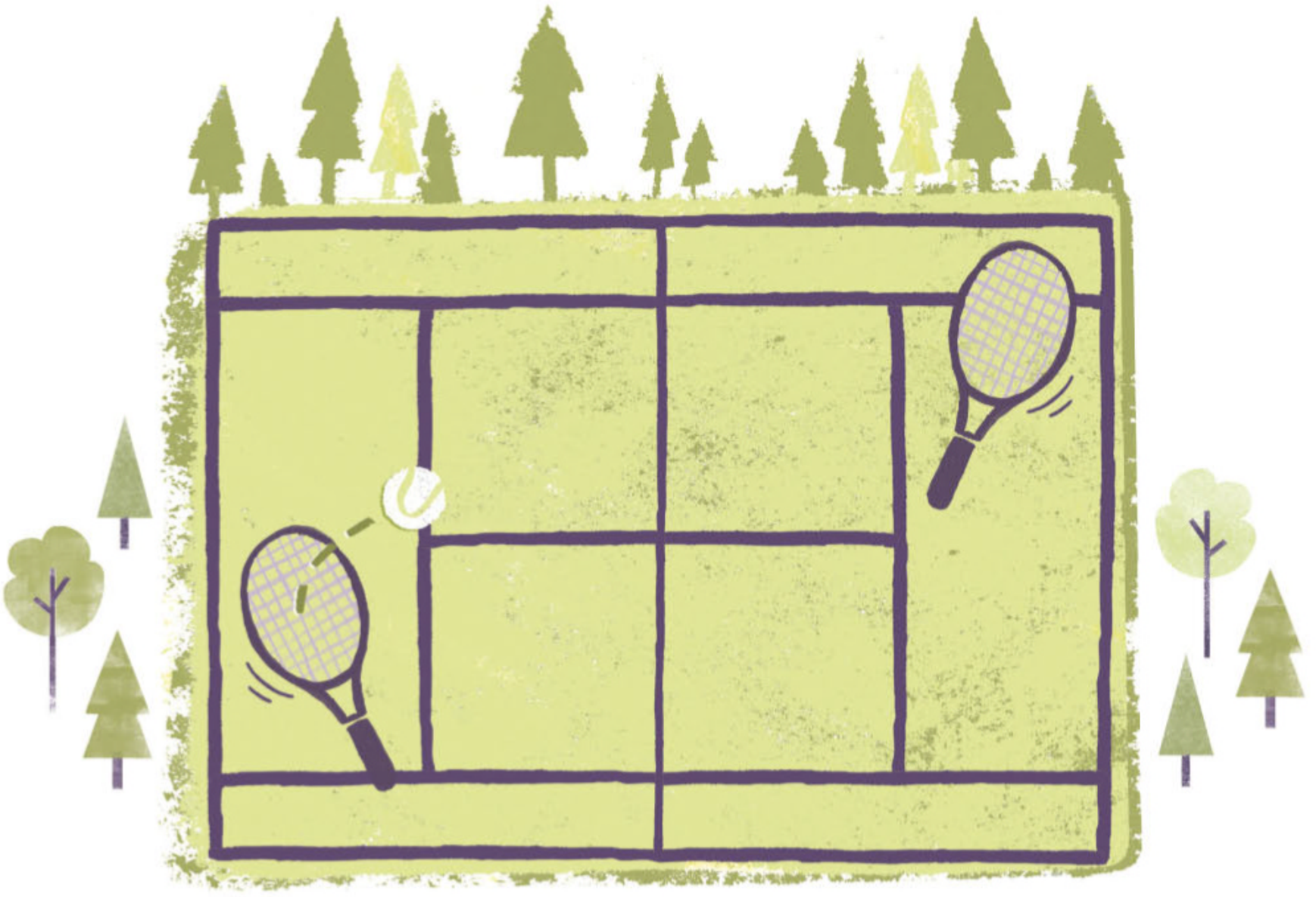
Arcade: *Star Castle* would go on to inspire the Atari 2600 title *Yars' Revenge*.



Arcade: *Reactor* was Tim's only released game for Gottlieb but you'll find *Insector* and *Screwloose*, his two unreleased projects, on MAME.

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Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. He currently hosts *The Late Night Alternative* show at weekdays from 10pm on www.talkradio.co.uk and runs daily retro streams on www.twitch.tv/iainlee.

The adventure games



I was a weird kid. I've pretty much accepted that now. Honestly, I think I knew it back in the day. I always preferred my own company, I would make up strange games and languages, and would often hide if my friends came knocking for me on my front door. Looking back, I can understand most of my behaviour as a child and feel a lot of affection for that kid.

Recently however, I've found myself questioning something I used to be obsessed with. Text-based adventures. I would play them a lot. *Madness And The Minotaur*, *Twin Kingdom Valley* and *Bored Of The Rings* were some of my favourites. And I'm talking from the age of nine years old, so really young. Not having played a text adventure for decades, I thought I'd have a go and get back into them.

Booting up the old hacked BBC – it has a USB slot, don't you know – I was actually very excited at the prospect of staring at a load of words on a screen for a few hours and solving puzzles that would have had me stumped back when I was a kiddie. With so many options to choose from, I plumped for *Colossal*, the classic from Level 9 released in 1982.

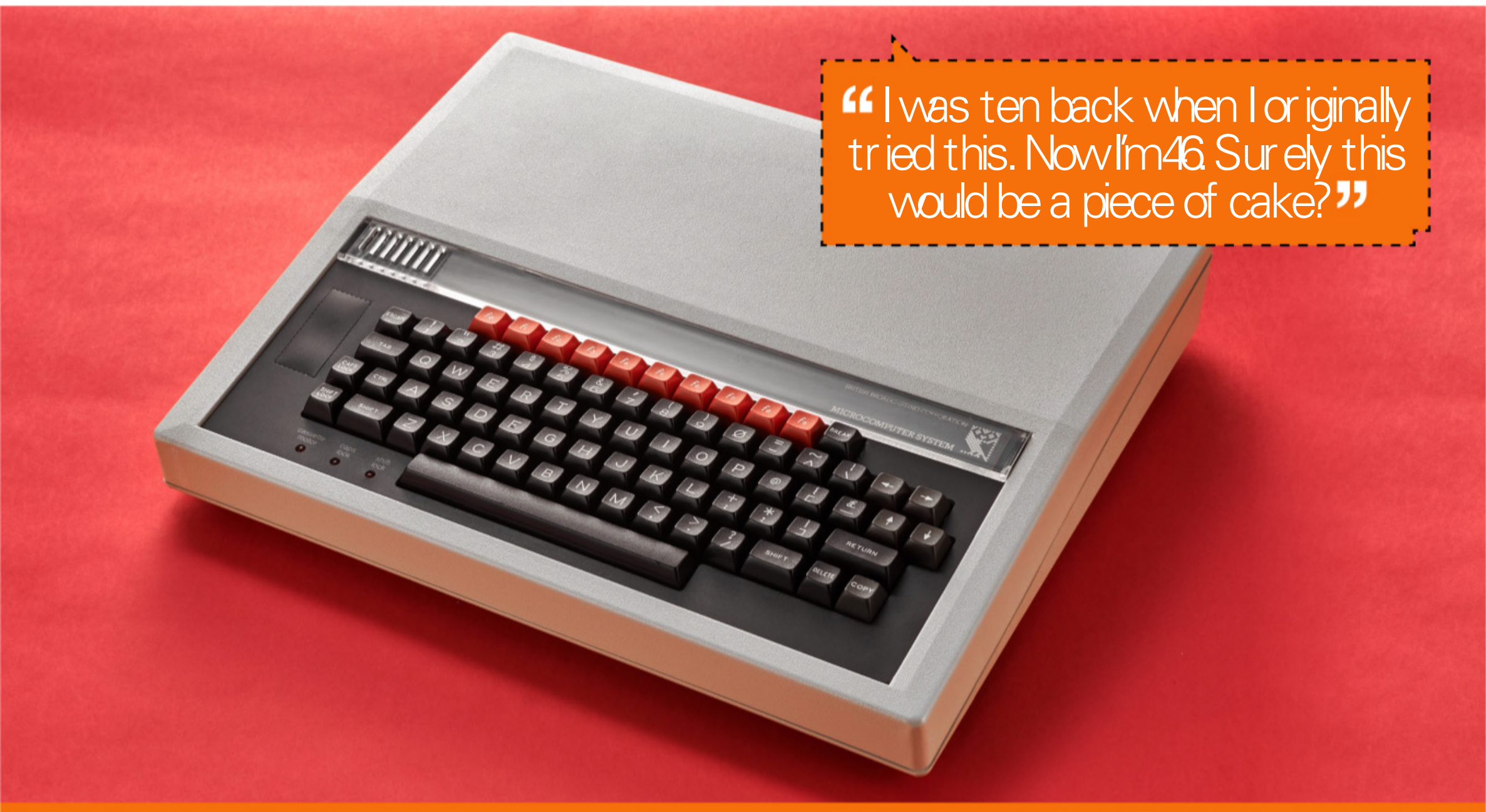
The starkness of the screen was beautiful. Black with just a few words displayed in blinding white. It took me back in time to setting up the computer in mum and dad's bedroom on the portable telly. I was actually nervous. Would I be able to solve the puzzles? Could I even complete this mythical beast? I was ten back when I originally tried this. Now I'm 46. Surely this would be a piece of cake?

The first thing was getting to grips with the parser, you know, how you input words. GO EAST and GET KEYS were relatively straightforward, but I had forgotten just how difficult it could be to reduce your instructions to two words that could be understood by an idiot. I managed it though, and started making progress. I found the keys, opened the grate and even chased the snake away with the bird.

But I was bored. Really, really bored. It was boring. The story was dull, the challenges almost sent me to sleep and I had absolutely no interest in what was happening. I ended up switching it off after 40 minutes.

I'm not saying any of this to be controversial or to upset adventure fans. If it's your thing, then I salute you and wish you well. I guess I'm trying to understand WHAT THE HELL 9-YEAR-OLD ME WAS THINKING??? How the Debbie McGee did I, as a very young child, sit and play these bloody things for hours on end?

I see a therapist, and I thought we were coming to the end of our work together. It looks like I'm probably going to need another six months with him to try and understand my inner child just a little bit better. Because at this precise second in time, I think he's a bit of a div and a loser.



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

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamerMag retrogamer@futurenet.com

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

Age of innovation



I'm of the belief that I, and likely many of you, lived through the greatest era of videogames. For at least a decade (or more) now, gaming has been in what I think of as 'The Incremental Age'; games have stuck rigidly to a handful of genres and templates, graphics have stopped taking giant leaps, and the biggest technological development in gaming – virtual reality – is one that has been knocking around for close to 30 years.

Our privileged generation got to see the development of gaming in real time. We were the guinea pigs that the mad bedroom scientists unleashed their experiments upon. We seem to have lost the thrill that came with encountering a type of game that looked and played unlike anything that had gone before it.

It's almost weird that I've never really lost the memory of playing those landmarks for the first time. Mine may be different from yours, but the first time I was rendered speechless by a game was Sega's *Killer Shark* – an electromechanical shark-hunting game from the early Seventies. In a dingy seaside arcade, having to stand on a box to reach the cabinet's harpoon controller, it was the first one which got lodged in my brain. Then came *Battlezone* – taking the *Space Invaders* format, and putting me right inside the action.

I recall playing Sega's *Zaxxon* (somehow, Sega features heavily in this list) for the first time, its pretending-to-be-3D visuals convincing me that game graphics surely couldn't get any better.

How wrong I was. Seeing the Disney-level animation of *Dragon's Lair* running at a local funfair, getting in the queue to play it, and then throwing caution to the wind by sinking a precious 50p coin into it (almost enough to buy a new car in those days). And dying almost immediately (I soon learned it was a game that was more fun to watch than play). *Knight Lore* was another big one for me. From seeing the first screenshots in a magazine, then actually getting to play it – and scarcely believing that it played as well as it looked.

Going round a mate's house and witnessing the cinematic, technicolour glory of *Defender Of The Crown* and *Dragon's Lair*. The first *Sonic The Hedgehog* – faster than any game I'd ever played, and with parallax scrolling to boot. In my own home! Then came the 3D era. *Doom*. *Super Mario 64*, *Tomb Raider*. Jump forward a few years, and *Half-Life 2* nailed realistic physics. And it was around then that games, for me, began perfecting what had came before, rather than pushing forwards. The thrill started to evaporate, replaced by endless sequels to *FIFA* and *Call Of Duty*.

But being generous, what progress is there left to be achieved? During the first 30 years of true videogaming the industry built something out of nothing, and, game by game, moved it ever closer to photorealism. Our mad, complicated, multifaceted, world recreated through lines of code. I've not lost all hope that maybe I'll once again fire up a game and sit there open-mouthed, scarcely able to believe what I'm seeing, but I fear those days are gone. ✱

> "We were the guinea pigs that the mad bedroom scientists unleashed their experiments upon"



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

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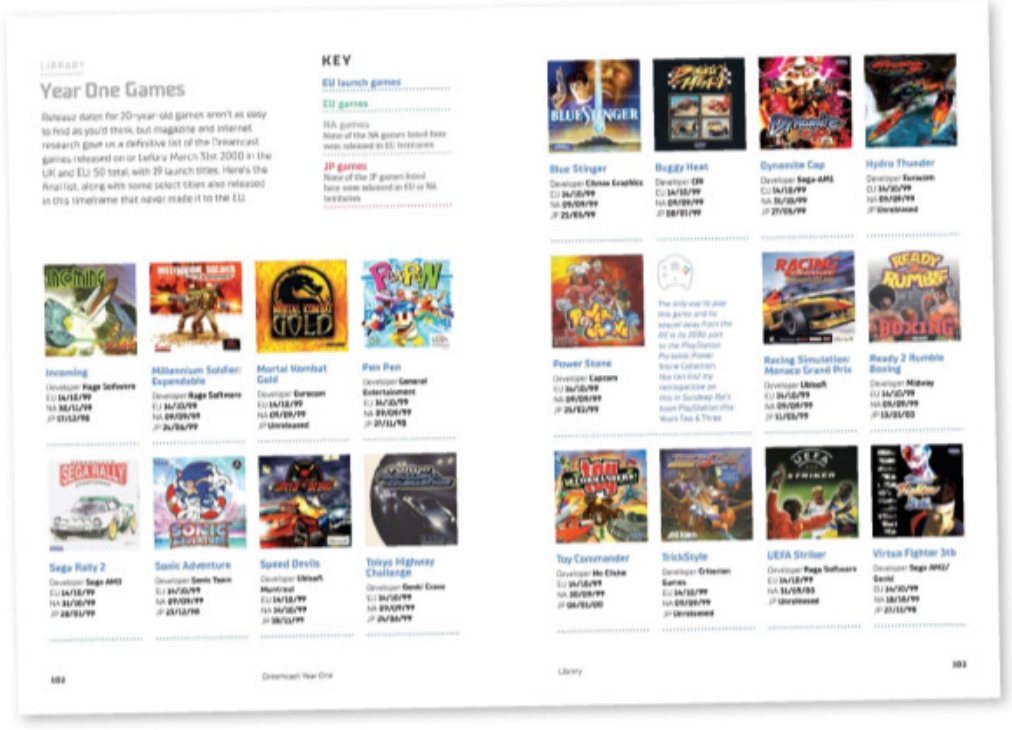


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A PAL

The Dreamcast was meant to be a return to form for Sega, after its Saturn console failed to live up to expectations following the phenomenal success of the Mega Drive/Genesis.
However, less than two years after launching in Europe, Sega discontinued the Dreamcast and withdrew from the hardware market. Nonetheless, the system is still revered as a classic two decades later, and lives on thanks to a thriving fan community.
In this book, you can learn how the Dreamcast came to be, as well as what happened during its first year on the market. You can also understand more about the history of Sega's final console through interviews with heavy-hitters from the industry, as well as retrospectives of games that put the system on the map, for all the right [and sometimes wrong!] reasons.
Dreamcast: Year One
The unofficial story of the Sega Dreamcast's conception, launch, and first year
Andrew J Dickinson
DCY
dreamcastyears.co.uk

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BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

MAY 2003 – Are online games worth the hassle? Developers aren't convinced but console manufacturers are, and the verdicts are rolling in. Nick Thorpe takes a break from watching Flash animations to bring you all the news



NEWS MAY 2003

The month began with an apparent triumph for coalition forces in the invasion of Iraq. Arriving by plane on the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier on 1 May, US president George W Bush declared that major combat operations in Iraq had finished, while standing in front of a banner reading 'Mission Accomplished'. Just over two weeks later on 16 May, the US and UK announced that allied military command will remain in place indefinitely.

The last foreign journalist working in Zimbabwe, Andrew Meldrum, was ejected from the country by the government. He had clashed with the authorities in 2002 over his publication of a report alleging that supporters of Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF party had executed a woman in front of her children, but was acquitted of publishing a falsehood. His official deportation order had been ruled illegal by a judge, but the government proceeded regardless.

Advances in cloning continued this month. On 23 May, the white-tailed deer Dewey was born following a successful cloning process by Texas A&M University scientists. The first ever cloned deer was swiftly followed by the first ever cloned horse, as Prometea was born at the Laboratory Of Reproductive Technology in Cremona, Italy.



PC – Over 400,000 players were signed up for duels like this, and EA was going to struggle to cope.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MAY 2003

Reporting from the Game Developers Conference, *Edge* noted that the focus of the year's talks was the difficulty of creating successful online games. One of the key players in this space was Electronic Arts, which offered sobering words for any developer trying to enter the scene. Gordon Walton, executive producer of *The Sims Online*, noted, "The more success you get with an online game, the bigger drain it becomes on the company's resources." A great example of this was *Star Wars Galaxies*, which had a team of 27 people just looking after community management and problem solving, as well as six shifts of customer support staff. Server capacity was another major problem, with Rich Vogel claiming, "We've already taken 400,000 preorders but there's no way we can handle that number of players in the first week." Even getting the game design right was tricky – the company shut down online racer *Motor City Online* because "the game was quickly dominated by skilled players" and "new players were faced with more defeats than helping hands".

This was all especially interesting as both Nintendo and Microsoft's online support were finally earning some post-launch coverage in the press after both arrived in March, and Sony's plans were nearing fruition. *Cube* was wholly unimpressed with Nintendo's "dismal offering", which was accompanied by "a marketing campaign best described as invisible". GameCube players wishing to go online could purchase a modem adapter or broadband adapter, but both were supported solely by Sega's *Phantasy Star Online*. "Nintendo has undersold itself and seems indifferent as to whether UK gamers go online or not," the magazine opined. "Nintendo's showing at next month's E3 will confirm whether it has genuine commitment to the online cause or not."

A £39.99 Xbox Live Starter Kit package was required to enjoy online gaming on the Xbox, consisting of a headset, demo disc and subscription code – the necessary broadband connection hardware was already built into the console. *XBM* felt that Microsoft's service was highly impressive, giving it the issue's main review slot and scoring it 9/10. The reviewer felt that "even bad Xbox Live games become playable simply for



Xbox – Xbox Live was wowing players, and playing *MotoGP 2* was one of the best options to start with.



PS2 – If you couldn't get online, at least the multiplayer in *Midnight Club II* was pretty tasty.



[PS2] PS2 online was a while off, so *Hardware* was previewed with a LAN connection instead.

the mix of camaraderie and obligatory heckling", which was probably for the best as the second opinion box noted that "the standard of games so far isn't that great". *Unreal Championship* and *Moto GP 2* were considered to be highlights of the line-up, which also included *Mech Assault*, *Whacked!*, *NFL Fever 2003* and *Capcom Vs SNK 2: EO*.

PlayStation 2 owners would have to wait until later in the year for their fix of online gaming, but that didn't stop *Play* taking a sneaky preview of three of the games in early development for Sony's service. However, as it noted, only *SOCOM: US Navy Seals* was actually online, with the others running via LAN, and this failed due to "some kind of internet connection problem". *Destruction Derby Arenas* was considered to be more garish than its predecessors, but offered "that very familiar *Destruction Derby* feel" in its handling, and *Play* felt that "the signs for this are good". However, the magazine's greatest praise was reserved for *Hardware*, a vehicular combat game using military equipment such as jeeps and tanks. *Play* felt that sacrificing realism for constant action was the right move, and that the game represented "what online play should be all about".

But what of non-networked games? Well, Xbox fans had some predictable but solid fun to digest, with *NHL 2K3*, *NFL 2K3* and *TOCA: Race Driver* all picking up 8/10 scores. A rare 1/10 was doled out to *Pulse Racer*, as the magazine felt the "visual effects are comparative to the Game Boy Advance" and the controls were "jumpy as a kangaroo". For GameCube owners not entranced by the recent delights of *Metroid* and *Zelda*, the new ports of *Conflict: Desert Storm* (8.2/10 *Cube*, 89% *NGC*) or *Burnout 2* (90% *NGC*) might do the trick. However, the most intriguing news was that Shigeru Miyamoto himself had apparently confirmed that Konami was bringing *Metal Gear Solid* to the GameCube – and according to *Cube*, had alluded to not only some sort of remake, but the prospect of *Metal Gear Solid 4* as an exclusive. The magazine did express scepticism on this point stating, "We're perfectly willing to believe that another *MGS* title, along with the remake, is under development, but for this game to be *MGS4* is remarkable – perhaps too much so."



[PC] *Motor City Online* was shuttered, falling victim to the total inability of new players to – ahem– 'git gud'.

Midnight Club II impressed *Play*, scoring 82%. Though not entirely convinced by its open city course structure, the magazine praised the game's multiplayer modes noting that, "This is where the weapons come out and the damage starts to mount – not to mention the shouting." Importers were also urged to check out *Soulcalibur II*, which scored a whopping 96%. On the PC, space trading sim *Freelancer* arrived to a muted 5/10 from *Edge*, while *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down* earned 7/10, with *Edge* recommending it to those that "can stomach the precarious ethical nature" of the first-person shooter's tale of American intervention in Somalia.

Join us again next month – just make sure you do it on Pioneer II, okay?



[PC] We miss the days when wholly apolitical games would create stories from ongoing military conflicts.

CHARTS

MAY 2003

PLAYSTATION 2



1 – Enter The Matrix (Atari)
2 – Midnight Club II (Take 2)
3 – Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell (Ubisoft)
4 – Grand Theft Auto: Vice City (Take 2)
5 – The Sims (EA)

XBOX



1 – Enter The Matrix (Atari)
2 – Return To Castle Wolfenstein: Tides Of War (Activision)
3 – Moto GP: Ultimate Racing Technology 2 (THQ)
4 – Burnout 2: Point Of Impact (Acclaim)
5 – Halo: Combat Evolved (Microsoft)

GAMECUBE



1 – The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker (Nintendo)
2 – Enter The Matrix (Atari)
3 – Burnout 2: Point Of Impact (Acclaim)
4 – Super Smash Bros Melee (Nintendo)
5 – Metroid Prime (Nintendo)

MUSIC



1 – Ignition Remix (R Kelly)
2 – Favourite Things (Big Brovaz)
3 – Take Your Shoes Off (Cheeky Girls)
4 – Loneliness (Tomcraft)
5 – Rise & Fall (Craig David feat Sting)

THIS MONTH IN...



Play

The latest build of the long-waited *Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness* has arrived at *Play*'s office, and reactions are mixed. "Some old flaws seemed to loiter around the edges of play. The controls in particular need some tuning, as does the combat system," wrote the magazine, though they would "surely be improved in the final stages of development".



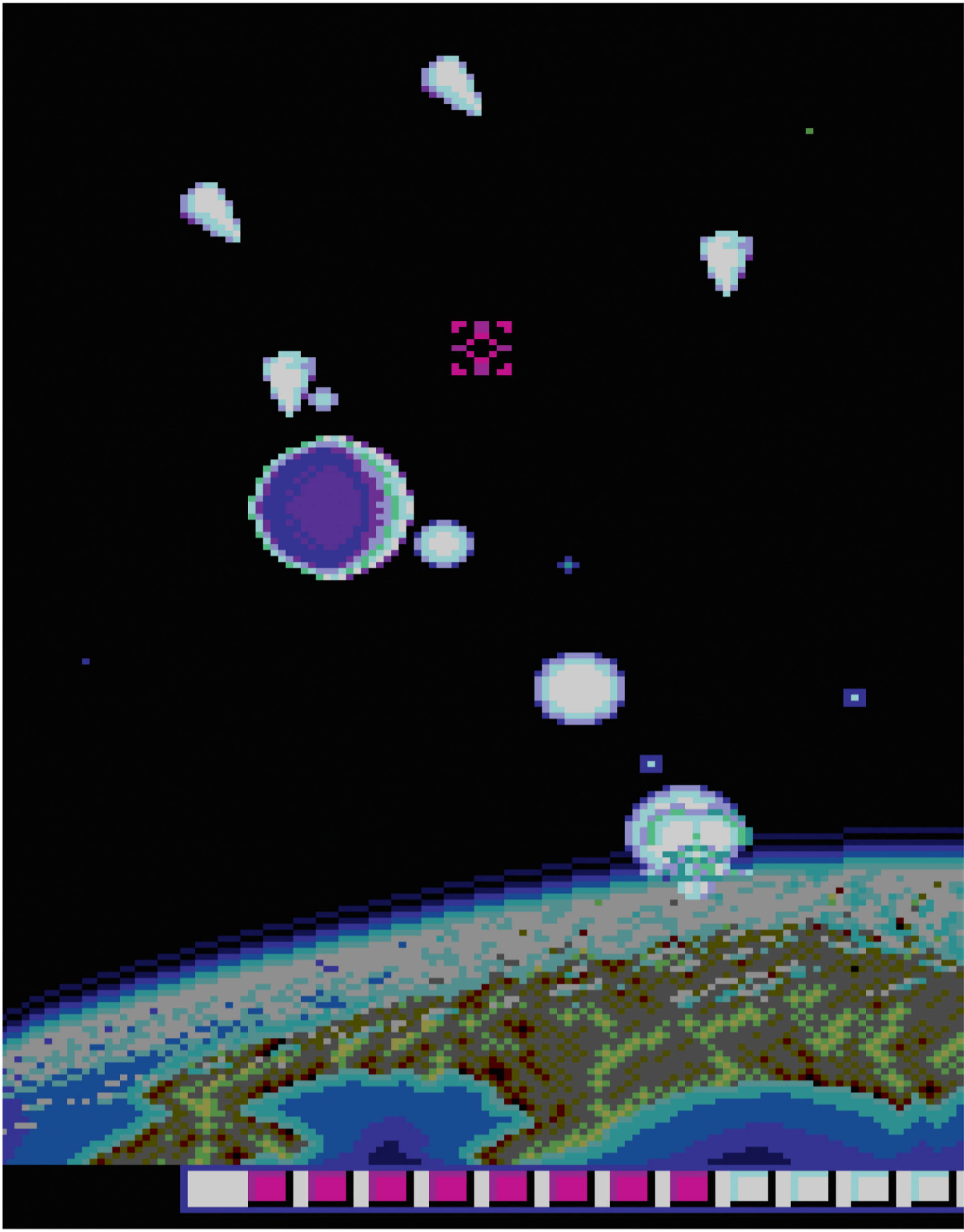
Edge

It's the annual awards issue, and this year *Edge*'s game of the year is *Metroid Prime*. Nintendo won publisher of the year and Tecmo took developer of the year. *Animal Crossing* and the *Steel Battalion* controller won awards for gameplay and hardware innovation, and poor old *Blinx: The Time Sweeper* was named disappointment of the year.



Cube

The future of *Animal Crossing* appears to be in doubt – at least as far as European players are concerned. The Viewpoint pages contained the question, "Why did *Animal Crossing* vanish from releases in issue 15 and no diary in issue 17?" The sobering answer: "Cause it's never gonna happen. Sob." Sob indeed.



Global Defense

NOT THE FANTASY MOME WITH THE, UH, MONSTERS

RETROREVIVAL



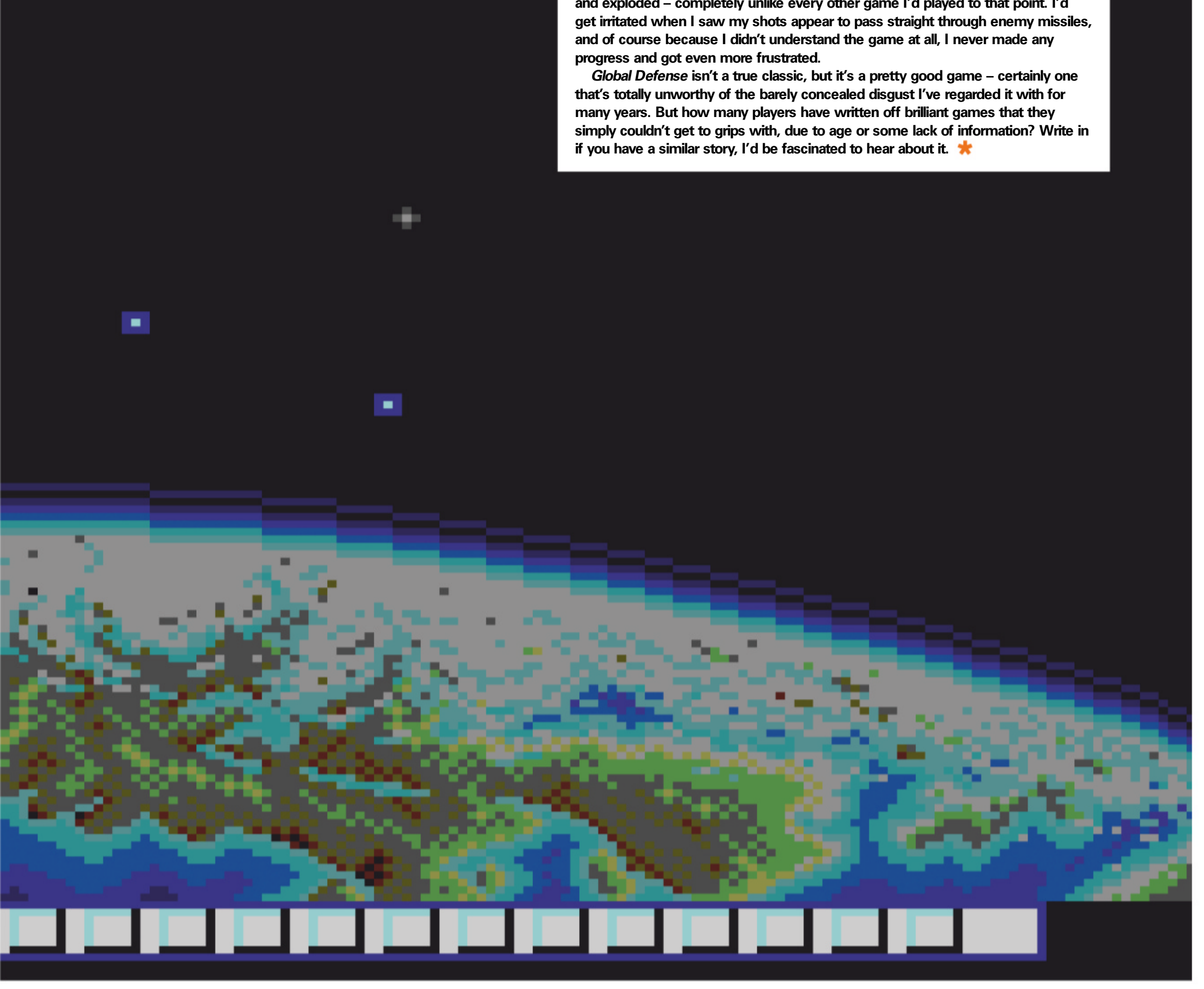
MASTER SYSTEM 1987 SEGA

Growing up with the Master System left me with some very distinctive views on gaming. For example, for many years I just couldn't work out why anyone gave a damn about *Strider* because the Master System version just made it feel like a slow, generic platform game. But at least that can be chalked up to a ropey conversion. With *Global Defense*, which you might know better from the arcade or other formats as *SDI*, the problem was most definitely me.

Beyond my problems with *Shanghai*-style puzzle games, which I've mentioned in these pages before, there were very few games that I legitimately struggled to work out as a kid. Unfortunately, *Global Defense* was definitely one of them. In the arcade, a joystick controlled the movement of your satellite, while the targeting reticule for your intercepting fire was controlled using a trackball – this is a good system that allows you to deal with both aspects of the game at once. On the Master System, with one d-pad and two buttons, something had to give and simultaneous independent controls were the big casualty. Instead, one button was reserved for fire, and the other functioned as a way of switching between controlling your satellite and aiming your shots.

That's already reasonably complex for a kid, but what really tripped me up was the way that your shots only became damaging once they'd reached their target and exploded – completely unlike every other game I'd played to that point. I'd get irritated when I saw my shots appear to pass straight through enemy missiles, and of course because I didn't understand the game at all, I never made any progress and got even more frustrated.

Global Defense isn't a true classic, but it's a pretty good game – certainly one that's totally unworthy of the barely concealed disgust I've regarded it with for many years. But how many players have written off brilliant games that they simply couldn't get to grips with, due to age or some lack of information? Write in if you have a similar story, I'd be fascinated to hear about it.



THE IMPACT OF HALF-LIFE

We follow the journey that began with Gordon Freeman taking the train to work to explain how Valve's revered series revolutionised game design and set the standards for the titles we are playing to this day

Words by Paul Walker-Emig

We all knew *Half-Life* was something special as soon as we stepped into the shoes of Gordon Freeman riding the train into the heart of the Black Mesa Research Facility back in 1998. At that time, we were still accustomed to thinking about the spaces that games – and first-person shooters in particular – took place in as levels – an artifice providing the backdrop for gameplay to happen. Black Mesa was different. This was an *environment*. You weren't dropped straight into a corridor with a gun in your hand and an enemy to use it on standing in front of you. You were playing as a person arriving at work. Valve took the time to show you a workplace in operation, with people going about their daily business, and gave you some time to inhabit its protagonist as a normal person doing their job before everything went to hell.

"Gordon, and by extension the player, is there for the *whole* incident," says Adam Engels, project lead on *Black Mesa*, the recently completed remake of the original *Half-Life*. "You kick it off, you fight through the facility, you kill the big bad at the end. You are not dropped into someone else's problem, and you have context for the whole adventure. I think, even to this day, it makes *Half-Life* stand out.

"The facility itself seems not only huge but active," continues Adam, reflecting on the worldbuilding that made *Half-Life* feel so revelatory when he first encountered it. "Like the whole facility is operating just out of view. It helps what might be a cheesy sci-fi fantasy feel grounded and real."

As Adam suggests, *Half-Life*'s opening was indicative of the approach Valve took to designing the game at large. There was a concerted effort not to create a string of videogame levels that you would take on one after the other, but instead create a consistent place that felt believable and try and situate the player in it as a real space as much as possible. Valve built a world that responded to you, where the scientists going about their business in the labs, break rooms and corridors of Black Mesa would acknowledge your existence and react to the things you do, even to the point of pissing them off by exploding their casserole in the microwave. It's a place where exposition isn't presented to you on a platter, as if you are the centre of the universe, but where overheard conversations provide small details, the environment is used to help tell the story, and those with a keen eye are rewarded with unsettling appearances of the nefarious G-Man lurking in the periphery. This kind of approach is now relatively commonplace, but at the time it represented a huge shift in the way we thought about games.

For David Speyrer, who is now a developer at Valve and worked on *Half-Life 2*, the first *Half-Life* had a profound impact. "My first exposure to *Half-Life* was playing the 'day one'



– PC – The enigmatic G-Man hides in plain sight, an omniscient observer of Gordon's progress throughout Black Mesa and beyond.



– PC – Instead of prerendered cutscenes, the team at Valve opted to have events play out in-engine through Gordon's eyes.











leaked build – but don't judge me – those were different times – David recalls. "My immediate reaction was – 'This is amazing and important – I would love to make games like this.' I found the seamless integration of storytelling and gameplay so compelling and transporting – I had never inhabited a videogame protagonist so completely. Jay Stelly and I had made games together all through high school and college – and he'd gone on to do loads of wonderful work on *Half-Life*. He'd been encouraging me to apply to Valve – but I was busy and happy living in Boulder," David continues. "Once I played 'day one' and realised what they had accomplished with *Half-Life* – I didn't need any more prodding. I came up for an interview on the day that *Half-Life* went gold and happened to take the team photo during the shipping party. It was a memorable day. Back then – I considered *Half-Life* important enough to change the course of my life."

The sense that *Half-Life* represented a fundamental shift in the way games would be designed was felt across the industry. Jonathan Chey – who was working on *System Shock 2* at Looking Glass Studios at the time – remembers the terror he felt when he came to realise what Valve had achieved.

"I had a terrible sinking feeling when I first played *Half-Life*," Jonathan remembers. "How the hell were we going to compete with this? It redefined what was possible with a first-person shooter – the frenetic gameplay and wafer-thin worldbuilding of the past was gone in one stroke. Black Mesa felt like a real place populated with something other than just mindless enemies to be gunned down. It evolved the first-person shooter genre into something entirely new – it demonstrated the power of in-engine storytelling and it pushed forward the state of the art in terms of weapon design and enemy behaviours. It's hard to believe what an incredible statement it was."

The in-engine cutscenes Jonathan references were integral to the ethos of what Valve was trying to achieve with *Half-Life*. Situating you in the world meant making a commitment to never taking you out of it. "Gordon resonated because he *became* the player," Adam argues. "Because he does not talk and because you never have control taken away from you – it is easy to see yourself *as* Gordon – not as a person controlling someone else." By keeping you in control at all times and having narrative events happen to you as a player who is moving through the space where those events are happening – rather than a character in a cutscene – or a piece of text between stages – *Half-Life* avoided the disjuncture that the games that came before it subjected you to. After *Half-Life* – others began following Valve's lead.

"I think the most enduring legacy of the *Half-Life* franchise is the continuity of experience – weaving through action – narrative – puzzles – downtime and vistas while never breaking the first-person perspective," David reflects. "Every time I experience what I think of as a 'train ride' in a first-person game – in which the player is taken on a linear journey through a bunch of environmental spectacle – I feel like I'm seeing the legacy of *Half-Life*."

Another area where *Half-Life* delineated itself from what came before was in the behaviour of its enemies. More often than not – enemies in the games that preceded *Half-Life* would do one of two things: run straight at you without any regard for their own safety – or stand fixed in one spot – robotically shooting at you until you took them down. In *Half-Life* – things were very different. The marines that show up to lock down and wipe out any evidence of what happened at Black Mesa after you've spent some time battling the iconic *Alien*-esque Headcrabs – Vortigaunts and other assorted alien creatures – were a particular revelation to players accustomed to the dead-eyed dumbness of videogame enemies – showcasing an ability to work together and respond to what you were doing. They would retreat and take cover – force you out from hiding with grenades and flank you. That the idea of marines as an elite force of trained soldiers was



– PC – Gordon inadvertently causes the Resonance Cascade – which kickstarts the whole bloody mess at Black Mesa.





– PC – Gordon isn't seen too far from his trusty HEV (Hazardous Environment Suit) – which helps him traverse hostile areas.

HALF-LIFE'S LEGACY

THE GAMES THAT HALF-LIFE SPAWNED

PORTAL



Valve's fantastic comedy puzzle game began life as *Narbacular Drop* – an indie game developed by students who were taken on by the company. The game jettisoned the idea of a princess trying to escape a castle and set it in the *Half-Life* universe instead – in part to allow the small team to use assets from *Half-Life 2*.

COUNTER-STRIKE



A game that's had a huge impact on multiplayer gaming – esports and streaming – among other things – *Counter-Strike* began life as a *Half-Life* mod. Valve – having picked up on the building hype around the beta – took on developers Minh Le and Jess Cliffe – and they finished and released the full version of the game under the studio's banner.

TEAM FORTRESS



The *Team Fortress* series has been fertile ground for experimentation for Valve – as well as a huge success. *Team Fortress Classic* was originally used to promote *Half-Life's* SDK and *Team Fortress 2* has been a successful guinea pig for the now-common phenomenon of microtransactions – to give just one example of its many innovations.



PC The military soon turns up at the Black Mesa facility, but not to help out . .



PC The gunplay in *Half-Life* is excellent, building on and evolving the action established in PC classics such as *Doom* and *Quake*.



PC The series walks the line between sci-fi action and body horror. This poor scientist has been mutated by an alien Headcrab.

being realised, albeit in a rudimentary way, in the way they behaved in-game was mind-blowing, and forced the games that came after to place far more focus on enemy AI that would act in more interesting ways and present more engaging challenges to the player.

Jonathan reveals that, though the team was late in development, the innovations that *Half-Life* made were significant enough that Looking Glass Studios felt compelled to try and incorporate some of its lessons into *System Shock 2*.

"Although *System Shock* had already established itself as something distinct from the *Doom*-style run-and-gun shooters in terms of its commitment to worldbuilding and simulation, *Half-Life* showed us how to blend some of those ideas with more accessible gameplay mechanics," he explains. "The controls were simple, but the world and challenges in it were not. *System Shock 2* was not a *Half-Life*-style game – it was slower, more free-form, contained RPG mechanics and differed in many other ways – but it drew date, lessons from what we saw in *Half-Life*. Although we didn't have the development resources or the time to reproduce the kinds of things we saw in *Half-Life* on *System Shock 2*, we, along with every other developer, knew that we'd have to reach that bar in the future.

"I think every FPS made since *Half-Life* has been extensively influenced by it," Jonathan continues, speaking of the broader influence of the game. "It made developers pay attention to level-building as something more than just constructing combat arenas. It showed how to use in-engine animated sequences to tell a story without breaking out into prerendered cutscenes, and it demonstrated how more complex enemy behaviours, animation and audio could result in deeper combat experiences."

Not many games have had the kind of far-reaching impact that *Half-Life* did, but what makes *Half-Life* so special is that this series didn't settle for changing the shape of gaming once. It did it twice.

Half-Life's story had left the potential for a sequel open, with plenty of questions

> "I think every FPS made since *Half-Life* has been extensively influenced by it"
> JONATHAN CHEY

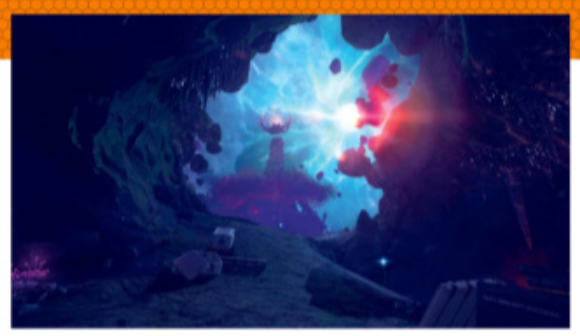


DAY OF DEFEAT



Day Of Defeat is another game that began life as a *Half-Life* mod that, yet again, Valve decided to snap up. Released in 2003, it is a multiplayer World War II shooter that takes a *Battlefield*-like approach, in that it focuses on objective-based gameplay and teamwork. A Source engine remake, *Day Of Defeat: Source*, followed in 2005.

BLACK MESA



A stunning reimagining of the original *Half-Life* made by Crowbar Collective with Valve's blessing, *Black Mesa* is faithful to what was great about the original, but isn't afraid to make tweaks where needed. Most notably, the infamously bad Xen chapters from the original game have had a huge overhaul.



PC A memorable section from *Half-Life 2* has Alyx introduce Gordon to her robotic pal Dog by playing fetch with it using the Gravity Gun.



PC You frequently team up with members of the resistance along with Alyx Vance throughout *Half-Life 2* making you feel like you're part of a collective.





PC Commanding Antlions against the Combine forces using Pheropods added an element of strategy to *Half-Life 2*'s action setpieces.

unanswered particularly through the fascinating character that is the G-Man who could frequently be spotted following your progress throughout the game. G-Man works because people love a good mystery Adam suggests. The way he keeps ominously and casually showing up throughout your adventures really helps build him up within the player's mind. To paraphrase someone else the theatre of your mind is way more interesting than anything you could put on-screen. G-Man feels like a threat without him ever really talking much or showing much emotion.

This tantalising narrative justification for a sequel was bolstered by the huge critical and commercial success of *Half-Life* the game selling one million copies by April of 1999 a mere five months after its release. A follow-up seemed inevitable and indeed in 2004 the hotly anticipated sequel *Half-Life 2* was released.

Half-Life 2 began in the same way as its predecessor: with Gordon Freeman arriving on a train. As well as being a deliberate echo of the first game this felt like a statement of principle a recommitment to the ideas that made *Half-Life* such a success. You were arriving in a world that wanted to convince that you could be in a real place. That world was the incredible City 17 a dystopic Eastern-European-inspired city overseen by the oppressive alien Combine. In introducing us to and building a vivid picture of this place the game did much of what the original *Half-Life* did but better. It gave you a taste of what people's day-to-day life was like as you moved through it showed you what this city was like to live in through gameplay rather than exposition having a bullying guard force you to pick up a can he knocks on the floor and told you stories via its environment the dilapidated ships that lay abandoned in barren landscapes where water once flowed gesturing with characteristic subtlety to the impact the Combine has had on this world to give just one example. It fleshed out the idea of picking out information from stolen moments of conversation using PA announcements to give you a flavour of how the Combine rules here and created more rounded and believable characters for you to interact with. Even the game's architecture was effectively employed as a way to give the player information without relying on exposition functioning as a visual representation of what kind of force the Combine was and what it was doing to the city via the steel of its brutally angular buildings jutting into the city's traditional architecture.

Half-Life played a huge role in establishing the idea of videogame levels as real places rather than shooting galleries. *Half-Life 2* added a depth and richness that the games that came after would try to emulate once again. But it was not just an aesthetic success. The level design of both games was excellent especially *Half-Life 2* says another great influencer of the FPS genre *Doom* and *Quake* designer John Romero who cites *Half-Life 2* as a game that raised the bar in design.

PLAYING WITH SCIENCE

GETTING TO GRIPS WITH THE GRAVITY GUN

USER GUIDE

The gun's primary fire is used as a kind of punt knocking objects out of your way. The secondary pulls objects towards you which can then be fired.

QUANTUM NAMING

The Gravity Gun's official name is the 'Zero Point Energy Field Manipulator'. 'Zero Point' is a real term taken from the field of quantum mechanics.

BULLETS AND BALANCING

Part of what makes the Gravity Gun so appealing is its versatility. It can be used to solve puzzles as effectively as it can be used to take out enemies in combat.



HUMBLE ORIGINS

The Gravity Gun began life as what was primarily a development tool nicknamed the Physgun that could be used to manipulate objects. Overtime the potential in the idea was realised and it became the Gravity Gun.

SUPERCHARGED

One of the most memorable and satisfying sections of *Half-Life 2* occurs near the end where the Gravity Gun gets supercharged allowing you to grab hold of enemies.



PC While *Half-Life 2* featured exciting new emergent game design it was still a first-person shooter at its core.

> GOING AFTER THOSE TECHNICAL INNOVATIONS AND EXPLORING THE IMPLICATIONS OF THEM CREATED THE PILLARS OF THE PRODUCT
>
> DAVID SPEYRER

The game was designed in such a way that the world felt incredibly open and free whilst subtly guiding the player on the path they were supposed to take and arming them with the knowledge they would need to do it without them even knowing it. *Half-Life 2* and its Episodes set a new standard for teaching the player and layering design mechanics to make the player not only feel powerful but in control Adam says. *Half-Life 2* was great at *showing* you how things work rather than telling you. When it introduced new ideas it would typically take a gradual approach showing you a mechanic with zero pressure in its simplest form then ramping up the danger or complexity associated with it as you encounter it again and again. For example there's a moment where the game forces you through a narrow gap with barrels that you have to push past inevitably sending one rolling down the hill in front of you where it gets hooked and reeled in by the hanging tongue of a Barnacle. You now know that you can effectively feed Barnacles objects to get those pesky tongues out the way and get past them. Then immediately after that you find some explosive barrels which you already know are explosive by this point. You can't help but put two and two together and realise that you can feed this to the Barnacles set it alight with a gunshot and blow them all away to clear the area. Plenty of games have failed to learn this lesson continuing to bore us with clunky tutorials but those that have been wise enough to learn from this approach have emulated it again and again in the years since the game's release.

Six years having passed since the release of the first *Half-Life* *Half-Life 2* naturally took leaps forward from a technical perspective. Even more so than its predecessor those technical innovations would have a huge influence going forward. The timing of those games at a moment in gaming that was rich with technical opportunities came into play says David on the series' impact. On *Half-Life* skeletal animation and AI were opportunities for innovation. On *Half-Life 2* rigid body physics facial animation materials and shaders were all becoming possible in real time. Going after those technical innovations and exploring the implications of them created the pillars of the product.

The game was heavily praised for its stunning visual effects and incredible facial animation the latter a big part of what made the character of Alyx work small movements of her face able to communicate emotion without her having to say anything. Again Valve had set a new bar for what was to come.

While those facial animations and the games stunning visuals were influential it was unquestionably the game's pioneering use of physics that would have the greatest impact from a technical perspective.

We're now so used to knocking over and throwing objects around in games that it can be easy to forgot how novel this once was. *Half-Life 2* was *the* game that made these kinds of physics-based interactions into something that would become commonplace. Going back

GETTING TO THE SOURCE

THE FLEXIBILITY OF VALVE'S INCREDIBLE ENGINE

As the engine that powered *Half-Life 2* Source showed itself to be a powerful tool capable of some impressive technical feats. The engine arose out of GoldSrc the engine used for *Half-Life* which was already based on a modified version of the *Quake* engine which Valve had licensed from id Software. While working on *Half-Life* the team began splitting off new features they were working on into what would become Source. Partly because of this history the Source engine is unusual in that it has a modular nature. Unlike other version-based engines in which numbered iterations are released to replace previous versions Source modules can be updated independently. This modular nature makes it a flexible tool that can be tweaked and updated with less risk of the ripple effect of backwards-compatibility problems to which other engines are more susceptible. Major overhauls of the engine have occurred however in Source 2006 for the *Half-Life 2* Episodes Source 2007 for the release of *The Orange Box* and a tweaked version for *Left 4 Dead*. Games made in Source include *Team Fortress 2* *Portal* and *Portal 2* *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* *Dear Esther* and *The Stanley Parable*. The engine is now being replaced by Source 2 first used for an update of *Dota 2* and the engine on which *Half-Life: Alyx* has been built.



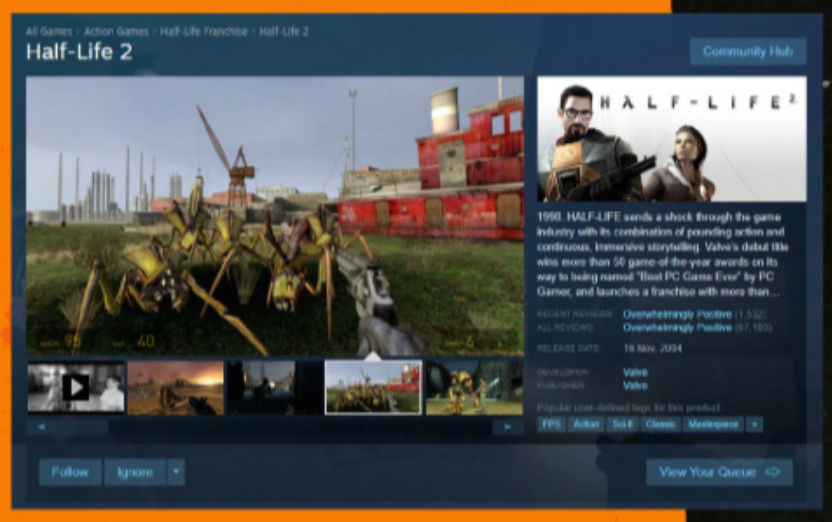
POWERING STEAM

HOW HALF-LIFE 2 HELPED KICKSTART DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION

In an age where digital distribution – and Steam in particular – has been accepted as the 'normal' way games are purchased on PC – it can be difficult to remember how contested this once was and how much criticism Valve received for using *Half-Life 2* to push its young distribution platform. The game – even when bought on CD – required that Steam was installed and active to play. This raised all sorts of legitimate concerns around ownership, servers and so on – still points of discussion today where we have seen servers switched off and effectively kill games, for example.

There are few games that could have persuaded people to overlook those very real concerns, but *Half-Life 2*. It seems, was one of them. "I don't think I would have installed Steam without *Half-Life 2*," says *System Shock 2*, *BioShock* and *Void Bastards* developer Jonathan Chey. "Valve needed a killer app and so they built one themselves – what better way to do it? Would it have become a success without it? Hard to know, but it certainly would have built momentum much more slowly."

Thanks to the anticipation that surrounded the release of the sequel to the groundbreaking *Half-Life*, PC players bit their lip and downloaded Steam en masse. Now, just as Valve wanted, they were in. From here, it wasn't long before non-Valve games began to appear, shifting Steam from a download service to a store, digital sales became a wallet-breaking phenomenon and Steam established a stranglehold on PC gaming. It effectively killed the market for CD-based games and made the service the biggest PC distribution platform by far. This phenomenal success also had the regrettable effect – for those that enjoy its games – of shifting Valve from being a videogame developer, to a company far more focused on its money-making store.



to *Half-Life 2*, some of the game's puzzles admittedly scream "LOOK AT THE PHYSICS!" a little too loud, but they also bring so much to the believability in the world, from the way barrels roll down hills and float in water, to the way explosions create unpredictable chain reactions. Because of this game, physics became a standard for the titles that would follow in its footsteps.

That *Half-Life 2* was able to convince us of the value that physics simulations can bring to games is in large part down to its most famous weapon: the Gravity Gun. "The Grav Gun is probably the most important weapon ever devised for an FPS because it showed how physics simulations could be used for great gameplay," argues Jonathan Chey. "Of course, lots of other games have messed that up since, but it's still an inspirational weapon because of its multiple uses and potential for innovation by the player."

"The Gravity Gun was incredible because of its versatility," says John Romero, citing Ravenholm as his "favourite area". Here, "we were encouraged to see the potential of physics-based gameplay in the most enjoyable of ways. Wondering through a macabre zone populated with shambling zombies, you couldn't help but begin to calculate the possibilities when you spotted a sawblade on the wall, instinctively grabbing it with your Gravity Gun and then firing it at a zombie to slice it in half."

Ravenholm is arguably the perfect encapsulation of what made *Half-Life 2* special. It served as a successful prototype for a kind of gameplay we'd never seen before. It took place in



an expertly designed area, crafted with technical and aesthetic excellence, and built an incredible atmosphere through environmental storytelling and sound design.

Jonathan Chey tells us that, as with the first *Half-Life*, "him self and his colleagues couldn't help but be influenced by it. "When we built *BioShock*, we were able to draw on the kinds of resources we needed, and I think it's very much a game that combines ideas from *System Shock* and *Half-Life*. And, I think, moved the bar forward on what both series had done. It keeps the more free-form level design, the RPG elements, but adds much more sophisticated level design, environmental storytelling and in-engine story sequences to that," he says on the elements of the *Half-Life* series that impacted the way the game was designed.

"Even *Void Bastards*, an indie game without the budget to do many of these things, pays attention to the legacy of the *Half-Life* series," he continues. "The opening level that gently teaches you how to play while starting the worldbuilding process seems like a cliché now, but I don't recall seeing it before the iconic train ride to Black Mesa. The first level of *Void Bastards* isn't so different."

"I believe any FPS developed after *Half-Life 2* was influenced by it, simple as that," says John

> "THE OPENING LEVEL THAT GENTLY TEACHES YOU HOW TO PLAY WHILE STARTING THE WORLDBUILDING PROCESS SEEMS LIKE A CLICHÉ NOW"
> JONATHAN CHEY





PC *Black Mesa* finally released this year after a lengthy development period.



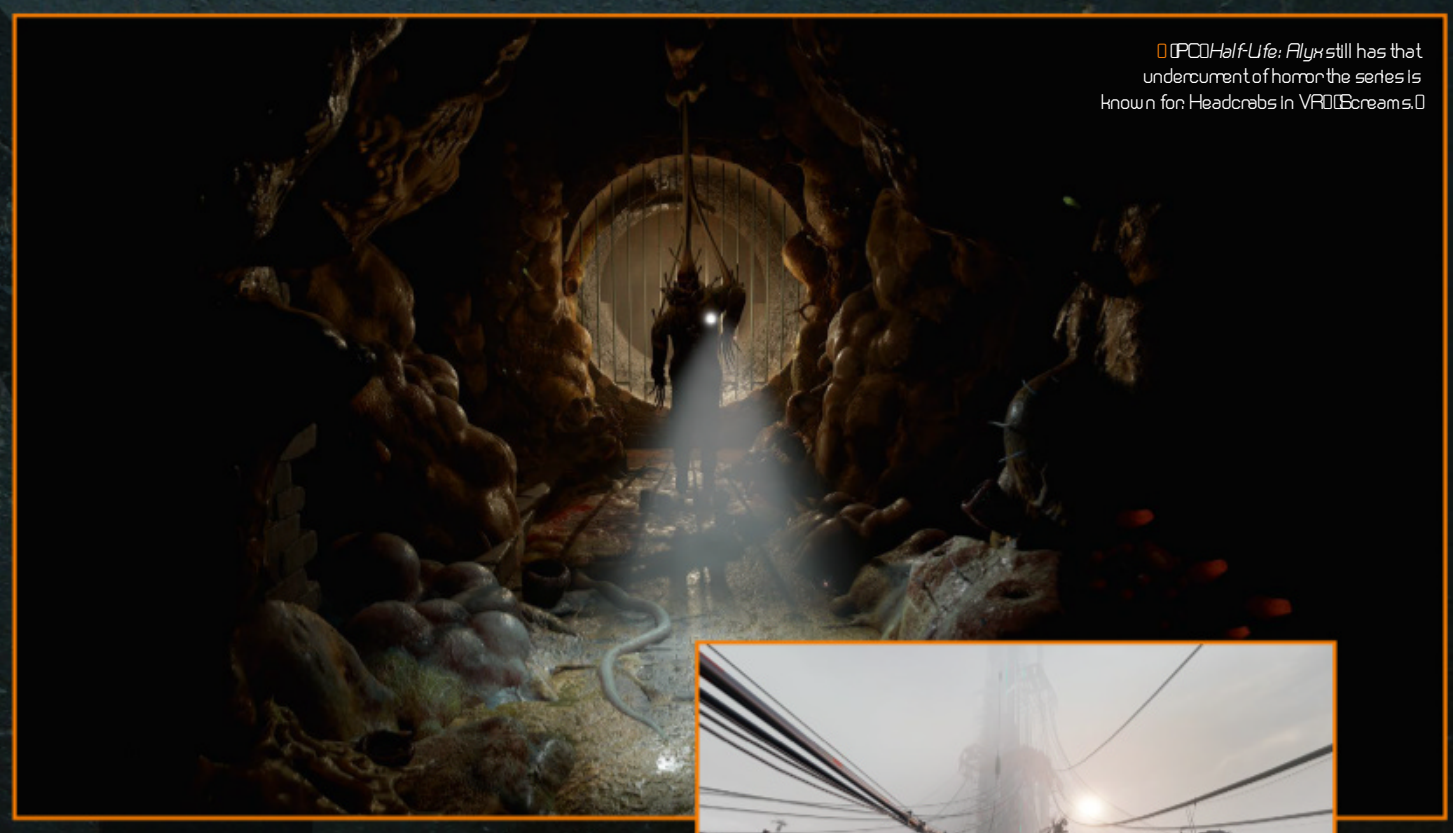
PC We don't remember Dr Kleiner looking this good in the original *Half-Life*. . .



PC *Black Mesa* breathes a whole new lease of life into Valve's landmark shooter.



PC Impressed by the work from its development team Valve gave *Black Mesa* its 'blessing'. You can buy it on Steam right now.



PC *Half-Life: Alyx* still has that undercurrent of horror the series is known for. Headcrabs in VR Screams.

PC City 17 is an oppressive place after the Combine invasion and Valve was inspired by many cities throughout Eastern Europe.



PC Recent innovations in VR inspired Valve to return to the *Half-Life* series with *Half-Life: Alyx*, which is available now.



PC Valve's drive to push the envelope, plus an exciting new foray into VR, has made *Half-Life: Alyx* an electrifying experience.

Romero on the impact *Half-Life 2* had. "It raised the bar of the genre. The key points of influence are a strong story, gameplay pacing, world realism, weapon variety and physics use."

We can all look at something like the prevalence of physics in modern games, or slow-burn introductions that mirror Gordon's first ride and trace that legacy back to *Half-Life*. However, David points out that there are other, less obvious ways in which *Half-Life's* legacy is still very much in evidence in modern videogame development.

"Some of the things that Valve did were innovative at the time, but have since become more commonplace," says David. "For example, Valve recognised that for a game design to succeed, it has to be tested by players with no prior knowledge of the designers' intent. Playtesting with real customers reveals the hundreds of ways that game designs which sound good in theory can fail in practice. Following that process, and relentlessly fixing the problems observed in playtests until the design succeeds, was a huge part of *Half-Life's* success.

"Another innovation was eliminating the design hierarchy and trusting individual contributors to make design decisions, which contributed to much of the moment-to-moment craft and magic of the *Half-Life* franchise. So many of *Half-Life's* inventions arose from someone understanding the constraints of a particular problem space and trying to do the coolest thing they could within those constraints."

In that respect, *Half-Life* may still have plenty to teach us. The 'cabal' system referenced by David, used to develop the *Half-Life* games, split the team up into semi-autonomous groups working on different aspects and sections of the game outside of a standard hierarchical system, offering a space for innovation and variety that was evidently very successful. It remains, however, unusual.

"I do believe the cabal development arrangement was a great idea that resulted in a rollercoaster of an experience," says John Romero. "I've never developed a game with that team structure, but I do think some companies in the industry should try and see how it turns out."

Regardless, the huge impact *Half-Life* has had on videogames is undeniable. In frequent greatest ever game list appearances and semi-serious jokes clamouring for a true third instalment in the *Half-Life* series, the impact it has had on the fans that played it is as obvious as its influence on the designers making the games we are playing today. It is as loved as it is important. And it's not quite over yet.

"I hope that *Half-Life: Alyx* can be for virtual reality gaming what *Half-Life* was to first person shooters," says David. "I hope that it brings new people to VR by demonstrating what a full, high-production-value VR game can deliver in terms of richness, engagement and immersion in a fictional universe."

And we hope that there might just be more to come from the series. Why not take a third shot at revolutionising videogames?

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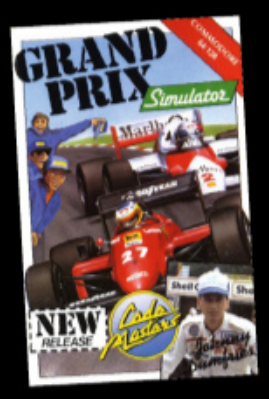
THE MAKING OF

GRAND PRIX SIMULATOR



Activision thought the Oliver twins' Grand Prix Simulator ripped off Atari's Super Sprint□ but the brothers were actually inspired by Codemasters' BMX Simulator. Philip Oliver explains how the twins started their racer after visiting a safari park

Words by Rory Milne



IN THE KNOW

- PUBLISHER: CODEMASTERS
- DEVELOPER: PHILIP AND ANDREW OLIVER
- RELEASED: 1987
- PLATFORM: AMSTRAD CPC□ VARIOUS
- GENRE: RACING

There are no hard and fast rules for coming up with ideas for games□ and this was especially true during the Eighties. That said□the background to the Oliver twins' racing game concept *Safari Madness* was more unusual than most□as Philip Oliver explains. □We thought it would be hilarious if you took our brother's orange Citro□n 2CV through Longleat Safari Park□ because the monkeys could probably pick most of the pieces off it□□ Philip grins. □That's where we got *Safari Madness* from. The problem was that since you couldn't scroll on an Amstrad□ the whole road system had to □t on one screen□which meant that we ended up with matchbox-sized cars and tiny monkeys.□

The Olivers tried everything they could to make monkeys dismantling 2CVs work on a humble Amstrad CPC□before temporarily putting *Safari Madness* on hold. □Around that time□we pitched *Super Robin Hood* to Codemasters□□ Philip say. □It was only when we □nished *Ghost Hunters*□and we had seen *BMX Simulator*□that we thought we could revisit *Safari Madness*□but instead of a safari you could be going around racetracks.□

Having given their racer a more grounded theme□the twins next looked to a childhood pastime to inspire courses for their retitled pro□ect: *Grand Prix Simulator*. □Our track design skills were honed on Scalextric□□ Philip beams. □We were always trying to make bridges□so we had to have them in *Grand Prix Simulator*. You had to keep a straight line going underneath them □otherwise you were buggered□□

Besides building bridges□the Olivers tweaked the road handling of *Grand Prix Simulator*'s player vehicle□taking their lead from a BBC Micro classic and watching TV. □A really big inspiration was Geoff Crammond's *Revs*□□ Philip enthuses. □It didn't have sliding around corners□ but I think we had watched rally driving□and that was all about controlling the slides□



□Amstrad CPC□Hitting oil slicks in *Grand Prix Simulator* can cause cars to spin-out and lose control.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

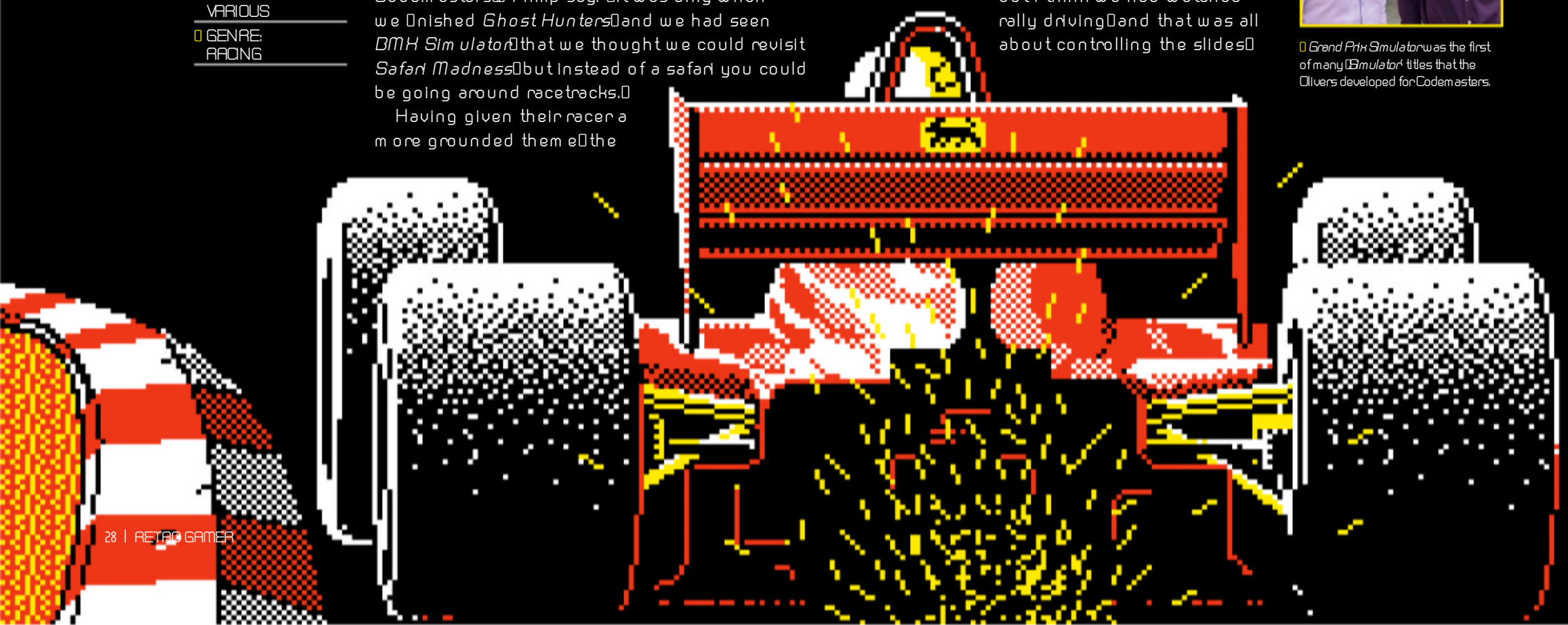
PRO BMX SIMULATOR
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC□
VARIOUS
YEAR: 1988

GRAND PRIX SIMULATOR 2 □PICTURED□
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC□
VARIOUS
YEAR: 1989

□ET BIKE SIMULATOR
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC□
VARIOUS
YEAR: 1989



□*Grand Prix Simulator* was the first of many □*Simulator* titles that the □livers developed for Codemasters.



> I think we had watched rally driving and that was all about controlling the slides and those did make Grand Prix Simulator a lot more interesting
> Philip Oliver

and those did make *Grand Prix Simulator* a lot more interesting.

Of course, as interesting as sliding around *Grand Prix Simulator* was, the game needed an opponent, and so Philip and Andrew added a computer car, which was essentially a playback of their test runs. "The problem was when another car got in the way," Philip notes, "so we made the computer car start slowly to give the player a head start. It then raced better to stay on your heels, but if you fucked up it would overtake, and if you collided with it there wouldn't be any effect. It just wasn't that clever."

Nevertheless, the twins incorporated their ad hoc computer driver into their game's two-player mode, just to up the ante. "We figured that if we had to have a one-player mode with a computer car then we could just leave it there for the two-player mode," Philip reasons. "It made it look more interesting, and it gave you more of a challenge."

Further challenges were added in the form of on-track collectibles worth bonus points, which gave *Grand Prix Simulator* additional replay value for very little coding time. "It was just adding a bit more depth," Philip reasons. "And all games back in those days had scores, so there were spanners that you could collect for points, and it was easy to add them."



Amstrad CPC: The fastest lap times are achieved by deftly drifting around corners.



Amstrad CPC: Make sure to nail your approach or you'll end up snagged on a barrier.



Amstrad CPC: You have to drive straight under the bridges to avoid getting stuck underneath.



Amstrad CPC: Sections of this *Grand Prix Simulator* course feel like tackling a slalom run.

The extra effort put into *Grand Prix Simulator* by the Olivers was appreciated on its release by almost everyone except publisher Activision, due to the game's similarity to its upcoming coin-op licence *Super Sprint*. "When the action came through the post, Codemasters called us about it, and we just reminded it that we had done *BMX Simulator* with cars," Philip recollects. "Codemasters went to the press. It did brilliantly out of it, the sales of *Grand Prix Simulator* were spectacular."

A home computer sequel followed two years later, and shortly after a third iteration was planned for the NES, but its name was changed to take advantage of a marketing opportunity. "Codemasters looked at its best-selling titles: *Dizzy* and *Grand Prix Simulator*," Philip recollects. "We couldn't do both, so we left *Grand Prix Simulator* to Andrew Graham. Then Codemasters did a deal with Galoob, who owned *Micro Machines*, and it was renamed."

Reviewing *Grand Prix Simulator* now, Philip is happy with the Amstrad racer, and points out what a bargain it was. "We're dead proud of it," Philip says with a smile. "It looks absolutely lovely. The maths could have been a little bit better, and there were a couple of bugs, but bear in mind that it was only £1.99."

CONVERSION CAPERS



Amstrad CPC

The gameplay at the heart of the Amstrad original is almost as impressive as its beautiful 16-colour courses. Its boxy player cars do get snagged on barriers and under bridges, but otherwise their handling is perfect. In terms of engine and skidding noises, the original's sound effects are spot on.

ZX Spectrum

Understandably, the Spectrum version is less colourful than the original, but it's disappointing that its graphics aren't as well designed. Additionally, its cars are the same colour, which is a bit confusing, and its in-game sound is poor. These minor faults aside, it's a pretty decent conversion.





Commodore 64

The player cars in the C64 iteration slide wildly every time you turn, which makes it feel like you're racing on ice, although there are fences around bad bends to help keep you on course. The C64 conversion has some great pregame music, but its vehicles sound more like desk fans than racing cars.

Atari 8-bit

Like the C64 port, the Atari 8-bit version has 12 courses to the original's 140, and they're less brightly coloured than those in the Amstrad game. On the plus side, its cars don't slide around as much as their C64 counterparts, and their engine noises don't cut out when they screech around corners.



THE EVOLUTION OF ANT ATTACK











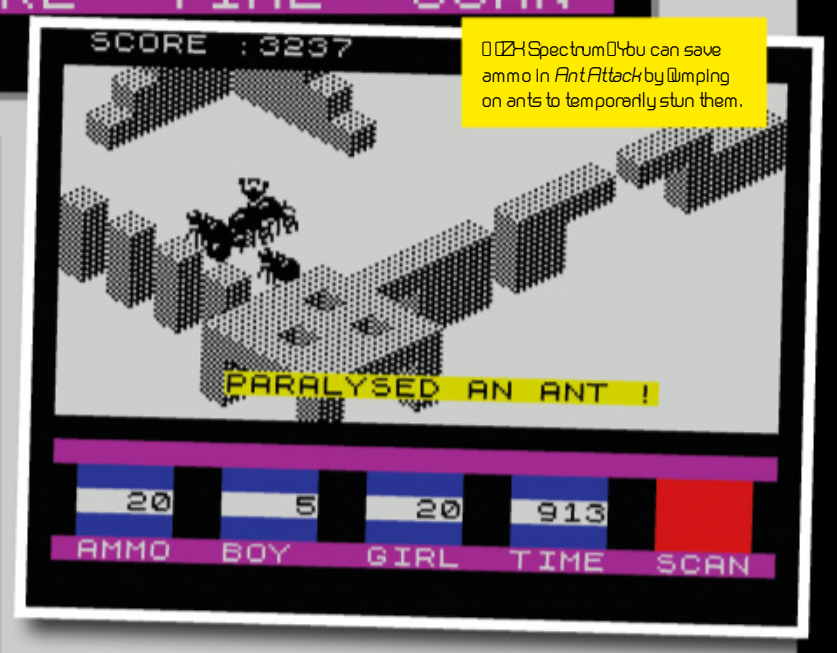
Former sculpture student Sandy White devised innovative 3D techniques for his hit debut game Ant Attack, and its follow-ups Zombie Zombie and I, Of The Mask. Decades later, Sandy relives the highs and lows of creating his trilogy..

WORDS BY RORY MILNE





ZX Spectrum *Ant Attack*'s core objective is to find hostages and get them safety out of Antescher.



ZX Spectrum You can save ammo in *Ant Attack* by jumping on ants to temporarily stun them.

Given his background in sculpture, it follows that art school graduate Sandy White would gravitate toward 3D computer graphics rather than 2D ones, but that doesn't explain his leap from stone to pixels. In fact, Sandy was fascinated with circuits and computers from an early age, and as he explains, this led to him combining art with technology, which got him a job with a perk. "I was using a Sinclair MK14 at art college, which had a little LED calculator display, and I made a few sculptures that had processors in them," Sandy recalls. "Some businessman saw what I was doing, maybe at my degree show, and his business had a plan to do something with Prestel – a basic online service. So I got roped in as a programmer, just to make a bit of extra cash, and I got the loan of an Acorn Atom."

When the young artist wasn't using the Atom for work, he tinkered with its low-res, black-and-white display, and this resulted in him accidentally building a virtual world. "I managed to make an isometric cube," Sandy recollects, "and I wrote a bit of code that sprayed cubes all over the screen in random places. Then there was a magical moment, where I added a line of code that lined them up by their vertices. Once I did that, I got random walls and towers appearing, and that was the genesis of *Ant Attack*'s city. *Superman* was in the cinema at the time, so I made a little Superman sprite to fly over it."

At this stage, however, Sandy's out-of-hours art project was just that. He wasn't calling it *Ant Attack*, it wasn't even a game, but all that changed after visiting his younger brother. "I had to give the Acorn Atom back," Sandy sighs, "and I knew I had to get something with graphics. My brother had a Spectrum, so I went to see that. Then I showed him what I was doing, and he just said, 'What? You should turn this into a game!' So that's what happened. I ended up getting a Spectrum and taking that random city on the Atom, and thinking, 'Right, I bet I could write a game.'"

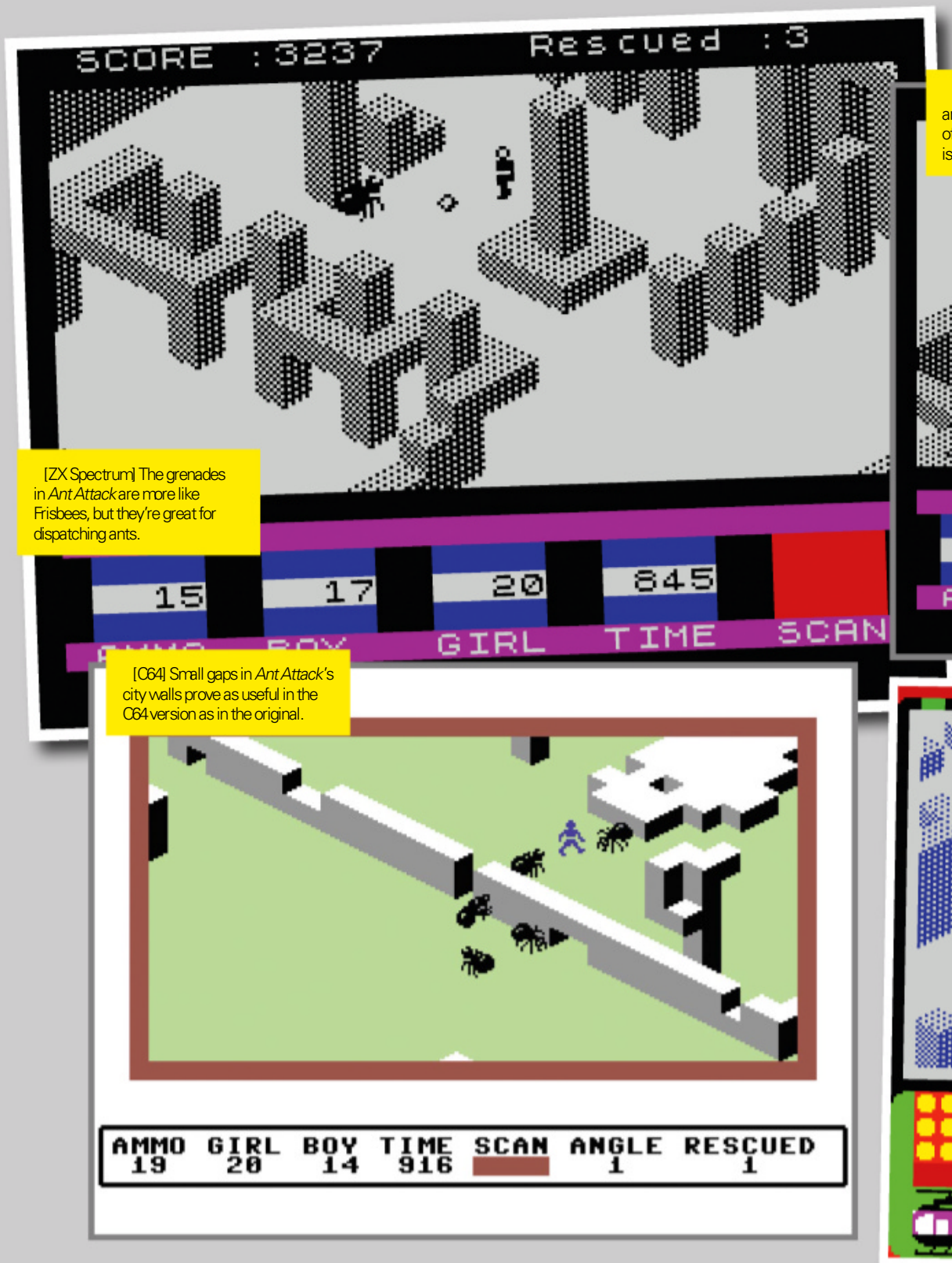
Having chosen to repurpose his isometric environment, Sandy could have studied the handful of games to have used the skewed perspective previously, but they simply weren't on his radar. "I'd never seen *Q*bert*, and believe it or not I'd never seen *Zaxxon* either," Sandy admits. "I didn't play games, I wasn't a gamer. It was just one of those classic examples of when a technology reaches a certain point there are certain obvious directions to go with it, and you get independent reinvention of stuff."

Perspective aside, Sandy's isometric open world was a product of invention rather than reinvention, which the developer populated with characters – one human and others of unknown origin. "They were originally just black blobs, and their docking algorithm came about early on," Sandy notes. "I got their collisions working with the city, I must have had a steerable



Sandy White now works in the audio software industry, but still dreams of making *Ant Attack 2*.

"I don't think I'd seen a giant ant movie, and I'm not sure if I thought about the ants as giant when I was making *Ant Attack*."
SANDY WHITE

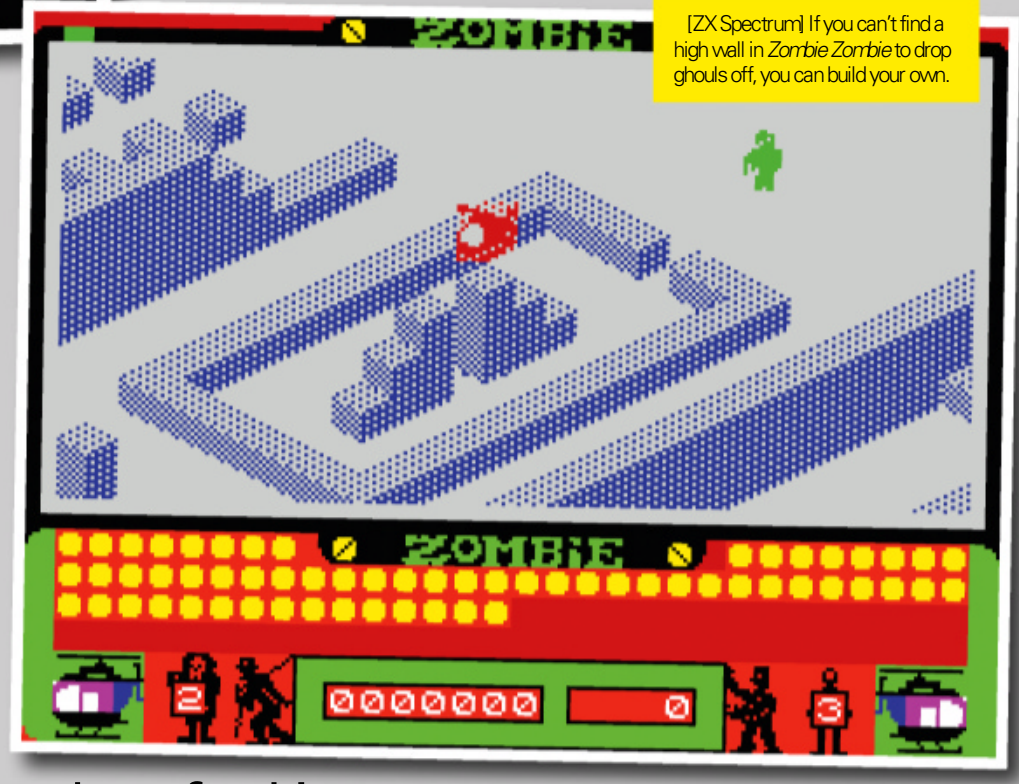


[ZX Spectrum] The grenades in *Ant Attack* are more like Frisbees, but they're great for dispatching ants.



[ZX Spectrum] Steady nerves are required to negotiate some of *Ant Attack*'s more precarious isometric structures.

[C64] Small gaps in *Ant Attack*'s city walls prove as useful in the C64 version as in the original.



[ZX Spectrum] If you can't find a high wall in *Zombie Zombie* to drop ghouls off, you can build your own.

character in early as well, and the black blobs would just follow it. I suppose they could have been spiders *or* ants – or even Liquorice Allsorts! *Attack Of The Liquorice Allsorts*, I quite like that!"

Of the options available to him, Sandy decided to make his game's opponents ants, which ended up dwarfing his human hero, but for technical reasons rather than a love of Fifties B-movies. "I don't think I'd *seen* a giant ant movie," Sandy exclaims, "and I'm not even sure if I thought about the ants as *giant* ants when I was making *Ant Attack*. The bricks were as big as a person as well, that wasn't right. But there was so little planning, it was all just emergent."

But one aspect of Sandy's project emerged and was then removed due to being overly problematic, more specifically his ants' climbing ability. "I probably had them climbing the blocks," Sandy reveals, "but in the time that we had I couldn't get the gameplay tuned. The game worked when you knew you were safe; you knew you could jump onto something and that you would be okay."

As well as providing safe areas, Sandy opted to arm his game's heroes – by this stage he had two: one male, one female, both human, since Superman hadn't survived the journey from Atom to Spectrum. "The routines that moved the grenades about were very similar to the routines that moved the ants about," Sandy says of the choice of weapon for his debut game. "The grenades were just more blobs, and they didn't get lobbed through the air, they actually hugged the ground and [ran along it]. It was to avoid mathematics and physics. But a gun would have been an interesting challenge; I could have used a shotgun with a big blast area."

> "I hadn't thought of doing a good game, the building in Zombie Zombie was just me trying to give a fun element"
> SANDY WHITE

If anything, the grenades in Sandy's game – named *Ant Attack* by its publisher – further differentiated it from standard gaming fare, and its uniqueness and compelling gameplay ensured brisk sales. However, a second *Ant Attack* wasn't on the cards. "I can't figure out why I never did a sequel," Sandy frowns. "There was so much potential just to follow up with a much bigger environment. The ants could have learned to climb, or maybe there could have been other adversaries or creatures that you could have set against the ants. There was loads of stuff that could have been done, but I thought it would be unoriginal."

In keeping with this belief, Sandy based *Ant Attack*'s follow-up around zombies, an idea that was conceived with the sequel's codeveloper and his then-girlfriend Angela Sutherland. "*Zombie Zombie* was a real concerted effort to make up gameplay, where as *Ant Attack* hadn't been," Sandy says. "Michael Jackson's *Thriller* was around, and there's no doubt that it influenced the choice of zombies. It was the zeitgeist of the time, and it was responsible for that."

But while zombies were thematically distinct from killer ants, the heroes in Sandy's second project looked identical to those in his first. If they were the same characters they could connect the games, except for one snag. "There was a problem with the hero and heroine in *Ant Attack*, in that they were nameless," Sandy explains. "I think that was probably why they



ZX Spectrum Compliant zombies in *Zombie Zombie* turn pink and will follow you to their doom.



ZX Spectrum Tap *Zombie Zombie*'s foes on the back to make them follow you but only if they're green.

didn't go on to be the same characters in *Zombie Zombie*. What would we have said 's Boy and girl ' Here they are again?' But there was a marketing element missing there and I wish we had tied the two games together using the characters.

Aside from the two games' player characters less obvious similarities emerged as Sandy and Angela developed *Zombie Zombie* In that the follow-up adopted an abandoned feature from its predecessor An aeroplane was there in the *Ant Attack* sprites Sandy remembers. Maybe late on in its development we were even able to build bits of the city by dropping bricks from the plane and that was carried on to *Zombie Zombie* and probably by that time I'd heard comments like: Why didn't you do *Superman*?' So flying *had* to be in *Zombie Zombie*.

But as well as flying and dropping bricks *Zombie Zombie*'s aerial transport a helicopter could remove bricks from its city giving its heroes almost godlike power although they lacked the grenades that *Ant Attack*'s protagonists had been armed with. I hadn't thought of doing a god game Sandy ponders the building in *Zombie Zombie* was just me trying to give a fun element. I've no idea why the grenades from *Ant Attack* didn't go in they so easily could have. We should have done *Choplifter* that would have been good. Damn. Damn it

Unlike *Choplifter* however *Zombie Zombie*'s player characters only had puffs of air to defend themselves with a plot point that was driven by the restraints of isometric game design. Probably the gameplay came first and then the 'blowing' came in to explain what you were seeing Sandy reasons. The problem with guns was that you had no finesse with aiming so maybe we realised that everything in front of you was being targeted and that could have been the reason we went for blowing.

But if *Zombie Zombie*'s defence mechanics were inventive its offensive manoeuvres were wildly innovative. They involved forming steps up to sheer drops in city walls which zombies wouldn't walk away from if they were lured into falling from them. Well that's what you do in zombie movies you kill them Sandy remarks on his innovation. But it wasn't a movie it was a game and there were no guns so what mechanism was I going to use?



ZX Spectrum The enemies in *Zombie Zombie* become red splats when they fall off high-up structures.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

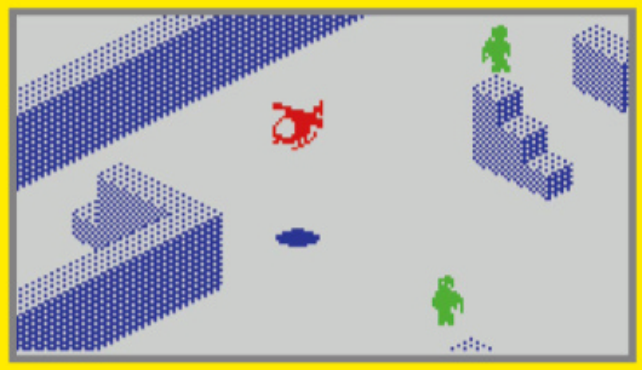
MODES OF TRANSPORT

How on-foot travel was complemented by helicopters and Jetsuits



ANT ATTACK

In order to explore Antescher you have to leg it there aren't any alternatives. That said your character never gets tired and you can change direction without losing speed. This makes escaping the game's ants a matter of running towards an isometric structure and seeking shelter on top or behind it.



ZOMBI E ZOMBI E

You can run around *Zombie Zombie* like in *Ant Attack* but you can also take to the air in a helicopter. As well as letting you fly safely over your environment at top-speed looking for zombies the sequel's whirlybird also allows you to add or remove bricks from its abandoned city's walls.



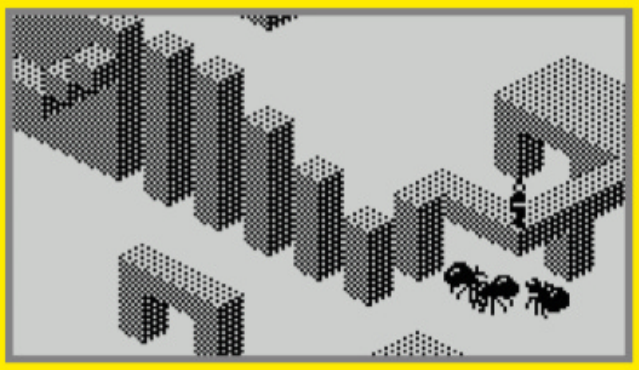
IOOF THE MASK

The sprawling maze in *IOOf The Mask* is a mess of narrow corridors and tight bends that can only be navigated on-foot. You're exploring it against the clock so running rather than walking is required. The game's portals are more open spaces however that you can fly around in a Jetsuit.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

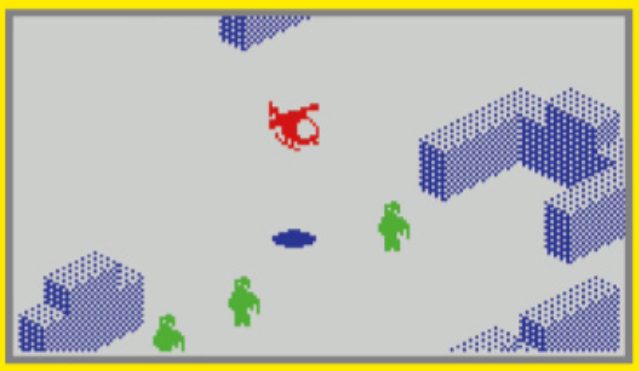
POINTS OF VIEW

Ground level and aerial isometrics to third-person perspective



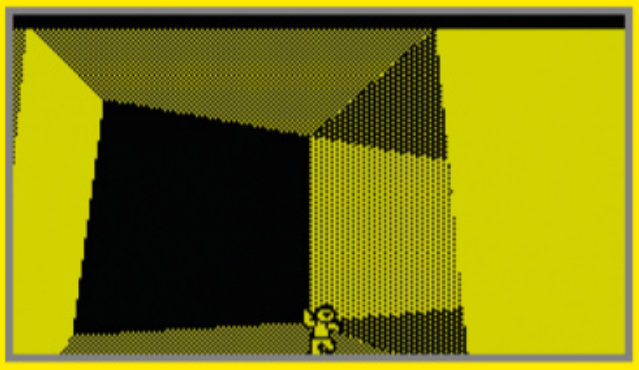
ANT ATTACK

Although not the first isometric game, *Ant Attack* was the first game to be built around an isometric open world. Where as earlier examples like *Zaxxon* and *Q*bert* heavily restrict your interaction with their environments, *Ant Attack* allows you to fully explore its virtual city's structures.



ZOMBIE ZOMBIE

As well as a street level viewpoint like *Ant Attack*'s, *Zombie Zombie* also provides you with a bird's-eye view of its isometric playfield. Far from just a freeing experience, the follow-up's aerial vantage point gives you a far more effective lay of the land than you get from on the ground.



I, OF THE MASK

Rather than isometric projection, *I, Of The Mask* uses a third-person perspective that gives you the impression of running into a labyrinth, where the majority of the game takes place. *I, Of The Mask* further differentiates itself from its predecessors with aerial into-the-screen interludes.

I was trying to achieve something that was within the zombie theme, but that also had gameplay, and you got a red splat when they fell off the walls, which was fantastic!"

Less fantastic were *Zombie Zombie*'s sales numbers on its release, despite its undoubted originality. Sandy and Angela responded by recruiting coder Paul Fik, and the trio devised the highly ambitious third-person perspective title *I, Of The Mask*. "I just wanted to be doing something cool!" Sandy beams. "By that time, I'd met other Spectrum programmers, and there was a gentle competitive feel, because you could forge new ground. The first Spectrum games weren't pushing it, then we had this two-or-three-year window where you went from flat simple graphics to *I, Of The Mask*, which was getting towards the pinnacle of what was possible."

The downside, however, of pushing the Spectrum to its limits was the restrictions it placed on *I, Of The Mask*'s protagonist, who Sandy got running through the game's maze of corridors and flying around its portal sections with the aid of a jetsuit. "I would have made a hero that could climb and move his arms, but I was very limited technically," Sandy reflects. "It was really hard to make him walk, and you didn't see his feet actually touch the ground. The jetsuit was a nod to *Jetpac*; it was one of the games that I most admired. Ultimate brought this level of professionalism that was just gob-smacking. It was like it had arrived from some other planet."

The vibrantly coloured labyrinth at the heart of *I, Of The Mask* also appeared to be from another planet, which is unsurprising given one of the game's major inspirations. "I was influenced by the original *Alien*," Sandy acknowledges, "but what I imagined in my mind's eye was way better than what I ended up with. I would have totally loved to have had a free environment, but I just couldn't do it in the time. *I, Of The Mask* could have been *Wolfenstein 3D*, but so much of the gameplay was dictated by what was technically possible."

The second aspect of *I, Of The Mask*'s technically-driven gameplay – its aerial portal sections – enabled the game's hero to teleport around his world or get a chance to collect robot components by blasting one of three egg-shaped crystals. "I didn't know the eggs were called crystals in *I, Of The Mask*'s instructions," Sandy points out, "in my mind they were eggs. *Alien* was around when I was at art college, and I remember I was so struck by that scene where the top of an egg opens and an alien shoots out. So in my mind that was an association between *I, Of The Mask* and *Alien*."

The laser weapon carried by *I, Of The Mask*'s hero also reflected the game's sci-fi aspirations – in contrast to the grenades and puffs of air in Sandy's

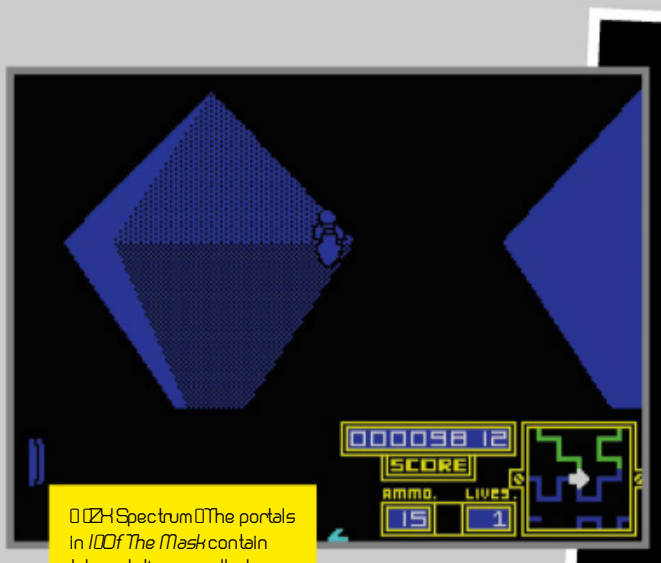


[ZX Spectrum] *Zombie Zombie*'s opponents temporarily turn red, rabid and deadly if you walk in front of them.



[ZX Spectrum] *I, Of The Mask*'s forbidding robot appears when you walk through some of the game's walls.

[ZX Spectrum] T-junctions in *I, Of The Mask* lead to different coloured corridors containing colour-coded components.



ZX Spectrum The portals in *IOO f The Mask* contain teleportation eggs that you activate with your lasers.



ZX Spectrum A filmic fullscreen countdown precedes attempts to obtain *IOO f The Mask*'s robot components.



ZX Spectrum Following successful collection of a component your jetsuit remains temporarily powered-up.

The first Spectrum games weren't pushing it. *IOO f The Mask* was getting towards the pinnacle of what was possible

SANDY WHITE



previous games and as well as blasting eggs the lasers were required to shoot down robot parts. We'd gone into perspective 3D so we had moved on from primitive weapons Sandy enthuses. Plus the laser was probably just easier to render. It was also an artistic decision to have lasers instead of grenades or blowing.

As with its weapon *IOO f The Mask*'s ultimate objective of assembling a giant robot was aesthetically driven and Sandy credits the mechanic to a pair of classic sci-fi movies. I had a fascination with movie robots like Gort and *Forbidden Planet*'s Robby Sandy grins. Practically you could have just been ticking off crosses in an inventory but collecting robot parts was a better way to present it. The intension had been that once you collected all of the parts the robot would come to life but that wasn't to be. The game just barely got finished.

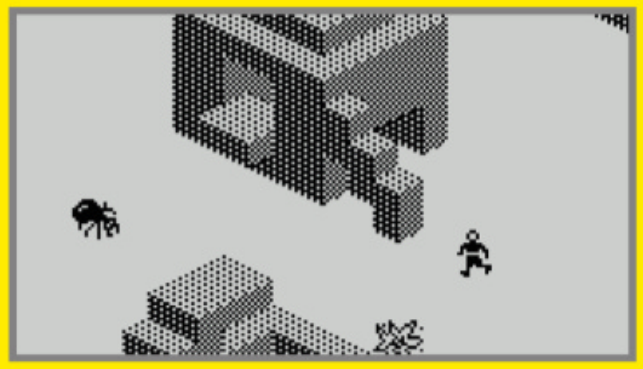
But despite deadline issues and falling short of Sandy's vision *IOO f The Mask* reviewed even better than its predecessors.

Sadly it sold poorly despite its acclaim. *IOO f The Mask* was just a nightmare Sandy winces. Eventually we were operating on two hours of sleep a day and caffeine with an alarm clock waking you up when you had just gone to bed. I was hallucinating seeing things in front of my eyes and how it even got out to the shops is crazy.

Drawing a line under a trying experience Sandy and Angela moved into Amiga development but as Sandy explains their fourth project lacked direction and so ultimately the groundbreaking series that began with *Ant Attack* remained a trilogy. *Dick Special* started out simply as a cartoon a flat animation in an isometric environment Sandy considers. There was a little dog and Dick was a detective well that was Angela's plan for it anyway. She sailed off doing narrative and I was still interested in the more technical side so I guess it could have almost been anything from my point of view I just wanted to do innovative stuff.

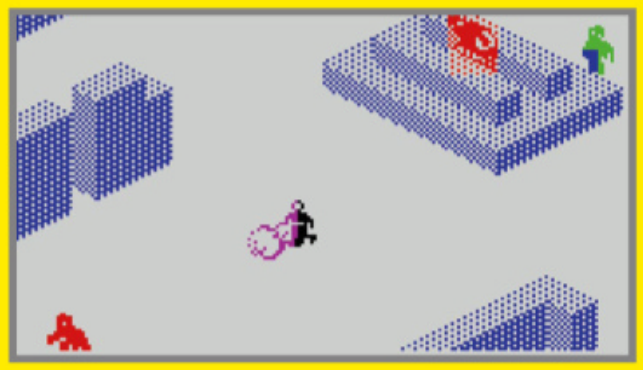
STAGES OF EVOLUTION: WEAPON OF CHOICE

How on-foot travel was complemented by helicopters and jetsuits



ANT ATTACK

Strictly speaking *Ant Attack* has two weapons: its hero's feet and their grenades. You have the option of jumping on your ant opponents as often as you like although this only stuns them. If you need a more permanent deterrent you can lob a limited number of explosive projectiles at them.



ZOMBIE ZOMBIE

Unlike ants jumping on zombies gets you eaten so in *Zombie Zombie* you blast air at the undead fends. This simply sends them off in another direction so the sequel's real weapon is its protagonist's bravery and you have to use that to lure its zombies into taking falls that end in bloody splats.



IOO OF THE MASK

There aren't any threats in *IOO f The Mask* but its aerial stages require a projectile weapon more specifically a belt-mounted laser. Its purpose is to activate rather than destroy: in the game's portals it triggers eggs that teleport you about and it's used to transfer robot components.

1UP 11

CRE

TI

LOCAL

Crime Fighters

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE VIOLENCE

» RETRO REVIVAL



ARCADE 1989 KONAMI

I've mentioned many times that I used to frequent Quay Amusements in Poole whenever I was in need of an arcade gaming fix. My partner in crime was typically my friend Wayne Osbourne and, as I've noted in the past, he had a penchant for fighting games and would typically pay for me as he always seemed to have more cash.

While it's typically Capcom that gets associated with arcade scrolling fighters, it's worth remembering that Konami was no slouch in the genre, either. Due to the company focusing on licensed brawlers like *The Simpsons*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Bucky O'Hare* and *X-Men*, games like *Crime Fighters* didn't typically get the same attention from gamers because there were no recognisable characters splashed across the side art or marquees.

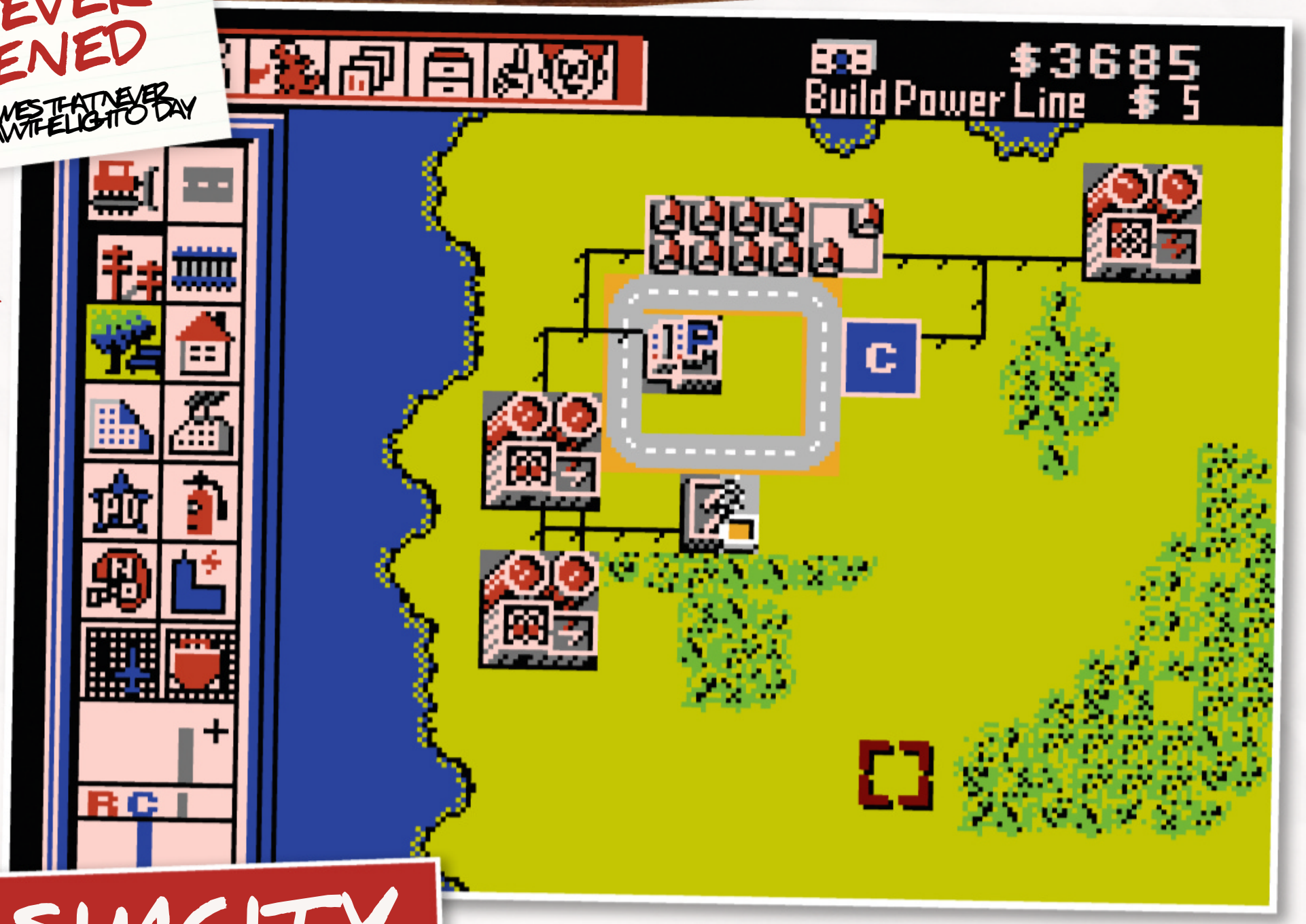
It's a pity that *Crime Fighters* doesn't get the love it deserves, because it's a viciously violent brawler that puts you in the tight denim jeans of some undercover police officers (both two-player and four-player versions of the game were available). Granted, *Crime Fighters* isn't the most original of games and it gleefully packs every trope and clich of the scrolling beat-'em-up genre into its eight core levels, but me and Wayne never cared because it was such a blast to play.

Crime Fighters, like Capcom's *Final Fight,* is all about crowd control, as each level typically swarms you with thugs, from mohican-wearing punks wielding poles to hair-combing greasers and gun-toting heavies. Every criminal deviant appears to have been catered for in *Crime Fighters,* and you get to mete out plenty of justice on them, whether it's aiming a flying kick at their heads, aggressively stomping them while they lay prone on the ground or viciously kneeing them in the groin.

It's not just violence that *Crime Fighters* excels at, there's plenty of humour to be found in Konami's game – and we just don't mean those aforementioned groin clashes. Greasers fuss over their hair as they approach you for a kicking, billboards squash you when they fall on you, while pimps flatten you by slamming glass doors on you if you approach their call girls. That balance of violence and humour continued with the sequel, *Vendetta,* but that's a story for another time...

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...

GAMES THAT NEVER SAW THE LIGHT OF DAY



SIMCITY

N SNES

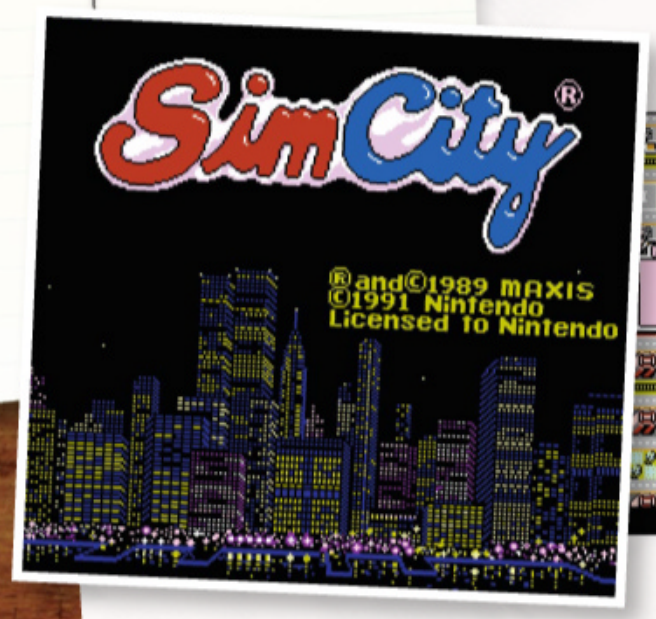
IN THE KNOW

PUBLISHER NINTENDO

DEVELOPER NINTENDO

SYSTEM NES

DATE OF RELEASE



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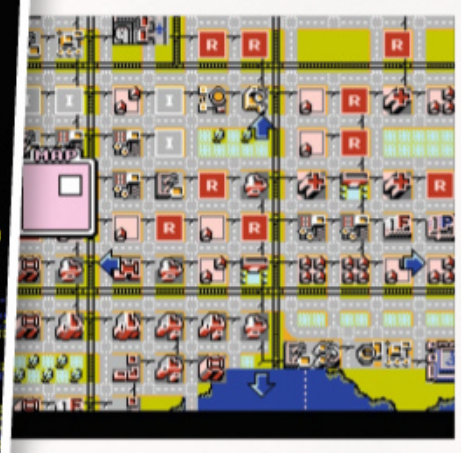
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NES Y NES

SIMILAR GAMES THAT DID GET RELEASED

SIMCITY
1991, NINTENDO

■ The SNES version ultimately represents the finished vision of *SimCity* on consoles, albeit with rather different music to what was being prepared for the NES game. If a ROM hacker ever 'completes' NES *SimCity*, this will be the game they base it on.



SIMCITY 2000
1993, MAXIS

■ The sequel to *SimCity* made its way to multiple Nintendo platforms. HAL Laboratory ported it to the SNES in 1995, Imagineer did an N64 version that was only ever released in the Japanese market, and Full Fat brought it to the Game Boy Advance in 2003.



CITIES: SKYLINES
2015, COLOSSAL ORDER

■ One of the most popular city-building games on the market at present is another example of their suitability for consoles – including Nintendo's Switch, which received a port by Australian developer Tantalus Media in 2018.



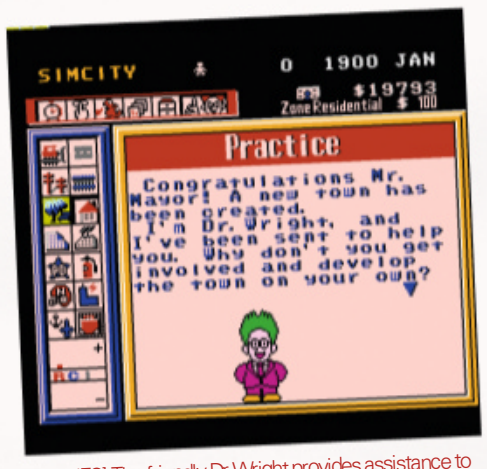


[NES] Map generation is surprisingly swift on the NES, likely due to the simplified nature of the overview.

"The prototype that is now widely available was likely the last build sent to the USA"

a blog post on 25 December 2018, the organisation ran an in-depth blog post on the game, comparing it to the 16-bit version and explaining as much of the game's history as could be explained. On the same day, the prototype was made available online.

It's said that *SimCity* was started on the NES, before development was moved over to the SNES. As a result, the game shows a good chunk of the direction that Nintendo was taking the game in, while showing where decisions had yet to be made. Many of the features that eased new players into the game, including Dr Wright and the bank loans, were already in place. The concept of receiving new building types as presents was included, too, as was the way that tiles visually changed to represent the growth of the city. However, it's easy to see where some ideas were yet to be set in stone – for example, the main tiles and present buildings are of different sizes, in contrast to the final SNES version. By combing through the game's unused data, it's possible to see more ideas under consideration – botanical gardens as reward buildings, a baseball stadium, and even graphics for the special UFO scenario can all be found by those who know where to look. Notably, the soundtrack was completely different with the exception of one major theme.



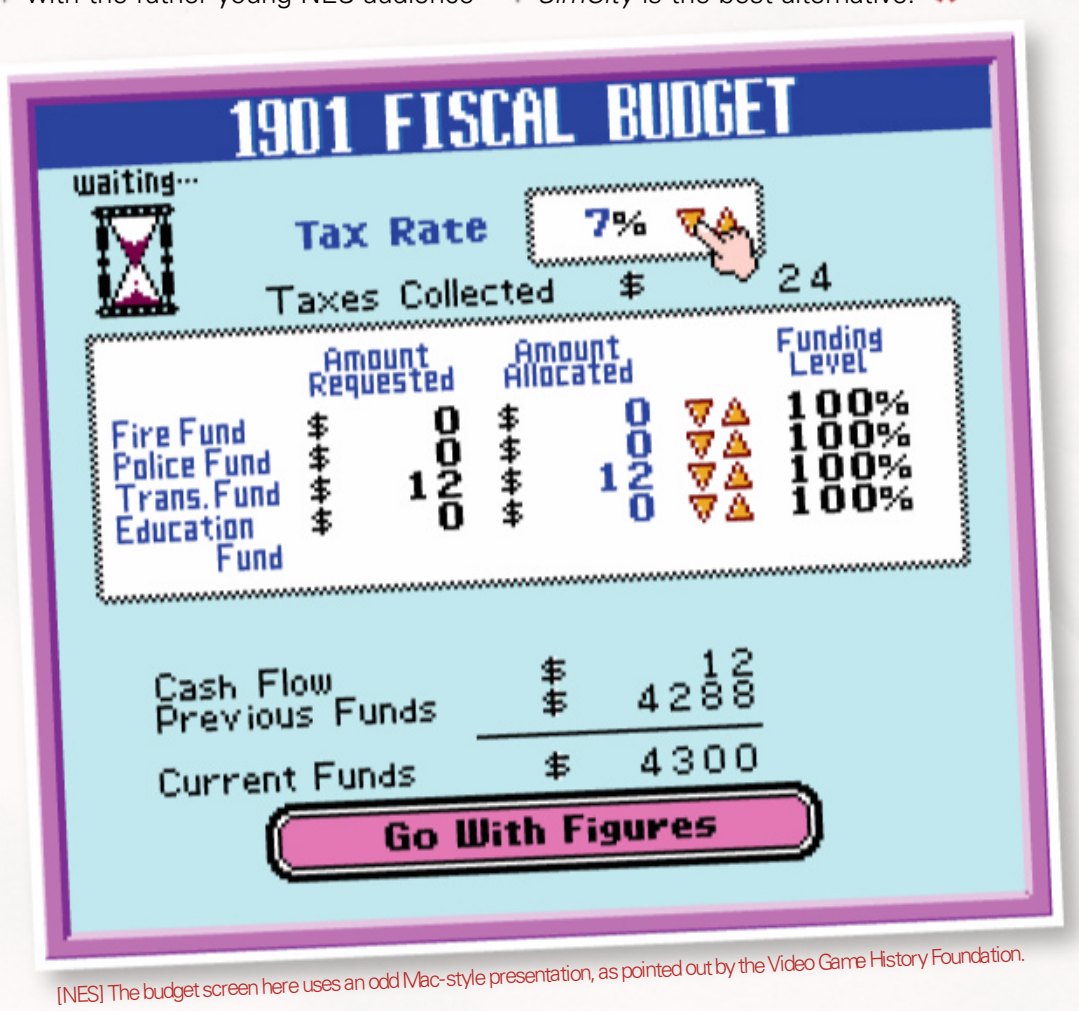
[NES] The friendly Dr Wright provides assistance to new players, just as he would in the final SNES game.



[NES] One of the cuter touches in the SNES version, the use of Bowser for the giant monster, isn't seen here.

According to the Video Game History Foundation, the prototype that is now widely available was likely the last build sent to the USA, and combing media doesn't provide any evidence that the game developed beyond this version. Yet the prototype doesn't provide any clues as to why the NES version was cancelled – though it contains bugs, the game appears to have been progressing well. The cartridges themselves are said to originate from focus testing sessions, and we can only wonder how *SimCity* would have gone down with the rather young NES audience at the time. Another knock against the game would have been that it was shaping up to be relatively expensive to produce, requiring the powerful MMC5 mapper chip as well as battery back-up. We'll likely never solve this particular mystery, though.

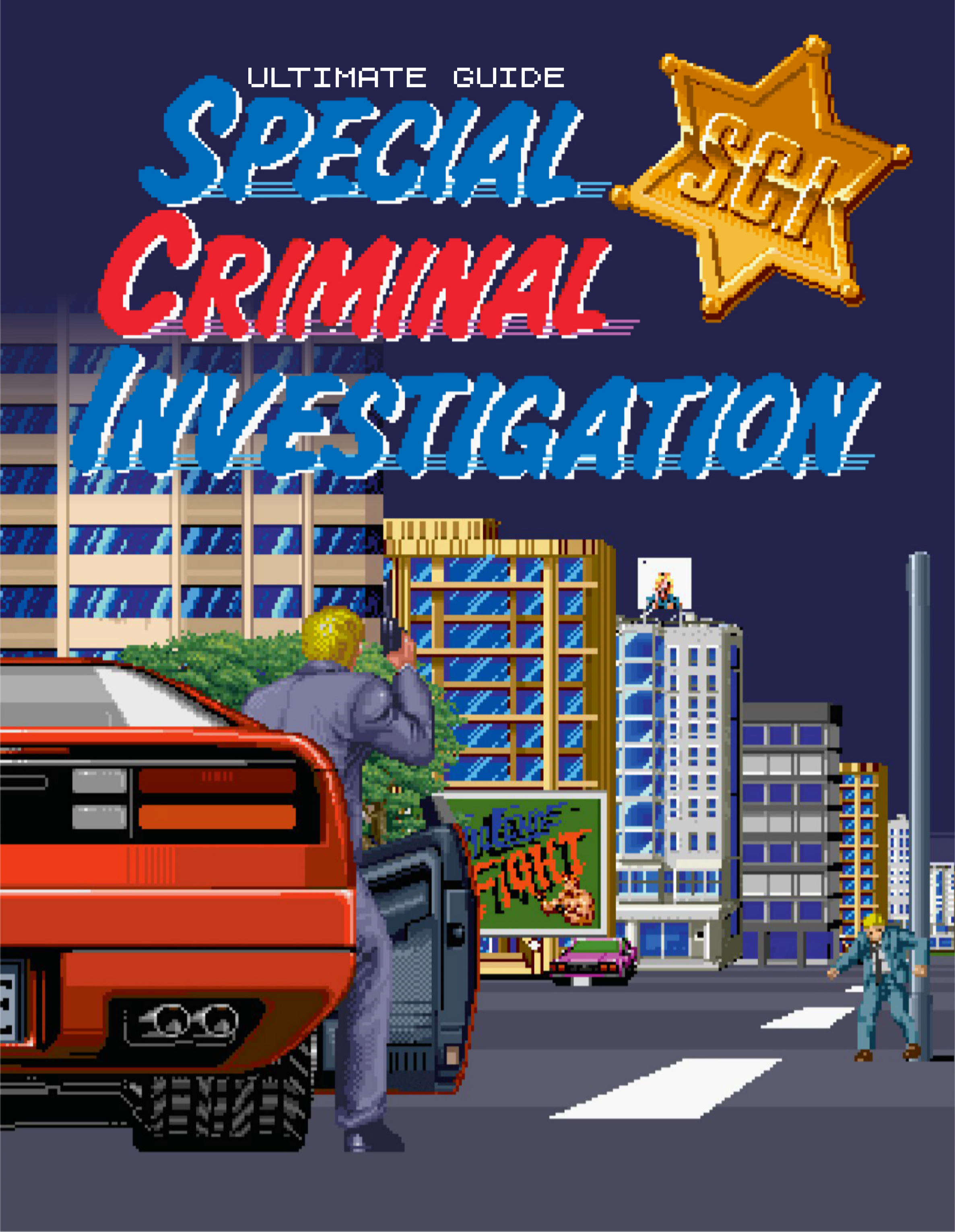
While NES owners at the time missed out on what was shaping up to be an excellent game, the cancellation of *SimCity* ultimately didn't deprive us of much – we still got to experience Nintendo's unique take on the game, just on a different and more powerful platform. However, it's the sort of find that's thrilling for archivists. It's rare to see an internal Nintendo prototype be leaked online, it's rarer still for the game in question to have been cancelled outright, and it's quite extraordinary for a prototype of that nature to offer genuine insight into the design process of a classic. Until games start to come with their own DVD-style documentary materials, tearing through lost gems like *SimCity* is the best alternative. ✱



[NES] The budget screen here uses an odd Mac-style presentation, as pointed out by the Video Game History Foundation.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

SPECIAL CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION



Taito mined arcade gold with Chase HQ, But how could it top the catch 'em and crash 'em gameplay from the original? We take a look at the explosive sequel that blew the bloody doors off rival racers

Words by Martyn Carroll

When it came to capitalising on a hit coin-op few did it with the speed gumption and ruthless efficiency of Taito. If an arcade game was doing the business then a follow-up would appear rapidly often within 12 months.

But clearly no one at Taito was tasked with leveraging brand strategy because the sequels were rarely marketed as such. Instead of *Operation Wolf 2* we got *Operation Thunderbolt* instead of *Rastan 2* we got *Nastar* instead of *Bubble Bobble 2* we got *Rainbow Islands*. Okay so *Rainbow Islands* was subtitled '*The Story Of Bubble Bobble 2*' but you get the idea. In the Eighties Taito rarely took a hot title and simply slapped a big fat numeral on it. The sequel to its 1988 hit *Chase HQ* followed this pattern debuting less than a year after the original with the title *Special Criminal Investigation*. There was no mention of *Chase HQ* on the cabinet art or in the game for that matter. Dispatcher Nancy was gone replaced by someone called Karen. It wasn't even confirmed that the two cops were Tony Gibson and Raymond Brody from the original although the US arcade flyer stated that they were despite depicting Brody as a white guy. Yet you'd only have to watch the attract mode for two seconds to know that *SCI* was *Chase HQ 2*. So why wasn't it named as such?

The reason was simple: as with its other sequels Taito didn't want the new game to supersede and therefore replace the existing one which was still relatively new at the time. Rather it was presented as a companion to the first game one that arcade owners could place alongside the original and collect earning from both. This thinking was particularly appropriate for *SCI* because it introduced an element that transformed the gameplay: guns.

In *Chase HQ* you caught up with the enemy vehicle and smashed it into submission. In *SCI* you caught up with the enemy vehicle and smashed it into submission aided by ammo. With Brody holding the wheel Gibson would pop out of the car the pair had swapped their black Porsche 928 for a red Nissan 300ZX with T-bar roof and blast the baddies with his hand cannon. Here



Arcade Playing chicken with oncoming traffic in the game's opening stage.



Q&A Alan Grier

We chat to the artist who created the graphics for ICE Software's conversions of SCI

Coin-op conversions of driving games were ICE's bread and butter. For each title did the team simply build on the previous one?

Absolutely. ICE's founder Ian Morrison had previously coded *Enduro Racer* an excellent and well-received racer for the Spectrum. There was no way a racing engine that good was going to be used just once. Ian ensured that every ounce of goodness was squeezed from it on titles like *Turbo OutRun Cisco Heat RoadBlasters Hydra* and *SCI*. Over the years it was continuously refined updated and ported to several machines.

Did you have the original *SCI* coin-op in your office to base your graphics on?

We did. Over the years several publisher-supplied arcade machines came and went from the ICE offices. We would simply set up a camera on a tripod stick the game on freeplay and play away. Whoever was the best player would then spend hours playing through every single stage while someone else snapped away. It was a laborious but necessary task. Then it was a trip to the local camera shop with our spools in hand. We'd take a bag full of photos back to the office and get to work.

What software did you use to recreate the graphics?

In the Speccy days my tool of choice was Melbourne Draw a fantastic drawing program in its day. I later used DEGAS Elite on the Atari ST. I hold my hands up to producing Amiga graphics on the ST sorry about that

How did you find working on the Spectrum with its colour limitations?

I loved every minute of it especially producing loading screens which weren't as technically limiting as sprites. I would roughly sketch out the composition on paper then trace the main outlines onto a sheet of clear acetate which I literally Sellotaped to my TV screen. For a long time I thought I was being unique and innovative until I finally met other artists and realised we all used the same method.



What are your memories of playing *SCI*?

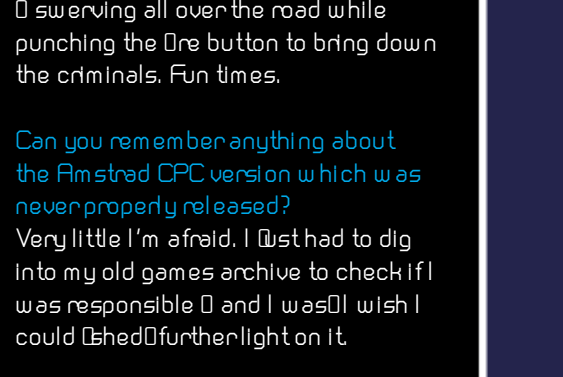
My main memories of playing *SCI* come from the arcades. When it was in the office it was work and I rarely played it in front of colleagues as I was terrible at it But it was a pretty cool game. The shooting certainly added another interesting element swerving all over the road while punching the fire button to bring down the criminals. Fun times.

Can you remember anything about the Amstrad CPC version which was never properly released?

Very little I'm afraid. I just had to dig into my old games archive to check if I was responsible and I was I wish I could shed further light on it.

SCI received average scores but many reviews praised the graphics. That must have been pleasing?

It was at the time but racing game fatigue was tarnishing the whole experience for me by this point. The racing engine was showing its age and the constant tweaks and revisions over the years were yielding minimal improvements. I believe it was retired after *Hydra* and we moved onto shoot-'em-ups and platformers for the next few years. They truly were the happiest of days.



Amiga Alan's pixel work is easily the highlight of ICE's home conversions.





Arcade The game features occasional downpours that make driving conditions difficult.



Arcade Videogame lore dictates that there'll be a handy tunnel behind the waterfall.

> "IT WAS A PRETTY COOL GAME. THE SHOOTING CERTAINLY ADDED ANOTHER INTERESTING ELEMENT"
> **Alan Grier**

the chopper that swooped down and told you which junction to take in the original *Chase HQ* would now drop a five-shot bazooka which you could use to blow vehicles to bits. From stage four onwards you'd be handed a shotgun to deliver extra damage. At its heart it was still a wild driving game but the gun gimmick dominated the proceedings.

The game also introduced a bunch of new obstacles and effects. On the opening stage you had to contend with oncoming vehicles and inclement weather, while stage two introduced suspended roads which you could crash over the side of. Later on stray boulders and cross-town buses would block your way. The vehicles you had to apprehend were more challenging too, as each one was surrounded by wheeled minions that you had to smash or shoot first.

The craziness quota increased throughout the game and by stage five you were up against an 18-wheeler and a *helicopter*.

Rather than chasing random crims as in the first game, *SCI* featured a kidnap plot which tied the stages together. This culminated in a tricky final challenge where you had just 30 seconds to save the mayor's daughter from being blown up. Fail and you'd get the bad ending as well as an instant game over (continues weren't permitted on this final stage). Succeed and you'd witness Gibson lighting up a smoke to celebrate a job well done. How very Eighties.

As you'd probably guess, *SCI* ran on the exact same hardware as *Chase HQ* and *Continental Circus* before it, namely the Taito Z system which was powered by twin 68000 CPUs and a custom GPU with sprite zooming capabilities. The game was made available in two forms: a stand-up cab and a rarer cockpit variant complete with flashing siren on the roof. The two red buttons on the steering wheel fired the gun and were placed so that you could push them with your thumbs while still holding the wheel with both hands. The US stand-up



Arcade Air support arrives and drops off a five-shot bazooka for dishing out extra damage.



Arcade The outlandish penultimate stage sees you engaging both an enemy truck and chopper.

CONVERSION CAPERS

WHICH OF THE HOME VERSIONS WERE WORTH A HOT DAMN?

COMMODORE 64

Even a game that merely functioned would have surpassed the original *Chase HQ* on the C64 so to find the sequel was actually rather good was a bonus. It doesn't really benefit from being a cartridge-only release the stages are all too samey but it's still a solid conversion.



ZX SPECTRUM

This ranks as one of the most disappointing coin-op conversions on the Speccy due to its poor sense of speed heavy controls muddy visuals mind-numbing music and an all-round lack of polish. Ocean really should have kept this one in-house and updated the original code.



ATARI ST

Like a lot of 16-bit coin-op conversions this looks superb in screenshots with its large detailed sprites and good use of colour. Yet up and running it falls apart thanks to its lousy framerate that really drags down the gameplay. In short: looks bona fide plays cockeyed.



AMIGA

You guessed it based on the lead ST version with minor improvements to graphics more colours in the sky and backgrounds and superior audio Chark the police siren absent on the ST. It's also not as choppy as the Atari release so that's a big plus but then again it's no *Lotus*.



PC ENGINE

At the time of release in 1991 this was the most faithful version yet. It even includes the weather effects that were missing from other conversions. It's really fast too and actually outpaces the coin-op making this one wild ride. The only downside? It's a touch too easy.



MASTER SYSTEM

Like the MS version of *Chase HQ* this features a flat track with no hills or dips. But this is a much better effort overall and most elements from the coin-op are included. It does lack challenge however. You can finish most stages with 30 seconds or more left on the clock.



SATURN

Not arcade perfect but pretty near and closer than the conversion of the original coin-op which is included on the same CD. If you're a fan with a multiregion Saturn then this Japanese-exclusive double pack released in 1996 is definitely worth chasing down.



PLAYSTATION 2

If you're looking for an arcade-perfect version then you'll find it on the Japanese-exclusive *Taito Memories II Joukan* collection. For reasons we can't fathom neither of the *Chase HQ* games were included on the two *Taito Legends* packs that were released outside of Japan.





STREET BEAT HOW TO KEEP THE STREETS SAFE

STAGE 1
THE SUBURBS

A Porsche-like sports car with one of three kidnapped girls aboard is fleeing towards the suburbs. The car is supported by bomb-flinging bikers.

HOW TO BEAT IT: Avoid the oncoming vehicles in the opening section then catch up with the target and ram the bikers out of the way before bringing him to a stop. Easy.



STAGE 2
THE COASTLINE

Another of the kidnapped girls is in the back of a station wagon hotfooting it along the coastline freeway. A pack of black Porsches will protect the target.

HOW TO BEAT IT: Take it steady on the bridge sections if you don't want to end up in the drink. Grabbing the bazooka speeds up what is already a straightforward apprehension.



STAGE 3
THE MOUNTAINS

Crime boss Bob Black is speeding towards the mountains in a limousine. Other limos protect the boss and at one point the road turns into a river. Don't ask.

HOW TO BEAT IT: Watch out for rolling boulders in the road and also the cliff edges later on. The boss' cohorts are easy to dispatch use the bazooka on the boss.



STAGE 4
THE CITY

The patrol wagon taking Bob Black downtown has been stolen by an associate and driven at speed through the city. He's aided by a bunch of blue sports cars.

HOW TO BEAT IT: Be aware of the three buses that cross your path early on. The final chase takes place on a long flyover ram the enemy vehicles over the sides.



STAGE 5
THE DESERT

Turns out that future mayor Tony Raymond is behind this whole business. He's racing towards the desert in his convoy that includes an armed chopper.

HOW TO BEAT IT: When the truck reaches half damage Raymond will take to the skies in his chopper. Wait for it to drop low then hit turbo and smash into it.



STAGE 6
THE WAREHOUSE

Raymond reveals that the final kidnapped girl the current mayor's daughter is in a warehouse that's about to blow. You have 30 seconds to save her.

HOW TO BEAT IT: This is tricky as one crash and it's game over. Ease off on all the corners and save your single turbo for the final straight section. Good luck.

cabinet was slightly different, however, with the gun button located on the odd-shaped gear shifter.

The game was released in October 1989 and made its UK debut at the ATEI expo the following January. Newsfield's Robin Hogg took it for a test drive at the show and gave it the thumbs up. "*Chase HQ* still holds its own in the arcades even now," he reported in *Zzap!64*. "The exhilaration of racing flat-out is still wonderfully strong in the sequel. Play it NOW!!" The reviews were positive in other mags too, with the general consensus that it was as fun as the first game and the gunplay added an extra dimension. "SCI is a remarkable update of a remarkable original," wrote *Commodore User*, while sister mag *Sinclair User* said it was "destined to be a hit in every arcade in the land" and awarded the game 8/10.

At roughly the same time, Ocean's conversions of *Chase HQ* were proving to be a hit in homes – even if the quality of the different versions varied wildly. Ocean predictably bagged the home computer rights to *SCI* and outsourced most of the versions to ICE Software, the Glasgow-based developer that had previously converted *Turbo OutRun* and several other coin-op driving games. The Commodore 64 version was converted by Probe Software.

> "THE RACING ENGINE WAS SHOWING ITS AGE AND THE CONSTANT REVISIONS WERE YIELDING MINIMAL IMPROVEMENTS"
> Alan Grier

Now if there was one firm that knew about branding it was Ocean, which promptly retitled it *Chase HQ II* and pushed it out in time for Christmas 1990. Versions for the PC Engine (1991), Master System (1992) and Saturn (1996) followed, and these all retained the *SCI* title. Confusingly a game named *Chase HQ II* was released for the Mega Drive in 1992, but this wasn't a conversion of *SCI* and was closer to the original game. There was no shooting for a start, and you could choose one of three pursuit vehicles, including a truck.

Fast forward to 2007 and another game named *Chase HQ 2* arrived in the arcades courtesy of Taito. The graphics were updated and fully 3D but it featured the same old pursuit-style gameplay. Even Nancy was back. As enjoyable as this modern update was, fans of the series know that the *true* sequel to *Chase HQ* goes by a different name. ★



Arcade: In 1992 Gibson and Brody returned to arcades for a third time in *SuperChase: Criminal Termination*.

MISSION TERMINATED

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO THE AMSTRAD CPC VERSION?



Amstrad CPC: The Amstrad version was based on the Spectrum release but made good use of the Plus's expanded colour palette.

Chase HQ was fantastic on the CPC, so expectations were high for the sequel – especially as it was being developed as a cartridge game for the enhanced CPC Plus range. The game was previewed and even reviewed in magazines, but sadly it was never released – or that's what we thought at the time. Since then at least two copies have surfaced, proving that the game was 100% complete and ready to ship. So what happened?

The full story was covered in Retro Gamer issue 46. To recap: coder Ian Morrison recalled that the game missed its crucial December 1990 release date and Ocean decided to scrap it rather than release it late. How some copies escaped is a mystery, although we know that one was bought from a mail order company in 1993. We asked Alan Grier if he owns a copy and he doesn't – but he does still have all the graphics he created for the game.





C64 Success requires fast reactions and forward-planning, especially as you approach a tunnel.



C64 Constantly flicking your gaze between the action on the top screen and the track layout at the bottom gives your eyes a real optical workout.



Tony revisiting *Suicide Express* at his current place of work, Sumo Digital, in his hometown of Sheffield.

THE MAKING OF SUICIDE

After charming us with the steam-powered *Loco*, Tony Crowther returned to the tracks for a supercharged sequel, not once but twice

Words by Paul Drury

IN THE KNOW

- PUBLISHER: GREMLIN GRAPHICS
- DEVELOPER: TONY CROWTHER
- RELEASED: 1984
- PLATFORM: C64
- GENRE: RAIL SHOOTER

There is a saying that you can spend ages waiting for a bus and then three arrive at once. In 1984, prolific Commodore 64 coder Tony Crowther decided to apply it to train games, producing *Loco*, *Suicide Express* and *Black Thunder* all within the space of six months. 'I did it on a whim, I suppose,' grins Tony. 'Some of my old mates from Alligata said I ought to go back to *Loco* which I'd done for them and I thought, "Yeah, maybe I could do better now..."'

Loco's his take on Sega's arcade obscurity *Super Locomotive* (see RG196 for the full story), was Tony's final game for Alligata Software before he left to become a director at Gremlin Graphics. He coded *Potty Pigeon* and the C64 version of *Monty Mole* in quick succession and then began work on 'new train game', as it was known throughout its development, only being dubbed *Suicide Express* by Gremlin boss Ian Stewart just before its release. As with *Loco*, players steered their engine along a criss-crossing tangle of interconnected tracks, dodging enemy fire and exploding obstacles. The train was now nuclear rather than steam-powered, though, and the pastoral backdrop of rolling hills and flag-waving station masters was replaced by the futuristic setting of the planet Nilmerg.

'I was a sci-fi nut then and I still am now,' says Tony. 'I'd got better at sprite multiplexing so I had plenty to play with. Far more than eight. The enemy spaceships are two sprites when *Loco*'s were one and even the pillar that goes across the screen really fast is a sprite. There are sprites everywhere.'

There are dangers everywhere, too. Not only is your craft, a sleek and heavily armed monorail, assaulted from all angles by foes, you regularly have to pass through tunnels, obscuring your view of any track-based hazards. Add to that the need to collect ammunition along the way, a day/night cycle and a dizzying speed to the action, and attaining 100,000 points, which triggers an end sequence, becomes a serious challenge.

'I didn't mean to make it harder,' protests Tony. 'I just wanted to add more features. And by doing that, yeah, that made it harder. Ian Stewart took a big interest and would sometimes say, "Can you make it do this?" Was I good at taking advice? I like to think so. Though I probably needed a bit of convincing...'

As we play the game on a C64 Mini which we've set up at Sumo Digital in Sheffield, where Tony has worked since 2011, it's obvious he's still proud of the flicker-free speed of *Suicide Express*. However, when we comment on it being his first game to feature speech, he goes oddly quiet.

'I'd rather not talk about it really,' he says after an awkward pause. 'Are you not pleased with the harsh, metallic tone of the voice?' we ask. 'No, it's that I'm not pleased with where it came from. I may have nicked it from somewhere. I don't think they can sue me now, can they? It was from *Tales Of The Arabian Nights*. I hacked that game to make mine talk, which was cool but a bit naughty.'

He wasn't the only one being naughty. Tony had joined Gremlin on the understanding he would be an equal partner

> 'I MADE GAMES FOR THE C64 SO QUICKLY BECAUSE I LOVED DOING THEM. AS SOON AS ONE WAS FINISHED I WAS READY TO DO ANOTHER ONE'
> Tony Crowther





C64 *Suicide Express* was Tony's last game for Gremlin before leaving to set up Wizard Developments, though he was to return for a second spell at the Sheffield-based company.

C64 Tony: "I was fascinated with mazes. I'd just done *Monty Mole* which has a big maze in. I was chuffed with that so made sure I got one in this."

EXPRESS

with Ian Stewart and co-founder Kevin Norburn but when Geoff Brown came on board, Tony felt his nose pushed out.

"I got cheesed off because Geoff and Ian started doing stuff without asking me," he explains. "A chap in development called Roger Taylor said, 'You don't want to put up with that,' and persuaded me to join him and set up Wizard Developments. I'd own 50% of the company which sounded better than the 25% I had at Gremlin. I thought we'd be able to use *Suicide Express* to launch the new company but it turned out Gremlin owned it. The game wasn't quite finished, and I wasn't 100% happy with it, but there was a pre-release version that had been sent out to magazines for reviews... so Gremlin got one of them, sent back and duplicated that. I never handed anything over to them, and they never paid me a penny for it."

Annoyed and out of pocket, Tony took legal advice and was told that whilst they couldn't stop Gremlin releasing *Suicide Express*, they could alter the visuals and release it under a different name, which explains *Black Thunder*, a near-identical game, albeit it came with a Ben Daglish score replacing Tony's version of *Hotta* by Sky (see box-out Back To Black).

Both games received rave reviews in *Personal Computer Games* and *Your Commodore* and Tony smiles broadly as he recalls those heady days when he was producing a new game almost every month. "I made games so quickly because I loved doing them. As soon as one was finished, I was ready to do another one. I definitely enjoyed that time a lot."

One thing he may not have enjoyed is the software piracy prevalent in those pioneering days of home micros. Is that why the opening screen of *Suicide Express* shows a skull and crossbones being blasted by your train? "I'd forgotten that," he smiles. "To be honest, I was the worst for piracy as I had thousands of copied games."

We leave Tony, sham-faced but smirking, speeding across planet Nilmerg. Hang on, 'Nilmerg'? Ah, we just got that...

BACK TO BLACK



Though we can sympathise with Tony releasing *Black Thunder* given the lack of payment from Gremlin for his work on *Suicide Express*, we do wonder if he had any qualms that players might unwittingly buy what was essentially the same game twice? "When I heard Quiksilva was going to release *Black Thunder*, I thought, 'Well it's a different market because they're an American company,'" he protests. "I saw the packaging and honestly, I was sure it was only for the US market. I actually went over to San Antonio in the States to make *Black Thunder* and also my next game Gryphon run at 60Hz. I did both conversions in two days but ended up staying a month, getting drunk and going to parties. My wife was with me and she got homesick. I could've stayed forever."



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ZIGOZAG
SYSTEM: C64
YEAR: 1987

CHALLENGE OF THE GOBOTS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: C64/VARIOUS
YEAR: 1987

BUG BLASTER
SYSTEM: C64/VARIOUS
YEAR: 1983



Peripheral Vision

Zapper

PLATFORM: NES RELEASED: 1985
COST: $44.99 launch $30 boxed today $15 unboxed today

When Nintendo made the decision to localise the Famicom for the international market one of the peripherals the company decided to bring over was the Beam Gun. The lightgun already supported a few games including *Wild Gunman* and *Hogan's Alley* and would help to differentiate the NES from previous consoles in the wake of the market crash. Perhaps feeling that the Japanese design modelled on a revolver was too realistic Nintendo rebranded the device as the Zapper and opted for a futuristic design more evocative of sci-fi weaponry than a real pistol. The Zapper was included as part of the Action Set and Deluxe Set NES bundles as well as being available separately.

There are two visually distinctive models of the Zapper in circulation. The original model introduced in 1985 was designed to match the console's colour scheme. It sported a two-tone grey look with a red trigger. However a change to the law on the marking of toy firearms in the USA forced Nintendo to redesign the gun in 1989. Though an orange tip would be sufficient to comply with the law Nintendo replaced the darker grey plastic of the barrel and handle with bright orange and the trigger was made black. *



ESSENTIAL GAME
DUCK HUNT

Between *Duck Hunt*'s ease of acquisition and its iconic status in retro gaming culture, there was no other game that could receive this spot. Both the duck-hunting game and the clay pigeon shooting mode carried a sports shooting theme, and if that didn't mark it out as more family-friendly than the likes of *Wild Gunman*, the cartoon dog that laughed at you for missing shots certainly did. Thanks to the ubiquity of the *Super Mario Bros* and *Duck Hunt* multicarts that were bundled with Action Set consoles, we'd be rather surprised if any NES collectors *didn't* already own this game.



Zapper fact

■ The Zappers appear as weapons in the *Splatoon* series. The N-Zap 85 and 89 sport their original colour schemes, while the 83 is coloured red and gold like the original model of the Famicom.




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Stunt Car Racer

SHH! YOU'LL WAKE UP STEVE!



AMIGA 1989 MICROSTYLE

When I used to work at Gateway, I was friends with a person called John. I can't remember his surname, but I do recall that he had an Amiga. Well actually, he didn't have an Amiga at all, it belonged to his mum's boyfriend, Steve, and he never liked us using it because we were stupid kids that would break it .

Luckily for us, Steve the idiot as John called him worked nights, so he was rarely in, and the few times he was around he was typically fast asleep. As a result, John and myself would often play on Steve's precious Amiga without his permission. In a way this added to the thrill of playing, because you were caught in this weird state of nervous excitement where you were enjoying the game, but painfully aware that Steve might wake up at any moment and give you what-for.

Some things are worth risking a punch for when you're a 16-year-old kid though, and *Stunt Car Racer* was one of them. Being the owner of an Amstrad CPC 464, I had nothing on the machine that came close to it in terms of the game's speed and ambition, and I was constantly blown away whenever I had a chance to play it. The track design is perhaps one of the best aspects of Geoff Crammond's game, and while none of the designs felt as crazy as Sega's *Power Drift*, they still managed to feel incredibly distinctive and a world away from the traditional flat tracks found in most racing games of the time.

The AI of *Stunt Car Racer* always felt challenging as well, and I'd get immense satisfaction whenever I was able to come first in a race as each position gained genuinely felt earned. And then, of course, there were the excellent physics which often left your stomach churning as your car launched over jumps and hit the floor with a shuddering crunch. Falling off the side of the track was also terrifying, although that was mainly because our shouts of frustration would wake Steve up, and then we'd get in trouble! ✱

LOST IN BLUE

Soleil

Sega's 16-bit hardware had multiple great RPGs, both action and turn-based, many released in English. With the Mega Drive Mini featuring Shining Force, Landstalker, Phantasy Star IV, The Story Of Thor and Light Crusader, one game was conspicuous by its absence!

WORDS BY JOHN SCEPANIAK





Mega Drive The UK and US localisations were by different teams the US one (right) is funnier, but the religious aspects were toned down.



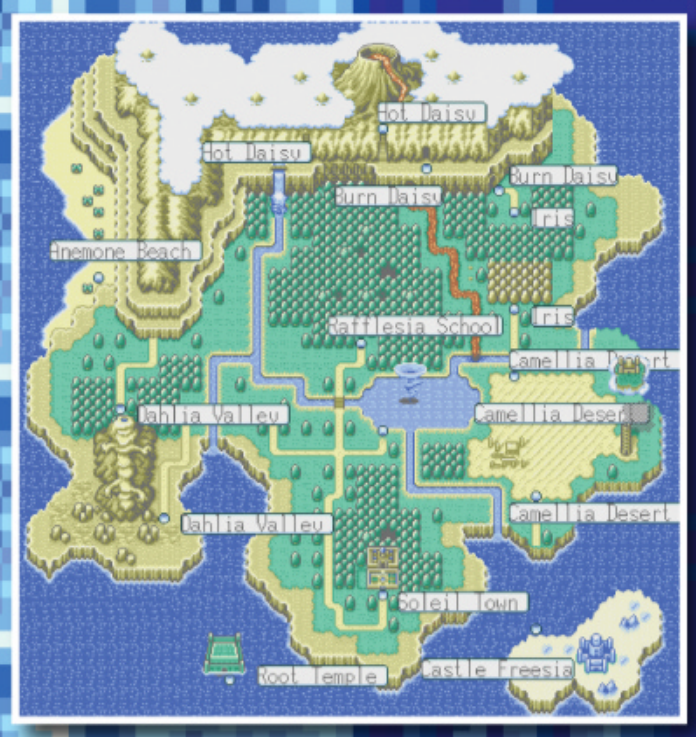


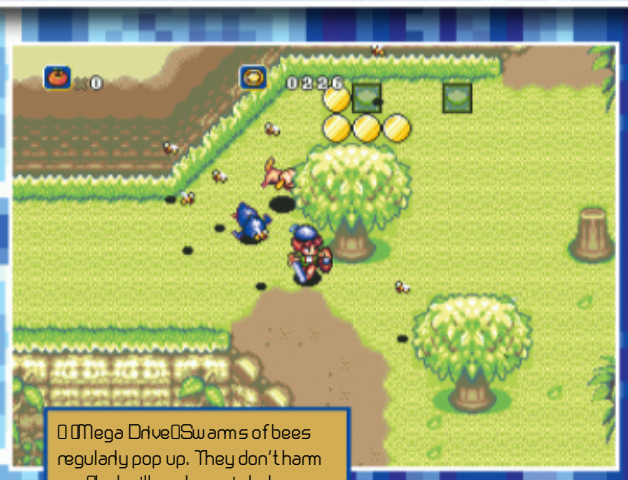


Despite *Soleil* being released worldwide (including South Korea) and getting rave reviews, it never developed the same following as more popular Mega Drive titles. For the many who saw screenshots, *Soleil* simply became that cute *elda* clone. While there are similarities, to dismiss it as a mere clone is to ignore its originality and signi cant wider conte t. For the heritage of *Soleil* is entwined with the heritage of the Mega Drive itself. Also its cuteness is super cial *Soleil* gets dark, e tremely dark.

The game was developed by Ne Tech, formerly GAU Entertainment, a spin-off from Wolf Team, which was a subsidiary of Telenet Japan. The GAU cofounders Toshio Toyota and Yukihiko Tani were involved in earlier games like *Sol-Feace*, *Final one*, *El Viento* and *Earnest Evans*. Their colleague at Wolf Team, Masaaki Uno, would go on to Camelot Software, working on the *Shining Force* and *Golden Sun* series. Wolf Team itself eventually became Namco Tales Studio, developing the *Tales* RPGs. Keep in mind also that Telenet was one of Japan s RPG powerhouses, at least for home computers. So what we have is a group of colleagues and friends who honed their skills during the RPG boom years.

Of course GAU s rst game, and *Soleil* s predecessor, was not an RPG, but the fast-paced technical masterpiece *Ranger X* in 1993. It showcased incredible visual effects few other Mega Drive games came close to, while the dual-mecha combat was diverse and novel, and it earned the team a reputation of being one to watch. Its follow-up was *Soleil*, released in Japan as *Shin Souseiki Ragnacenty* in June 199 right between *Phantasy Star IV* and *The Story Of Thor* in the chronologically listed games of our intro. In fact, on the Mega Drive, there had already been around 0 e amples of the genre in Japan alone more if you count western ▶





Mega Drive Swarms of bees regularly pop up. They don't harm you but will push you into traps.

SLIME HERO

HEALING APPLE





Mega Drive Platforms in heaven only become visible once touched – the layout is different between UK and US releases.



Mega Drive Sonic The Hedgehog makes an unusual cameo appearance lounging by the beach.



Mega Drive One of many puzzles: throw the sword and move down so on the rebound it hits the red switch.

MORE FROM SOLEIL'S TEAM

Soleil's developer spun off from Wolf Team and was known as GAU Nex Tech and eventually NEX Entertainment

Sol-Feace – 1990

Shares the same programmer and character designer as *Soleil* though developed while at Wolf Team. A hori-shmup released on Mega Drive Mega-CD and Sharp X68000.



Earnest Evans – 1991

Soleil's main programmer Yukihiko Tani acted as both lead programmer and director on this. The player character has a bizarre marionette style of movement.



Ranger X – 1993

Soleil's character / graphics artist Toshio Yamamoto handled graphics and game design while *Soleil*'s subprogrammer Toshio Toyota took on lead programming.



Wrinkle River Story – 1996

Soleil's script writer and game designer Yayoi Onda also handled the scenario and design for this. Also *please* stop romanising it as 'Linkle Liver'.



ANOTHER WORLD





GUN

ANOTHER FISH



Animal Magic

The cute critters that will help you on your epic Quest



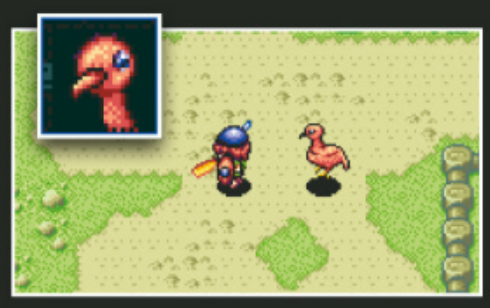
Kitty

Hireable at Anemone Beach village for 50 Malins. Replenishes all HP if reduced to zero, so it's therefore extremely valuable. Always have Kitty in your team.



MacGuffhnny

Your starting animal and your family's household pet. Supposedly locks down enemies, but apart from a couple of arbitrary story puzzles it is utterly useless.



Moa

A late-game acquisition, this bird enhances other animal attributes. Pair it with the butterfly for an outrageously overpowered, indefinite remote-control sword attack.



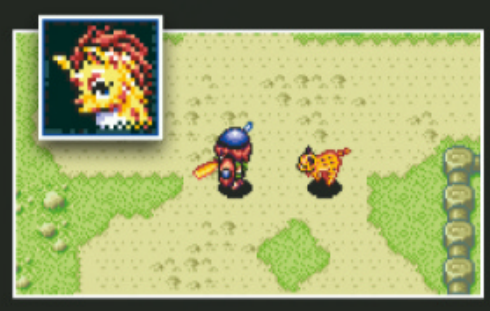
Inferno Lion

Found at the icy Castle Freesia, the lion imbues your trusty sword with the power of fire. Pair this ability with the dodo to set enemies alight.



Chilly Penguy

Found after beating Octopus, this penguin enhances your attacks with the power of ice. Harnessing this ability is the only way to damage certain fire enemies.



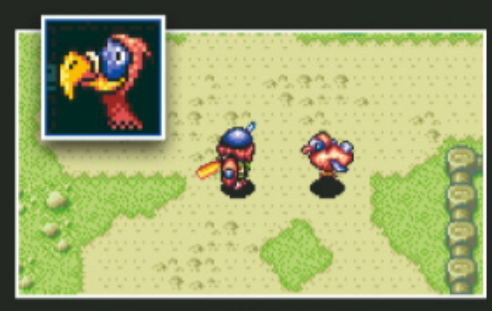
Flash Charlie

You have to beat this speedy creature in a race to acquire him. This is probably impossible normally, so just bribe him 50 Malins to run slower.



Dippy Dinosaur

Found in the desert, this prehistoric dinosaur turns the lake into a shortcut. It's also essential for crossing the ocean, plus several spike and water traps.



Dodo

Another late-game recruit. The dodo can attach ice or fire to enemies, and also drags enemies, items back to you. It is absolutely crucial for the final boss.



Leviathan

Defeat him at the end of the Root Temple to make him join your cause. He increases the speed of weapon charging and swinging. Nice, but not essential.



Wong Raccoon Dog

One of the last animals you get. It mimics the appearance of the main character, drawing enemy attacks. Not much use apart from during the last boss.



Cecil Ciel

Gained after beating the third boss, this flying squirrel makes your sword go further and ricochet off walls. This is needed for multiple switch puzzles.



Pieces Caterpillar

This guy is a joke character who you get after completing the chicken, caterpillar, flower puzzle. He does nothing, but later transforms into a butterfly.



Monarchy Butterfly

The butterfly allows you to control the movement of your sword like a flying drone. Flight time is limited, unless paired with Moa later on in the game.



Rio Armadillo

Now is the time for some annoying puzzles. The C button flattens him, so he can be used as a throwable mobile platform, or to activate switches.



Batty Bat

Costs 100 Malins to hire and makes you temporarily invincible. Honestly, there's never any situation which justifies such a price or losing a weapon slot.



Edgar Egg

The third and final hireable animal, costing 50 Malins. This one acts as a superbomb, attacking all enemies on screen. Sadly, he's never really needed.





Mega Drive In Hot Daisy Jump on this bridge board to reveal a rope and apple of life below.

exclusives. *Soleil* would need to be special to rise above the crowd.

Rise it did scoring 8 8 6 8 in *Deep Mega Drive* magazine the anomalous six was due to its resemblance to a certain work while only *Uncharted Waters II* scored slightly higher that issue. Roughly six months later it would reach English-speaking countries localised by Sega Of Europe as *Soleil* and according to *Mean Machines* come out in January. Atlus handled the American localisation renaming it *Crusader Of Centy* and according to *Electronic Gaming Monthly* released it March 1995. Each version uses an entirely different script the Atlus version is funnier but the religious themes are removed notice the lack of halos in heaven *Mean Machines* scored it 92 while *EGM* gave 8 8 7 8. Both scores cementing *Soleil's* legacy as a classic. Interestingly *GameFAN* reviewed it in its April 1995 issue alongside *Phantasy Star IV*. Sega's in-house RPG scored a respectable 90 87 82 while *Crusader Of Centy* scored a phenomenal 98 92 95. Decent scores were also in *NextGen GamePro VG CE* et al. Every publication regarded the game positively likewise all made reference to Nintendo's *Zelda* series.

However if we analyse *Soleil* how much like *Zelda* is it really? After all *Zelda* from 1986 followed the gameplay tropes already set by *The Tower Of Druaga Dragon Slayer Courageous Perseus Hydlide* and others in Japan. It was hardly original and to be more fair both *Zelda* and *Soleil* should be described as extensions to a style of game already well established before either. Of course there's still no denying certain similarities especially to *A Link To The Past*. Both games start with a young boy receiving the family sword from a relative said sword is used to cut down swathes of grass to find goodies both boys wear green tunics enemies can be attacked at close range or from afar while blocks must be pushed to solve puzzles there are a series of commonly themed 'dungeons' to conquer be they dessert ice fire etc. Also there are chickens except in *Soleil* they talk. If your only experience of *Soleil* is seeing screenshots of shared traits it's understandable you might dismiss it as just another *Zelda*.

Play a little further though or complete the game and you discover *Soleil* to be highly innovative defining itself as distinct from its peers. For a start the story is nothing like any *Zelda* which typifies the cliched 'hero saves princess world' arc. In *Soleil* you are given your dead father's sword and shield because humanity is in an endless war with 'monsters' and all 14-year-old boys are drafted into a sort of feudal militia. What sets the player apart is that early on you are cursed with understanding all creatures and not understanding humans allowing a window into their world and the prejudices they suffer thus initiating the adventure and eventual time travelling.





Mega Drive This section has you navigating an underwater maze with a limited air supply.





Mega Drive This puzzle is ingenious just make sure to use Dippy Dinosaur afterwards to cross the water.



Mega Drive After warping into the past you witness the desert people holding an unjust trial.



Soleil subverts many RPG tropes. You don't really save anyone. Key parts of the plot revolve around being unable to rescue certain groups and the tragedy that ensues. God himself becomes enraged that humans are failing his trials by killing everything and so he threatens to wipe out all existence. *Soleil* isn't really about a hero saving the world but rather a boy defying his omnipotent creator, time travelling to rewrite history and undo god's own work. However it's not epically conveyed like Greek mythology but through a series of small narrative vignettes encapsulated in each separate stage. Whether it's the Mother Slime weeping for her children slain by heroes, forbidden love between a girl and monster, massacre in the church or unjust trials which lead to execution of innocents, the world of *Soleil* is filled with ordinary folks (humans and monsters) suffering at the hands of a cruel deity and even crueller neighbours. As Schopenhauer said: "life is suffering".

By far its biggest divergence though, is game design. *Soleil* featured an integral racing section nearly a year before *Chrono Trigger* did the same. Meanwhile, instead of conventional inventory items like every other RPG, you gain animal friends each with a unique skill. Two can be 'equipped' at a time and there are special combinations to unlock abilities. *Soleil's* boomerang sword is more versatile than *Zelda's* beam sword, its jumping physics are fun, while its compartmentalised levels and style of block puzzles is more aligned with Quintet's *Soul Blazer* or *Illusion Of Gaia*. Finally, how many games from the 16-bit era accurately drew animated sprites for characters facing eight directions?

Now that we've made the case for *Soleil's* distinction, it's worth celebrating its producer, scenario writer, and game designer: Yayoi Onda. It's a shame her only significant credits are for *Soleil* and *Wrinkle River Story*, because she had the creativity and vision to rival Sega's own Rieko Kodama as Queen of the JRPG. Today *Soleil* is remembered fondly by those who played it, but strangely has never been re-released. Not on mini consoles nor official download services. Meaning your options are emulation or a minimum of £50 for a complete boxed PAL copy. ✱

BOSS RUSH

Battle against monsters and your senses.

WOLF

Open a floodgate on the mountain and then ride it to the old lady's house and this first boss. She's hiding in the fireplace.

How to beat it:

It's early-game so you're severely underpowered, making this first boss quite tricky. Avoid the objects flying around his head and throw your sword.



OCTOPUS

After a long trek through Anemone Beach you reach Octopus, and he's wearing a penguin as a hat. Beat him to recruit the penguin.

How to beat it:

Very easy, stay low. His arms can't hurt you, so just avoid his ice blasts and throw your sword. It changes colour after enough damage.





SHUFFLER

Navigate the fiery depths of Burn Daisy to find this tricky fellow. You don't actually fight his whole self, rather eight miniature versions.

How to beat it:

Only one copy can be damaged. Hit any, and the correct one flashes. Keep your eye on it as they move, attack only when they stop.



ROXIE

At first you think you're climbing a rope at the top of the Tower Of Babel, but suddenly it reforms itself into a boss.

How to beat it:

Most of the time it's invulnerable. Wait for it to charge and fire energy balls, only immediately afterwards can it be hurt.



GEORAMA

Getting through Castle Freesia is no easy task, featuring several ricochet sword puzzles. The boss, though, is fun, running both hot and cold.

How to beat it:

Be prepared to swap between your fire and ice buddies. Use fire on Ice Georama, and ice on Fire Georama. Avoid any burning ground.



LEVIATHAN

At the bottom of the Root Temple is the Leviathan boss who afterwards becomes a friend. The battle is more of a test before he joins you.

How to beat it:

He makes your mother appear on the lower raft sending homing attacks at her. If they hit she gains health so rebound them back.



MALDRA

Known simply as 'Dragon' in both the Japanese and UK release only Atlus' localisation of the game gives it the name Maldra.

How to beat it:

Equip the cheetah and run around this boss on the central platform. Throw your sword when possible. Afterwards have a chat with god.



CHAMELEON

The first of the bosses you fight in the past. You'll find Chameleon after climbing to the top of the dessert tower and descending.

How to beat it:

You're only likely to take damage when its tongue is extended. So keep running. You can ignore the babies as they run off-screen.



PUPPET MASTER

It's possible to glimpse him in present Dum Daisy but you can only fight him after getting the dodo and stealing his puppet through the wall.

How to beat it:

Equip the dodo and the lion. Set the puppet on fire. After it breaks the Puppet Master runs around Dum him while you can.



BARON

Talk to every village animal in the past. Monkey leaves. And the wounded monkey. Just south are four enemy stars Jump into the centre.

How to beat it:

Considering the difficulty of finding this boss she's super easy. After rolling into a ball he just moves around the arena's edge.



MOTHER MONSTER

After travelling back in time you fight the heart of a monster which forms part of Dahlia Valley itself. The dungeon is its inner body.

How to beat it:

It doesn't attack you at all. So just swing away and then listen to it admonish you for murdering creatures. It's quite tragic actually.

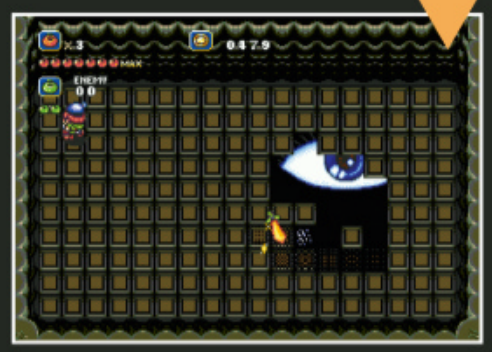


SENSE OF SIGHT

This along with the other four senses can be tackled in any order. The order you fight them in does not affect the battle.

How to beat it:

It hides beneath the floor tiles. Use Moa and Monarchy to control your sword around the arena. The holes in the floor cannot harm you.



SENSE OF TOUCH

The second of the five sensory bosses: a pair of touchy hands which try to impale you on spikes around the field's edge Do-er

How to beat it:

The ground is annoyingly slippery so one solution is to use Moa and the butterfly for remote-control sword attacks. Or just hit it really fast.



SENSE OF HEARING

A musical note to represent one's sense of hearing is quite smart. This is the halfway mark with only two more senses after to beat.

How to beat it:

Equip the cheetah. When the boss swaps the floor stay central. As you slide in one direction start Jumping towards the centre.

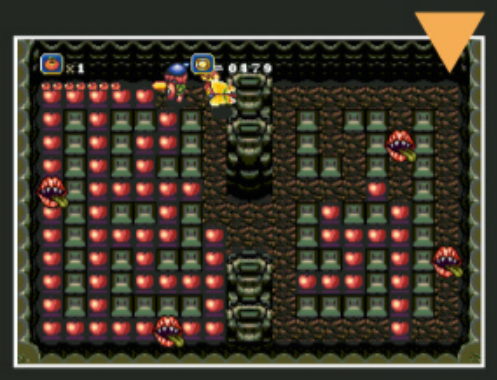


SENSE OF TASTE

This 'fight' is basically *Pac-Man* except with apples instead of dots and mouths instead of ghosts. Sadly the apples do not heal you.

How to beat it:

This is ridiculously easy. Just collect all the apples to win. If you hired the bat earlier on you might as well use him now.



SENSE OF SMELL

A giant slug with what appears to be a blackened nose? Whatever it is it cannot be hurt with conventional weapons only spike traps.

How to beat it:

Walk over tiles to prime the spike traps. You can activate them by Jumping but it's safer to press C while the armadillo is equipped.

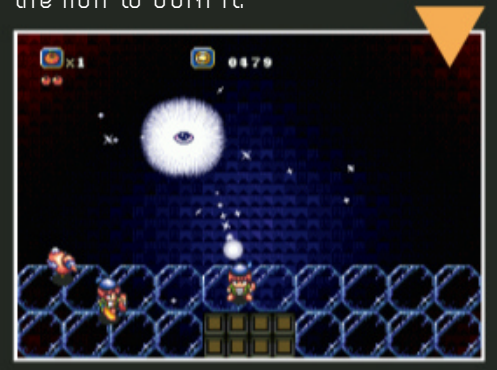


SPIRIT ENERGY

The final boss Beating it will open the gateway allowing monsters to return home. You also get to play around in a fun post-game ending

How to beat it:

Finally the Racoon Dog comes in handy Use it to absorb all attacks. Use the dodo to open the eye then the lion to burn it.





Many game stamp sets are based around a specific theme and the Royal Mail's was no different, focusing on the best of British gaming.

VIDEOGAME

In January, Royal Mail premiered a set of retro gaming stamps. While the UK was the first country to first issue postage stamps, it was not the first to issue videogame stamps, which has an uncoordinated history dating over three decades

Words By Michael Barron



It's unsurprising that a character as popular as Mario would end up getting celebrated as a stamp set.



NES A number of licensed videogames, including *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, have been immortalised in stamp form.

The first stamp to feature a videogame dates back to 1988 with *Pac-Man* as part of the Dutch Youth Care Campaign series of three stamps. Two years later in 1990 Israel issued a set of three stamps. Each one was devoted to an individual computer game, and *Chess*, *Volleyball* and *Car Races* were celebrated in all their 8-bit glory. The Nineties would see a few videogame stamps from unassuming nations like Uganda, Guernsey, Central African Republic and Palau, but the majority of these sets would not see the light of day until the turn of the century.

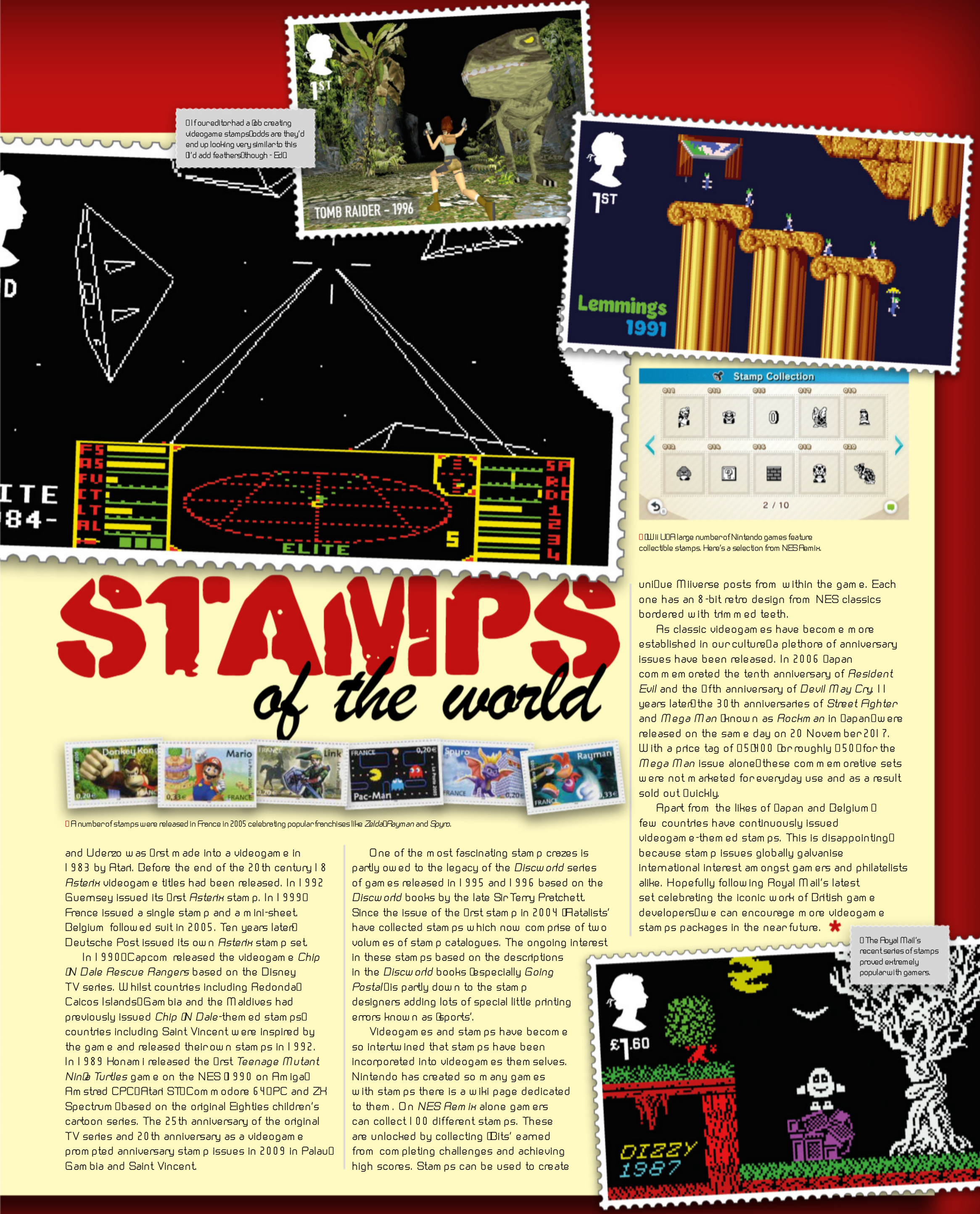
The history of videogame stamps is intertwined with individual nations' fascination with technology, particularly early computers. In 1987 India celebrated 100 years of Service To The Blind by issuing one stamp out of a set of two with a computer, demonstrating how computers can help those who are disadvantaged in society. In the same year, Australia issued a set of four stamps celebrating microchips and robotics amongst other technological innovations. Philatelists (stamp collectors, themselves have been widely using microcomputers to assist with stamp collecting since the early Eighties.

The advent of the 21st century saw a different approach to gaming. Previously, people, mostly children and teenagers, celebrated games as something new. But as time went on they began to commemorate gaming as something that has been normalised as a part of everyday living and a pastime for adults as well as children. With the advancement of computers and growing popularity of video-sharing platforms such as YouTube, videogame enthusiasts have used the template of the humble postage stamp to design their own videogame-themed stamps whilst sharing step-by-step guides for others to make their own designs.

Online platforms such as DeviantArt, where users upload their stamp designs, among many other art forms, are in such high demand and they have strict rules limiting the number of daily uploads. Rules also cover stamp design which must have the appropriate 'teeth' surrounding them. People in the USA, despite the country not issuing a complete set of videogame-themed stamps, have caught onto the idea that people want to design, or get graphic designers to create, their own personal stamps and send them out to their social circles through Zazzle.

The biggest, oldest and geographically dispersed videogame-related stamp designs are linked to titles that are based on TV shows or comic books. For instance the comic book series *Asterix* by Goscinny

STAMPS of the world



If our editor had a fab creating videogame stamps, odds are they'd end up looking very similar to this. I'd add feathers, though - Ed.

A number of stamps were released in France in 2005 celebrating popular franchises like *Zelda*, *Rayman* and *Spyro*.

and Uderzo was first made into a videogame in 1983 by Atari. Before the end of the 20th century 18 *Asterix* videogame titles had been released. In 1992 Guernsey issued its first *Asterix* stamp. In 1999, France issued a single stamp and a mini-sheet. Belgium followed suit in 2005. Ten years later, Deutsche Post issued its own *Asterix* stamp set.

In 1990, Capcom released the videogame *Chip 'N Dale Rescue Rangers* based on the Disney TV series. Whilst countries including Redonda, Caicos Islands, Gambia and the Maldives had previously issued *Chip 'N Dale*-themed stamps, countries including Saint Vincent were inspired by the game and released their own stamps in 1992. In 1989 Konami released the first *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* game on the NES, 1990 on Amiga, Amstrad CPC, Atari ST, Commodore 64, PC and ZX Spectrum, based on the original Eighties children's cartoon series. The 25th anniversary of the original TV series and 20th anniversary as a videogame prompted anniversary stamp issues in 2009 in Palau, Gambia and Saint Vincent.

One of the most fascinating stamp crazes is partly owed to the legacy of the *Discworld* series of games released in 1995 and 1996 based on the *Discworld* books by the late Sir Terry Pratchett. Since the issue of the first stamp in 2004, 'fatalists' have collected stamps which now comprise of two volumes of stamp catalogues. The ongoing interest in these stamps based on the descriptions in the *Discworld* books, especially *Going Postal*, is partly down to the stamp designers adding lots of special little printing errors known as 'sports'.

Videogames and stamps have become so intertwined that stamps have been incorporated into videogames themselves. Nintendo has created so many games with stamps there is a wiki page dedicated to them. On *NES Remix* alone gamers can collect 100 different stamps. These are unlocked by collecting 'bits' earned from completing challenges and achieving high scores. Stamps can be used to create unique Miiverse posts from within the game. Each one has an 8-bit retro design from NES classics bordered with trimmed teeth.

Wii U. A large number of Nintendo games feature collectible stamps. Here's a selection from *NES Remix*.

As classic videogames have become more established in our culture, a plethora of anniversary issues have been released. In 2006, Japan commemorated the tenth anniversary of *Resident Evil* and the fifth anniversary of *Devil May Cry*. 11 years later, the 30th anniversaries of *Street Fighter* and *Mega Man* (known as *Rockman* in Japan) were released on the same day on 20 November 2017. With a price tag of ¥5,400 (or roughly £50) for the *Mega Man* issue alone, these commemorative sets were not marketed for everyday use and as a result sold out quickly.

Apart from the likes of Japan and Belgium, a few countries have continuously issued videogame-themed stamps. This is disappointing, because stamp issues globally galvanise international interest amongst gamers and philatelists alike. Hopefully following Royal Mail's latest set celebrating the iconic work of British game developers, we can encourage more videogame stamps packages in the near future. ✱

The Royal Mail's recent series of stamps proved extremely popular with gamers.

BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO WRES GAMES

WRESTLING GAMES HAVE PROVIDED AN EXCITING ALTERNATIVE TAKE ON FIGHTING FOR DECADES AND WITH EXPERTISE IN BOTH WRESTLING AND GAMES OUR TRIPLE THREAT OF INTERVIEWEES WILL ENSURE THAT EVEN THE GREENEST ROOKIE CAN DISCUSS THEM WITHOUT SOUNDING LIKE A DABRONI

WORDS BY NICK THORPE



Arcade *Tag Team Wrestling* offered a surprisingly rounded experience though other games quickly improved on its method of selecting moves.



PS4 Modern wrestling games have pursued depth of simulation sometimes at the expense of ease of entry.

The championship match is over and standing in the middle of the ring is a 50-something former NFL player a supremely intense individual who has his arm raised in victory. His opponent a relentless horror movie monster who can be stunned but never truly stopped will show up on TV tomorrow as his alter ego an excitable but eminently unnerving children's TV presenter. Yes professional wrestling is preposterous. But we love *Tekken* and that allows you to kick the face off the devil himself with a schoolgirl so why not lean into the craziness? It's well worth doing so as wrestling games have evolved along very different lines to regular fighting games and offer a totally different way of generating thrills that is much better suited to having more than two players.

The development of wrestling games coincides with the industry's American boom years in the Eighties but most of the early games didn't feature the stars that were chasing championships in real life. Many developers were content to use their own characters. Early games in the genre include arcade games like *Tag Team Wrestling* and *Mat Mania* and computer games like *Rock 'N' Wrestle* and *Championship Wrestling*. These established the basic principles that most wrestling games would follow offering full movement around the ring rather than limited 2D movement and placed an early emphasis on the importance of bouts beyond standard one-on-one contests with their inclusion of tag-team matches. One console game stood out as a common introduction with our interviewees. The first one I ever owned I believe was the NES *Pro Wrestling* game the one with Starman III says The Librarian' Leva Bates a wrestler who can currently be seen on All Elite Wrestling's flagship show *Dynamite* which airs on ITV4 on Friday nights. I remember The Amazon I feel like he was the predecessor for Blanka and I remember loving him. The human wrestlers were cool but for me I enjoyed the over-the-top characters. Actor and former *Game Informer* editor Dustin Leeper has long been involved with wrestling having performed on the indie circuit and written for WWE videogames. I'd guess it was *Pro Wrestling* on the NES at my friend Steve's house. He and his big brother had a bevy of carts III he responds when asked about his introduction to wrestling videogames. It was good fun. Starman was the star man.



Arcade Women's wrestling has been represented since the early days of the genre thanks to stars like Dump Matsumoto and later Cutie Suzuki.

Still it wasn't in *Punch-Out*'s league. Or *Excitebike*.

Looking to broaden the appeal of their games developers soon began to seek recognisable characters. Sega essentially borrowed the likenesses of the likes of Antonio Inoki Hulk Hogan and Andre The Giant in the 1984 arcade game *Appoooh* but soon after secured Dump Matsumoto's likeness for Japanese arcade and Mark III games localised as *Body Slam* and *Pro Wrestling* respectively. Bandai produced a Famicom game based on the *Kinnikuman* manga series localised as *MUSCLE* on the NES as the toy range was better known in the US. The Eighties expansion of the World Wrestling Federation peaked with

TAG



Commodore 64 wrestling games have always seemed closer to sports sims than fighting games as Epyx's development of *Championship Wrestling* indicates.



NES Despite the lack of recognisable stars *Pro Wrestling* was a popular introduction to videogame wrestling.

NES *WWF WrestleMania* wasn't a satisfying game to play but it had all the real stars and their music.



JUSTIN LEEPER

Justin Leeper yo

Now an actor Justin's past work includes wrestling and games writing.



LEVA BATES

Wrestling Leva

As well as wrestling for AEW Leva is a streamer and cosplayer



SIMON MILLER

SimonMiller316

Former games journalist Simon is now a YouTube star and wrestler

WHAT MAKES A GREAT WRESTLING GAME?



VARIED MATCHES

■ Once you've mastered the Elimination Chamber, why not try ladder matches? After you've done them, how about tables? The more ways to dish out the pain, the more sustained your interest.

ATMOSPHERIC PRESENTATION

■ When the crowd is roaring, the commentators are all stunned and you earn an instant replay, you'll know that you're doing well and hopefully get totally absorbed in the moment.

SPECTACULAR MOVES

■ Unless you love chinlocks, hello to Baron Corbin, if you're reading, players want to pull off the same amazing feats of power and athleticism that defy belief when performed by real wrestlers.

BIG BRANDS

■ While there are some great wrestling games featuring original characters, everyone wants to play in the arenas they see on television, with the real stars that make the shows so memorable.

WISH FULFILMENT

■ In the past, crossover characters like Amie here provided this, but these days Create A Wrestler modes take care of a lot of the players' more imaginative ideas for dream matches.





▶ *WrestleMania III* in 1987 which featured Hulk Hogan defending his world championship against Andre The Giant. That same year, *Micro League Wrestling* became the first computer game to feature official WWF branding, though 1989's *WWF WrestleMania* for the NES was rather more popular and definitely more conventional. The first World Championship Wrestling game was released for the NES in 1990, and Japanese promotions followed through the early Nineties – by 1995 you could find games based on All Japan Pro Wrestling, New Japan Pro Wrestling, Frontier Martial Arts Wrestling, All Japan Women's Pro Wrestling and UWP Toshi Puroresu.

Unfortunately, licensed videogames have a reputation for poor quality, and

WRESTLING GAMES TIMELINE

1983

■ *Tag Team Wrestling* by Technos becomes one of the first wrestling games released to arcade audiences. It would later receive a NES conversion some years later in 1987.

1985

■ Sega releases a licensed arcade game based on Japanese women's wrestling star Dump Matsumoto, one of the earliest examples of a licensed wrestling game.

1986

■ Masato Masuda designs the NES game *Pro Wrestling*, which he codes by himself. He would later go on to work on the influential *Fire Pro Wrestling* series.

1989

■ *Microleague Wrestling* becomes the first home computer game to carry the WWF licence. However, its gameplay consists of using menus and looking at still pictures.

1989

■ Human Entertainment releases *Fire Pro Wrestling Combination Tag* on PC Engine, the first game in the long-running wrestling franchise that continues to this day.

early WWF games on home systems did nothing to buck that trend. As a result, the games relied heavily on the power of their branding. Simon Miller, a popular presenter on the YouTube channel WhatCulture Wrestling, an active independent wrestler and former editor of the gaming magazine *X360*, remembers his experience with *WWF WrestleMania* for the NES. "It had the most basic mechanics imaginable and essentially every Superstar just did the same moves, but that didn't matter at the time. It was my first experience with a wrestling videogame and that was enough, even if Hulk Hogan looked more like Homer Simpson than The Immortal One," he recalls. "Without doubt the best part of it was the MIDI music that replicated the themes you would hear when watching the show." That's something that Leva loved about *WWF Superstars* on the Game Boy, too. "I used to listen to Mr Perfect's theme over and over. I would just have the character selection menu up and have the music playing."

However, it's worth noting that while the WWF home games of the time were often not great, others were rarely much better. "I always wrestled using my action figures," as did my best friend Austin Aries. "We grew up to train together, too!" says Austin. "No simplistic 8-bit or 16-bit game could rival the five-star matches and compelling storylines I came up with on my own. And really, aside from *Pro Wrestling* and *Tecmo World Wrestling*, the US wrestling games of the time were garbage." Players looking for a great wrestling game experience were better served looking to the arcade at that point in time. *WWF Superstars* and *WWF WrestleFest* by Technos are both fondly remembered, and Midway's attempt to apply the magic of *NBA Jam* to wrestling in *WWF WrestleMania* was commendable. Meanwhile, games like SNK's *3 Count Bout* and Capcom's *Saturday Night Slam Masters* did the business without the need for licences. On consoles, the long-running *Fire Pro Wrestling* series offered quality action with its timing-based grappling system, but the games were confined to Japan.



SNES: By 'accidentally' knocking out the referee, it's possible to break the rules in games like *SuperFire Pro Wrestling Special*.



From the mid-Nineties, wrestling games began to offer more than just the ability to play matches. The first major innovation was the advent of proper storytelling – a natural progression, as unlike in traditional sports where matches and events are scheduled and drama arises from the results, the drama tends to provide the impetus for matches to take place in professional wrestling. Japanese developers led the way here, with one particularly infamous example being Goichi Suda's story for *SuperFire Pro Wrestling Special*, which culminated with your wrestler taking his own life just days after his championship victory. WWE games initially followed the televised stories fairly closely, with *WWF Smackdown 2* and *WWF No Mercy* both replicating the events of the company's storylines in 2000, but games soon began to include original stories. "I think every Yuke's WWE game brought its own flavour to story mode. They weren't perfect, but they were always worth playing," says Austin. "That's not something you can say about *NBA 2K3* versus *NBA 2K4*, for example. With straight sims, the newest one is basically always the best. A compelling story adds value and makes the game worth keeping/revisiting." This is something that sports simulators have actually imported from wrestling games, such as the scripted The Journey mode in recent *FIFA* games. In 2008, *TNA Impact* went even further by introducing a wrestler portraying Suicide, the player character from the videogame.

The other major innovation, and arguably the most important, was the introduction of creative modes, beginning with wrestler creation. While they had been present in Japanese games since the 16-bit days, they really gained traction in the west with Acclaim's 3D wrestling games *WWF*

Neo Geo: The greater graphical capabilities of Nineties machines allowed for sprites that felt like larger than life performers.

> "WWF WrestleMania had the most basic mechanics imaginable and every Superstar just did the same moves, but that didn't matter at the time"
> **SIMON MILLER**



Arcade: Midway's *WWF WrestleMania* gave wrestlers projectile attacks and the ability to knock their opponents 50 feet into the air.



N64: AKI's *Virtual Pro Wrestling 2* is cited as a favourite by many fans, such as former WWE champion AJ Styles.

1992 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998

- The home computer game *WWF WrestleMania* becomes a bestseller in the United Kingdom, climbing to the number one spot on the Amiga, Atari ST and all-formats charts.
- The first game in the *Toukon Retsuden* series is released, developed by Yuke's. The game would later be released as *Power Move Pro Wrestling* in North America.
- The Man Breeze releases *Virtual Pro Wrestling*, a 3D wrestling game for the PlayStation. The company would later be renamed AKI Corporation and then syn Sophia.
- Sega releases *All Japan Pro Wrestling Featuring Virtua* on the Saturn. The game features *Virtua Fighter* characters, and Sega sponsors a wrestler to play Wolf Hawkfield in AJPW.
- Acclaim's *WWF War Zone* becomes the first game based on the promotion to feature modern gaming elements such as 3D graphics and a Create A Wrestler mode.



N64 *WCW vs nWo World Tour* compared favourably to *WWF War Zone* mirroring WCW's lead in the Monday Night Wars.

> "Pro wrestling never had its NBA Jam or Tecmo Bowl but I still think a good arcade wrestling game would find an audience"
> **JUSTIN LEEPER**

PlayStation 3D graphics allowed for increasingly authentic and exciting presentation in games like *WWF Smackdown 2*.



War Zone and *WWF Attitude* with magazines like *GamesMaster* sharing guides on how to create the likes of Duke Nukem and Lara Croft. Subsequent games have greatly increased the versatility of Create A Wrestler modes and expanded into other areas including arena design and even finishing moves. Today these features are considered to be essential. "My buddy Austin Aries says that as a kid wrestlers were his superheroes. We wrestling fans imagine what it's like to be a wrestler and almost everyone has an idea of a character they'd want to portray" says Justin. "The creation suite has always facilitated this – evolving to upload download functionality, custom logos etc. You can make just about whatever your mind can imagine." Simon agrees that wish fulfilment is a key reason for this popularity. "No one likes to play the fantasy card more than wrestling fans, and as you're not likely to see The Young Bucks versus The New Day anytime soon, why not let people do it in the game? It's just another selling point" he says, before pointing out a good commercial argument for including them. "You also ward off any potential competition if you do it right. You may love New Japan, but if you prefer what 2K is doing *and* you can make Okada over there... great."

These innovations combined with some gameplay breakthroughs, too. On the N64, AKI was doing brilliant work with games like *Virtual Pro Wrestling* in Japan and *WCW vs nWo: World Tour* elsewhere, culminating with the critically acclaimed *WWF No Mercy*. The games offered a rich system of grapples and counters and even took into account the relative weight and strength of wrestlers, as well as excellent creative modes. On the PlayStation, the *WWF Smackdown* games by Yuke's were less complex and more immediate, with a greater focus on authentic presentation. Reflecting the state of the televised product, gameplay expanded beyond the ring with backstage brawls. By 2000, 3D wrestling games had progressed to the point that they weren't just great wrestling games but great videogames, and achieved genuine crossover appeal as a result.



Dreamcast games like *Giant Gram 2000* began a trend for introducing legendary former wrestlers such as Bruiser Brody.

Much like sports games in general, the wrestling game market has become less competitive over time, largely due to the importance of brand recognition and the global dominance of a single promotion. When WCW and ECW folded around the turn of the millennium and the WWF rebranded to WWE, publishers looked to introduce licensed products that weren't based on major televised promotions, but few of them lasted long. Acclaim launched the *Legends Of Wrestling* series featuring unaffiliated wrestling greats in 2001, but the series ended after the third game due to the publisher's 2004 bankruptcy. Eidos featured wrestlers from Insane Clown Posse's indie promotion Juggalo Championship Wrestling in 2003's *Backyard Wrestling*, but the series was abandoned after the 2004 sequel. Both Leva and Simon highlight the 2003 EA game *Def Jam Vendetta* as one of the best alternatives. "I really would like to see another *Def Jam*. It just offered something different, and of course because you *didn't* have actual wrestlers it gave you a bit more leeway" says Simon, advocating for the game's mechanical differences and outlandish action. Sadly for wrestling fans, the sequels *Def Jam: Fight For NY* and *Def Jam: Icon* moved away from the wrestling roots of the original game.

As a result of this reduction in competition, arcade-style wrestling games have unfortunately all but disappeared with WWE's last flirtation with over-the-top action coming with 2011's *WWE All-Stars*. "The 2K series is great at what it does but it's very much focused wrestling. The sport is clearly made for the more outlandish style and to stay away from that is odd to me, especially when you look at *All-Stars*" says Simon. "Not only was that a welcome breath of fresh air, if a little limited after a while, but it did alright. With a bit more time and thought we could've had a new franchise on our hands there. I get it hit a snag when THQ went out of business but still." Justin feels that this shift towards simulation has actually

WRESTLING GAMES TIMELINE

1999

- In a licensing merry-go-round, THQ gains the WWF licence Acclaim held for a decade, EA gains the WCW licence THQ left behind, and Acclaim picks up Extreme Championship Wrestling.

2000

- Electronic Arts releases *WCW Backstage Assault*, a wrestling game that doesn't actually feature any in-ring action. Unsurprisingly, the game becomes a notable critical flop.

2001

- Acclaim introduces *Legends Of Wrestling*, paving the way for throwback wrestling games such as *WWE Legends Of WrestleMania* and *RetroMania Wrestling*.

2003

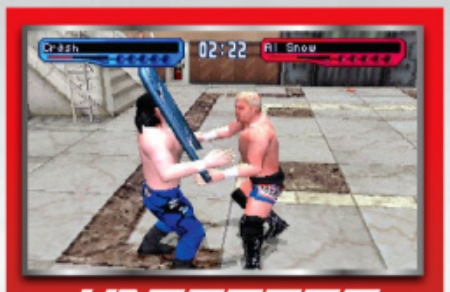
- Electronic Arts introduces *Def Jam Vendetta*, which achieves the distinction of succeeding without a major wrestling licence – only for later games to forego wrestling for street fights.

2006

- THQ abandons its resource-intensive strategy of releasing different WWE titles across various formats, instead porting *Smackdown Vs Raw 2007* to all major formats.

JUDY BAGWELL ON A FORKLIFT

CHARGES THAT SITUATION NEVER MADE IT INTO A WRESTLING VIDEOGAME. BUT HERE ARE EIGHT NOTABLE ONES THAT CROPPED UP OUTSIDE OF IT.



HARDCORE MATCH

These matches feature no disqualifications and no countouts, and don't necessarily have to finish in the ring. These have many names including Street Fight, Extreme Rules and No Holds Barred.



CAGE MATCH

The classic way to settle a feud – confine heated rivals inside four walls of solid steel, with no disqualifications. As well as winning by pin or submission, it's possible to achieve victory by escaping.



LADDER MATCH

With an item – often a championship belt – suspended above the ring, wrestlers must climb the ladder to win. However, creative contenders can find many ways of using a ladder to cause pain, too.



TABLE MATCH

Popularised by the Dudley Boyz, this type of match requires you to drive your opponent through a wooden table to win. There are no disqualifications or countout victories here.



FIRST BLOOD MATCH

Wrestlers are allowed to do whatever they like to one another, with the winner being the first to make their opponent bleed. Stone Cold Steve Austin lost his first world championship in this type of match.



IRON MAN MATCH

This type of match takes place against a time limit, with the wrestlers scoring the most falls winning. Normal rules still apply, so you can score via pin, submission, countout, knockout or disqualification.



SUBMISSION MATCH

Only a submission victory here counts – either you make your opponent pass out, tap out or verbally submit. The 'I quit' match is a variation where a verbal submission is often made on the mic.



BATTLE ROYAL

This involves many wrestlers, who are eliminated when they are thrown over the top rope to the floor. Last man standing wins. The Royal Rumble is a battle royal variant with timed entries.

reduced the appeal of the games. "Modern wrestling games kinda suffer from *Madden*-itis. Through so many iterations, the genre has gotten more complex – and thereby intimidating for newbies or returning players. At times, control will become needlessly more complicated due to lack of ideas," he explains. "Pro wrestling never had its *NBA Jam* or *Tecmo Bowl*, but I still think a good arcade wrestling game would find an audience."

There's a sense that wrestling games still have room to grow. One of the odd things about them is that they maintain the core conceit of wrestling – the pretence of a legitimate athletic competition. While non-fans seem to assume that we're ignorant of the concept of scripted entertainment, dismissively telling us "it's not *real*, you know" before meekly watching Marvel's latest *Avengers* documentary, we know that the results of wrestling matches are predetermined. Yet this is never reflected by wrestling games. "One thing they miss is that a lot of times, you're hitting buttons just to bring the opponent down and, 'I'm gonna pin you' but it misses the art



"Dreamcast's ECW popularised hardcore wrestling games. Introduced brutal elements like barbed wire ring ropes."

2008

Midway releases *TNA Impact* across various formats. The game's original character Suicide is introduced to the actual show with various wrestlers donning the mask.

2010

Publisher Slang releases *Lucha Libre AAA: Heroes Del Ring* for Xbox 360 and PS3, marking a rare videogame outing for a promotion not based in North America or Japan.

2013

In the wake of THQ's bankruptcy, Take Two picks up the WWE licence to publish under its well-established 2K Sports brand. Visual Concepts joins the series as a codeveloper.

2017

Spike Chunsoft releases *Fire Pro Wrestling World*, officially licensed by New Japan Pro Wrestling and later, via DLC, Japanese women's wrestling promotion Stardom.

2019

Yuke's departs the annual WWE game project with Visual Concepts developing *WWE 2K20* solo. The game is infamously buggy on launch and became target of much online ridicule.

HALL OF FAME

FIVE OF THE MOST ESSENTIAL WRESTLING GAMES FROM OVER THE DECADES



WWF WRESTLEFEST

1991

Technos' arcade grappler features a great line-up of golden age WWF stars including Hulk Hogan, Jake 'The Snake' Roberts, Mr Perfect and The Ultimate Warrior. The chunky cartoon graphics perfectly represent the Eighties wrestling scene, and the tag-team battles make for great multiplayer.



SATURDAY NIGHT SLAM MASTERS

1993

While Capcom's arcade grapple-'em-up might be short on recognisable characters beyond *Final Fight*'s macho mayor Mike Haggar, it does offer the kind of immediacy that makes it perfect for the arcade, and as a result, it's great for non-fans who just want some alternative fighting action.

BOOKING THE TERRITORY

JUSTIN LEEPER EXPLAINS THE PROCESS OF COMING UP WITH ORIGINAL STORYLINES FOR THE WRESTLEMANIA AND SMACKDOWN VS RAW SERIES



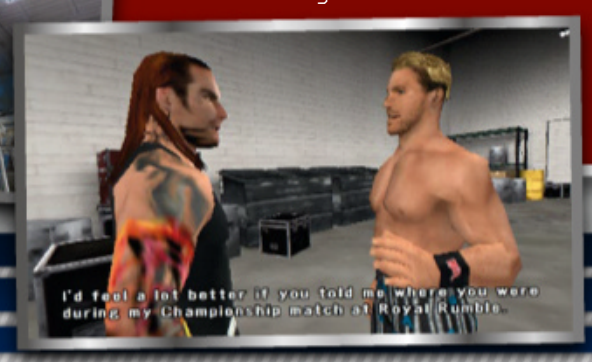
For a long time, WWE's games were distinguished from other major series in the sports realm by their inclusion of scripted story modes. Justin Leeper wrote the Road To WrestleMania stories for *WWE Smackdown vs Raw 2009*, *2010* and *2011*, a job for which he was well qualified. "I have a background in wrestling, acting, writing and games. I tried to use all of those skills, plus just a love for and knowledge of the source material," says Justin. "Making original, character-specific stories is something that was rarely done before, or since," and I took my job as very seriously."

Working on a licensed property can mean restrictions, and WWE is famously protective of its brand. "WWE approved every storyline at the outline level, then every completed script – which reached hundreds of pages per story in *SVR 2011*," Justin explains, when asked about how much freedom he was given by WWE, though he's sure to remind us that keeping the licensee happy wasn't the only job. "Keep in mind my bosses at THQ and our developer Yuke's had to approve everything as well. So while I was a one-man idea factory, I definitely wasn't left alone to let loose." Despite that, Justin was allowed to do some things very differently from on television, such as creating new stables, utilising lesser-used characters such as The Boogeyman, or even doing crazy things like having wrestlers zombified. "The first year, they sent a writer out to THQ who (unbeknownst to WWE) I believe came in a blank slate and tried to rewrite everything I'd done. That was stressful. After that, WWE kind of gave me more freedom. Yes, they'd come back with tweaks and edits, but they were usually minor. I don't think I ever heard, 'WWE wants this Superstar, or this story.'" In the subsequent two games, they were one turning Mysterio heel or putting Vince in a chicken suit.

For Justin, a big challenge was writing for wrestling that's being presented as a televised product, while allowing for the fact that it's not. "A videogame is not a movie, people have to play it. So, melding gameplay and narrative is essential. You have to take advantage of the interactive aspect, don't have every big moment play out in a cutscene," he explains. Justin's approach was to try to write scenarios that provided something unique for the player to do, compared to just playing regular matches. "It could be said that gameplay in *Smackdown Vs Raw* was a little... established. So I tried to mix things up as much as possible – whether that was *Smackdown Vs Raw 2009*'s Better-Than-U-Topia rules or channelling survival horror games in *Smackdown Vs Raw 2011*'s versus Undertaker story."

For more insight into the Road To WrestleMania stories, it's well worth checking out the commentated gameplay videos on Justin's YouTube channel, youtube.com/user/TonTongue.





of storytelling that a lot of real wrestling matches tend to have, and it's really hard to capture that in a game," says Leva. "With championship storylines or the career path, I think that's kind of cool because they try to include a storytelling aspect, but the match itself is not as much of a storytelling moment as real-life matches."

We put this thought to our other interviewees. "How someone hasn't developed a title where the idea is to work together to put on a match for the fan, I don't know," says Simon. "I get that there are systems built that encourage you to do it, but I mean throwing any sense of 'real' competition out the window and saying, 'Hey. No. The concept is to entertain. Go!' So if someone covers you in the first minute you kick out at the count of one because it's too early to be defeated. Fans would love that, or at least I would. It may be a touch more difficult than your basic 'beat this guy' idea but that's wrestling." However, from the development perspective, Justin views this as an extremely difficult task. "While actual pro wrestling has improvisational elements more than fans may realise, I trust we all know it's a show where the participants are working together toward a goal. That's not possible against an AI opponent, and I haven't seen two people (or TAS-style programming) choreograph a match designed with the peaks



WWF NO MERCY

2000

Wrestling was at its absolute hottest in the year 2000 with stars like Stone Cold Steve Austin and The Rock garnering considerable mainstream popularity. Though it shipped with a crippling save bug this N64 game is still revered for the depth of its grappling system and its versatile character creation tools.



WWE ALL-STARS

2011

Rather than the usual simulation style this licensed game went way over the top with wrestlers backflipping to the top turnbuckle leaping 20 feet into the air and slamming each other so hard they generated shockwaves. Almost everyone on the roster is a top star so you'll probably have a favourite.



FIRE PRO WRESTLING WORLD

2012

The *Fire Pro* games have long been championed for their great creation tools and extensive game modes and being able to download other people's creations makes that even better. This latest iteration adds the New Japan Pro Wrestling licence giving the game an additional injection of star power.

and valleys of an actual match. I don't really know how to fix that. I added exclusive commentary to my Road To WrestleMania matches had certain events tied to damage states and even created a match-rating system. But adding real match psychology is seemingly impossible.

There's also more that could be done in terms of wishful thinment when it comes to characters too. Leva highlights Konami's *Rumble Roses* as one of her favourite games for this very reason. I thought that was so much fun. It was cheesy as all get out but I absolutely loved it. It was an all-women's game characters were just over-the-top ridiculous probably the same reason why I love Starman and The Amazon she says. But the thing I loved about that game was that they could turn. When you beat the game as one character you would unlock the opposite characters. So for example when you beat the game as the main babyface you unlock her as a heel. It was kind of like you had double the characters and double the storylines because you were able to unlock that and I just thought that was a really cool concept. However she notes the difficulty of implementing this in a licensed game. It'd be harder because people see a character and think Oh this is how this character is whereas you take a fictional character and can say Here they are as a good guy here they are as a bad guy.'

So what does the ideal wrestling game look like to our experts? A for it to exist and B for me to be in it says Leva with a laugh after being asked to imagine what would make a theoretical All Elite Wrestling videogame great. I don't know anything about if a game is happening and what direction they'd go in but I just want it to be fun and not be glitchy. I honestly would love just to have a game out. We asked Simon to provide his Ups and Downs as he does for wrestling shows on YouTube. Ups for me are always going to be aimed at that fluidity in the ring as much of a nerd as that makes me sound. I love it when I'm countering hurricanranas with powerbombs off the top rope. I react like I would when I see it on TV and that's the best. As for the Downs. . . yeah. . . don't have 2K18 9 glitches in your game and make fans rely on constant patches he says referring to the infamously broken *WWE 2K20*. For Justin it all comes down to the marriage of strong branding and a solid game experience. A good wrestling game has to be fun to play. The gameplay has to feel right with good collision and satisfying friction. I think it's important to have multiple options for multiple positions a standard set by AKI's games. Staying true to the source material is vital. Few fanbases are more knowledgeable and more picky than wrestling fans. Of course a game working reliably and consistently should go without saying. Wrestling fans can forgive a botch or two if you're trying your hardest but they can smell a rush job or cash grab.

Whether you're a fan of televised grappling action or not there's plenty to love about wrestling games. Some people will love the alternative take on combat sports that the best in the genre offer and the often peerless creative options provide amazing opportunities to arrange any fantasy fight you could think of. So the next time you're in the mood to open up a can of whoop ass on some digital dickass put on a wrestling game instead of your usual brawler of choice because Retro Gamer said so. You can thank us later.



PS4 Creation suites in games like *Fire Pro Wrestling World* are very flexible but quite complex.

"With championship storylines or the career path I think that's kind of cool because they try to include a storytelling aspect"
LEVA BATES

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Toy Story

» PLATFORM: MEGA DRIVE » RELEASED: ▒▒▒6 » DEVELOPER: TRAVELLER'S TALES

Sometimes, a game comes along that feels like a minor miracle, and *Toy Story* is one of those games. It's based on one of the biggest ▒lms around, but it's actually good, and it's available on the ▒6-bit consoles. After months of looking longingly at the shots of PlayStation and Saturn games in magazines, it feels good to have something of your own to get excited about again. But of course, it's a platform game ▒ and while there are sprinkles of variety here and there, the effect of the polished visuals is beginning to fade slightly.

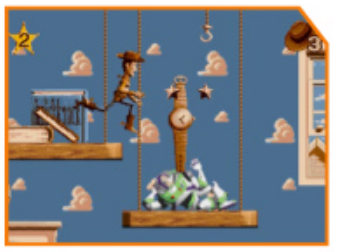
Then it happens. Just over halfway through the game, *Toy Story* throws you a curveball and ditches the platforming for a ▒rst-person maze level. You've never seen anything ▒uite like it on your ageing console ▒ the speed and size of the 3D display leaves games like *Zero Tolerance* looking rather sad. Sure, you're collecting cuddly aliens rather than shooting murderous ones, but who cares? You're watching your trusty old console defy your expectations. ✱

BIO

Given the advanced 3D technology used in Pixar's debut feature ▒lm, you may have reasonably expected that its videogame adaptation would use the new generation of 3D consoles. Traveller's Tales instead delivered something of a last hurrah for the ▒6-bit systems, delivering prerendered visuals that looked great on both Mega Drive and SNES and incorporating technically tricky sections that pushed the consoles. The ▒lm's various scenes were mined for minigame ideas including top-down racing segments and a ▒rst-person stage, giving the game a suf▒ciently varied feeling to cut through the mid-Nineties platform game malaise. Licensed games don't often get better than this.

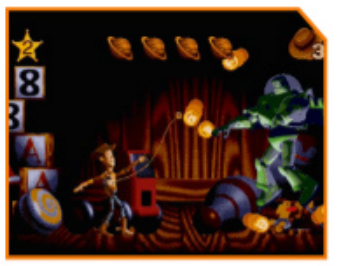
MORE CLASSIC TOY STORY MOMENTS

Buzz Off



When Woody and Buzz Lightyear compete in a race across Andy's bedroom, the old cowboy doll is at a distinct disadvantage. To showcase the astronaut's arrogance, Traveller's Tales gave him some hilarious animations, letting him fly through the air while doing an ancient Egyptian walk or posing.

Show Your Work



The game's most memorable boss battle features Woody trying to defeat a nightmare vision of Buzz, who can glow in the dark and fire real lasers. This is one of the few scenes that was not based on the finished movie – instead, the concept was taken from an abandoned scene that was never rendered by Pixar.

Pizza The Action



In the stage Food And Drink, the normal platforming rules don't apply – instead, you must sneak through Pizza Planet while wearing a Mega Gulp cup as a disguise. There's no jumping necessary, just good timing to avoid being kicked over by kids or knocked silly by cans falling from vending machines.

Let's Go Away



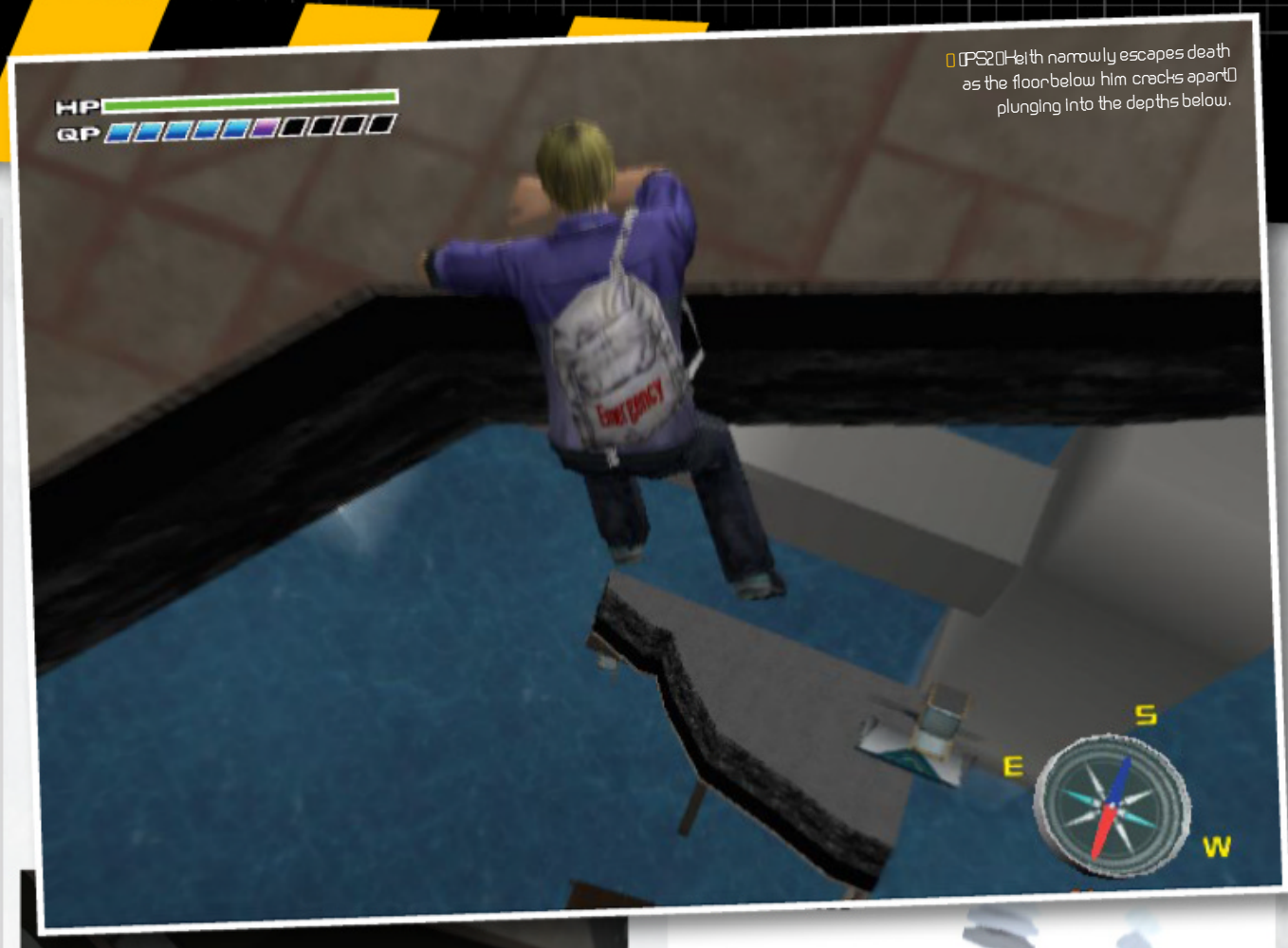
The Mega Drive version of *Toy Story* is the only one to include the Day-Toy-Na level, and while you can argue that it doesn't add a whole lot – ultimately, you're just driving down an empty road – the technical implementation was another moment where you couldn't believe you were playing a 16-bit game.

THE HISTORY OF DISASTER REPORT

SURVIVAL ADVENTURE GAMES USUALLY RELY ON MONSTERS, BUT DISASTER REPORT'S DANGERS ARE TERRIFYINGLY REAL. KAZUMA KUJO TELLS US HOW HIS DISASTER-THEMED SERIES WAS CREATED, AND EVEN SURVIVED A CRISIS TO BECOME A CULT FAVOURITE

WORDS BY NICK THORPE





PS2 Keith narrowly escapes death as the floor below him cracks apart, plunging into the depths below.

Sometimes a single idea can change everything. During the late Nineties Kazuma Kudo was a key developer behind renowned shoot-'em-ups having produced *In The Hunt*, *Metal Slug* and *R-Type Delta*. However, as with many creative individuals he soon developed the urge to try something a little different, and this would set him on a path that would shape his career for decades to come. 'Around 1999 I had a strong urge to make a game that was unlike anything else'. At the time, novels and films often had themes of surviving through a disaster, but I realized not many games dealt with those themes," says Kudo, who was then a producer at Irem. "The PlayStation 2 was about to come out, and I thought that this would be a good time to try creating a game that dealt with disasters." This was the origin of *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi*, released in North America as *Disaster Report* and in PAL regions as *SOS: The Final Escape*. The game cast players as rookie newspaper reporter Keith Helm, arriving for his first day of work on Stiver Island only to be caught up in an earthquake.

Kudo was able to draw on real-world experience, which is what led him to choose earthquakes as the primary obstacle to contend with. "Living in Japan we often deal with earthquakes, typhoons, volcanic activity and other natural disasters, but even amongst all those, earthquakes are by far the most feared," he explains. "Thanks to climate satellites, we can now forecast typhoons. For volcanic activity, you can remove yourself from the areas that will be affected and limit your chances of being involved in something. However, we don't know when or where an earthquake will happen, and I thought that showing that fear through a videogame would be suitable and have a large impact." Of course, reality wasn't the only influence that led to this theme. "There was also a TV drama on when I was a kid called *Japan Sinks* that made a lasting impression on me, and I wanted to create a game like that," says Kudo, referring to an adaptation of Sakyo Komatsu's award-winning novel.



PS2 In one of the game's most impressive setpieces, Keith and Haren sprint away from a falling building.

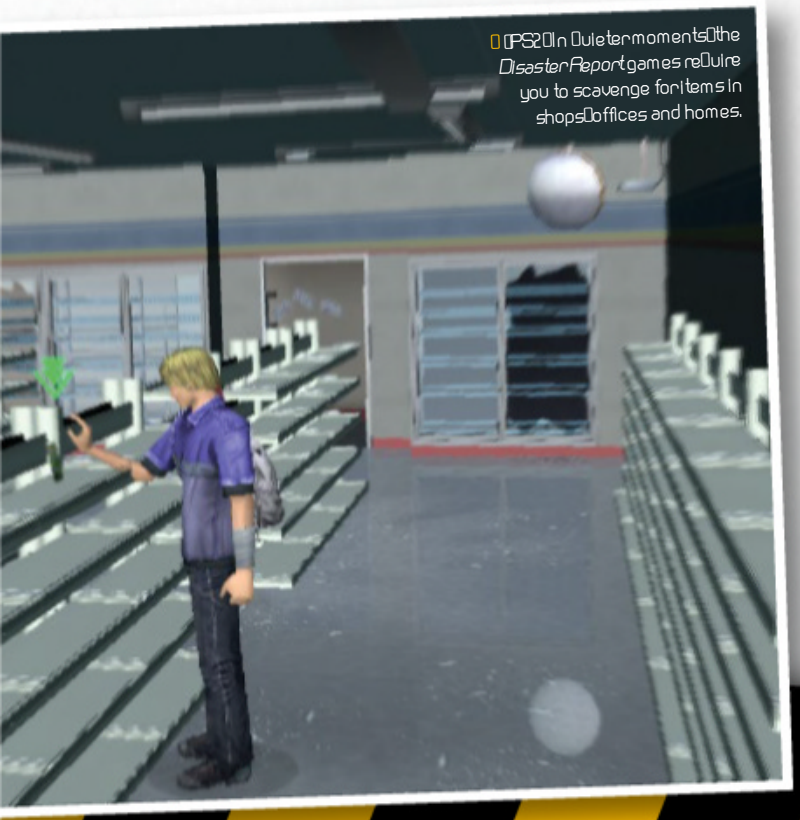


PS2 As an aftershock hits, Keith braces himself and hopes to avoid falling debris from the overpass above.

Disaster Report has much in common with survival horror games, but the natural disaster theme meant that combat was out of the question. "Making an earthquake into a game, so to speak, requires a unique twist. I feel the most difficult aspect is that there are fewer factors that give a sense of exhilaration and achievement," says Kudo. "In combat, defeating enemies provides the player that feeling of satisfaction, but handling a game centred around a natural disaster means having to depend on a game design that deals with not being able to defeat these natural disasters." Tension must therefore be created in other ways, whether that's traversing collapsing structures, dealing with unexpected aftershocks or even escaping from falling buildings. "Displaying the collapsing buildings was something that was difficult at the time, but even having many buildings displayed in a row was something that I remember struggling with," explains Kudo. "For the buildings that collapsed, we had to create the parts that would break one by one and create their animations, which took a lot of time. We didn't use a physics engine, but rather did everything by hand."

The survival aspect is emphasised by your need to scavange resources. Keith's bag has limited space, though he can find larger ones, and he needs to stay hydrated during his attempt to reach an evacuation point. "By making the water source the base of operations, the next objective would be to find the next water source, thus opening up the character's range of movement, this was how we designed the game progression. Also, by making the water source a save point, the player is able to feel happiness and relief when they find one," says Kudo. "In order to have a wider range of exploration, we made it so that the player had to carry water with them. However, you are not able to carry whatever you need, and items like water bottles require space in your inventory, so we had the player decide between carrying water or something else."

Though the horror of natural disasters is the indiscriminate, emotionless destruction they cause, Kudo and his team did load the plot with human



PS2 In quieter moments, the *Disaster Report* games require you to scavenge for items in shops, offices and homes.

CATASTROPHIC COLLECTIVE

A NUMBER OF OTHER GAMES HAVE TAKEN NATURAL DISASTERS AS A CENTRAL THEME OVER THE YEARS – HERE ARE SOME OF THE MORE NOTABLE EXAMPLES

EARTHQUAKE: SAN FRANCISCO 1906

1981 • APPLE II

This graphic adventure offers players the chance to explore the famous Californian city during one of the most destructive natural disasters in American history. That's not all though – the game also features a murder plot, adding a sense of human drama that later disaster game developers have also included.



1080° AVALANCHE

2003 • GAMECUBE

Nintendo's snowboarding sequel needed a way to up the ante from the brilliant Nintendo 64 original, and it settled on natural disasters as a way to do so. Certain courses require snowboarders to outride avalanches, which are triggered either partway through a course or even at the very beginning.



EXIT

2005 • PSP

Taito's platform puzzle game casts you as Mr Esc, an escapologist who continually finds himself dealing with disasters including fires, floods and earthquakes. His goal is to lead his fellow survivors to safety. In a game that feels like a cross between *Prince Of Persia* and *Lemmings* in mechanical terms.



DISASTER: DAY OF CRISIS

2008 • WII

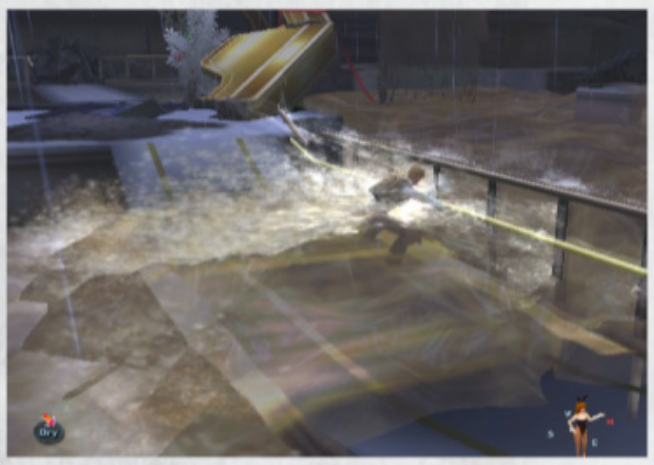
Former rescue team member Raymond Bryce has the worst day ever – as well as surviving an earthquake, tsunami and volcanic eruption, he'll have to take down a terrorist plot single-handedly. This preposterous game veers between third-person action and on-rails shooting – and is great fun despite its uneven quality.



elements. As the game progresses, Keith's journalistic instincts uncover the fact that the disaster was as man-made as the island it destroyed. "In an actual disaster, there is no outlet for the characters' or players' anger, and having things just end in sadness is something we wanted to avoid. I wanted to create something that those feelings could be directed to," Kudo tells us. Keith is accompanied by one of two female companions during the game, Karen Morris or Kelly Austin, and his relationship with whichever one you choose proves to be incredibly important to the game's ending. "There aren't many things that change depending on the partner, but I wanted to have as many changes as possible depending on your relationship level and who was travelling with you," says Kudo. "There are endings that may leave a bad taste in your mouth, but I think that in and of itself is something that makes a disaster game what it is."

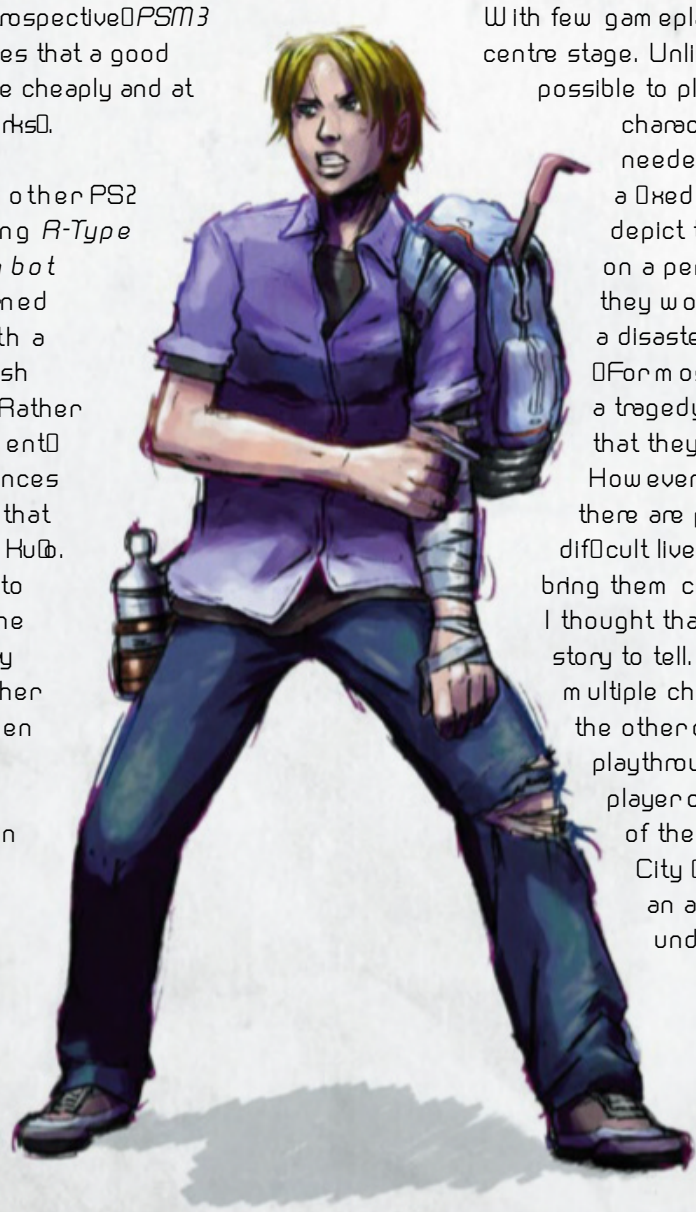
> **"There are endings that may leave a bad taste in your mouth, but I think that in and of itself is something that makes a disaster game what it is"**
>
> **KAZUMA KUJO**

Irem released *Disaster Report* in Japan in 2002, and Agetec published the international releases in 2003, with the game receiving a positive critical reception. *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*'s review criticised a "laughably poor" translation and felt that "the game's graphics leave a lot to be desired", but awarded the game 7/10 for being "a wholly original concept" that was "enjoyable despite its deficiencies". *Play* described it as "a thinking person's game that had the potential to be brilliant", awarding it 7/9. In a retrospective, *PSM3* said that the game "proves that a good enough idea, even if done cheaply and at times hopelessly, still works".



"PS2" Joshua has to cling to a railing in order to pass through the raging flood waters of Geo City.

After working on other PS2 projects including *R-Type Final* and *Steambot Chronicles*, Irem returned to *Disaster Report* with a sequel with the English title of *Raw Danger*. "Rather than being an improvement, I wanted to have differences between the games so that it didn't stagnate," says Kudo. "We wanted the game to be very different from the previous one, at the very least using a disaster other than an earthquake. When we were still designing it, we wanted the game to take place in winter. In the beginning, the idea was having snow or snow-related damage, but snow brings to mind leisure activities, so we decided on a flood." A new element was the need to keep the character warm and dry, by using weather-resistant clothing and looking for heat sources. However, Kudo was keen to ensure that this new factor didn't overburden the player. "We wanted to use the cold as one of the key points, but adding multiple elements means that there's more for the players to keep track of. We didn't want that fear of the cold to become lessened, so we removed the thirst element."



With few gameplay changes, the plot took centre stage. Unlike the first game, it was possible to play as a variety of different characters, though their stories needed to be experienced in a fixed order. "We wanted to depict the idea that depending on a person's status or position, they would view and approach a disaster differently," says Kudo. "For most people, a disaster is a tragedy to be grieved over and that they would want to avoid. However, even without a disaster, there are people who are living difficult lives, and a disaster might bring them certain opportunities so I thought that would also be a good story to tell. We also wanted to have multiple characters that would affect the other characters in subsequent playthroughs." To ensure that player characters cross paths, all of the stories take place in Geo City, Geo Frontier in Japan, an advanced city with major underground construction.

MOTORSTORM: APOCALYPSE

2011 • PS3

Evolution Studios decided to spice up *Motorstorm*'s racing action with tornadoes and earthquakes for the third game in the trilogy. Unfortunately the game was beset by real disasters. It was cancelled in New Zealand and Japan following earthquakes in early 2011 and delayed in the rest of the world.





PSP The new generalised stress bar makes it easier to represent various types of hazard in a single game.



PSP A fire tornado seems outlandish but it's a real thing that can happen making it all the more terrifying.



PSP Despite slightly more cartoonish character models plenty of human drama drives the story in the third game.

I'm conflicted as to whether the Geo Frontier setting was necessary or not Hubb says. However we wanted to portray a city equipped to handle natural disasters in a situation where various facilities were inaccessible because of disaster.

One of the aspects of the series that *Raw Danger* emphasised was that the protagonists are not necessarily heroes. As an example when confronted with a man hanging from a ledge you can choose to try to rescue him but you can also simply smile at him or even steal his hat. Rather than trying to include comical scenes purely for the sake of humour we tried to expand the range of player choices which in some cases resulted in some funny moments. So it wasn't our main objective but those options were provided to help players make their choices as honestly as possible says Hubb. In later scenarios this gets considerably more serious as players can even make the choice to let other people live or die. I want to convey above all that people's actions and emotions within a natural disaster are not gracious. I want players to experience the game without worrying about what others think. I kept this attitude in mind while making games and it's applicable no matter which game I'm working on.

Raw Danger was published relatively late in the life of the PS2 arriving in Japan in 2006 with Agetec and 505 Games issuing North American and European versions in 2007. The game received broadly positive reviews. *Edge* gave the Japanese version 70 with the magazine praising its dramatic and cinematic air its lovingly crafted chaotic destruction and above all its network of interconnected personalities. *PSM2* also reviewed the import version awarding it 78 and noting that an English version could add up to 10 to that score but warned that the framerate has a good shot at ruining the whole thing. The PAL release received 80 from *PlayStation Official Magazine* but *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* gave the game 40 criticising the graphics including wobbly jelly water and assessing the characters as impossible to connect with.

The third game in the series returned to the theme of a city hit by an earthquake but used fire as a frequent hazard. However it was more notable for moving the action to the small screen as it was developed exclusively for the PSP. The game was created under the theme of 'A *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi* you can take with you.' We wanted *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi 3* to be something useful in a disaster so we made it for a portable system. Another reason we chose a portable game system was because we wanted to implement multiplayer elements says Hubb. Sony's handheld might seem like an odd platform for that but it's important to remember that this was at a time when multiplayer PSP games like *Monster Hunter* were selling millions of copies in Japan.

Zettai Zetsumei Toshi 3 allowed two to four players to join forces locally. As a result the team decided to allow players to pick between the male character Naoki Housaka and the female Rina Makimura the former being stronger and the latter less prone to stress. We wanted selectable gender to be one of the elements. We tried to make it so that there was a breadth of characters that the player would really want to become Hubb recalls. Thinking about it now I think the strength feature wasn't really implemented all that well and we might not have even needed to put it in there at all. We were hoping that the differences in ability would be fun for multiplayer but I feel as if that aspect wasn't fully realised. Stress was more of a catch-all replacement for previous mechanics. We wanted to broadly define the element that determined the player's movements more clearly than 'cold' or 'thirst' as in the previous games. So we made 'stress', which contains those elements.



PS2 Plenty of items are useless alone but can be combined into useful gear like this makeshift coat.



PS2 As well as escaping disasters Amber must hide from the cops unless she's lucky enough to loot a police uniform.

MEET THE SURVIVORS

A QUICK GUIDE TO THE CHARACTERS YOU'LL MEET THROUGHOUT THE DISASTER REPORT SERIES



KEITH HELM

A rookie reporter who finds himself trapped on Stiver Island. After surviving the incident, he returns to report on the disaster in Geo City, investigating the motivations of the NorCal Corporation.



KAREN MORRIS

Trapped by the earthquake on her way to the airport, Karen accompanies Keith after being rescued from a falling bus. She really loves her dog, and demands you travel with her to rescue it.



KELLY AUSTIN

One of Keith's companions in the original game, Kelly goes into teaching after those events. She returns in *Raw Danger*, and again under her Japanese name Natsumi Higa in *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi 3*.



GREG BACH

This freelance photographer and aspiring journalist happens to be a bit of a jerk, though he does at least accompany whichever partner you choose to leave behind. You can unlock his photos as mementos.



JOSHUA HARWELL

A waiter working the mayor's special event at Geo City, he accompanies waitress Stephanie McMurrough, who is desperately trying to reach the hospital to see a certain injured survivor.



AMBER BRAZIL

After the police station is destroyed, this fugitive student hooks up with the mayor's assistant Aidan Chase, who suggests that she revisit the scene of her brother's murder to clear her name.

UNNATURAL DISASTERS

THE DISASTER REPORT SPIN-OFF THAT OFFERS UP KAIJU, FOR THOSE WHO DON'T FIND EARTHQUAKES SCARY ENOUGH

The PlayStation 4 version of *Disaster Report 4 Plus: Summer Memories* was announced in 2014 but didn't arrive until 2018, and one of the reasons it took so long to complete is that developer Granzella actually designed a totally different spin-off game in this time. *Kyoei Toshi*, typically translated as 'City Shrouded In Shadow', was announced in 2015 as a project in partnership with Bandai Namco, and saw Granzella return to the disaster survival genre – but with a crucial twist. Unlike in the *Disaster Report* series, which deals with natural disasters (or at least, disasters that can be plausibly passed off as such), *Kyoei Toshi* casts you as a civilian during the kind of giant monster attack that occurs in major Japanese cities at least twice a week. It's your job to make it to safety, as crazy eye-beams and gigantic feet destroy everything around you. Excellently, the monsters in *Kyoei Toshi* aren't just generic nasties either. The likes of Godzilla, Ultraman and even the Angels from *Neon Genesis Evangelion* get involved in the city-sundering conflicts from which you must escape.

Kyoei Toshi was released in October 2017, arriving as a PS4 exclusive after the planned Vita version was scrapped. The game scored 31/40 in *Famitsu*, earning 8/10 from three reviewers and 7/10 from the remaining reviewer. It made its debut at number two in the Japanese all-format charts, landing ahead of *The Evil Within 2* but far behind *Gran Turismo Sport*, and sold at least 60,000 copies before disappearing from the charts. Unfortunately *Kyoei Toshi* wasn't released outside of Japan and there appear to be no plans for an English-language release, so if you want to play this one you'll have to import.





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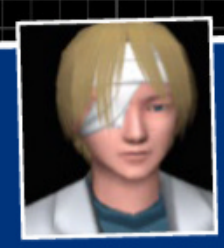
ISAAC SCHILLER

This taxi driver appreciates the finer things in life – mostly smoking and drinking. He picks up the fare of his life in Sophia Briggs, a reporter whose determination knows no bounds.



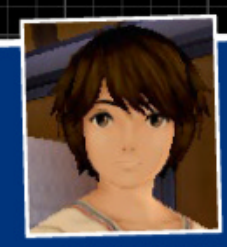
PAIGE MEYER

This student faces plenty of troubles during her escape, including a teacher who needs rescuing, another who wants to "privately tutor" her and an encounter with her sadistic bully, Emily Rose.



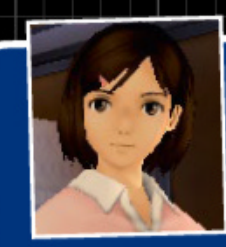
IVAN KOZLOV

This, bandaged man is suffering from amnesia, and trying to piece together his own identity. Sierra Young accompanies him – that is, once she manages to find him in the first place...



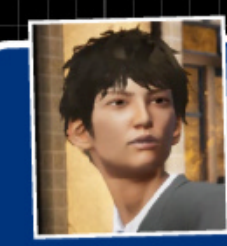
NAOKI KOUSAKA

A 19-year-old student, who survives a bus crash caused by an earthquake at the beginning of *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi 3*. His personality is more or less up to you, thanks to expansive dialogue options.



RINA MAKIMURA

Rina replaces Naoki in *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi 3*'s story, so she's also a student on her way to Central Island. She's a year younger than her counterpart, and is physically weaker but less easily stressed.



???

The protagonist of *Disaster Report 4 Plus* is whoever you want them to be – you must design your character before the game begins, and you get to decide their backstory as you play through the game.



PS4 This bloke looks shady and he's looking for someone. Misdirect him and you'll gain immorality points.



PS4 These days Granzella works with disaster experts to ensure that the games are authentic and even informative.

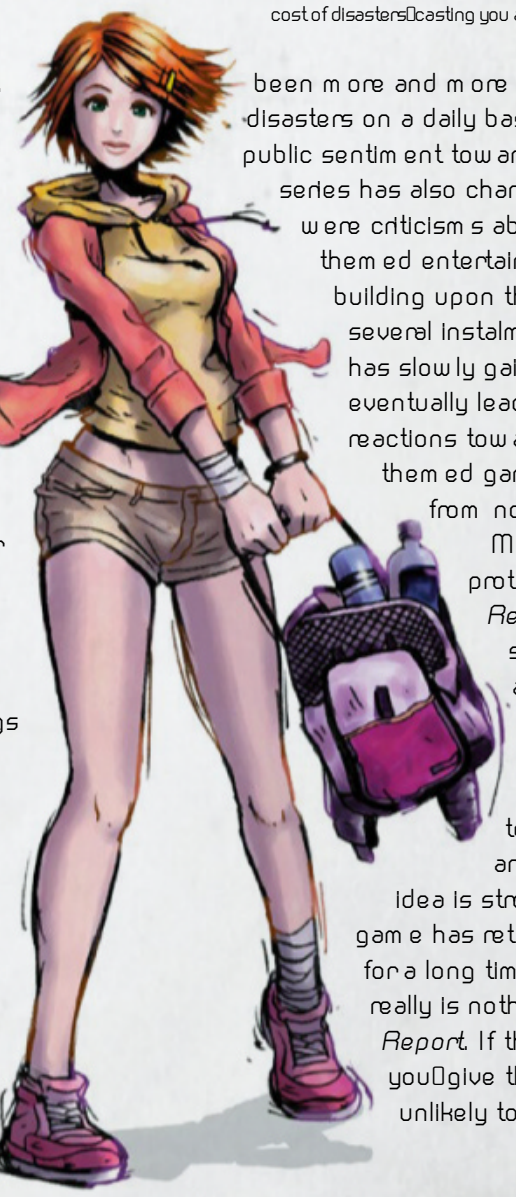


PS4 *Disaster Report 4* increases both the timescale and visible human cost of disasters, casting you as one of many long-term refugees.

With Irem withdrawing from videogame development, Kubo left to form his own studio. "We believed in the possibility of the disaster-themed game and founded Granzella," he explains. "When we started, we did not have the sales rights to the *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi* series. We tried to get those rights, but negotiations were taking a long time. When we didn't have the rights, we began research on developing a game. Thankfully, during that time, we acquired the rights to the *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi* series." The company resumed distribution of the original games on digital stores, and decided how to proceed. "We thought we could start over with *Disaster Report 4*, which had been indefinitely postponed. I wanted to bring out a game that was more than just collapsing buildings and broken roads. I wanted it to also deal with the misfortune that people can bring upon each other." The company announced the development of *Disaster Report 4 Plus* for PS4 in 2014. "By making the game for PS4, the main changes we implemented were fixing the story parts that were difficult to understand, as well as adding a mode where you could explore the town half a year after the events of the main game."

Disaster Report 4 Plus: Summer Memories was completed in 2018. A Switch port was released in 2019, and NIS America has released these versions plus a new PC version in English. The game increases the role-playing element of the series, allowing you to design your own character and decide their motivations and backstory. "We wanted to make it easier for the players to get emotionally invested," says Kubo. "We also think that it is important that the players are able to play with their own customised character. You have a larger number of options when responding to other characters, and you can now earn points for moral and immoral actions. For the first time, the game traps the player in a disaster zone – the emphasis being on long-term survival and interaction with fellow survivors, rather than immediate escape. "We tried to show that the stress and exhaustion aren't just present immediately after an earthquake, but they increase over time. I think that if players are able to experience these feelings and overcome the fear of the disaster and feelings of helplessness, then this was a game worth making," says Kubo. "I hope that many people give it a try."

Having been working on *Disaster Report* for a couple of decades, Kubo reflects on how the experience has changed him and his team. "We became more serious about natural disasters which have happened during game development and post-launch. We've been more and more interested in natural disasters on a daily basis," he explains. "The public sentiment toward the *Disaster Report* series has also changed. In the past, there were criticisms about natural disaster-themed entertainment. But after building upon the series by releasing several instalments, the public has slowly gained understanding, eventually leading to more positive reactions towards natural disaster-themed games, and attention from non-gaming media."



Much like its many protagonists, the *Disaster Report* series is a real survivor. Despite all the challenges that it has faced, from inconsistent international branding to its own brush with an earthquake, the core idea is strong enough that the game has retained a loyal following for a long time, and even now there really is nothing else like *Disaster Report*. If the concept intrigues you, give the games a go – you're unlikely to regret it. ✱

Resident Evil 2

This million-dollar port proved that the N64 wasn't immune to an infection of Resident Evil 2's size

PLATFORM: N64 RELEASED: 1999 DEVELOPER: ANGEL STUDIOS/FACTOR 5

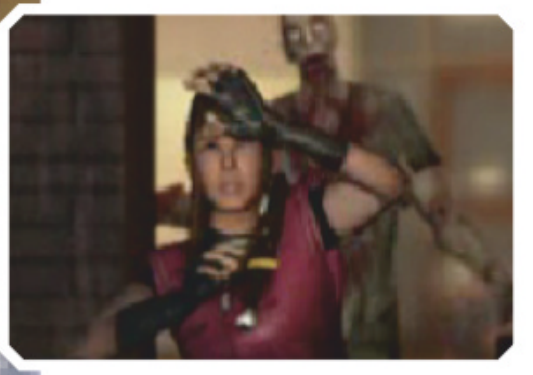
Nintendo's decision to shun CD-ROMs for the N64 didn't prevent the system from having plenty of great games, but it did a huge amount to shape the type of games the console received. While the N64's hardware was capable of displaying large 3D worlds with the kind of stability that PlayStation owners could only dream of, the storage limitations of ROM cartridges meant that the system struggled with the FMV, voice acting and prerecorded audio that were common on Sony's hardware. If you wanted to make a great multiplatform game, it seemed as though you'd have to play to the strengths of neither format.

Resident Evil 2 was not developed as a multiplatform game. Just as with the original, the PlayStation was the target platform and anything else was secondary and would come later. As a result, the game is designed for the strengths of the hardware – it features plenty of FMV and voice acting, while the storage-intensive prerendered backgrounds lower the burden on the system's 3D graphics capabilities. The game was so large that it didn't even fit on a single CD-ROM.

That's what makes Angel Studios' work so impressive. The 64MB cartridge the team had to work with was the biggest the Nintendo 64 could support, but still roughly a tenth of the size of one PlayStation disc. Yet the team of nine full time staff and a contractor managed to cram *Resident Evil 2* into that space, and miraculously did so without any significant cutbacks – every bit of the survival horror experience is there to enjoy. More significantly, the small American developer even managed to expand on the experience, offering alternative control schemes and options to reduce the gore, a new randomiser mode, new cheats and extra story files connecting the game to other games in the series.

The exclusive features and sheer wow factor of *Resident Evil 2*'s N64 port ensure that it's constantly in demand with collectors, and therefore it's not the cheapest version of the game. A loose cartridge will set you back £25 or more, and you'll have to get a little lucky to pick up a boxed copy for under £100. However, if you do prefer to play it on Nintendo's platform, you can rest assured your gaming experience will be wholly uncompromised. ✱

HOW IT PUSHED THE LIMITS...



Fabulous FMV

The team developed a proprietary FMV compression system for this game, and the results are excellent – virtually all of the original scenes are here, though the framerate is halved compared to the PlayStation version.



Careful Compression

Textures were reworked to fit the N64's 4KB limit, while voice data was compressed to save space – backgrounds were, too, but you'd struggle to notice without a direct side-by-side comparison.



Expansion Opportunities

With an Expansion Pak installed, *Resident Evil 2* will sometimes utilise a higher-res mode. Combined with this version's texture filtering, this can make for a cleaner appearance than the PlayStation version of the game.



Audio Assistance

Angel Studios struggled with audio conversion and brought in Factor 5 to assist. It was a smart move – the music ended up better than the PlayStation version, even offering full support for Dolby Surround setups.

SIMON BRATTEL

For a period of three years, his name was synonymous with impossibly fast and impressive games, on the ZX Spectrum computer in particular. We journeyed to the north of Wales to meet up with Design Design's Simon Brattel, to find out more about the man behind the games

Words by Graeme Mason

It's raining when we arrive at the offices of Design Design Technology, just outside Wrexham. It's raining when we leave, too, and presumably it didn't stop in the three hours between given the large puddles that dot the car park. Inclement weather aside, the rest of the afternoon is a pleasant one, in the company of a man responsible for some of the most technically memorable ZX Spectrum games of the mid-Eighties. From the large open maze of *Halls Of The Things* to the lightning velocity of space shoot-'em-up *Dark Star*, these were games that captured the hearts of gamers, and the magazine *Crash* in particular. A commercial games coder for a mere three years, he was the Spectrum programming fire that burned so very brightly, very quickly, before software deadline fatigue forced him back to his roots as an electronics designer and builder. From the halls of Manchester University to the headquarters of his Design Design empire, this is Simon Brattel, in the chair. Expect copious urine-related expletives.

Hi Simon. How and when did your love of computers begin?
I started in the very early days – actually probably ahead of the curve around 1976, and I was building homebrew stuff before you could just walk into a shop and buy a computer. I guess I was always interested in electronics, essentially pissing around, getting my friends to fund my education by building amplifiers for them. And then along came these things called 'microprocessors', and I thought, 'Yeah, they look interesting.' So, I started building my own home computers from scratch. And the thing was, you had to make it all up as you went along, looking at the data sheet of the chips. My first actual commercial computer was a ZX80, which had a whole 1K of RAM. It was a horrible thing.


Suited up and ready to design.

Did you have a purpose to all of this tinkering around?
It was just for fun really, something new and interesting. I always dreamed about having a computer, probably from watching *The Goodies* where they had these bloody great things with tapes. It was a hobby; I was still at school and living with my parents, and did most of my computer-designing during French lessons. I had an arrangement with the teacher: I was never gonna learn French, and as long as I didn't disrupt the lessons, he didn't actually care.

C'est la vie. Eventually this led you into software design?
The interesting thing about designing your own hardware is you have to write your own software and operating systems. I mean, there were 8K ROMS that you get for the Commodore PET, but they were unobtainable, so all the software running on the machines you had to do yourself. Then, while I was at university, I bumped into a guy called Neil Mottershead, and Neil had a Nascom 2. Wow, it was really advanced, and at the time Neil was a much better programmer than I. But the beauty back then was that you had to know a lot about the hardware to get a thing like the Nascom working. Neil had written his own assembler and various utilities, and we basically put this on my hardware. We called it Zeus, and it was brilliant.

How did you first start working for Crystal Computing?
I had bumped into Graham Stafford in a book shop in the early Eighties – he was perusing the 6502 section and I was in the Z80 section. We took the piss out of each other, and had another chance meeting a year later. Graham had met up with a guy called Chris Clarke, and they had set up Crystal


All strangers, they were fighting over the Spectrum, one with a finger on the ‘f’ key and the crowd baying ‘fireball it’!
Simon Brattel



> I always dreamed about having a computer probably from watching The Goodies where they had these bloody great things with tapes
>
> Simon Brattel



Even the older Simon Brattel occasionally smiles.

Computing. Eventually they rented a three-storey Victorian house in Cheetham Hill, Manchester, but to start we were all living in various flats and student accommodation. It somehow ended up with Neil and I putting together a version of Zeus for Crystal to sell as an assembler. It was a strange relationship: they didn't want our names to appear on this anywhere, they wanted it to come out as a Crystal product, which was fair enough. So, Neil and I snuck our names into it anyway.

Ah, was this the very first mention of Design Design?
I came up with the name when I'd been making amplifiers as a kid. Lots of Ds... something about it. As a child I had this very vague idea of setting up a design commune, where people would come to us as a group and we would solve problems. I was very naïve.

What was your first actual game?
I'd written a fair number of *Space Invader*-type games, but actually the first game I wrote had a row of about nine light bulbs and there were switches underneath, and you had to hit the right switch to go with the lights. That was all I could essentially do on my first computer, with its room-wide set of switches.

Were you employed by Crystal?
Nope, we were still students, pissing around, and it ended up one day Neil and I dimly thinking that we didn't like any of the games out there, thinking they were all crap. We were playing a game on Neil's Nascom called *Keys Of Khaal*, an early maze game – in fact, a very good game for its time. We were with another guy called Martin Horsley by now, and he suggested you could do a similar game in real time and with more monsters. It sort of ended up with Neil, Martin and I writing *Halls Of The Things*, which I still think is the best thing we ever did. It was the first game where you had things existing off-screen and where the enemies essentially had the same weapons as you. Nowadays, you'd call it a sandbox game, and it was developed for fun, really, the three of us writing the computer game we would like to play.

When did you think you were onto something special with *Halls*?
There was one evening where we took it up to the common rooms in the university halls of residence and put the game on the television screen there. Over the course of about four hours, the room filled up with people who were blown away by this game. All strangers, they were fighting over the Spectrum, one with a finger on the 'F' key and the crowd baying, 'Fireball it!' At one point, the three of us backed away, looking at this room ful of people and basically said to each other, 'We've got something here!' A few years ago, I looked at the code and rewrote a few things, and added sound, which we could have done at the time and I actually regret. Our argument back then, though, was that sound would have slowed it down, which we would have hated.

Which of your development machines was *Halls* created on?
Lurch. They didn't really have names, but then people would ask me what they were called, so I'd just come up with something. Lurch was from *The Addams Family*. Basil was Basil Fawlty.

After *Halls*, you turned your hand to a fast-paced, ahem, unofficial, arcade game?
Well, I'd always liked *Defender*, but I could never play it – it was too fast, and I didn't like the controls. But I thought it was brilliant, a great piece of programming, and loved the idea. Very pretty graphics for the period. So I wanted to do a version and do it as a frame-locked, really fast game to



THE BEST OF BRATTEL

Offerings from Simon that are worth your time



ZEUS

■ Neil Mottershead created this Greek-deity-inspired assembler for the Nascom 2 computer, before Simon helped port it to his own hardware and the ZX Spectrum, where it was published by Crystal Computing. It was praised for its ease of use in particular, and is still used to this day by Spectrum Next enthusiasts.



HALLS OF THE THINGS

■ While it may have required five hands to play, there's no doubting the breadth of *Halls*' technical achievement: a vast maze, replete with hungry monsters that didn't just exist on-screen, and an open-world ethos that successfully generated enough atmosphere to entertain players for years. A genuine 8-bit classic.



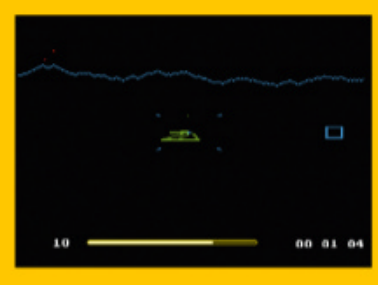
INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHASO

■ Lightning-fast and frantic, *Invasion* successfully mimics much of the original arcade game that it – ahem – pays loving homage to. Most of *Defender*'s gameplay is present, from the energetic laser beams and helpful radar screen, to the devilish aliens who are trying to abduct humanoids from the planet surface.



DARK STAR

■ A *Star Wars* game in all but name, *Dark Star* is regarded by many as Simon's masterpiece. Featuring a breathtaking first-person view rarely experienced on the ZX Spectrum, its clean lines and frenetic blasting action immediately cemented the game as another high-quality release from the bearded wonder of Manchester.



TANK BUSTERS

■ With his colleague Martin Horsley having already produced the excellent *Battlezone* clone, *Rommel's Revenge*, for the ZX Spectrum, Simon himself had a crack with a similar game on the Amstrad, with the smooth and impressive *Tank Busters* the result, complete with its best bitter-fuelled explosions, fermented in its coder's alcoholic stupor.



[ZX Spectrum] By the time *Forbidden Planet* was released, Simon was tiring of squeezing fast 3D games onto the ZX Spectrum.

[ZX Spectrum] *Forbidden Planet is* technically impressive but tough as nails.

Simon pauses for a swig of fizzy pop during a computer show.





[ZX Spectrum] *Dark Star*'s B-side housed the mockery, *Spectacle*.



[ZX Spectrum] *Dark Star*'s speed was maintained by keeping its graphics simple.

show technically that you could do that on the Spectrum. Neil wrote a couple of bits for it too, and we were using his assembler. He was probably writing the new version of Zeus at this point.

Why was Zeus 2 not released commercially?
I can't recall specifically – maybe we were just such assholes that we didn't want to give anyone else the tools. Or that it was too tied to the development machines to be given away, as it was written specifically to run on our machines.

Your last game for Crystal was *Warlock Of Firetop Mountain*...
At some point Penguin got in touch and they wanted a computer version of the book. Essentially, they had seen *Halls* and liked it, and wanted something like that, only bigger and with different enemies. It was an interesting programming exercise because the thing with *Halls Of The Things* was that the size of the maze was determined by how much memory the Spectrum has. It's actually got the whole map stored in memory as one byte per space in the map, which makes it easy to do things like moving the monsters, but the problem is it takes up a lot of memory. They wanted a bigger maze, so we couldn't do the same trick, we had to compress the data and the consequence was the maze had to be very sparse. So we ended up with this maze that's hugely bigger than *Halls*, about 16 times bigger in each direction, but got very little in it. There aren't enough monsters, and you're sort of wandering around this empty maze with not much happening. We put a few tricks in, like a trail for the monsters to follow and a few things guarding doors, but it didn't do much for me.

The result was directly compared to *Halls* – did that annoy you?
Yes, because the code was totally different, it had to be. And they got what they asked for. There's also a bug, I think you can't actually complete it because the point where you find the warlock and kill them is supposed to open an exit, but the code that opens the door actually screws something up. Shows you how much playtesting it had! We were under pressure and basically pushed the memory capacity to get this huge damn maze in. We were never particularly happy with *Warlock*.

How did Crystal turn into Design Design?
We called it 'The Night Of The Long Knives'. It was very childish, and essentially Neil, Martin and I fell out with Chris and more or less kicked him out of his own company. Graham, being a programmer, sided with us. Everyone will see this differently, so I'm just giving you how I look at it now. It was when Design Design took over because we were getting fed up with Chris trying to stamp his name over everything. He went off to join Artic and work with Jon Ritman, whom we always used to take the piss out of. We were great friends and he'd come up and stay with us. One time, he came up after he'd released *Match Day*, and as a joke I tore up his *Match Day* poster into little bits and put it on a piece of string as toilet paper. We'd wind each other up like that.

Why use your old name Design Design?
Well, basically, I was quite smart, 'cos I said, 'Okay we need a name for this, I'll let you all use Design Design, but if I ever leave, I'm taking the name with me because it's one I've used for a long time.' Which they were all pretty happy with.

SELECTED TIMELINE

GAMES

- HALLS OF THE THINGS [1983] ZX SPECTRUM
- INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHAS! [1983] ZX SPECTRUM
- ZEUS [1983] ZX SPECTRUM
- RETURN OF THE THINGS [1984] ZX SPECTRUM
- THE WARLOCK OF FIRETOP MOUNTAIN [1984] ZX SPECTRUM
- DARK STAR [1984] ZX SPECTRUM
- SPECTACLE [1984] ZX SPECTRUM
- TANK BUSTERS [1985] AMSTRAD CPC
- FORBIDDEN PLANET [1986] ZX SPECTRUM
- SPECTACLE 2 [1986] ZX SPECTRUM
- TAKING TIGER MOUNTAIN [1986] AMSTRAD CPC (UNFINISHED)

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

Readers can get involved at www.retrogamer.net/forum

ISA BREMAN: How did the idea of the interactive high score tables come about?

It was an opportunity to slip more jokes in. Writing games took time, much of it spent alone, with not much to entertain my sense of humour. So I had free rein to dream up jokes and slip them into the code. Besides, I needed some excuse in case my bursts of mad cackling were overheard.

WILL BROOKER: Was the name Design Design inspired by Duran Duran?

No. No, oh no. No, not at – well, okay, yes. Maybe. But which Duran Duran?

LEE THEASBY: Why didn't you do Commodore 64 conversions?

Didn't like the machine much, mainly because of the 6502 processor. But we did keep a 6502 programmer, must have been in a cage somewhere, and they did conversions for *Halls* and Zeus… actually it might have been the cellar. Not sure we would waste a cage on one of 'em. Not a whole cage. Not each.

CARLETON HANDLEY: What's the password for S*pectacle 2*? This is an in-joke – I worked at Walking Circles and somebody rang once a week asking for it.

Yeah… I'm sorry about that. I won't do it again. They changed my meds and… oh, sorry. That was someone else. Ignore that… there's a clue in one of the high score tables, a reference to a Marillion CD. On the cover, a magpie holds a key and the password is either, 'The magpie holds the key,' or, 'The magpie holds the golden key.' I don't remember exactly.

> "I'd had enough. Another 3D game, boring as hell. Everything was hard, I pushed the speed up, then added things and drove the speed down"
> Simon Brattel

We did have a ponder about other names, but it became that by default as it had been mentioned on stuff and we all liked it.

So, 1984, new company, new games. Who's in charge?
We let Graham think he was in charge, but all the decisions were very ad hoc. From my point of view, I just wanted to play around with electronics, design hardware and write software for fun. Basically games were an inconvenience we had to do every now and then to pay for it all. It was quite amusing times – we were basically pissing about, making lots of money and having fun.

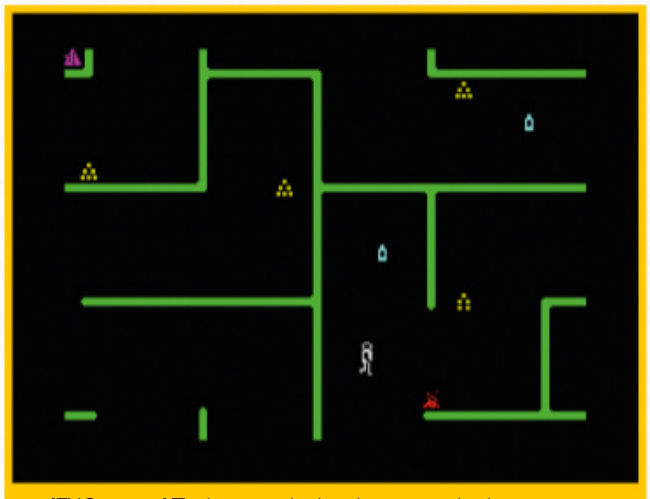
You acquired the nickname Crem – what was that about?
It was from the Kenny Everett cartoon series, *Captain Kremmen*. Simon Jackson's girlfriend, Fiona Churchyard, called me it and I spelt it with a 'C' because I'm stupid.

Your first game at Design Design was *Dark Star* – how did this come about?
There was a *Star Wars* machine at one of the motorway services on the M62 and we would sometimes head out that way in the middle of the night to go and play the bloody thing. *Dark Star* was originally a starfield demo which I'd done for my graphics card that I'd designed at university. Basically, the machines I was doing had better graphics than you would get on a typical home computer, and I did this demo to show off a moving starfield to show off the fact it had nice pixels. At some point, while I was playing with this, I reduced the Y to zero, so instead of having a big block of stars you actually had a flat plane and the visual effect of slipping in and out of this looked really superb. I'd always thought I'd quite like to do a game with this, but I'd found if you want to do proper 3D, the maths is quite involved. But if you took a block of stars and just slide the viewpoint around so it never changes angle, it just moves; you get pretty much the same visual effect, and reasonably fast. I'm quite proud of all the coding tricks I used to get it to go fast. If you look at the towers, it does have some hidden lines, people thought it was done to make it more realistic, but it was to stop me having to draw those bloody things!

It was well-reviewed…
As a programming exercise I was very proud of it, but as a game, it was really very simple. Spaceships were drawn with three lines; I couldn't afford to draw any more than that. Most of my code was designed around doing something impressive-looking, and trying to put a game on it. *Crash* were a great bunch in particular, and I think it was the only time they ever gave 100% for something as well. Think it was for 'use of computer' – presumably because I threatened them!

***Dark Star*'s cassette had an odd program called *Spectacle* on its flip side. What was that about?**
The first adverts for the Spectrum made a fuss about the fact it was a colour computer and there were these teletext images basically implying you could do teletext on the Spectrum as a sales thing. So it occurred to me as a piss-take that we ought to do something that looked like teletext. [In the] meantime I was getting bored writing *Dark Star*, fiddling around with code, drawing lines, optimising and getting thoroughly fed up. I loved to joke around, and games were an excuse, with the high score tables, and I started muttering darkly about doing this teletext editor, knocking it up on my development machine, but not having time to do anything with it. But Martin Horsley liked the idea, and he wandered off one weekend and wrote all the code for *Spectacle* and dumped it on my desk.

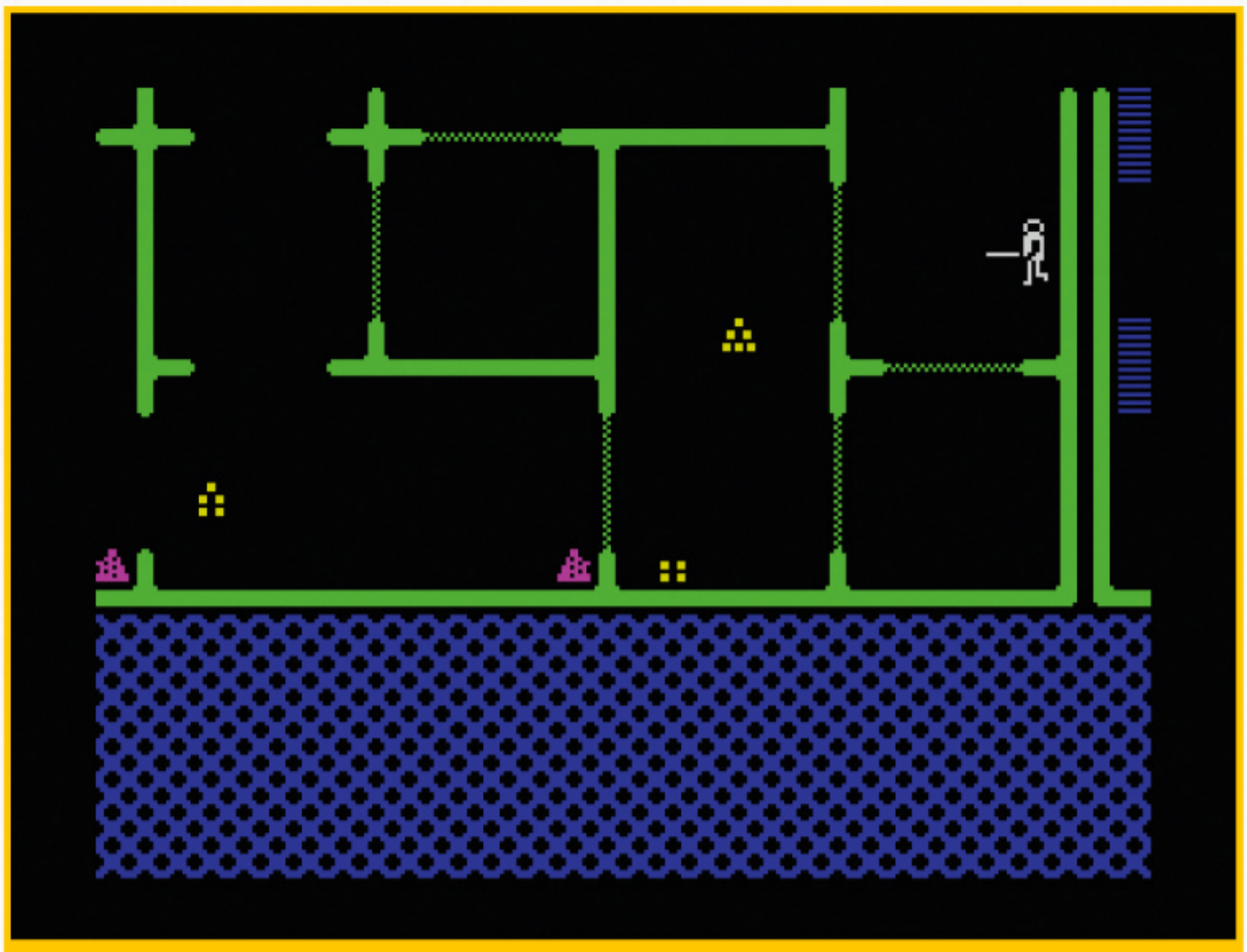
The high score tables – you became renowned for them!
We could never resist the opportunity to take the piss. I used to joke that we made games so we could release high score tables, as people wouldn't buy them by themselves. Everyone moaned there wasn't one for *Halls*, so it started with *Invasions Of The Body Snatchas!*. It used a proportional font so you could get as much text as possible in and I think everyone came up with names to put in. Martin came up with 'Little Fuzzy', there are



[ZX Spectrum] The hero stands triumphant over a dead Thing in *Halls Of The Things*.



[ZX Spectrum] Attractive *Defender* homage *cough* clone, *Invasion Of The Body Snatchas!* is fast and frantic.



[ZX Spectrum] Go waggle that thing in someone else's direction.

references to the *Blues Brothers*, and a bloody joke behind every single line.

What came after *Dark Star*?
I did the Amstrad game, *Tank Busters*, which I still like. I used to have a *Battlezone* arcade machine – it was a stunning game that we all loved. Martin had already done *Rommel's Revenge* on the Spectrum, and I thought it was too slow. Take nothing away from him, brilliant to have done it on the Spectrum, but the framerate was never high enough. So I had in the back of my mind to do a better version of *Battlezone*, and technically I think it's probably the best piece of software I've written from those days because it was hard to get it going fast. And it bloody moves! It was a short, sweet couple of weeks programming, but towards the end I needed an explosion for when you shot a tank. In *Rommel's Revenge* they just disappeared, and I thought, 'I'm not having that.' But I couldn't do it, it involved far too much processing, so we all went out one night and got completely pissed, seven or eight pints of Old Toms. When we got back, everyone else went to bed and I sat down in front of this thing thinking, 'I have to do something about these explosions.' And I woke up and the development machine is still on with *Tank Busters* sitting there. I hit the space bar to fire and there's this beautiful explosion breaking up into fragments, spinning off and bouncing everywhere. It was perfectly formatted code, and conclusive proof my subconscious is a lot smarter than I am. Although, subsequent experiments have not been as effective…

Dark Star sequel *Forbidden Planet* marked the beginning of the end for you with videogames. What happened?
It was awful. I'd had enough. Another 3D game, boring as hell. Everything was hard, I pushed the speed up, then added things and drove the speed down. Technically, *Forbidden Planet* had a lot of bits that were very hard to do, like the force fields you have to see through when they're open, which didn't translate to looking particularly impressive. That was where it went wrong, a lot of work went into the mechanics and fundamentally it didn't pay off. I'd really had enough of writing games. '30-year-olds don't write games,' I thought. How wrong was I? And it wasn't my best decision to get out of the games industry.

Were you working on anything when you left?
Yes, there was a game that never reached the shelves called *Taking Tiger Mountain* which was going to be *Tank Busters 2* with a strategy element, probably for the Amstrad and Spectrum. You had a console interface, you could type commands in, arrange supply drops and it was two players as well – a cunning piece of hardware that connected two Amstrads. But I never finished it; I walked out in 1986, and told them they could use the name [Design Design] for a year. It was very stressful working to deadlines. I set up KBM Systems and began doing more electronic design.

Design Design became Walking Circles…
I thought that was a really good name, after the illusion of circles that spins, I think. I was jealous.

Which of your games are you most proud of?
Halls because the gameplay was spot-on and it wasn't just a programming exercise. The three of us worked well and it was written for fun.

How do you look back at your time making games in the Eighties?
I look back at it fondly. It was a great bunch of people and we got paid a lot for having fun.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

JAKE WARREN: Whatever happened to the crew of the black Astra?

They grew up, and had to leave Neverland… I took the Astra when I left and used it for a few years, before giving it away to a friend. Not that the tax office ever believed that.

RORY MILNE: Why wouldn't you tell Jon Ritman how *Knight Lore* worked when you sussed out how some of its graphics could go behind others before he did? What was Jon's reaction?

Gawd knows, I don't remember. We were probably both stoned at the time.

NORTHWAY: Did you make any 16-bit games?

Yes, an unreleased version of *Battlezone* on the Amiga and a follow-up to *Invasion Of The Body Snatchas!* for the PC back in the 8086/80286 days, and a few others buried away inside various bits of hardware for people to discover.

FLORINTHEDWARF: Why did you insist on using 90% of the available keys for *Halls*?

We developed it, and played it, on my homebrew computer, which had a really nice keyboard. The keys weren't the skin-crawlingly awful experience they were on the Spectrum, so we didn't really think about avoiding them. I suppose the number crept up without us noticing we'd reached *n-n-nineteen*. I took pity on people with the recent re-releases of *Halls,* and it can be played with just five keys, or passably with a joystick!

What set us apart was having a decent sense of humour, which is absent quite a lot these days. And I was basically free to do whatever I wanted, spending most of my time designing computers, fiddling about with software for myself, and writing the odd game as a sideline. You know – pissing about.

Tetris DS

FAR FROM A MISSING LINK



NINTENDO DS 2006 NINTENDO SPD

If there's one thing I admire about the *Tetris* series, it's the way that it always manages to reinvent itself into something new and interesting, while remaining completely accessible. While there have been some truly baffling spin-offs, the core game mechanics are so pure that they have popped up in a number of interesting projects from *Tetris Battle Gaiden* to more recent affairs like *Puyo Puyo Tetris* and the engrossing multiplayer game, *Tetris 99*.

My favourite *Tetris* release is this charming little puzzler for Nintendo's DS, which contains no less than six different ways to enjoy the venerable brain-teaser. Many of the modes utilise both of the console's screens to great effect, and include classic Nintendo characters as well. 'Catch Mode', for example, features a stylish *Metroid* backdrop while you catch falling Tetrominoes and stick them to your centralised block, while the competitively focused 'Push Mode' has a charmingly animated *Donkey Kong* backdrop. Some of the mechanics arguably work better than others, but the end result is a packed cartridge that offers astonishing longevity. I've been playing it since its 2006 release and it still manages to offer a tremendous amount of fun.

While I've always enjoyed the varied modes of play that *Tetris DS* offers, I typically find myself returning to 'Standard Mode' which, as you've probably guessed, is the purest version of the classic puzzler and comes with a variety of options, including competitive multiplayer against a human or computer opponent. It's your typical game of *Tetris* on the bottom screen, while the top screen displays charming little gameplay clips from classic Nintendo games. It's completely throwaway, of course, but it's a nice touch all the same and just highlights the wonderful presentation and thought that went into the game.

It's unlikely that we'll ever get a fully Nintendo-themed version of *Tetris* again, so my advice would be to pick it up now while the game can be had for under a tenner. Try and get a US copy if you can, though as the box has a far nicer spine. ✱

HOLD

NEXT

LINE
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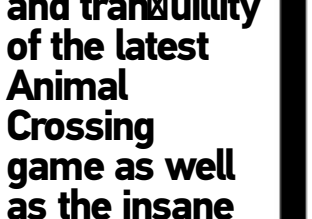
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RETRORATED



It's been a real rollercoaster ride this issue as we've dabbled with both the peace and tranquillity of the latest Animal Crossing game as well as the insane carnage that can only come from experiencing the excellent remaster of Doom 64

PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

Doom 64

I've been playing this on N64, and it's nice to see how many enhancements Nightdive has made to its ambitious remaster.



DREW

Resident Evil 3

Jill Valentine is clearly the best *Resident Evil* character, so it's great to see her take centre stage again after a long hiatus.



» Xbox One *Doom 64* has a number of stages called 'Fun Levels'. They're not fun at all, though, and are brutally difficult.

Doom 64

MIDWAY'S GAME REMAINS ETERNAL FUN

INFORMATION

- **SYSTEMS:** XBOX ONE (TESTED), PC, PS4, SWITCH
- **PRICE:** £30
- **PUBLISHER:** BETHESDA SOFTWORKS
- **DEVELOPER:** NIGHTDIVE STUDIOS
- **PLAYERS:** 1



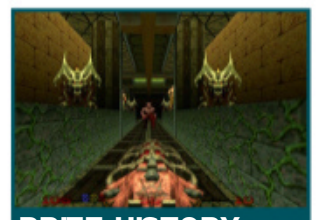
Doom 64's Nintendo 64 exclusivity meant that many gamers never got to experience it first time around. This is a crying shame, as it's easily one of the best examples of early *Doom* that you can buy and proved the N64's capabilities at handling a fast-paced frantic first-person shooter. Thankfully, *Doom 64* has now been given a larger release thanks to a fantastic new HD re-release by Nightdive Studios. It's a wise decision on the part of Bethesda, as the Vancouver-based Nightdive has quickly built a solid reputation thanks to impressive remasters of *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter*, *System Shock*, *The 7th Guest* and countless other classics.

If you've never gotten around to playing the original N64 release, let's just say you're missing out. Granted, aspects of *Doom 64* feel old-fashioned – hell, they felt a bit archaic back in the day when compared to the likes of *GoldenEye* – but what it does it does very well indeed. The core *Doom* gameplay is all present and correct, which means you'll be looking for keys to open colour-coded doors, flipping switches to activate lifts and access new areas, and religiously exploring every nook and cranny of the expertly designed levels to find secrets that will contain useful items like ammo and armour. *Doom 64* works so well because everything about it feels so incredibly pure. Rather than a simple remake of the original game, *Doom 64* is a completely new entry in the Hellspawn-slaying series with brand-new chapters and a selection of secret, sometimes brutal levels.

The map design, while not quite up to the standards of John Romero's work on *Doom* and *Doom II*, still manages to hold up exceptionally well, starting off relatively straightforward, but soon turning into labyrinthine mazes that will test both your mental agility as well as your trigger finger. The weaponry on offer is as satisfying as you'd expect from the *Doom* series and while the firing animations are nowhere near as impressive as other versions, the actual feel of each gun is superb and you really feel the impact of your weapon's firepower as it rips and tears through demonic flesh.

» Xbox One Nightdive Studios has added several new stages that were originally planned for the N64 release. They're extremely challenging, so be prepared.





BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *Doom* was released in December 1993 and instantly revolutionised the first-person shooter. Its influence was widespread and *Doom* clones' quickly became synonymous with any shooters that followed in the game's wake. *Doom 64* was released as an N64 exclusive in 1997 and contained 32 brand-new levels along with numerous enhancements to the original *Doom* engine.



» box One There are plenty of familiar weapons to use in *Doom 64* and each and every one packs a mighty punch.

WHY NOT TRY

SOMETHING OLD
WOLFENSTEIN 3D PC



SOMETHING NEW
DOOM ETERNAL BO ONE



Doom 64's menagerie of foul beasts will be largely familiar to those that have played earlier *Doom* games, but their new designs which admittedly can look a little blurry at times certainly help to keep the experience fresh and reinforce that this is a standalone *Doom* game you're playing, and not some uick-and-dirty port. While only a few new demons are exclusive to *Doom 64*, they fit in perfectly and will uickly succumb to the excellent weaponry that's available to use. Chainsaws, shotguns, pistols, rocket launchers and even the BFG9 are all present and correct, and the game also introduces the Unmaker, a dangerous laser that was planned for the original *Doom* but never made the cut.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of *Doom 64* is just how cheap it actually is. 3.99 is ridiculously inexpensive when you consider just how much game there is to enjoy in Nightdive's latest remaster, and it even comes free with certain versions of *Doom Eternal*, making it even better value for money. Of course *Doom 64*'s paltry asking price would be pointless if it was a sloppy version of the original N64 game, but this is far from the case and Nightdive Studios has done a cracking job on making *Doom 64* nice and presentable for modern gamers.

The most obvious upgrade to the original game is the core controls. The N64's lack of a second analogue stick meant that you had to rely on either the C or shoulder buttons for strafing. It worked fine for the time, but is a little hard on the thumbs today we've recently started playing it after picking up a NTSC version . That's no longer an issue on modern controllers and as a result everything feels that little more responsive. Graphically it has been given a significant upgrade, too. Running on a modified version of the original *Doom* engine, *Doom 64* always looked good on its original release, and Nightdive has done everything it can to ensure its distinctive look has been replicated on modern systems. There are new brightness options, it's possible to change the field of view and add a filter, while numerous antialiasing options have also been included.

But that's not all, Nightdive has also added a brand-new chapter to the game, that consists of six challenging new levels, as well as an additional 'fun' level, bringing the total level count up to an impressive 39. This new chapter, which takes place after you complete The Absolution *Doom 64*'s final stage , is filled with dangerous enemies, sneaky pu les to solve and some brilliant map design. It's tough, but feels like a natural extension to an already impressive game. *



» box One The Absolution is *Doom 64*'s last level and what the project was called before it became a *Doom* game.

» box One *Doom 64*'s pu les are relatively simple and often focus on the collection of keys.



» box One Play your cards right and you can watch enemies turn on each other, saving you bullets.



In a nutshell

While *Doom 64*'s gameplay is old, it's also incredibly pure, and as a result it's aged far better than similar games of the period. Add in some enhanced extras and a low price and this is an essential purchase.

>> Score

RETRO ROUNDUP
WE LOOK AT THE LATEST RETRO-RELATED RELEASES

* PICK OF THE MONTH

Resident Evil 3

» System: PS4 (tested), Xbox, PC » Buy it from: Online, retail » Buy it for: 49.99

Hot off the heels of the excellent *Resident Evil 2* remake, the survival horror series has returned for a reimagining of the series' threequel.

Due to it being developed in tandem with last year's game, *Resident Evil 3* will immediately feel and look familiar to those who explored the RPD. This time stepping into the boots of Spencer Mansion survivor Jill Valentine, you find yourself in the streets of the doomed Raccoon City pursued by a terrifying bioweapon: Nemesis.

And this is where we find one of our main criticisms Nemesis just doesn't really command the terrifying presence like he did in the original game – here he just feels like a spooky setpiece generator. When he appears, he genuinely is threatening and will likely wipe the floor with you, but he only shows up at set times. While you felt like you were trapped inside a location with Mr X in *RE2*, here Nemesis feels like a nuisance you have to outrun for a bit. That said, the multiple boss fights against this big bad beast feel much more improved compared to the showdowns against Mr X or William Birkin in last year's remake. This is thanks to *Resident Evil 3*'s stronger focus on action and gunplay.

Yes, there's less solving puzzles here and more dealing with bigger hordes of brain-biters. And Jill now has access to a dodge ability that can slow down time when executed at the right time, which makes the game feel more videogame-y, but it doesn't ruin the fun. There's still an emphasis on managing ammo and health, so don't think everything you come across can be solved by throwing bullets at it. Sometimes it's just better to run.

How much you'll enjoy this remake compared to last year's depends on how you like your horror – more atmospheric or action-packed? If you prefer *Aliens* to *Alien* then you'll probably like this as much as or more than *RE2*. If you revel in slow burns though, this will fall short. However, it's still a strong remake of the original.

≫ **Score 82%**



» PS4 The script and voice acting are a lot better when compared to the *Resident Evil 2* remake.



» PS4 Environments are typically more urban than other *Resi* games, and are crammed full of undead.



Langrisser I II

» System: Switch (tested), PS4, PC
» Buy it from: Online, retail » Buy it for: 39.99

This package bundles together remakes of the first two games in Masaya's tactical RPG series, the first being better known in the west as *Warsong*. Fans of games like *Fire Emblem* and *Shining Force* will be right at home here, with a neat wrinkle being that your party members can hire soldiers, unlocking di erent types with their own strengths and weaknesses as you promote them through classes. You can choose between classic or remade music and character art, but the graphical presentation on maps and in battle is relatively weak for a full-price game. If you can look past that, the two games are still good fun and both of them are pretty he y, so they will last a long time for even avid fans of the genre.

≫ **Score 77%**

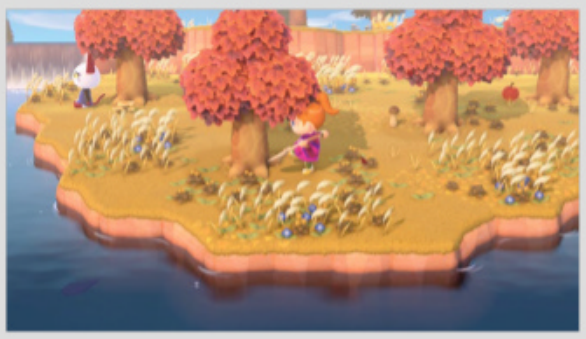


La-Mulana 1 2

» System: Switch (tested), PS4, Xbox One
» Buy it from: Retail » Buy it for: 54.99

This homage to MSX-era platform games was first unleashed upon the world in 2005, and quickly became famed for its rather obtuse design. It falls somewhere between *Super Metroid* and *Rick Dangerous* – you have the freedom to go anywhere you like, but it's rather di cult, with some very sneaky traps and very little in the way of help o ered to new players. Both games play similarly, though the sequel's visuals are a little more impressive and you play as the daughter of the original adventurer. The games are undoubtedly well constructed, but can prove highly frustrating. The physical bundle is quite lavish, featuring a puzzle, CD soundtrack and art book, but the two games are available separately as digital releases for a lower price – seek them out if you're unsure.

≫ **Score 72%**



Animal Crossing: New Horizons

» System: Switch » Buy it from: Online, retail
» Buy it for: 49.99

The *Animal Crossing* series continues to evolve with each new release, and while *New Horizons* certainly isn't earth-shattering, it's becoming an essential way to while away each new day. While progress feels slow and the ability to only have one island per Switch seems stingy, there's no denying that much has been done to make *New Horizons* as accessible as possible. The addition of Nook Miles, which are granted for achieving tasks like collecting insects or building items, adds some much-needed structure to the series, while the inclusion of a cra ing system also helps to flesh the game out. Add in lots of charming flourishes, and *New Horizons* proves that Nintendo's cute sim still has plenty of life in it.

≫ **Score 85%**

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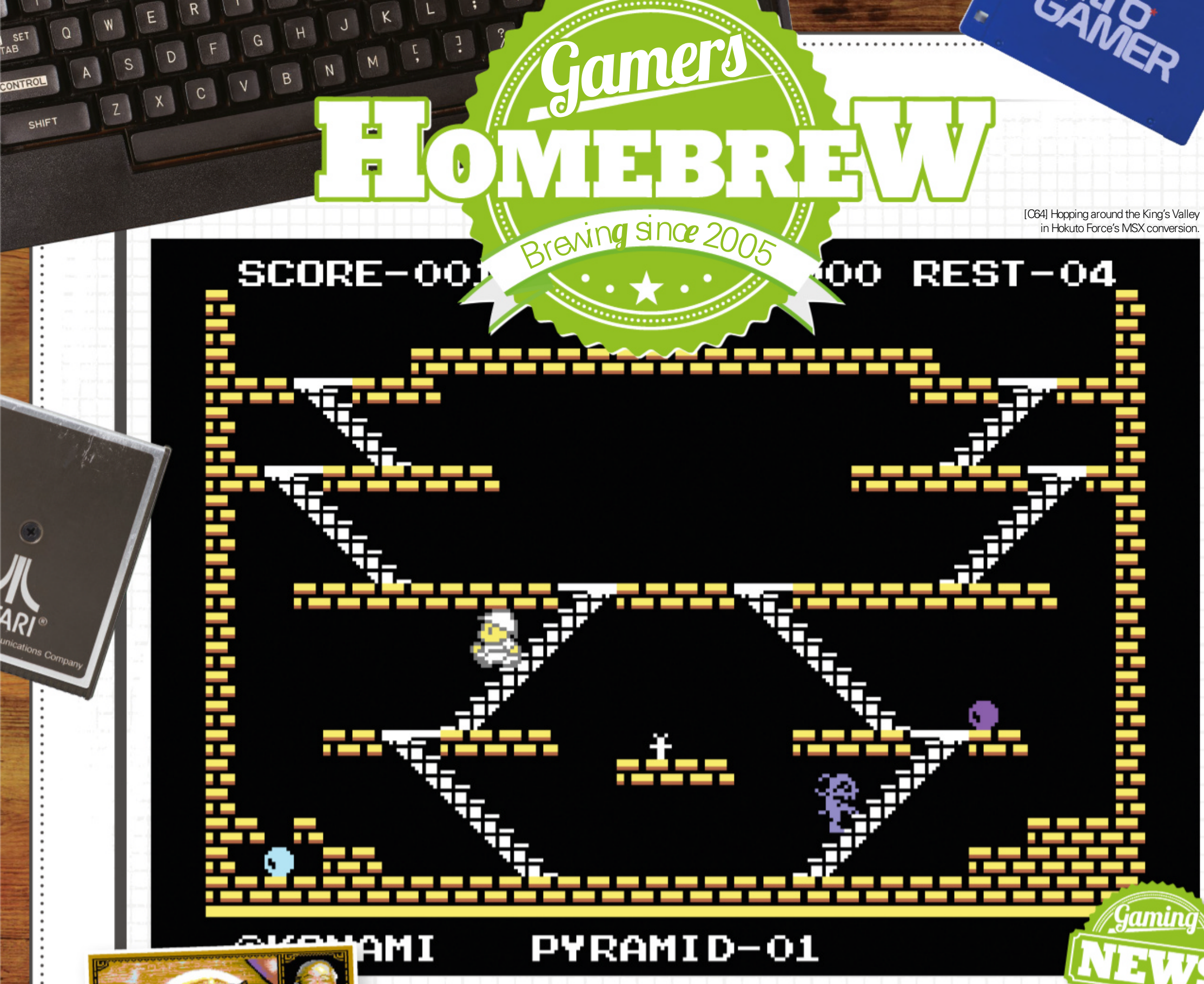
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Gamers HOMEBREW

Brewing since 2005



[C64] Hopping around the King's Valley in Hokuto Force's MSX conversion.

Gaming NEWS

C64 OVERLOAD!

The last couple of months have been spectacularly busy for the Commodore 64 scene, so we'll just touch on some recent releases. To get things going, Antonio Savona has recently put out another Activision Atari 2600 port in the form of *Crackpots,* where the player's avatar must drop flowerpots on spiders as they clamber up a wall. This seems a little harsh on the spiders to us, but Dan Kitchen, the developer of the original game, has given this C64 port his seal of approval and it can be found at Kikstart.me.uk/crackpots-c64.

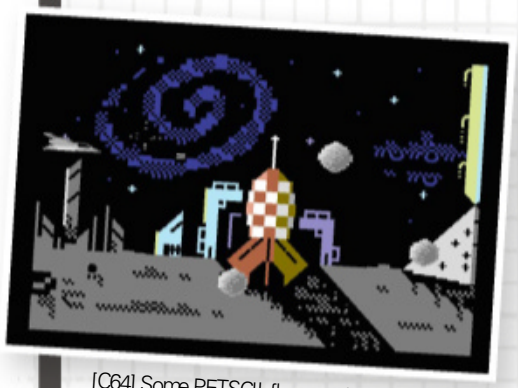
Also on the conversion front, Jon Williams has released a port of his C16 classic *Major Blink* – available at Kikstart.me.uk/major-blink-c64 – which is a no-nonsense blaster in the same style as his previous release *Berks Four* and the other games in that series. Another conversion made available at the end of 2019 was the platform-based *King's Valley* from Hokuto Force. This is the Konami MSX game of the same name shifted over to Commodore's beige Breadbin, and everything has survived the conversion very nicely, judging by the quick play we had after exploring behind Kikstart.me.uk/kings-valley-c64.

Drunken Chopsticks by Atlantis is a slightly more surreal game, where karate master Mr Miyagi encourages the player to capture flies threatening their food with a pair of chopsticks hovering over the plate, loosely recreating a scene from *The Karate Kid* in the process. This task is very difficult both in real life and the game, but would-be martial artists can give it a try at Kikstart.me.uk/chopsticks-c64. Those wanting to exercise mentally rather than physically might want to look at *MatchSCII* – Kikstart.me.uk/matchscii-c64 – which is being published by developer Wil and is a pair-matching memory game where the player must find two identical cards within the deck laid out on-screen to remove them.

Heading back to action games, there's a YouTube video behind Kikstart.me.uk/leap-c64 of *Leap*, which seems to be a visually attractive tribute to the Gremlin Graphics classic *Bounder* currently in the early stages of development. Finally, there's a couple of shooters in the form of *Into Hinterland World* – Kikstart.me.uk/hinterland-c64 – by demo scene developers Abyss Connection, and *Vega* – Kikstart.me.uk/vega-c64 – from Atwoods Studios, both are space-bound adventures, with the former offering some challenging and fast-paced blasting, and the latter dishing up PETSCII graphics and a more sedate feel to the action that we found rather enjoyable.



[C64] Practicing with *Drunken Chopsticks* is perfect for when there's a fly on your food.



[C64] Some PETSCII-flavoured intergalactic scrolling shooter action with Atwoods Studios' *Vega*.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at: retrogamer@futurenet.com

HOMEBREW HEROES

The Aquarius hasn't received much attention after it was discontinued, but one man looking to change that is Roy Templeman. We had a quick chat with him about the challenges of programming for Mattel's system



THE BIG INTERVIEW

The Aquarius doesn't get much homebrew love, what drew you to it?

There are two main things that draw me to this machine. Like so many out there, you have an emotional tie to your first computer, in my case that was the Aquarius. It was a Christmas present for ten-year-old Roy, who wanted a Spectrum, would have settled for a ZX81, but got an Aquarius! 2I absolutely love the underdogs. The Aquarius is certainly an underdog.

And how difficult is this system to program for?

Very. The limitations of the machine make it difficult to do some of the things that other computers can do with ease. Simple things like colour changes, keyboard repeats and graphics. The Aquarius has no UDG ability whatsoever, and no 'graphics' mode. It means that everything is character-based, this makes creating games very difficult.

How long did *Aquariworm* take to write?

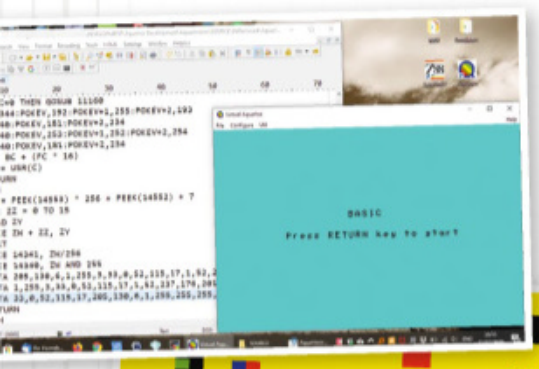
If you include all the testing, then it probably took about a month or so.

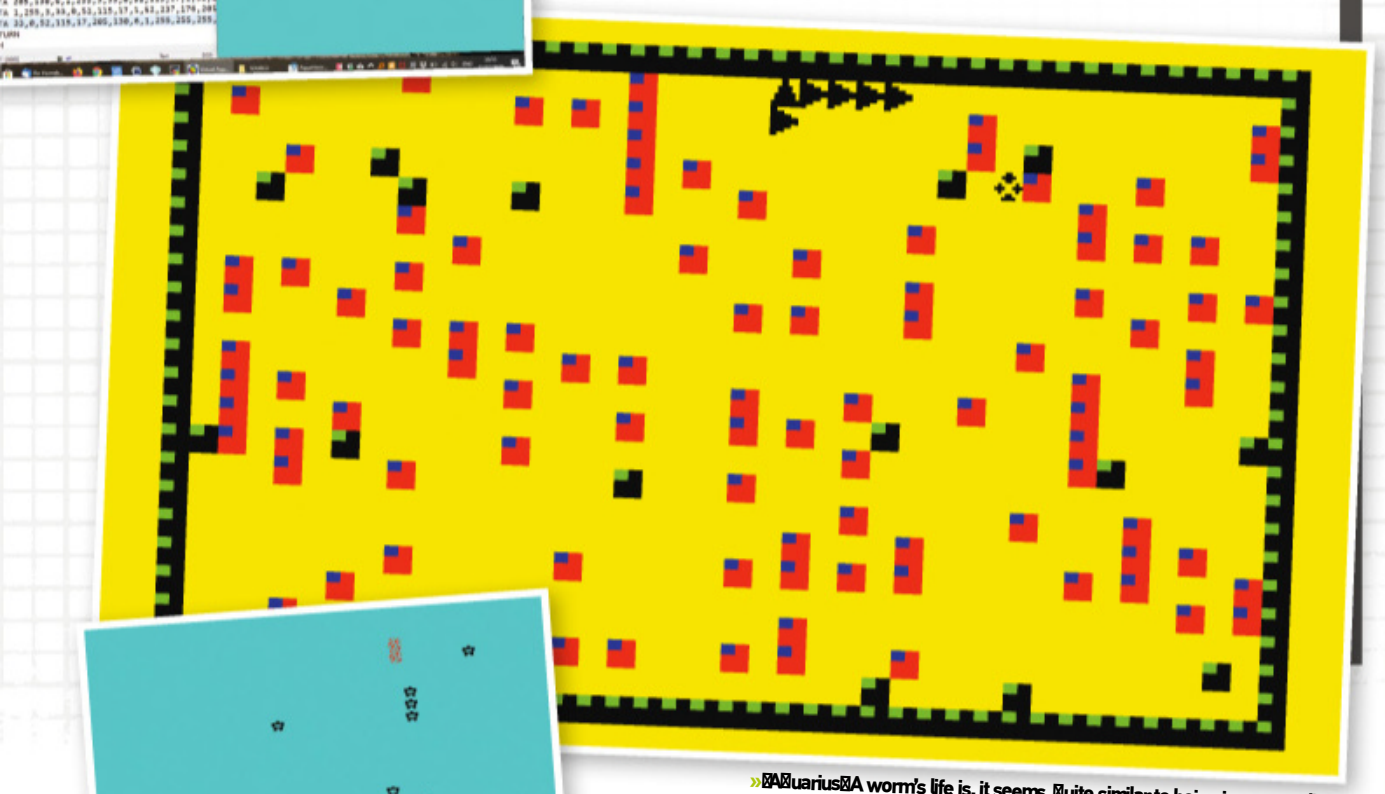
What has the response from Aquarius gamers been like?

Fantastic! Everyone loves *Aquariworm*. I think it's the first new game for the Aquarius in the last 35 years! I was at a retro computer meet-up only a few weeks ago, and took my Aquarius with *Aquariworm*. I was taken aback by the number of people that wanted to play it. The good news is that Cronosoft will be publishing *Aquariworm* very soon, so other Aquarius owners will be able to get hold of a brand-new game for 2020 on tape!

Finally, do you have any future projects lined up for the Aquarius?

Well, I have written a couple of ten-line games – *Invader* and *Bomb Catcher* – and as a result of those, I have begun work on *Bomb Catcher 2*. I appear to be on a one-man mission to increase the games library for this terrible, yet lovable underdog! I have around 70 machines in my collection, and I definitely like the underdogs. I have been a collector for about 20 years. The Aquarius was my first computer. I think that the salesman saw my dad coming, as he managed to convince dad that his son wouldn't want a ZX81, it had no sound, no colour and only 1K of RAM … What you want is this! The Mattel Aquarius, with colour! Sound! 4K of RAM, and it's cheaper than a ZX81!' Dad did the 'right' thing, and bought the 'better' machine. When I opened the Aquarius on Christmas, I was anything but disappointed! I didn't care that I had never heard of an Aquarius, I didn't care that it only came with one game – *Tron Deadly Discs* – I didn't care that it was only on the market for four months. This was *my* computer. And so my adventure began at ten. Had it not been for that Aquarius, and its lack of games, I don't think that I would be in IT doing what I love today. It started me on a career path, that was – as also my hobby. How lucky am I?! Thank you dad, thank you Mattel, thank you Aquarius.





» Aquarius A worm's life is, it seems, quite similar to being in a conga line.



A LICK OF PAIN

» Amstrad CPC Is this world may be a dangerous place, but it looks prettier now.

Over at the CPCWiki forums, a user called Fmtrx has been playing with Richard Aplin's 1990 conversion of *Shinobi*, pulling it apart to modify the graphics and edit the colour palettes used with a piece of software called cpctoolkit. The result of this work is *Shinobi Remaster* and, while the gameplay remains the same, the new look is striking.

There's a discussion thread which can be found at Kikstart.me.uk/shinobi-rem-cpc which goes into a lot more detail, including some side-by-side comparisons from both CPC versions and the arcade original.



» Atari 7800 Lining up three of the yellow blocks to appease the dragon.

ENTER THE DRAGON

It's a work-in-progress at the time of writing, but *Dragon's Cache* for the Atari 7800 is a *Columns*-style action puzzler that's already received a noticeable amount of love and attention. Players can become avaricious dragons on their own, but the game also offers a battle mode where two dragons can duke it out for treasure.

The current version is available to download as a public beta from Atari Age behind Kikstart.me.uk/dragons-cache-7800, so ProSystem fans may want to give it a go and perhaps offer up some feedback.



DO YOU REMEMBER?

Released in 2008, *Shoot Redux: Marifrisky Space Warrior* on the Spectrum was developed by Computer Emuzone under its CE Minigames label and is a gallery-style shoot-'em-up. The asteroids at the top of the screen aren't a threat but they are worth points and so should be the primary target. The rockets that regularly zoom down the screen usually end up as collateral damage since they spawn directly above the player craft.

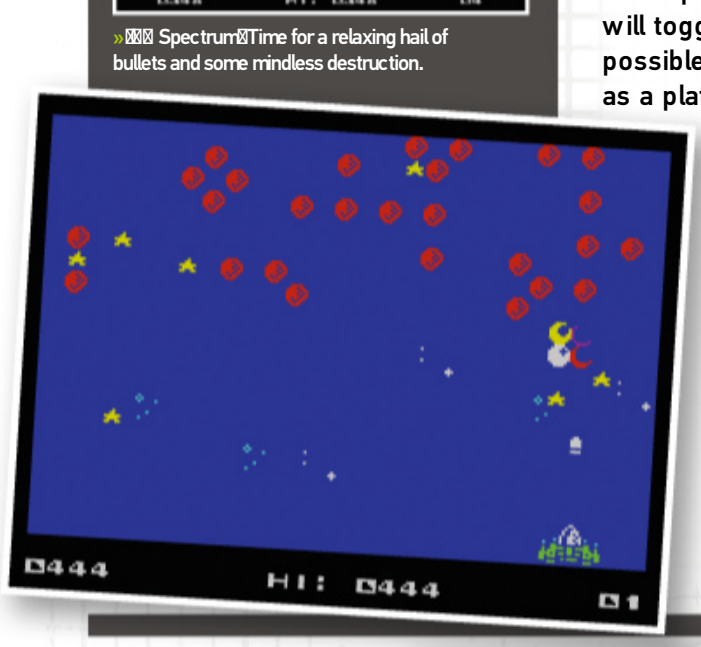
Players shouldn't expect any depth from *Shoot Redux* there aren't any long missions to worry about and it does have a somewhat steep difficulty curve, but at the same time this is one of those simple blasters where it's easy to just get into 'the zone' and relax despite the frantic pace. Head to ikstart.me.uk/shoot-redux-spec for more information.



» Spectrum Shooting straight up the middle, looking for a gap to zap asteroids.



» Spectrum Time for a relaxing hail of bullets and some mindless destruction.





» C64 Magically changing control between the two playable characters to solve a puzzle.

MILLIE AND MOLLY

» PLATFORM: COMMODORE 64 » DEVELOPER: CARLETON HANDLEY » DOWNLOAD: START.ME.U/MILLIEC64 » PRICE: £3.00 DOWNLOAD

Millie and Molly's world is full of malicious monsters and the two ladies have decided that enough is enough. Dispatching these creatures might seem easy since it's just a case of walking left or right directly into the space they occupy, but, because neither of our heroes can jump, the player must instead use ladders to move vertically through the stage or fall onto items which have previously been positioned. Only one character is available initially, but when both are in play a tap of the fire button will toggle between them, and it's possible for the inactive one to act as a platform for the other if needed.

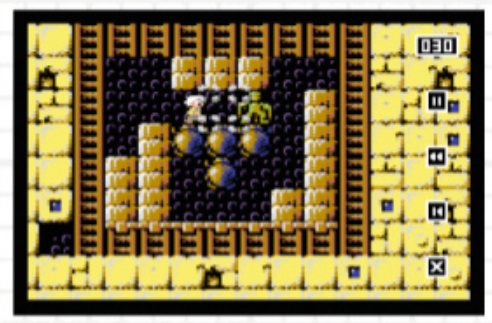
Neither of the characters can die within a stage, even if they should plummet from a great height or something large falls onto their head, but it is feasible for them to end up in an impossible situation, so the game offers a couple of ways out. There's the traditional option to restart the current stage either directly from the in-game menu or by using the current level code to return to it at a later date with fresh eyes or the more interesting time-rewind feature, which is activated by holding the fire button down during play and sees recent events spooling rapidly backwards, accompanied by on-screen noise that's reminiscent of a VHS recorder until the button is released.

It's obvious that a lot of thought has gone into making this game very approachable, and there isn't a clock ticking down during each stage, either, so players can stop and ponder at length about the puzzles before making their first move. That relaxed attitude and freedom to rewind away otherwise game-ending mistakes doesn't mean the puzzles are easy however, and it doesn't take long before all of that extra thinking time comes in handy. There's even a built-in level editor included from the game's main menu which can be used to knock up new stages and save them to disk for later, allowing the more creative players to test each other further.

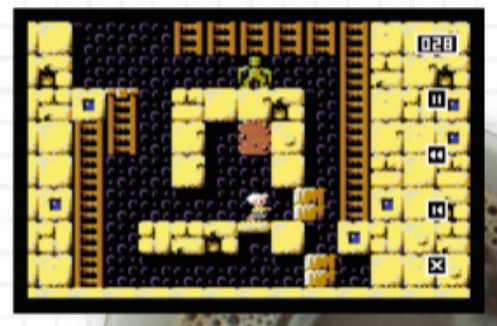
Score 93



» C64 Some of the monsters fall but others don't, which is something that needs to be allowed for.

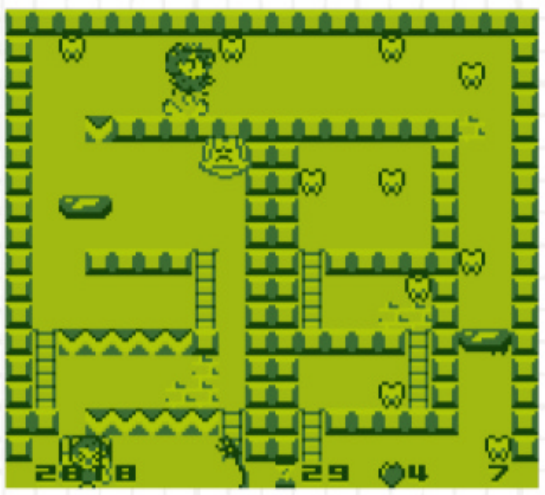


» C64 Making mistakes isn't the end of the world… just a learning experience.



A FAIRY WITHOUT WINGS

» PLATFORM: GAME BOY » DEVELOPER: NETETE
» PRICE: NAME YOUR OWN
» DOWNLOAD: ITCH.IO/FAIRYGB



» Game Boy One enemy type slowly drifts around after the player, so nowhere is safe.

All of the fairy folk have been caged up and carted off until only one remains to rescue them, which is a bit of an ask. She might have an innate predilection for gathering molars and the like, but she was born without wings and can't flit freely around while going about her job.

Having to walk means that gathering all of the teeth on each stage while avoiding baddies is going to take longer and prove more difficult than it would for her sisters, but doing so grants the brave sprite the ability to fire lightning bolts which can be used to free the captives.

The controls can sometimes prove a little finicky and the game is quite stingy with dishing out time, but this is a neat platformer. A little forward-planning will help with completing the stages, but quick reactions and solid D-pad skills are far more important to save the fairies.

Score 85

» Game Boy Either these creatures are really small or whatever lost those teeth is huge.



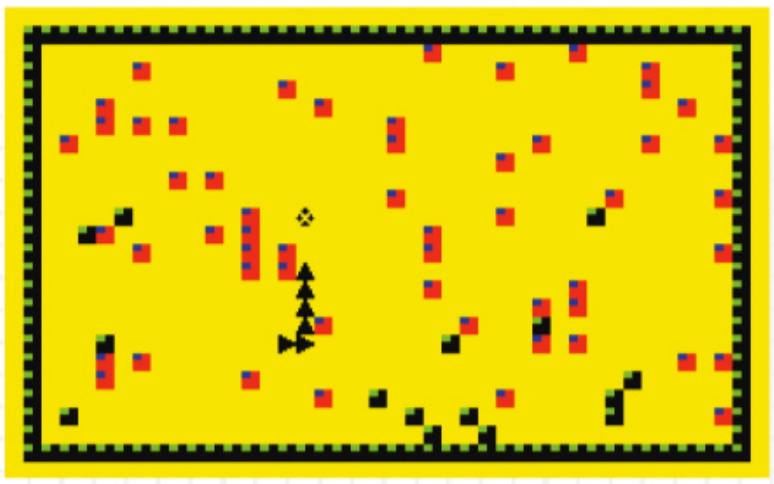
AQUARIWORM

» PLATFORM: AQUARIUS » DEVELOPER: ROY TEMPLEMAN
» DOWNLOAD: ITCH.IO/START.ME.UP/AQUARIWORM
» PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD, TAPE TBA

Life as a snake might seem fun from the outside but there's constant danger, especially if you should find yourself trapped in a mazelike environment with only the occasional morsel of food available to sustain you. It doesn't help that once you're in motion and slithering through gaps in the walls it's impossible to stop, so fast reactions are a must to avoid fatal head-on collisions with immovable objects and parts of your own body which expands every time you eat.

Aquariworm isn't the best implementation of the classic *Snake* formula that we've seen on an 8-bit system – there's nothing preventing an immediately fatal reversal of direction, for example – but is a reasonable if sometimes frustrating experience to play. It's hard not to appreciate it as an exciting sign of life for the Mattel Aquarius however, and we're interested to see where both the platform and developer head next.

Score 70



» Aquarius Lining the worm up for what is hopefully a tasty snack.

ANGRY BETTY

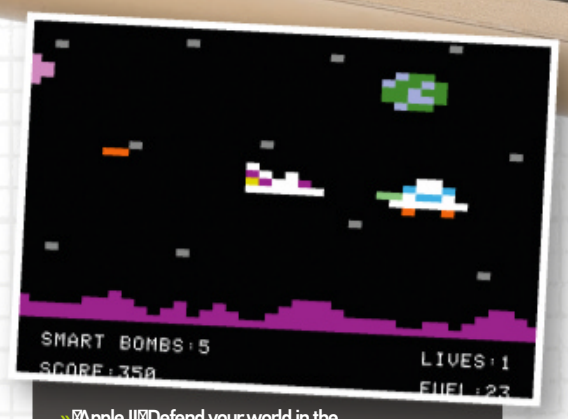
» PLATFORM: ATARI 8-BIT » DEVELOPER: MICHAEL TASTULA
» DOWNLOAD: ITCH.IO/START.ME.UP/BETTYA8 » PRICE: FREE

When Betty decides that she wants a new house, it's up to her poor, beleaguered husband to scrape together the required cash. Fortunately, our hero knows how to wield a pickaxe so he can go digging for treasure while taking care to avoid the patrolling underground creatures, becoming trapped after excavating too much soil or running out of air.

Along with their trusty pickaxe, the player has a limited stock of ladder segments and explosives which can be used to recover from difficult situations and, along with saving for the new house, money earned from gathering subterranean riches can be spent at the shop for more supplies or upgrades to the default mining tool.

The idea is interesting but the execution is somewhat clunky, with sluggish controls and sometimes ropey collision detection. This could have been far more entertaining, but as it stands it won't keep the average player coming back for more.

Score 61



» Apple II Defend your world in the horizontally scrolling *Planet Invasion 2020*.

ROUNDUP

There have been a couple of new games for the Apple II recently. *Planet Invasion 2020* is a simple, *Defender*-style shoot-'em-up where the player's craft is flown over the scrolling landscape to blast UFOs. There's a limited supply of fuel to worry about, but this can be replenished by blasting the rockets. You can find the game at itikstart.me.uk/planet-invasion-a2 and, while it's simple now, it might be expanded on in the future.

Bagatelle is based on the game of the same name where balls fall down a table and score points by dropping into holes guarded by pegs. We gave it a quick try and, although it's a little hard to tell what's going on sometimes, we found it entertaining so Apple fans may want to give it a try. Head to itikstart.me.uk/bagatelle-a2.



» Atari 8-bit The ladder can be helpful after literally digging yourself into a hole.



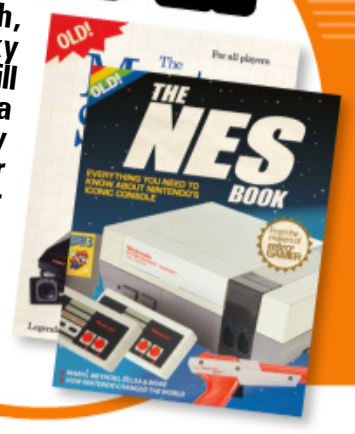
» Atari 8-bit There's a limit to how far Betty's husband can go to escape her wrath.

MAILBAG

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WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES Master System or SNES Mega Drive books



STAR LETTER

MAKE THE SWITCH

Dear Retro Gamer,

Have you considered putting Nintendo's Switch on the cover of Retro Gamer? Before you laugh me out of the room, have a think about the sheer amount of retro-based content which is available on Nintendo's machine and it all begins to make a lot of sense. Virtually all the Neo Geo AES library is available on the system, and there is a large number of other arcade games to buy, too, from Data East classics to those from Nintendo. And then, of course, there are the large number of compilations you can buy for the console, both digitally and physically. There are countless *Mega Man* collections, the SNK compilation, the recent Psikyo collections and many more, plus I've not even started on titles like *Okami*, *Resident Evil*, *Wonder Boy* and the *Sega Ages* range. Basically, Nintendo's hybrid handheld is an essential console for any retro gamer and the uicker you put it on the cover the happier I'll be.

Regards,

ason Turner

Thanks for writing in, ason. While we're unlikely to put the Switch on the cover, we do agree with you that it's a fantastic device for playing retro games on. Granted, many of the games you've mentioned are also on other contemporary systems, but the Nintendo exclusives and the system's versatility make it our preferred choice, too.



» Switch Nintendo's hybrid console has a staggering number of classic titles, compilations and remasters, including the excellent *Sega Ages Out Run*.



» Darran's spending far too much money on boxed N64 games at the moment, so he feels Lee's pain.

MINT IN BO

Hi Retro Gamer,

My son recently discovered my old PlayStation and PlayStation 2 consoles, along with a load of games for each. He has now decided that he wants to display them in his bedroom as part of his gamer setup. Unfortunately, I no longer have the original boxes for the consoles, and some of the game cases are broken and cracked due to the moving we have done over the years.



» SNES If we can get hold of the relevant developers we'll certainly consider a big article on *Fighter's History*. It's unlikely to make the cover, mind.

I was hoping if you knew of any seller that sells original or duplicates of the console boxes and packaging. I am also looking for original or duplicates of PlayStation cases to return the consoles and games back to their retro glory.

I thank you for your time and any information that you can provide.

Kind regards,

Lee Cunningham

It's great to hear that your son is enjoying your older games, Lee. In terms of replacement cases, your best bet is to try the likes of Etsy and eBay, although many of these are reproductions, which ultimately dilute the collecting market. Alternatively, look for cheap sports games at places like CE and replace your cases that way.

GET READY TO RUMBLE

Hi Retro Gamer,

You run a terrific maga ine and I've bought it from the start. One huge game series that has slipped your net for coverage has been *Fighter's History*. This is surely worthy of a full eight-to-ten-page story and not some lame four-pager You have a character called Karnov with his own timeline, you have three fighting games and the original *Fighter's History Dynamite* made world news with its court battle between Data East and Capcom.

Please could you devote a nice eight-pager to this series. Imagine the beautiful *Karnov's Revenge* art on that edition of Retro Gamer's cover.

Keep up the great work,

Mohammed Khan

Thanks for writing in, Mohammed. If we can get some suitable interviews we'd be more than happy to cover the games you've re uested. Our very own Nick Thorpe is familiar with the series and he's well aware of the court case you mention. We will see what we can do.

IT'S BUSTIN' TIME

Dear Retro Gamer,

First, thank you for the awesome job you do on this publication. As a long-time reader of your maga ine 1 -plus continuous issues I've come to find



» iOS If it wasn't for ames' email we'd have no idea that *Ghostbusters Pu le Fighter* existed. Thanks?



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certain features to be my favourite Nick's Back To The Noughties, followed by when a Conversion Capers is included in an article.

I'm writing to you with a certain request. I would love to see an article on either the history or making of the *Ghostbusters* games. The David Crane game has always been awesome and has been ported to almost as many platforms as *Doom*. I can name a number of *Ghostbusters* games but would like to see if I missed any, and the differences between all the ports. Along with a history of all the *Star Trek* games, you would then have covered nearly every game I've ever cared about! Thanks,

James

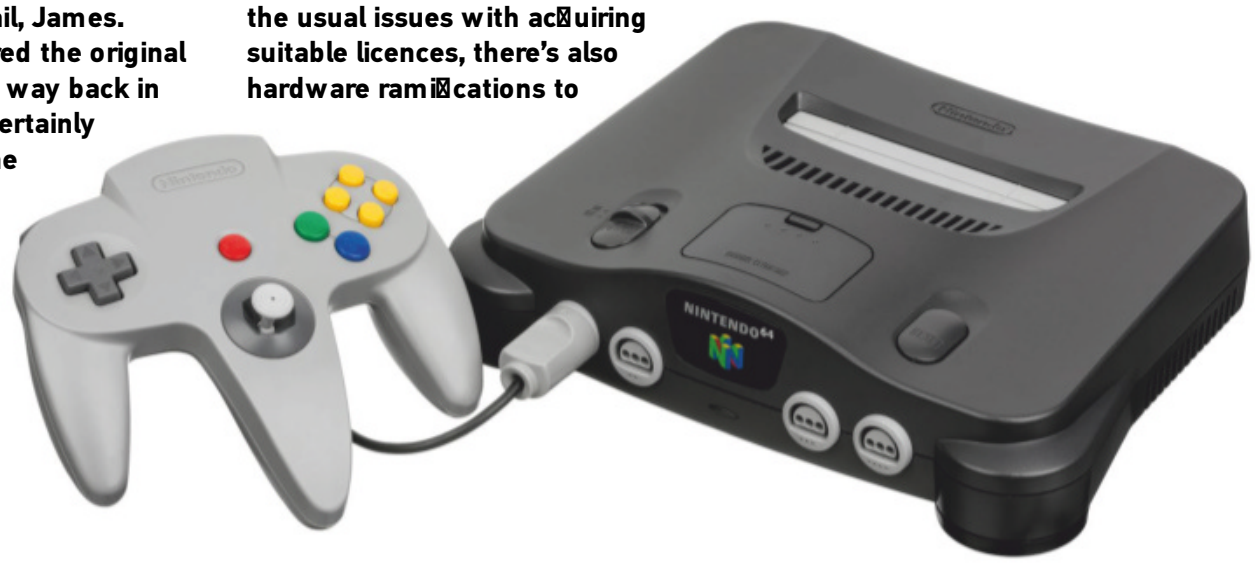
Thanks for your email, James. We've actually covered the original *Ghostbusters* all the way back in issue 25. We could certainly look into covering the franchise's history in videogame form, particularly with a brand-new film on the way.

MORE MINIS

Dear Retro Gamer, When is Nintendo going to come to its senses and release a mini console based on the Nintendo 64? There are some fantastic games on Nintendo's console, and I'd love to be able to play classics like *Super Mario 64*, *GoldenEye*, *Castlevania* and *Donkey Kong 64* on a big television. It feels like the SNES Mini came out ages ago and I've played the 20 games on it to death. But if I could play a new mini with 64 N64 games on it? Wow! What a game-changer that would be. Regards,

Paul Taylor

We're sure Nintendo is considering making the system, but it probably won't be as straightforward as you're hoping, Paul. In addition to the usual issues with acquiring suitable licences, there's also hardware ramifications to consider. The PlayStation Classic stumbled in this aspect, so we'd imagine Nintendo won't move ahead with anything until it's confident it can nail the emulation at a sensible price.



DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Working from home

Like many of you, team RG is now working from home in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Darran has set up shop on his dining room table, placed perfectly so that his Nintendo Switch collection is on clear display during the team's video chats. Andy is thrilled that he can keep an eye on his beloved *Kenshi* while he designs pages. Nick has returned to his hometown to help care for his family and expand his Master System empire. Meanwhile, Drew is growing what he calls an 'isolation beard', and frankly it looks like teenaged bum fluff.



Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite moment from the Half-Life series?



»PC Lots of readers mentioned Ravenholm and with good reason, it's terrifying!

Graham Plowman
So many moments… one that stands out is the 'tripod' battle in *Half-Life 2* when you're with the resistance in the main square of City 17. There's something so satisfying about bringing one of those machines down.

David White
The tram ride. As soon as that began, I knew *Half-Life* was unique and special. To me it was new, it was like an interactive movie. It is still my favourite game of all time.

@Bunkerneath
Looking out for the G-Man, then noticing him through the window, which I can't break through. Just let me get to him!

Jared Robb
Blue Shift. The whole elevator scene. "Get this thing started so we can get on with this miserable day!" And Calhoun's POV of the whole resonant cascade.

@ErwinLavens
The demo of the original *Half-Life* before release of the game itself. I was blown away! I played it a zillion times before the actual game came out (and that blew me away again).

@magedghoraba
Half-Life: the tram ride to Black Mesa is probably the best game intro in the history of videogaming, as it smoothly sets you up for the ride of your life! *Half-Life 2*: "We don't go to Ravenholm…" and for a good reason! That chapter alone is the most frightening zombie game ever made!

@sassquad
I think the journey up the Citadel towards the end of *Half-Life 2* was an epic moment. The sense of scale… looking around at it all was amazing.

Robert Beadle
Picking up that crowbar for the first time and venturing into the unknown of the Black Mesa facility. It was absolutely groundbreaking at the time.

Simon Che Rodriguez
The opening of the original *Half-Life* is still incredible. Developers used pure creativity rather than just throwing technology at the screen.

@AnotherHowie
The very beginning of *Half-Life 2* in City 17. All those old apartment buildings and the canal. Excellent worldbuilding.

retro GAMER

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ENDGAME



MR DRILLER

It's hard being the child of a gaming legend. Poor Susumu Hori is forever butting heads with his dear old dad Taizo Hori of Dig Dug fame. During his rebellious teenage years he decided he didn't want to blow up monsters like his dad and has taken a more pacifistic route to heroism with his trusty drill. Taizo warned him that it'd never work – let's see if he was right...

01



Having taken care of enough coloured blocks to build an artificial Belgium in the sea, Susumu finally meets with the chap behind all the problems – the leader of the Underground Kingdom, who is quite happy to receive a visitor.

02



Susumu is not so pleased. In fact, he's positively mad that the Underground Kingdom has behaved so thoughtlessly – by filling the world above with coloured blocks. It's fair to say the UK can be a pretty bad neighbour sometimes.

03



But the King isn't having any of it, and explains that the blocks aren't just weird random constructions – they're food, and the Underground Kingdom is taking precautions by stockpiling them. Who could begrudge them that right?

04



Well, Susumu could. Stockpiling is fine, but only if you do it responsibly. Going into overdrive and impacting on other people isn't okay, especially if you flood the world with blocks. Just get a little extra each week during the good times, and you'll be ready for when the crisis hits.

05



Suitably chastened, the King promises to stop overproduction immediately, restoring societal harmony. That's why he's the King – ultimately he can behave responsibly and direct the Kingdom to do the same. Now he just needs to issue a decree concerning the purchase of toilet paper...



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