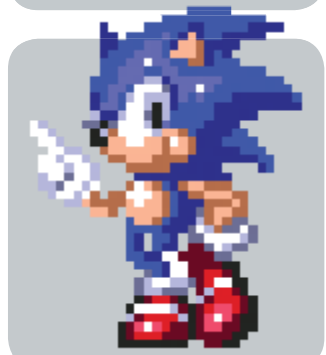




25 GREATEST SEGA GAMES



THE 25 GREATEST SEGA GAMES

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96
PHANTASY
STAR
ONLINE



80
SHENMUE

Nozomi, do you know of any shops where sailors might go?



102
CRAZY
TAXI

TOTAL EARNED \$ 296.87
FARE \$ 594.60

\$0.50x3

Crazy Jump!
COMBO 3

\$1.50x3

63

games™ 3



BEST BOSS

SPACE HARRIER ARCADE [Sega] 1985

■ WITH ITS chequerboard backdrops and eye-popping speed and colour, *Space Harrier* made a great first impression on anyone that played it. Beyond its impossibly pretty visuals, you'd discover a game that was just as fun as it was stunning, offering addictive gameplay that saw your titular Space Harrier firing hot plasma death into anything that was stupid enough to stray into its gunsights. The most impressive of these enemies were the massive, often screen-filling bosses that awaited you at the end of each stage. As tough to take down as they were exotic to look at, many of them looked distinctly odd and ranged from skeletal dragons to fire-spewing rock heads. By far the most memorable however was the beautiful beastie you battled on *Space Harrier's* third stage. Going by the name of Godarni, it's a huge two-headed Chinese dragon that vomits out deadly fireballs from both heads. Moving majestically through the air, it's tough to take down due to the accuracy of its projectiles.





STAGE

3



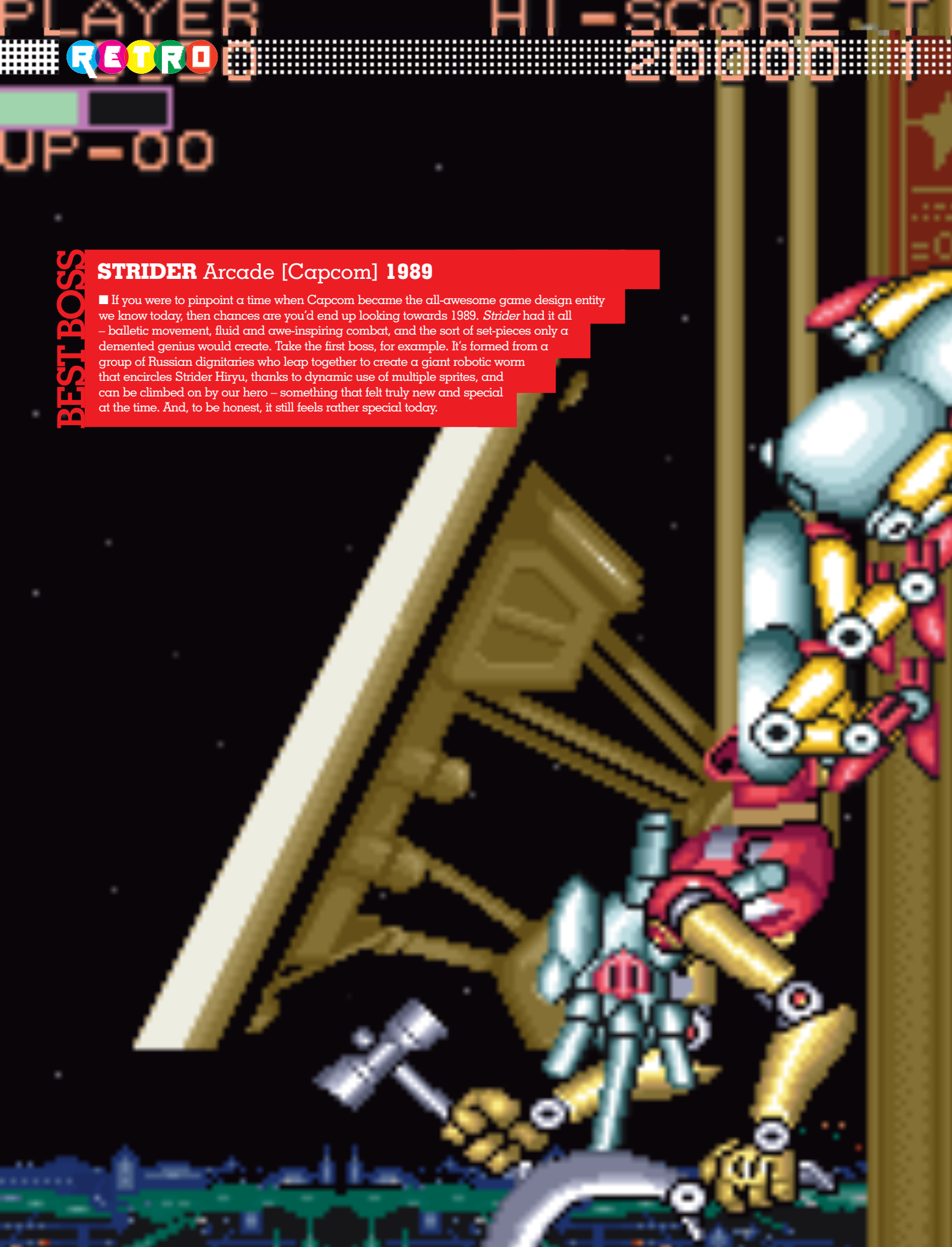
THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI MEGA DRIVE [Sega] 1989

■ Who would win in a fight between a ninja and Godzilla? It's a question that had plagued the minds of mankind for years before Sega's rock-hard sequel gave us a succinct answer. It's Godzilla. While the shrunken Tokyo-wrecker might look more like Godzuki than his famous uncle, it doesn't change the fact that the massive-but-not-quite-massive-enough beast can drop you in just two hits from his unpredictable flame breath, or a single swipe of his tail. Licensing issues unsurprisingly arose, leading to this evident knock-off being replaced by a skeletal dinosaur in later versions of the game, while the equally cheeky Batman cameo also got the chop, and the fake Spider-Man was elevated to a licensed appearance.



STRIDER Arcade [Capcom] 1989

■ If you were to pinpoint a time when Capcom became the all-awesome game design entity we know today, then chances are you'd end up looking towards 1989. *Strider* had it all – balletic movement, fluid and awe-inspiring combat, and the sort of set-pieces only a demented genius would create. Take the first boss, for example. It's formed from a group of Russian dignitaries who leap together to create a giant robotic worm that encircles Strider Hiryu, thanks to dynamic use of multiple sprites, and can be climbed on by our hero – something that felt truly new and special at the time. And, to be honest, it still feels rather special today.

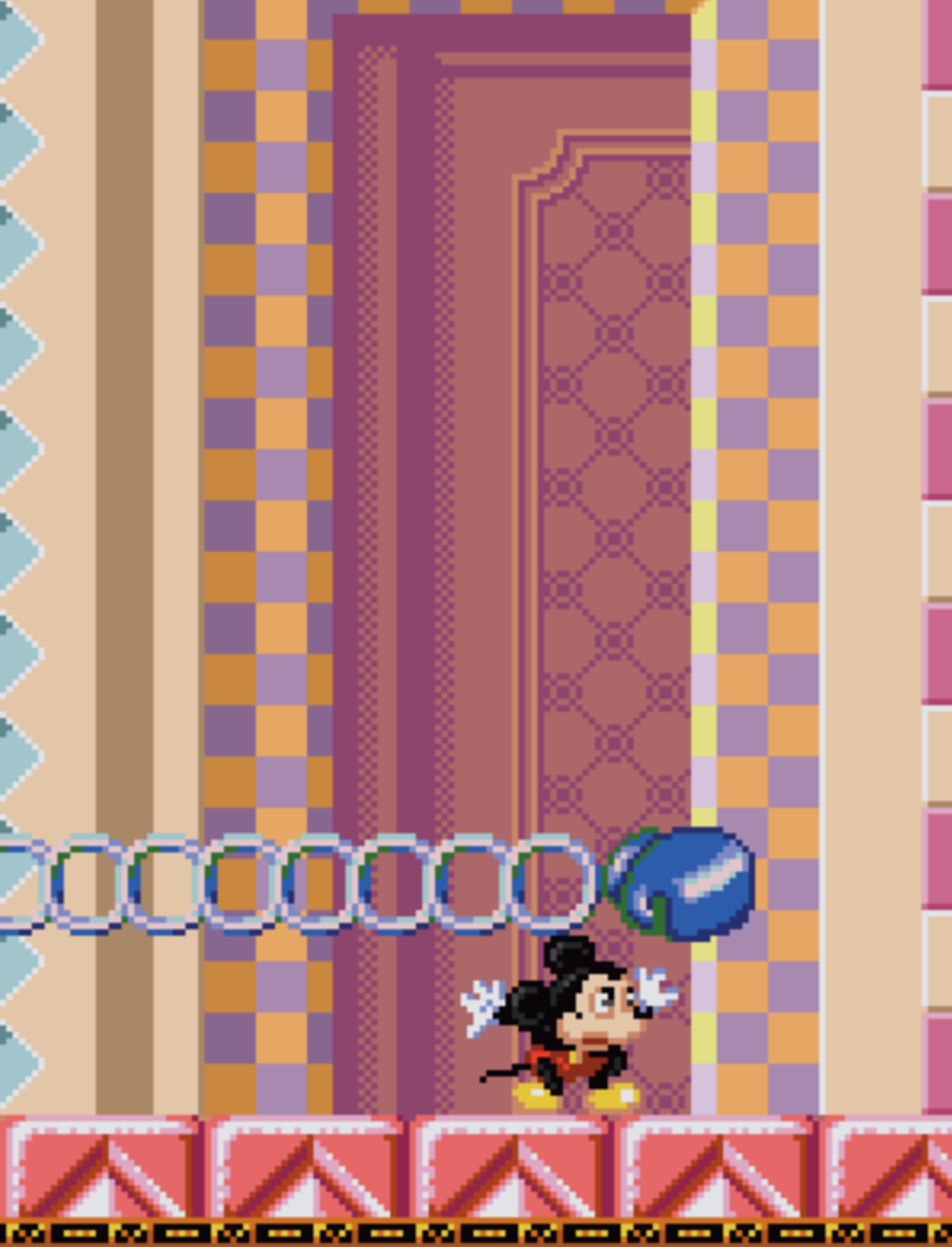


TIME
03

2-PLAYER
03

BEST BOSS STRIDER





BEHIND THE SCENES

TOEJAM & EARL

Of all the games inspired by Rogue, ToeJam & Earl was decidedly the odd one out. Join games™ for a look back at this cult hit

lots of fun because you can get a lot of enjoyment out of it while you're making it. Static level, single player games get old really fast."

These influences, in the hands of other designers, could have produced a game which only differentiated itself from peers on a mechanical level. However, the team's love of humour would ensure that the game had a distinct character. "I don't think I've ever done anything very serious," Johnson offers. "*Starflight* and *Star Control* were both very light-hearted and silly games. I suppose it's true that *ToeJam & Earl* gets even a little more crazy though."

ToeJam and Earl stood out as characters, even as anthropomorphic animals were fast becoming the norm in character design terms. "I got the idea of aliens running away from crazy Earthlings," says Johnson of the origins of the characters. "I'm half African American and I love old school funk, so that also influenced the game's flavour," he continues. Alongside funk, the hip-hop culture that had emerged during the Eighties would prove to be a key influence.

The aliens were quintessentially Nineties in their designs. ToeJam's backwards baseball cap is the most obvious sign, but the trends of the time spill over into every aspect of characterisation, right down to the slang they use when they run across each other in-game. The intergalactic rappers gained their unusual names more by accident than design – programmer Mark Voorsanger has impaired hearing, leading him to mishear Johnson's intended names, *FlowJam & Whirl*, and add the names we know to the game. Sega loved them, and they stuck.

The plot saw ToeJam and Earl stranded on Earth following a crash-landing, with players tasked with finding the scattered pieces of their spaceship. They'd have to do so while escaping a bizarre set of Earthlings, including massive hamsters in balls,

When talking about individual influential games, *Rogue* must come high up on the list. While first-person shooters have shed the "Doom clone" description, the term "roguelike" is still used to describe a subset of role-playing games, and it's a subgenre with a rich history. If asked to name them, classical examples such as *Moria* and *NetHack* would come to mind quickly and followers of modern indie games could easily offer *FTL: Faster Than Light* and *Don't Starve*.

ToeJam & Earl, though definitely inspired by *Rogue*, would come rather further down the list of names most people would come up with. It's not hard to see why – to the casual observer, the unusual characters and setting are typical of Nineties mascot platform games and that route was explored by the game's sequel. Even for more seasoned observers, the game exhibits some very obvious departures from its inspiration. However, *ToeJam & Earl* was all about exploration, with randomly generated stages filled with enemies and packed with treasure.

It's a game born of the passions of the game's designer, Greg Johnson, who was a big fan of them. "Often we build the games that we want to play ourselves," says Johnson. "I have always loved games with random maps and randomly placed objects and characters. I remember I wanted that *Rogue* experience that I loved, but I wanted something faster paced and with more action. I love surprise, so that's what *TJ&E* became."

While *Rogue* is the only game that Johnson cites as an influence, he had ideas of his own to add to the formula, as he explains. "I also really wanted to make a game that would deliver a great two-player experience, as I like playing games with others." Johnson's decisions were not only focused on the end product, but the experience that would be had in making it. "Making a random two-player game is

"I WANTED THAT ROGUE EXPERIENCE THAT I LOVED, BUT I WANTED SOMETHING FASTER PACED"

GREG JOHNSON

boogeymen and devils, and it's here that much of the game's humour is to be found. It's a classic gaming trope turned on its head – far from being a hostile invading force, ToeJam and Earl are laid-back aliens who desperately want to leave Earth and return to their home planet of Funkotron.

It's here that *ToeJam & Earl* is most different from its inspiration – not only is combat real-time, but generally discouraged. "*ToeJam & Earl* really was more about finding ways to evade enemies than to fight them – rose bushes, decoys, hi-tops, wings, teleporting doors," Johnson confirms. While the



Released: 1991
Format: Mega Drive, XBLA, PSN, Virtual Console
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Johnson
Voorsanger Productions

KEY STAFF

Designer – Greg Johnson
Programmer – Mark Voorsanger
Music composer – John Baker



The small sprites don't convey their characters as well as later games.

EARL AND MYSELF ARE
HIGHLY FUNKY ALIENS





WHAT THEY SAID...



A most triumphant excursion of cerebral excellence. Dig?

Sega Pro,
November 1991



characters did occasionally gain access to tomatoes that could be hurled at the hostile citizens of Earth, the evasive items that Johnson mentions greatly outnumber offensive options.

Just as *ToeJam & Earl* is not the first game that comes to mind when thinking of roguelikes, the Mega Drive – known in the USA as the Genesis – is not an obvious choice of platform. It's rather better known for its platform games and arcade conversions than slower-paced games of exploration. And though it seems a little odd with hindsight, at the time choosing Sega could have been perceived as a very bold move. Though the Mega Drive was faring better than its predecessor, these were the pre-*Sonic* days, when Nintendo was still unchallenged as the dominant force in the worldwide console market. Sega was still something of a minnow and hadn't yet developed a solid international presence – the company's US office still only employed roughly 20 people

For Johnson though, it was a question of corporate ethos rather than sales potential. "It seemed obvious at the time," he explains. "Sega was making interesting

and unusual games back then. I think the Genesis was the right platform for *ToeJam & Earl*." Maintaining friendly relationships with third-party developers was one of the ways in which Sega sought to differentiate itself from its rival, and Johnson remembers good working relationships with the company. "The folks at Sega were great to work with. We had the best

"SOMETIMES I WISH I WASN'T SO DARNED QUIRKY AND JUST BUILT GAMES FOR THE MAINSTREAM"

GREG JOHNSON

producers ever – Scott Berfield and later Bert Schroeder. They were both awesome."

ToeJam & Earl saw players taking control of one of the game's aliens to explore a series of stages, which took place across a collection of floating islands. While there was a fixed stage mode for players who enjoy memorisation and repetition, the game's primary mode randomly generated stages from pre-defined segments. It was an idea that Johnson and Voorsanger had presented to Sega with a selection of cards with level segments drawn on them, alongside mock screenshots. The islands weren't just connected horizontally by both hidden and visible pathways, but vertically – levels were stacked atop one another and accessed by an elevator. Falling from above can allow you to explore areas otherwise inaccessible, which was key as progression in the game's level system relied on exploration.



■ While exploration is key, spaceship parts are not kept hidden – indeed, they're literally signposted.

Not that it was anything so dull as a “level system” – ToeJam and Earl were never level 2, they started out as Weiners who eventually became Dudes and – if you were good – Funklords. A handy map provided players with the tools to chart their progress, and even if you’d found an elevator to exit the stage, it was often worth revealing more of the map in order to bring the next level a little closer.

Earthlings were the antagonists of the game. Their ranks comprised of both exaggerated caricatures of human society and bizarre, off the wall enemies. Lawnmower-wielding men and bees were among the most ordinary of the enemies, with others including a drill-crazy dentist and herds of nerds. More bizarre were the mailbox monster, the army of chickens and the phantom ice-cream van.

As well as searching for parts of their broken spaceship and avoiding Earthlings, ToeJam and Earl needed to seek presents, which would aid them in their search. Hi-top trainers could enhance speed, boomboxes distracted enemies and delicious junk food refilled health. Despite this not all items were beneficial, and you’d need to use them in order to identify them, or else find and pay the man in the carrot suit to do so on your behalf. Presents were also randomised at the start of each game, but could be spotted from their wrapping once identified.

While the Mega Drive was a powerful format for its time, the game wasn’t without technical challenges. The game’s design called for dynamic split-screen play, in which the screen would split and recombine when ToeJam and Earl drifted apart and reunited. To say that it was ambitious would be an understatement, as Sega had actually declared the effect to be impossible on the hardware. Reflecting on how the game may have played out without it, Johnson notes the decisions made in its sequel, which didn’t feature



■ Presents that haven’t been used yet are represented with question marks, keeping the contents hidden.

it. “The two characters would push on the sides of the screen if they wanted to go opposite ways. Also if one of the characters fell off the screen they could teleport back on again.” Johnson’s preferred approach is clear, as he declares, “the split screen is way more fun.”

“The split-screen feature was quite a challenge,” recalls Johnson, “but quite honestly I never worried about the technical challenges too much because I had so much faith in my partner, Mark Voorsanger.” Johnson’s faith was well-placed, as Voorsanger managed to work out a way of implementing it. It was a challenge well worth overcoming, as the co-op mode proved to be the heart of the game. With two players, the personality that Johnson and Voorsanger had strived for came to the fore. ToeJam and Earl spoke to each other through on-screen text and could interact to the benefit of the players. Moving the duo close to one another allowed them to high-five, exchanging a little health to help the trailing player, and players could even donate a life to their dead partner to allow for continued



■ Differing types of terrain affected movement speed – roads speed the character up, while sand slows them down.

Sequel shock

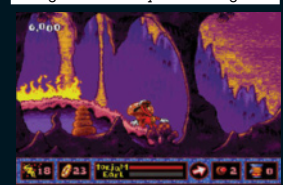
■ *ToeJam & Earl’s* sequel, *Panic On Funkotron*, was a drastic departure from the original game. Recast as typical platform game mascots, the duo returned to Funkotron following the events of the original game, only to find that they had brought a horde of Earthlings back with them. Having caused the problems, the aliens were required to capture the Earthlings and ship them back home.

In design terms, this meant searching for enemies in platform stages, pelting them with jars and taking them to the spaceship at the end of the stage. Seeking the exploration key to the original game, many of the Earthlings were hidden. The sequel was a good platform game and reviewed well, but has received retrospective criticism for abandoning the formula of the original game.

While he’s proud of the sequel on its own merits, Greg Johnson has expressed his regret over the drastic change in style, feeling that it was too different to the first to connect with fans. “Stick to your guns if you believe in what you’re making, even if your publisher doesn’t.”



■ A beat-matching mini-game made repeat appearances, foreshadowing the emergence of the rhythm action genre.



■ The improved graphics and large sprites helped players to connect with the game’s characters and setting.

REVISITING THE FORMULA

■ Though the second *ToeJam & Earl* game was a straightforward mascot platform game, Johnson and Voorsanger were able to revisit the original game's design over a decade later in *ToeJam & Earl III: Mission To Earth*. Originally planned for the Dreamcast, Sega's collapse as a hardware manufacturer caused the game to move to Microsoft's Xbox. The original design seen in the leaked Dreamcast prototype was very close to being a 3D remake of *ToeJam & Earl*, with returning enemies and presents. Some new elements had been

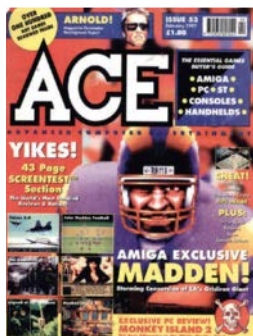
added, including a new female character called Latisha. "We added more ways you could fight back – you could shoot notes to funkify Earthlings, for example," adds Johnson. "I'd be interested to know what players really thought of the difference."

These elements of the game carried over to the final Xbox version of the game, but arrived alongside less welcome elements. "We were told by Visual Concepts (Sega's representatives) to model our game after *Donkey Kong 64*," Johnson explains. As a result, the game's progression

structure was drastically changed from the original model, with linear progression removed in favour of hub worlds and key collection. Mini-games were also added, further removing the game from the original design. The result was a product which received only a lukewarm critical reception. With long-term fans put off by the new additions and newcomers generally baffled by the game, *ToeJam & Earl III: Mission To Earth* launched to underwhelming retail performance and became the final game in the series.



WHAT THEY SAID...



If Sega think this is what "Ver Kids" want, then they're sorely mistaken

ACE, February 1992



play. Better yet, the split-screen play enabled players total independence of movement, even allowing them to exist on different stages should one of them fall down.

Once the split-screen system had been worked out, work progressed relatively smoothly. "Pretty early in our development we got the game to a playable state," Johnson explains. "The two of us put many, many hours into playing it before it was released and that gave us lots of opportunity to tweak it and tune it." The tuning produced a refined game that contained a lot to like, but one which was by no means flawless.

"The game can be pretty darned frustrating at times," Johnson confesses. He's not overstating it. Some of the negative presents were among the most infuriating misfortunes to be inflicted upon players of any game. Summoning an Earthling was relatively mild, as compared to picking up the Total Bummer, which instantly killed your character and, if they were present on screen, your partner's character too. But perhaps the most frustrating of all was the Randomizer, an item which not only cleared all of your existing present identifications, but re-randomised the sprite associations. Johnson doesn't get tremendously hung up on the problems of the past, though. "Looking back there are still many things I would change, but heck, hindsight is always so terribly easy."

One thing that certainly wouldn't change is the game's music. As is to be expected from a game that takes so many cues from music culture, audio is a key part of the game's appeal. John Baker composed the game's theme tune, which became so iconic that it ended up being one of the few elements of the original game that was retained in its 1993 sequel. The soundtrack was of such importance that the Jam Out sound test mode was present on the main menu, as opposed to being buried in the options menu.

As development entered its late stages, the friendly relationship with Sega nearly resulted in much bigger things for ToeJam and Earl as characters. "Sega was actively searching for a mascot, or mascots. They



Mailbox monsters serve as hidden threats, as the game also includes regular, helpful mailboxes.

needed something for their company branding," recalls Johnson. Sega had a variety of recognisable arcade hits under its belt, but its mascot Alex Kidd could never rake in cash like *Mario* did for Nintendo. For a brief time, it looked like the interstellar duo might take his place thanks to support from Sega's offices in the USA, but this never came to pass.

"We got pretty excited at the prospect, and the folks at Sega who supported the idea were genuine," Johnson explains. "Unfortunately, like most game companies that have their home base in Japan, it's really Japan that calls the shots, and *Sonic* came from a Japanese company and felt more Japanese. It may be that we never really had a shot, but we thought we did." It evidently stung a little – if you explore a little during that game's closing stroll around Funkotron, you'll meet an alien who remarks on the lack of hedgehogs in the area.

When *ToeJam & Earl* was released in 1991, it received a generally positive response. The game's sense of humour was appreciated and critics recognised the fact that the game offered a different experience to the majority of Mega Drive games. Aspects singled out for particular praise were the

> A GAMING EVOLUTION Rogue > ToeJam & Earl > Banjo-Kazooie



Rogue's random generation of levels and exploratory gameplay surely had an influence on the creation of *ToeJam & Earl*.



Exploration and item collection heavily featured in many of Rare's N64 games, the tale of a bird and a bear included.



game's music and its dynamic split-screen co-op. "I'm surprised more people haven't done that since then," Johnson reflects. "I'm actually thinking of making another game with a dynamic split screen right now. It makes for a really great two-player, on-the-couch experience."

But while critical reception of *ToeJam & Earl* scored well on average, the game proved divisive, drawing particularly strong criticism from some reviewers. One of the most unfriendly reviews came from the magazine *ACE*, whose 1/5 review claimed that "Boring really doesn't quite sum up the toe-curling tedium of the whole debacle." Even the positive reviews included caveats for players who might find the game's offbeat nature off-putting.

"I have thought a lot about that over the years," Johnson tells us. "It's particularly relevant to me now because I recently released a game for Sony called *Doki Doki Universe*, and it had mixed reviews that were very similar to the reviews I got on *ToeJam & Earl*, long ago. I certainly could have taken a more straight and typical path to building a roguelike game. Another group did that shortly after *TJ&E* came out. Their game was called *Diablo* and they made piles and piles more money than we did." Indeed, *ToeJam & Earl* was not an immediate success and struggled to find an audience. Initial sales were very low, meaning that the game relied on word of mouth to build to its eventual cult success. With that outcome in mind, **Games™** was curious to know if Johnson would have chosen Blizzard's route if he was given the choice.

"Would I have changed places with them? Sometimes I wish that I wasn't so darned quirky and just built games for the mainstream," he concedes. "But then every time I start a new game, that feels too dry and too boring." It's a somewhat sad statement to hear, but Johnson's next statement is rather more reassuring. "Thankfully there are enough quirky people out there who appreciate something off the

wall and different. I don't think I would change *ToeJam & Earl*."

Nevertheless, *ToeJam & Earl*'s struggles at retail caused a lack of enthusiasm for a straight sequel from Sega, which was concerned that it could not adequately sell the game. Work on this more traditional sequel was abandoned and *ToeJam & Earl: Panic On Funkotron* became a conventional mascot platform game, with only traces of the exploration-based action that defined its predecessor. Johnson and Voorsanger would not return to the original *ToeJam & Earl* formula until 2002's *ToeJam & Earl III: Mission To Earth*.

Johnson is still an active developer with HumaNature Studios and he continues to apply the lessons learned through his experience with *ToeJam & Earl*. "A really fun game can be built with just two people – you don't need a huge team," he advises. "Don't change the style of your sequels too much or you confuse your user base," he continues, in practical fashion. "Crank up the funky tunes while you work, and play test like crazy, then you'll end up with a game that's more fun to play," he concludes, providing the answer that seems most key to *ToeJam & Earl*'s appeal.



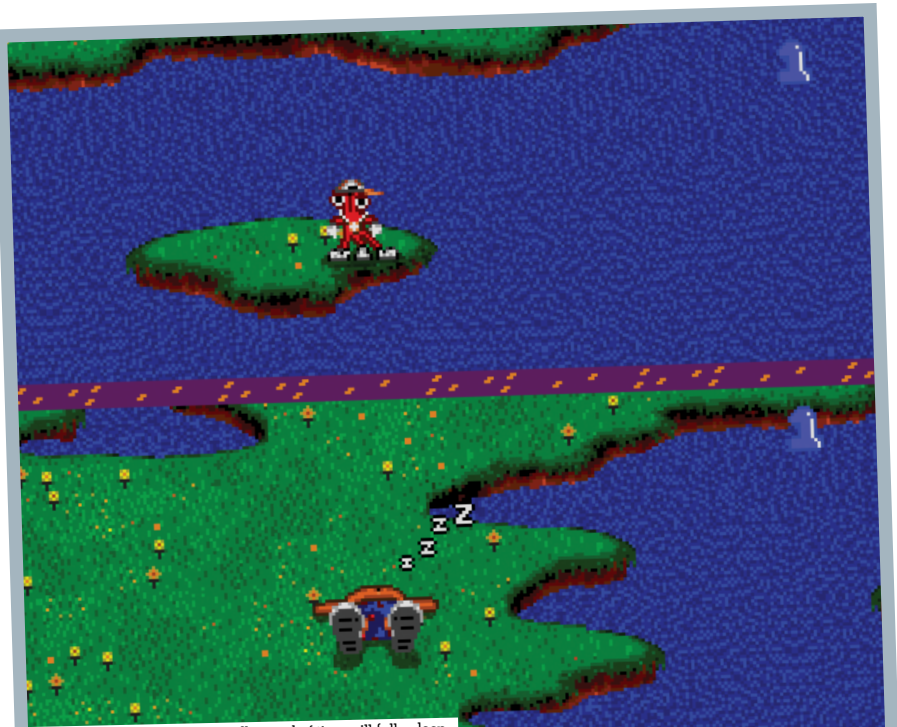
10 parts of *ToeJam and Earl*'s spaceship must be recovered for the game to be finally completed.



The game's map served not only to highlight previously visited areas, but potential places to gain points and level up.



Small snippets of dialogue appeared whenever *ToeJam and Earl* reconvened on the same screen.



Characters left alone for a small period of time will fall asleep, responding only after being woken with button-mashing.



GAME CHANGERS

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Released: 1991 Publisher: Sega Developer: Sonic Team System: Mega Drive



There aren't as many secrets in *Sonic* as there are in *Mario*, but if you're prepared to experiment you will find them.

games™ examines the industry's most important videogames, looking at their influence and what made them so great in the first place. This month we take a look at *Sonic The Hedgehog*, Sega's answer to Mario

FLATTERY BY IMITATION is rife within the videogame industry, with one company often emulating the success of another to further its own success. By far one of the biggest examples is Sega's *Sonic The Hedgehog*; a franchise created to compete directly against Nintendo's *Mario* series.

Sega's Master System, while popular in Europe, had failed to make a big impact in the US or Japan, where it trailed massively behind Nintendo's NES. Sega already had a mascot by the name of Alex Kidd, and while he had starred in several popular games, he was no Mario. Wanting to rectify this, Sega had numerous developers submit character designs to its AM8 department and eventually settled on a creation by Naoto Oshima. It was a cute blue hedgehog who was then known as Mr Needlemouse. Created from a number of inspirations that ranged from the shoes of

Michael Jackson to the blue of Sega's corporate logo, Mr Needlemouse was given a spiky 'can do' attitude that would appeal more to Western gamers. He was then handed over to Yuji Naka, who worked in the five-man AM8 development team that would go on to become known as Sonic Team.

Work began on *Sonic The Hedgehog* in April 1990, with Yuji Naka on main programming duties. The small team worked for just over a year, with Sonic finally making his debut on 23 June 1991. *Sonic The Hedgehog* became an immediate success, and before long it had replaced *Altered Beast* as the Mega Drive's pack-in game of choice. The same thing happened on Sega's 8-bit console, with the Master System version (which was completely different to the Mega Drive offering) replacing *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* on the Master System II.



MAGIC MOMENTS

SONIC IS FULL OF MAGIC MOMENTS. IF WE WERE TO PICK JUST THREE, THOUGH, THESE ARE OUR FAVOURITES...



THAT INTRO

★ **FROM THE MOMENT** Sonic rushes across the screen and 'Sega' screams from your TV, the character's iconic status was secured. It's further reinforced by Sonic popping up and wagging his finger, just to show you how Nineties he is.



CHAOS QUEST

★ **REACH THE END** of Act 1 or 2 with 50 rings or more and you'll be transported to Sonic's Special Stage, an awesome level that must be completed in order to retrieve the Chaos Emerald found at the stage's centre.



THE NEED FOR SPEED

★ **THE SPEED OF *Sonic The Hedgehog*** remains one of its best mechanics. It makes even more of an impact when you pick up the relevant power-up and can speed through loops and across collapsible platforms like a hedgehog possessed.

■■■ WHILE THE MASTER System version is an incredibly slick platformer, it's arguably the Mega Drive outing that helped give Sega a much-needed edge over Nintendo. The speed of Sonic was absolutely blistering, making Mario look decidedly sluggish and old hat in comparison. Sonic was cool and spunky and had a much-desired attitude that Nintendo's plumber simply couldn't match. Of course it also helped that *Sonic* was an exceptionally fantastic platformer, and while it lacked the depth of *Super Mario World* (which had debuted some seven months earlier) it was quite clear that there was nothing else like *Sonic* on any other system.

Even if you ignored the breakneck pace at which Sonic ran, there was no denying that it was an aesthetic delight. The abstract designs of Sonic's different worlds (known as zones) further set it apart from the generic-looking environments of many other platformers of the time. Green Hill Zone was full of sharp-edged trees and chequerboard hills, Labyrinth Zone had a distinctly Aztec styling to it, while Star Light Zone offered sparkling backdrops and huge loops to negotiate. Each and every one of Sonic's six main zones (split into acts) were full of detail and featured bright primary colours that perfectly complemented the high speed action that Sonic Team's game offered.

SONIC HAD AN ATTITUDE THAT MARIO SIMPLY COULDN'T MATCH

KEY FACTS

■ Reach the end of an Act with 50 rings or more and Sonic gets the chance to collect a precious Chaos Emerald. Collecting all emeralds unlocks a different ending.

■ The Master System version has a different story to the Mega Drive game, as it's set afterwards. It still features Dr Robotnik, but many of the zones are completely different in design.

■ Such was the success of the Mega Drive pack-in that it enabled Sega to overtake Nintendo's market share for the first time in six years. In 1991 Sega counted for 65 per cent of the console market.

And yet there was more to Sonic than simply moving as fast as possible. While some would later go on to complain that the game was simply about 'pressing right and jumping at the right moment', the level design proved to be as every bit as memorable as *Sonic's* glorious visuals. Although the levels lacked the sheer depth and variety that *Mario* games offered, they still proved a joy to navigate. Let Sonic explore his environments instead of simply racing through them and you soon discover all sorts of delightful secrets tucked away that would lead to rings and various power-ups.

The rings were also a key aspect of *Sonic's* appeal, being a way of earning extra lives or acting as a useful shield. Whenever Sonic hit an enemy he would drop rings if he was carrying them, allowing him to quickly recover any before they disappeared completely. Hit an enemy without them, however, and he's robbed of a life. It's a neat mechanic that still holds up brilliantly today and remains a key component of practically every *Sonic* game since.

Equally memorable was Sonic's nemesis, Dr Robotnik, who would attack Sonic at the end of each final zone with all kinds of crazy contraptions, only to flee in terror when he was finally bested. As Bowser was for Mario, Dr Robotnik proved to be the perfect foil for Sega's new mascot and has hassled him ever since, gaining even more outlandish machines as console technology has continued to grow in power.

With *Sonic The Hedgehog*, Sonic Team created an unforgettable platformer that built on the DNA of past games but left its own distinct blueprint for others to follow. Even now, some 22 years after its original release, numerous digital releases ensure that a new generation of gamers are still able to experience that 16-bit magic.

BEFORE SONIC

PLATFORMERS BEFORE SONIC CAME ALONG

PITFALL! 1982



■ The ground-breaking platformer from David Crane was one of

Activision's first big hitters and introduced many key mechanics that would go on to appear in later scrolling platformers.

PAC-LAND 1984



■ Interesting *Pac-Man* arcade spin-off that saw the iconic Namco

mascot sprout legs and run through deviously designed stages on his quest to enter Fairyland. It was later ported to numerous home systems.

SUPER MARIO BROS 1985



■ Landmark release from Nintendo that turned Mario into a superstar

and created the template for virtually every *Mario* game that has appeared since. It went on to sell over 40 million units.

WONDER BOY 1985



■ Popular arcade game starring a precocious prehistoric

tyke who used a hammer and skateboard to rescue his beloved girlfriend. *Wonder Boy* later went on to spawn several sequels, including Hudson Soft's *Adventure Island* franchise.

NOTABLE SEQUELS

SONIC HAS APPEARED IN COUNTLESS GAMES. HERE ARE JUST A FEW OF THEM...



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2 1992

■ This masterful sequel not only improved on the level design, but also introduced sidekick Miles 'Tails' Prower. It's widely regarded as the best 2D *Sonic* – and rightly so.

level design, but also introduced sidekick Miles 'Tails' Prower. It's widely regarded as the best 2D *Sonic* – and rightly so.



SONIC CD 1993

■ This excellent platformer was originally exclusive to the Mega CD and centred on clever time travel mechanics. It's since been released on numerous digital systems, from iOS to PC.

CD and centred on clever time travel mechanics. It's since been released on numerous digital systems, from iOS to PC.



SONIC & KNUCKLES 1994

■ An experiment that featured lock-on technology

to allow the first three *Sonic* games to be combined with it, creating effects like new levels or the ability to play as Knuckles.



SONIC THE FIGHTERS 1996

■ The concept is sound, but this is an atrocious beat-'em-up that does no favours to Sonic. He wouldn't appear in a decent fighting game until *Super Smash Bros Brawl*.

'em-up that does no favours to Sonic. He wouldn't appear in a decent fighting game until *Super Smash Bros Brawl*.



SONIC ADVENTURE 1998

■ While it's somewhat ruined by an annoying

central hub, the action stages of *Sonic Adventure* capture the insane excitement of the early 2D *Sonic* games.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2006

■ Sonic's first next-gen outing was quite simply terrible, with bland level design, floaty controls and annoying camera angles. It marked the first appearance of Silver the Hedgehog.

with bland level design, floaty controls and annoying camera angles. It marked the first appearance of Silver the Hedgehog.



THE DARK BROTHERHOOD 2008

■ BioWare turns its hand to the *Sonic* universe

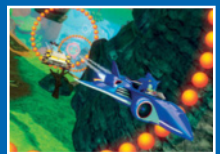
with interesting results. The dialogue is a little twee, but it's saved by solid combat and an entertaining story.



SONIC AND THE BLACK KNIGHT 2009

■ Arming Sonic with a sword sounds like another crazy gimmick, but this one actually works. The end result is a solid Wii platformer with a heavy focusing on combo chains.

Arming Sonic with a sword sounds like another crazy gimmick, but this one actually works. The end result is a solid Wii platformer with a heavy focusing on combo chains.



SONIC & ALL-STARS RACING TRANSFORMED 2012

■ An excellent racing game that

pits Sonic against other Sega characters. It improves on the original with better tracks and transforming vehicles.



SONIC DASH 2013

■ *Sonic* rips off *Temple Run* and, if we're honest, it makes for a far more entertaining game. There's a lack of levels, but it doesn't hurt your pocket with in-app purchases.

There's a lack of levels, but it doesn't hurt your pocket with in-app purchases.

WHAT YUJI NAKA DID NEXT

NON-SONIC GAMES THAT NAKA HAS BEEN INVOLVED WITH



RISTAR

1995

■ This entertaining and charming platformer never gets the love it

deserves. Naka was involved with *Ristar's* design, once revealing that the main character had started off life as a rabbit.

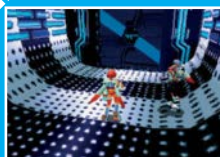


NIGHTS INTO DREAMS

1996

■ A delightful score attack game from Sonic Team that

produced a wonderful feeling of freedom and delivered imaginative boss encounters. Naka was a programmer.



BURNING RANGERS

1998

■ Superb 3D action outing from Sonic Team that sees

the player putting out dangerous fires and rescuing trapped civilians. Naka was on production duties.

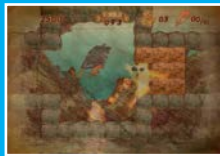


LET'S TAP

2008

■ Naka's first project after forming Prope was an interesting selection of mini-

games for the Wii that saw the player tapping on cardboard boxes. The vibrations would then be picked up by the Wii Remote.



IVY THE KIWI?

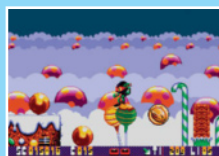
2009

■ An interesting puzzle game where the player must guide Ivy to her

mother by drawing lines that stop her from walking into danger. It's extremely similar to *Kirby: Canvas Curse*.

PLATFORM GAMES INSPIRED BY SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

A SELECTION OF THE MANY GAMES THAT HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY SONIC. SOME GOOD, SOME BAD...



ZOOL

1992

■ Gremlin's *Ninja of the Nth Dimension* was as fast as Sonic,

but the gameplay was nowhere near as impressive and it remains a poor alternative to Sega's popular hedgehog.



AERO THE ACROBAT

1993

■ Task-based platformer featuring a cute

bat. He became a mascot for publisher Sunsoft and secured a sequel in 1994. An effort that's worth investigating.



ZERO THE KAMIKAZE SQUIRREL

1994

■ Zero was Aero's rival, but

became big enough to get his own game. It's surprisingly decent as well, with Zero gliding to get around the large levels.

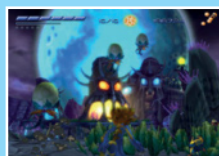


KLONOA: DOOR TO PHANTOMILE

1997

■ Excellent 2.5D platformer from

Namco starring a cute long-eared cat that was remade on Wii. It remains a relatively low-key franchise.



SCALER

2004

■ An interesting oddity from A2M (not to be confused with

Sega's *AM2*) that stars a chameleon who can transform into five distinctive mutant lizards.



AWESOME POSSUM

1993

■ Annoying platformer with an environmental

theme. It's a bad clone of *Sonic* with ropey gameplay and bland design. It did boast large amount of digitised speech, though.



ALFRED CHICKEN

1993

■ *Alfred* is surprisingly good, mainly thanks to

charming visuals and solid level design. A sequel/remake went on to appear on PlayStation in 2002.



CRASH BANDICOOT

1996

■ Excellent 3D platformer from Naughty Dog that

boasted incredible smart level design, great graphics and some truly jaw-dropping technical effects.

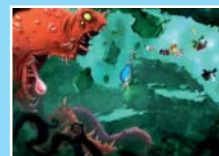


PINOBBE: WINGS OF ADVENTURE

2001

■ This was a launch title for the

GBA and starred a cute bee. While the levels are rather large, floaty controls and bland gameplay let it down.



RAYMAN ORIGINS

2011

■ Excellent reboot of Michel Ancel's popular

hero that featured clever level design and truly stunning artwork. A sequel, *Rayman Legends*, is due later this year.



BEHIND THE SCENES

SHINING FORCE

Join us as we meet Hiroyuki Takahashi, president of Camelot and mastermind behind the Nineties vintage Shining Force games, in a dungeon in deepest Shinjuku

■ The Game Gear titles lacked town exploration but provided a healthy dose of portable strategy gaming nonetheless. A DS remake is long-overdue.



I BELIEVE ENGAGING BATTLES ARE THE MOST CRUCIAL FACTOR IN AN RPG



Released: 1992-1998

Format: Mega Drive, Game Gear,

Mega CD, Saturn

Publisher: Sega

Developer: Camelot Software Planning

KEY STAFF:

Hiroyuki Takahashi

(Planning, production, scenario)

Shugo Takahashi

(Planning, production, scenario)

Yasuhiro Taguchi

(Programming)

Haruki Kodera

(Programming)

■ **IT SHOULDN'T HAVE** been this complicated. From the outside looking in, *Shining Force* throughout the Nineties represented everything that was great about Sega: a 'big' Sega property and a unique calling card for the Mega Drive and Saturn, it delivered some of the finest deep tactical role-playing of the decade. Yet while the series' course through to *Shining Force III* led mesmerised players to a vast Holy Land of blissful RPG perfection, Sega's treatment of the games and their second-party developer, Camelot, only went from bad to rotten.

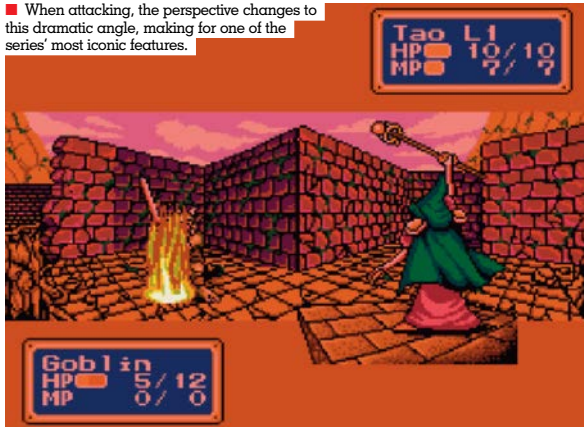
Prior to collaborating with Sega on the development of 1991's preparatory dungeon-crawler *Shining In The Darkness*, Hiroyuki Takahashi had been in employment at Enix, working on the *Dragon Quest* series of games and in particular making a significant contribution to the production of *Dragon Quest IV*. After that, he left Square Enix, went independent, formed his own company and soon began work on *Shining In The Darkness*. As Takahashi clarifies, "I was never an employee of Sega, but from *Darkness* on I worked as game designer and team leader on the *Shining Force* series. My younger brother Shugo wasn't a Sega employee, either."

If it sounds like Takahashi's keen to distance himself from Sega it's because he is. There's a whole litany of hurt to relate, but for a start consider this: for each of the three *Shining* Mega Drive games, Sega gave Takahashi's team the bare minimum funding offered to out-of-house developers. *Shining In The Darkness* was a success, but apparently not enough to merit a raise for the development of *Shining Force*; and although *Shining Force* was a hit, there was still no raise forthcoming when it came time for a sequel to be built. There is more, but in the interests of chronology let's return to the story of the series' conception. **CONTINUED >**



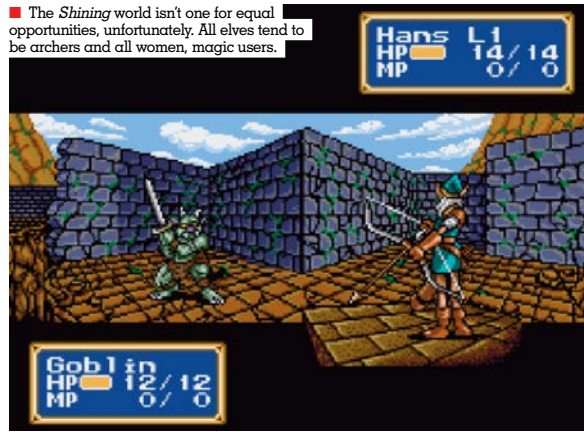


■ When attacking, the perspective changes to this dramatic angle, making for one of the series' most iconic features.



■ *Shining Force III* took the series into 3D and was one of the best looking RPGs on Saturn.

■ The *Shining* world isn't one for equal opportunities, unfortunately. All elves tend to be archers and all women, magic users.



■ A few of the *Shining Force* games were never localised into English, but are perfectly playable in Japanese anyway.



■ Spanning three separately released discs, *Shining Force III* is a true 32-bit epic.

FROM THE FORUM

Posted by:
SWOOPER D

▲ My first memory of *Shining Force* was playing it on import round a mate's after he borrowed it from his uncle. Well, it was all in Japanese, but once we sussed some of the actions and magic we were hooked. Naturally it became the reason for me parting with my pocket money upon its UK release. I never got to play the second one until I played the recent *Sega Mega Drive Ultimate Collection*. But when I bought *Shining Force III* on the Saturn I played it so much I was having grid-based dreams. In my eyes, the series is the best tactical RPG. It's a travesty that the other two scenarios of *Shining Force III* were never translated.

Posted by:
MFNICK

▲ *Shining Force II* is what got me into RPGs in the first place. My mum bought it for me as a complete surprise – I had no idea what it was, but as soon as I started playing it I was hooked. It just had so many interesting characters to meet, locales to discover and party members to gather. But the combat's where it really shone. It was unlike anything else I'd ever played. Being overhead and on a grid with set movements per turn while managing a team of characters was just so mentally stimulating at the time and allowed for great strategic planning. Even better, when you finally went to attack an enemy (or when they attacked you) it switched to a ground view, showing off some beautiful artwork.





■ The *Shining* series' icon-based menus made it one of the most user-friendly RPGs of all time.



Systems' (ostensibly) similarly structured *Fire Emblem* series only earns us a humorous retort: "The original Famicom *Fire Emblem* game? The tempo of that title was so bad that it wasn't something I even wanted to play. *Fire Emblem* had zero influence on *Shining Force*." Takahashi continues, "Rather, before participating in the *Shining Project* I was thinking, 'I wonder if there's any way we can take the battles from *Dragon Quest* and make them more fun?' *Shining Force*'s battle system came about as a result of following that line of thinking to its logical conclusion" – evidently with a little help from *Silver Ghost*.

Even with *Shining In The Darkness* completed (see *Dungeon Fascination* boxout for more on the production of that series prologue), development of *Shining Force* was ambitious and consequently proved extremely difficult for Takahashi's team to perfect. "From the battle system through to the combat screen, we entered development with the aim of making everything new, featuring only things that had never been seen in a game before. *Shining In The Darkness* was more successful than I had anticipated – in terms of sales and reviews – so I think I might have been overestimating my ability as a creator somewhat... In fact it was terribly difficult to produce *Shining Force*. For the battle screen and title screen we took inspiration from a certain other game, but what I didn't realise until after we'd finished development was that that game had used half of its four megs of ROM on those two features alone. Of course, we didn't copy the exact screen designs, but still... we created such memory-intensive battle screens that it was incredibly hard to pull it off. But hey, I remember feeling young and powerful back then.

"My basic stance as far as RPG development is concerned, is to produce worthwhile and enjoyable battles. *Shining Force* was the first embodiment of

I DIDN'T LIKE TACTICAL SIMULATION GAMES. THEY GAVE PLAYERS TOO MUCH TIME TO THINK



Helping Nintendo

■ With Sega effectively turning its back on Camelot, Takahashi began the search for another major company that could benefit from little Camelot's big skills. He recalls how back in 1998 Nintendo was "very isolated" and "seemed to be helpless". The reason for that sentiment? "I felt Nintendo's line-up of games was lacking. There's no doubt that Nintendo is the company that produced today's game market, and it's Nintendo that has provided the highest-quality game software to the largest number of users. But back then I felt as though NCL's line-up was missing something, so it was Camelot's turn to help. Nintendo was most in need of our assistance." As well as the excellent *Mario Tennis* and *Golf*, Camelot went on to create a sublime handheld tactical RPG series in *Golden Sun*.

■ *Shining Force* was launched in March 1992. "At that time, the games industry's way of thinking about role-playing games put the emphasis squarely on telling an interesting story," Takahashi laments. "That was apparently the purpose of role-playing games – just to tell a good story. However, I've always believed that engaging battles are the most crucial factor in an RPG. Even today, you see many role-playing games that are designed according to a philosophy where battles are just a bonus and the story is the main thing. I could never accept that and I wouldn't go along with it. RPG players spend such a great amount of their time in battle that there's no way a battle system should be treated merely as something that's tacked onto a good story."

As it transpires, a relatively obscure Japanese PC game called *Silver Ghost*, released by Kure Software Koubo in 1988, exerted an influence on the design of *Shining Force*. "Prior to *Silver Ghost*," Takahashi explains, "I didn't like tactical simulation games at all – they gave players too much time to think... their tempo was all over the place. But *Silver Ghost* was different: it was a simulation action type of game where you had to direct, oversee and command multiple characters; it was the title that convinced me simulation games didn't have to be crap."

■ ■ ■ *SHINING FORCE*'S MOST obvious inheritance from *Silver Ghost* is the gochakyara (multiple character) system, whereby the chess-like command of units drove the series' battle system and satisfied Takahashi's desire for a truly engaging brand of tactical combat. Daring to mention Intelligent

■ *Shining Force Gaiden: Final Conflict* was never officially translated, but a fan-made patch is available online if you know where to look.



that philosophy. I felt that the primitive battles in games such as *Wizardry* and *Dragon Quest* were enjoyable, but we introduced the notion of 'distance and range' to form *Shining Force's* tactical battles. However, in order to produce and hone that battle system we had to go through an incredibly difficult period of experimentation with trial-and-error procedures... We overcame so many obstacles to develop that battle system, but it was a labour of love and we ended up deeply attached to it."

■■■ Unfortunately for Takahashi, while players and critics universally appreciated his team's fine work on *Shining Force*, Sega's bosses were less enthusiastic. In part this was a result of differences in attitude and approach between the Sega managers Takahashi had initially dealt with and those who succeeded them – new additions to the administration one by one transforming the company from a modest game-loving outfit to an austere profit-obsessed corporation. "From 1990 on," Takahashi explains, "Sega gradually became a larger scale business. New managers were recruited and things started to change. When Sega's managers were replaced, we came to be seen just as a small, unruly subsidiary that wanted things its own way, and because of that we were forced out of Sega's main line of business. From that point on, I felt that Sega had ceased to be a true software-orientated company."



HIROYUKI TAKAHASHI
Camelot President

This sad state of affairs forced Takahashi to begin production of *Shining Force II* with a team that had been decimated and, effectively, rebuilt. Most of the original *Shining Force* staff were beginners who had potential but no prior experience. However, even though they now had a successful game in their back catalogue, Sega's reluctance to increase the level of funding it granted for the development of this sequel meant that

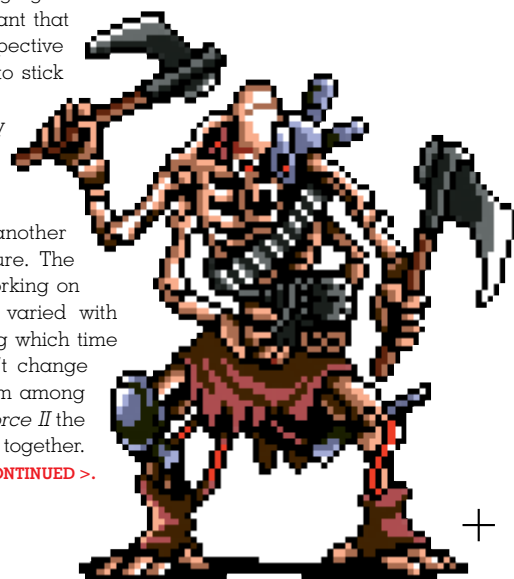
from an economic perspective there was little motivation to stick with the project.

"We were in a really precarious situation at that point," Takahashi admits, "because we knew that if we couldn't produce another hit we would have no future. The number of staff we had working on the *Shining Force* series varied with each game until the Saturn era, during which time the team was pretty settled and didn't change much. We carefully chose our staff from among many candidates, and after *Shining Force II* the core staff remained and grew stronger together. *Shining Force II* was an experimental **CONTINUED >**.

■ The 3D presentation of *Shining Force III* allowed the story scenes to play out with dynamic camera angles that dramatically followed the action.



■ The *Shining Force III* Premium Disc is a great place to find lots of concept art like this.



>. A GAMING EVOLUTION



PC-88 release *Silver Ghost* provided Takahashi with a template for *Shining Force's* advanced version of its multiple character system.



The *Golden Sun* games benefited from experience gained during Camelot's work on the Game Gear-based *Shining Force Gaiden* titles.





WHAT THEY SAID...



What makes [*Shining Force*] so extra special is that there is a real sense of control over the combat sections. Consequently I find myself wincing at every blow that my comrades take and cheering heartily at every fallen foe. It sounds crazy but then play the game for yourself and see if you don't do the same.

Mean Machines Sega, Issue 8



■ Even on Game Gear, Camelot was able to create some huge bosses to fight.

SHINING FORCE III SERVED AS PROOF WE COULD DO OTHER TYPES OF STORY

■ title where we improved the story and enhanced the game's 'RPG-ness'." Between 1992 and 1995, Takahashi also found time to oversee Camelot's production of the *Shining Force Gaiden* series of Game Gear-based spin-offs. "We developed the *Gaiden* series as a simpler variation of *Shining Force* – one that could easily be played on a portable console. At the time, I believe that a lot of games for handhelds were developed without much thought. But we wanted to produce a portable title that would be a genuine system seller, something that was more than just a 'not bad for a handheld game' type of affair." They succeeded in doing just that, and although the first *Gaiden* outing was initially restricted to a local Japanese release (a Sega publishing issue that would again hinder Camelot when it was time for the world to experience *Shining Force III*), it did eventually receive a translation as part of 1995's Mega CD compilation *Shining Force CD*.

While Takahashi's aims at the outset of the *Shining Force* series' development had been battle-orientated ambitions, the post-*Shining Force II* hardware migration from Mega Drive to Saturn – along with the maturing of Sega's core audience – meant that change was now essential. Specifically, Takahashi was aware of the need to give more attention to Camelot's storytelling, which had always been composed as an overarching, catch-all conceptualisation that included both the main *Shining Force* series and its different-name/same-bloodline close relatives. In the mid-Nineties there was a distinct shift in style: the early-period narrative can be traced right up to Camelot's 1995 Saturn

debut, *Shining Wisdom*, but the following year's *Shining The Holy Ark* brought with it a revamped, more complex tone.

■ ■ ■ "Until *Wisdom*, the idea had been simply to develop a story that would attract a broad range of users," says Takahashi "From *Holy Ark* on, the story and game world were redesigned to focus on the Saturn players of the time. Japanese Saturn owners were generally in their late-teens or early-twenties. The age group had shifted away from children, so with these Saturn owners as the focus, we constructed a world where the concept was 'fantasy that can be enjoyed by adults'. This new approach led to a darker, deeper world than we had been creating for the 'all ages' category prior to *Holy Ark*. We started to work on the plot of a story that would be appropriate in such a world.

Things moved up another notch once Camelot turned its attention to the epic, triple-scenario *Shining Force III*. "We wanted *Shining Force III* to serve as proof to those users that we could do other types of story," Takahashi remembers. "But on the other hand, we didn't want to reject those fans who had never complained about the good-against-evil story lines. In that sense, in order to appease both sets of fans, *Shining Force III* ended up as a compilation of the results of lots of trial and error." The resulting game still told a story of good versus evil but radically allowed you to play from the perspective of 'evil' on its second disc, revealing that the definitions between the two weren't so clear cut.





Dungeon Fascination

■ "When I was working as a producer at Enix," Takahashi says, "I remember seeing a 3D dungeon game brought in by a freelance game creator. I was very impressed. I thought that if he was in charge of programming we'd definitely be able to make something special, and so I started to plan. That game creator was Taguchi, who is still our main programmer today... Because we were on such a tight budget, apart from the programming and graphics, I did nearly all of the work on *Shining In The Darkness*. I suppose the basic concept behind *Darkness* was 'realism'. I thought it would be exciting if the player could actually travel to a fantasy world and walk around, exploring old houses, dungeons and other places. It was in essence a continuation of the sense of excitement you'd get from moving through the dungeons in older games such as *Wizardry*. By 'reality' I'm not talking about true realism - I mean the feeling that you really are progressing through actual houses and dungeons, and the same thing applied to the battles. In *Darkness*, *Wisdom* and *Holy Ark*, you can find evidence of our preference for the sense of 'being there' over accommodating standard game styles. I felt there were possibilities unfurling in the RPG genre, and I wanted to challenge myself to create RPGs in various styles."

Relative to team size and resources, Camelot's efforts with the *Shining* series had always been a little bit on the ambitious side, but the three-disc creation of *Shining Force III* was the team's boldest experiment and remains the high point of a series that has very few lows. The game's development was anything but simple: "We put everything we had into *Shining Force III* - it took so much time and so much of our money that no matter how many copies we sold, we would never have been able to make much money out of it. I'm both a game creator and a business manager, and from the business perspective you could say that *Shining Force III* was a ridiculous challenge. It's a miracle that the game was fully realised."

■■■ The passing of time means that Hiroyuki Takahashi is now willing to speak frankly about his disappointments, even if he has no regrets. In the case of *Shining Force III*, that spells rejection, demotion and imposed limitations. "I can tell you this now: at the time of *Shining Force III*, Sega's management was, I believe, in a state of complete chaos," reveals Takahashi. "It's probably hard for you to fathom, but what was once a major part of Sega's market - namely the *Shining* series - was ejected from Sega's 'main line' of games, and the money we received from Sega to produce *Shining Force III* was less than half what they would spend on the development of 'main' games."

The ultimate fallout from this situation meant that English speakers were only treated to the first of *Shining Force III*'s three parts. "Release abroad was terribly limited," Takahashi reflects, "but that was just a consequence of it

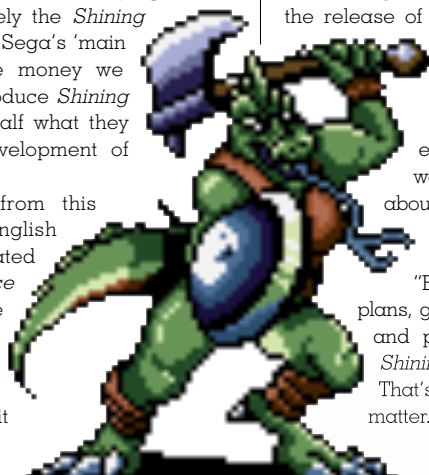


■ The first two Mega Drive games had some wonderful art that was sadly replaced by inferior work for the US and UK releases.



being treated so poorly by Sega in Japan. And it wasn't just *Shining Force III* that was mistreated. For example, at one point Sega was refusing to even release *Shining The Holy Ark*. We had hoped that all three *Shining Force III* scenarios would be released internationally, but our hopes weren't fulfilled. Regardless, we made *Shining Force III* in order to give something back to the fans who had supported the series up to that point. Of course it's a shame that the game wasn't a big hit, but even though it's been more than ten years since the release of *Shining Force III*, people still love the game. And because of that, it's a game that has made me genuinely happy."

And will the West ever get to experience that same happiness? It would have been remiss of us not to ask about the prospect of a *Shining Force III* remake/re-release, but Takahashi's response isn't one we wanted to hear: "Even though we produced all of the plans, graphics, did all of the programming, and produced all of the music for the *Shining* series, Sega maintains the rights. That's why we can have no say in the matter." A wry smile speaks volumes.



Dreamcast Unbelievers

Time for Camelot to leave Sega behind

■ "We were in attendance as guests when Sega announced the Dreamcast," Takahashi confides. "On stage there were Sega managers alongside representatives of four major software houses who were pledging to support Sega's Dreamcast market... Everyone was grinning." Here the story

takes a predictably blue tone: "Camelot had at that point been rejected; we were apparently no longer needed in Sega's marketplace. Even though people recognised that we had made the greatest contribution to the growth of Sega's consumer market, I felt on that day as though the time had come for

us to leave. I felt lonely, but at the same time I felt relieved because I sensed that there was no future for Dreamcast. Sega had become even less of a software-orientated company. Even if Camelot had made the best software for Sega, recovery of its market share still would have been impossible..."



RETRO

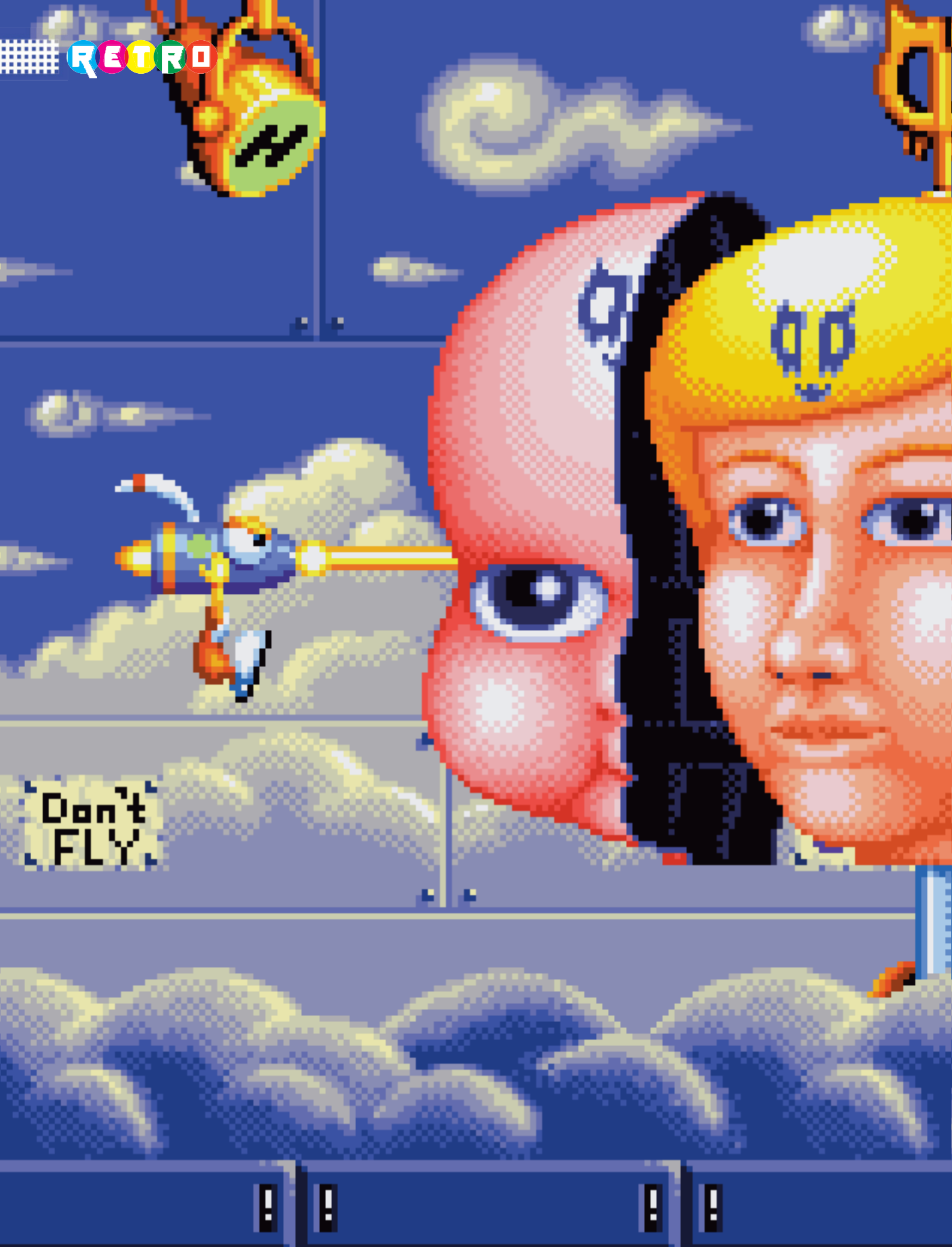


GUNSTAR HEROES Mega Drive [Treasure] 1993

WE'RE TECHNICALLY cheating on this one as the image on this page isn't actually from a boss battle. But we love it so much that we're going to let it count. Taking place at the climax of Level 2's blistering railway pursuit, this magic moment showcases Treasure's sharp sense of humour. With the train all but destroyed, each carriage decimated until only the engine is left, the driver and his crew squeeze into the tiny remaining space. With no weapons left, a wave of inspiration hits the desperate driver and he starts flinging his own soldiers at you, one by one, until you finally blow up the train. Genius.

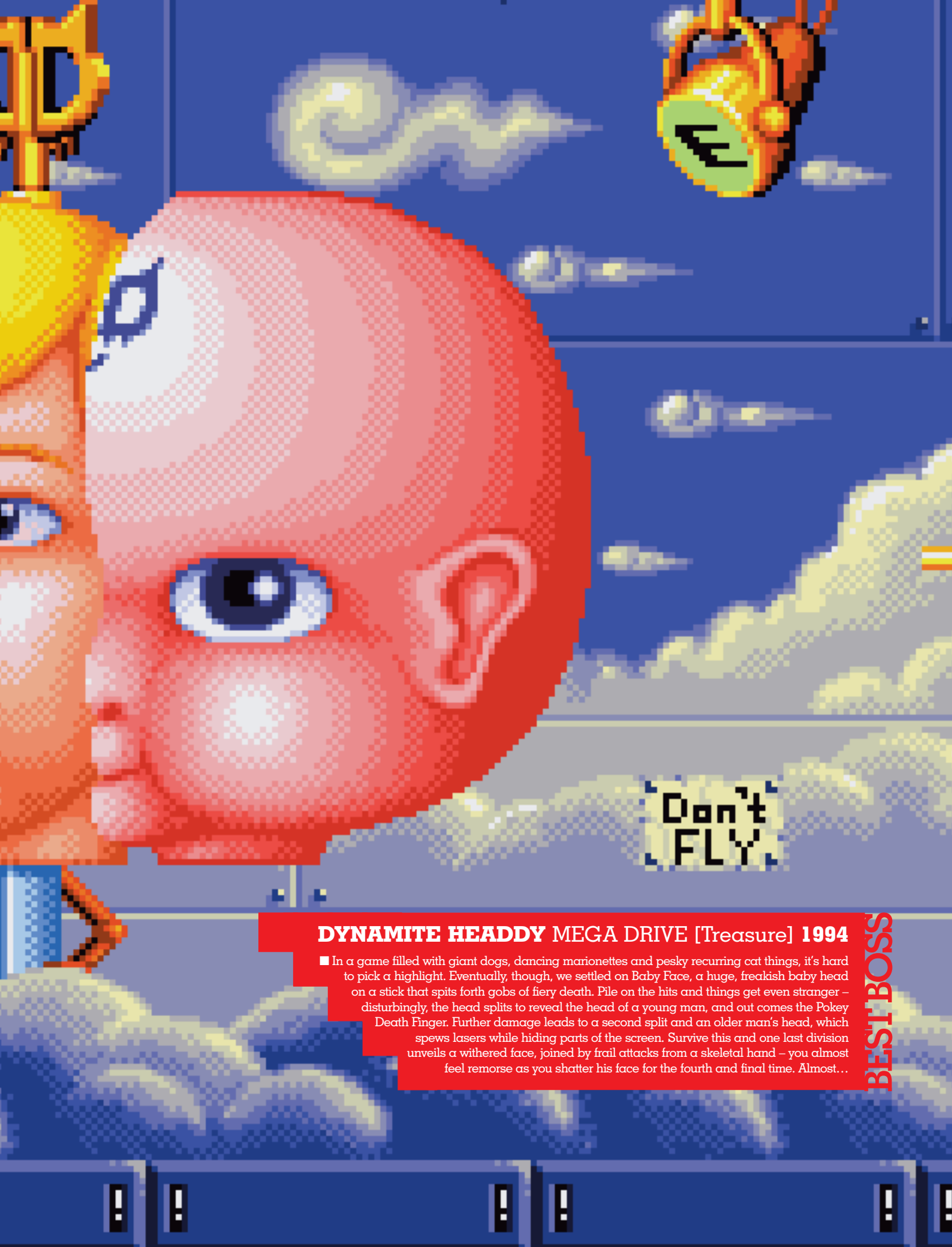
BEST BOSS





RETRO

Don't
FLY



Don't
FLY!

DYNAMITE HEADDY MEGA DRIVE [Treasure] 1994

■ In a game filled with giant dogs, dancing marionettes and pesky recurring cat things, it's hard to pick a highlight. Eventually, though, we settled on Baby Face, a huge, freakish baby head on a stick that spits forth gobs of fiery death. Pile on the hits and things get even stranger – disturbingly, the head splits to reveal the head of a young man, and out comes the Pokey Death Finger. Further damage leads to a second split and an older man's head, which spews lasers while hiding parts of the screen. Survive this and one last division unveils a withered face, joined by frail attacks from a skeletal hand – you almost feel remorse as you shatter his face for the fourth and final time. Almost...

BEST BOSS





BEHIND THE SCENES

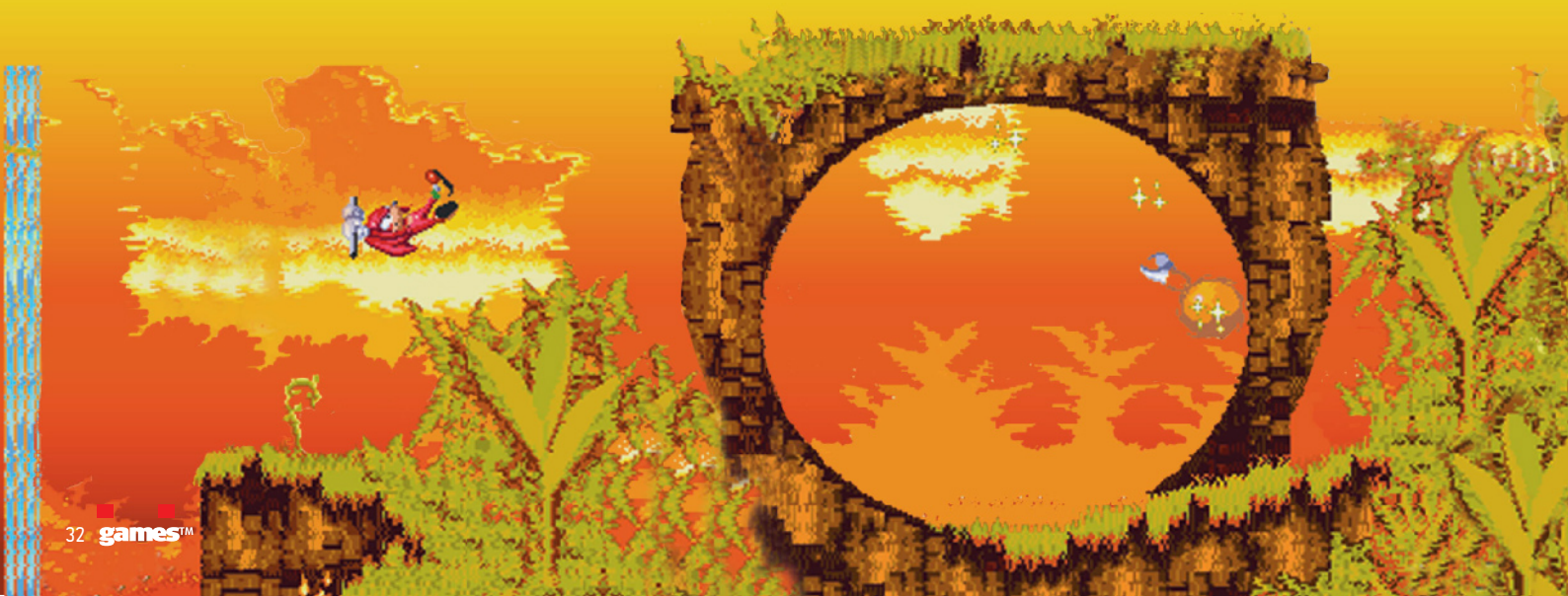
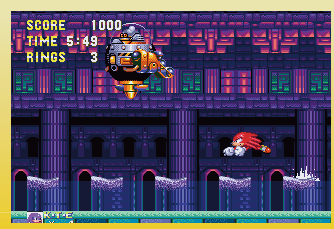
Release: 1994
Format: Mega Drive
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega Technical Institute
Key Staff:
 Yuji Naka (producer, lead programmer), Hirokazu Yasuhara (director, lead designer), Roger Hector (project manager), Takasaku Iizuka (senior designer)

IT'S OFTEN CITED AS ONE OF THE GREATEST SONIC GAMES OF ALL TIME BUT FEW WILL HAVE ACTUALLY EXPERIENCED IT UNLESS THEY OWNED BOTH SONIC 3 AND SONIC & KNUCKLES. THAT GAME IS SONIC 3 & KNUCKLES. ROGER HECTOR, THE ONLY AMERICAN ON THE DEVELOPMENT TEAM, REVEALS HOW THE INDUSTRY'S FIRST AND ONLY 'LOCK ON' GAME CAME TO BE...

The Sega Technical Institute is something of a phenomenon in retro game industry. Originally founded in 1991 and long since disbanded, STI was made up of staff from Sega of America and Sega Japan in equal measure with the intention that each nationality could learn from the other's experience to create the world's best games. For a time, this plan worked exceptionally well, with *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* being the most noteworthy triumph of the studio's early days. But such projects had been burdened by communication issues and cultural differences, while

rumours persisted that Yuji Naka was growing increasingly protective of the Sonic brand. Whether these rumours were the reason for division within STI, or the cause of it, is unknown but the Technical Institute nevertheless soon found itself split down the middle with the American staff working on original projects while the Japanese continued development of the Sonic series. This was the situation under which *Sonic The Hedgehog 3* began development, yet despite Naka working with a handpicked team, with full control over his own project, production was far from painless. As the general manager of the

Sega Technical Institute, Roger Hector is one of only a few English-speaking individuals to have had first-hand experience of the development of *Sonic 3*. "My job was to interface between the Sonic team and the rest of the company," Hector explains. "I had to keep the rest of the company from interfering with or bothering the team, and I had to keep the team on track. I had to make sure they had what they needed, and if they had problems, I had to solve them. This included everything from scheduling and resources to giving creative input to resolving personal disputes. Sometimes I had to bring in outside



contractors to help, other times I had to lock the doors to keep well-meaning but distracting people out."

With such an important role within the company, it was imperative for Hector to communicate effectively with the staff in Japan. "Most of the Japanese spoke some English. The ones that were more fluent did translation for the others," Hector reveals. "There were some additional Sega of Japan management staff that came in and helped with communications at big meetings. We also brought in an outside language teacher and conducted a regular Berlitz class in Japanese." While Hector's role within the production of *Sonic 3* may seem relatively perfunctory at first glance, the troubled development ahead would see his ability to manage people and resources while maintaining relationships with external companies become invaluable to the development team.

Following an initial experimental phase, in which an isometric version of *Sonic 3* was prototyped and scrapped in favour of a more traditional platform game, the STI

"IT WAS DECIDED THAT IT WOULD MAKE MORE SENSE TO SPLIT IT INTO TWO GAMES" ROGER HECTOR

began work on its most ambitious Sonic title to date. "The company wanted a high-quality Sonic game to sell that would build on its already strong reputation," says Hector. "The team wanted to expand the story with new characters and new gameplay. There were a lot of ideas that had



been brainstormed up, but had not been used in *Sonic 2*. In addition, many more ideas started to pour out during the creative process... and once this gets started, it takes on a life of its own. These were very creative people, and there was no shortage of ideas."

Those ideas were so plentiful, in fact, that it soon became quite apparent to Hector that *Sonic 3* – in its proposed form – was simply

unachievable. "There were so many creative ideas that it would take too much time to develop such a massive project. The team brainstormed up two games' worth of material initially and it was decided, before the Alpha stage I think, that it would make more sense

to split it into two games."

The first would be released as *Sonic 3* in February 1994 while the second part, now known as *Sonic & Knuckles*, would follow in October of the same year. The decision was a logical one, and probably not all that uncommon in the game industry, but it was the form that the dissected game would eventually take that would make this such an unusual project. Rather than release each game as a separate entity, completely unrelated from one another, the development team decided to create the ability to allow both cartridges to physically join together in order to make a third game that combined the best elements of each.

By wiring a cartridge connector into the top of the *Sonic & Knuckles* cartridge, the STI delivered a method that would allow users to plug their *Sonic 3* cart into the top, which would then merge the

BETWEEN THE ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

The delays involved in the development of *Sonic & Knuckles* put even more pressure than normal on Sega Technical Institute as Sega had arranged for the game to be launched live on MTV, from Alcatraz Island. The deadline for which could simply not be missed. The game was finished on time of course, but as Roger Hector explains, not even a large MTV broadcast could completely avoid STI's run of bad luck. "Hundreds of people were brought in by boat, and film crews and dozens of players flown in from all around the world. Many game stations had been set up inside the old prison, and the players furiously competed for a big cash prize on live TV. But it turned out that the US Navy's Blue Angels precision jet team were performing that day over the bay, and they were using Alcatraz Island as the centre point of their show. We were putting on a show for MTV and were being buzzed by real fighter jets at the same time. It was wild."



▲ The MTV special included a visit to STI and an interview with Roger Hector.





assets of each title to create *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* – the game that *Sonic The Hedgehog 3* was originally intended to be before the split. “I was surprised at the relative ease with which this was done,” comments Hector. “It was a tricky technical piece of work, but these guys were some of the best in the industry and it came off pretty smoothly.”

The resultant games were both instantly familiar and different from previous Sonic games. *Sonic 3* boasted levels that were three times larger than those in *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, and contained multiple routes that were only accessible by either Sonic or Tails in conjunction with their own unique abilities or

with Knuckles, whose play differed from Sonic. As well as being able to glide and make use of a force field power up, Knuckles also played through a completely different set of levels, meaning that the game could be played through twice, with major differences depending which character was used.

With both cartridges locked together, *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* was unlocked, offering a completely new experience that differed from its component parts. The new game primarily allowed Knuckles to play through *Sonic 3*, with new sections and bosses added exclusively to his run through the game, followed directly by the levels from *Sonic*



“MICHAEL JACKSON WAS A VERY BIG FAN OF SONIC AND HE WANTED TO RECORD A SOUNDTRACK FOR THE GAME”

ROGER HECTOR

by using the new environmental elements such as trapezes.

Sonic 3 was also the moment when the story began to take a more important role in the series. Knuckles, an echidna that actually bore little resemblance to the long-beaked animal, was introduced as a non-player character while cut-scenes were used between each zone to explain the changes in location. *Sonic & Knuckles* made further radical changes. As the title suggests, Tails was dropped as a playable character and replaced

& *Knuckles*. There were other differences too; Tails could be used to play through the *Sonic & Knuckles* levels while star posts would unlock one of three bonus games from either *Sonic 3* or *Sonic & Knuckles*. Even more content could also be unlocked by plugging other Sonic games into the *Sonic & Knuckles* cart (see *Locked And Loaded*).

Sonic 3 and *Sonic & Knuckles* sold around 4 million copies collectively, but we can only guess at how many people owned both copies, allowing them to play *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* as

it was intended. Nevertheless, those who have been able to sample the game's delights generally remember it, alongside *Sonic CD* and *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, as one of the best 2D Sonic games ever made. Roger Hector's memories, meanwhile, although dominated by a feeling of pride for the game, reveal further troubles as the *Sonic 3* project neared the end of its development.

“It was a process that was full of highs and lows,” Hector explains. “Everyone involved knew how much was riding on these games and



▲ *Sonic 3's* bonus levels weren't as impressive as *Sonic 2* but made a change from the main game.

we had to live up to extremely high expectations. The most difficult thing was to keep the balance, supporting the creative and technical needs of the team, and the business demands of a critical Christmas release schedule. Sonic Team was largely self-motivated and Naka's personal drive was a key to success. But there

LOCKED AND LOADED

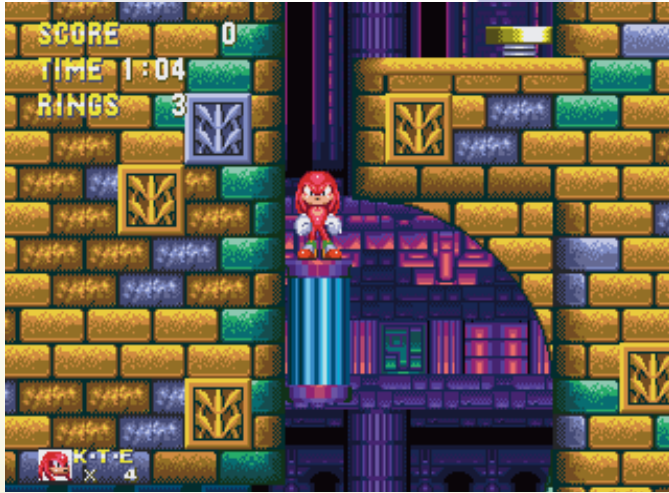


Sonic 3 & Knuckles wasn't the only game that could be unlocked using the *Sonic & Knuckles* cartridge as curious, cartridge-wealthy gamers found out in 1994 when they predictably tried every single one of their Mega Drive games with the Lock-On system. Plug any Mega Drive cartridge into the top and one of over a hundred million variations of *Sonic 3's* mini-game

will be playable. Stick in the original *Sonic The Hedgehog*, meanwhile, and it's possible to play all of those variations. Best of all, if the player inserts *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, new game *Knuckles The Echidna In Sonic The Hedgehog 2* is unlocked. This was essentially the same as *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* but with Knuckles as a playable character and some new items placed in unusually high places in order to take advantage of his gliding and climbing abilities. That STI managed to introduce such changes into a game that was never designed to link up to *Sonic & Knuckles* in the first place is perhaps an even greater achievement than *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* itself.

▲ *Sonic's* underwater levels. Did anyone actually enjoy playing through these?





was also creative burn out, personal squabbles, unrealistic schedules, misunderstandings and technical problems... the works. As you can imagine, any time you bring together many different creative people to work on one thing, there will be disagreements about what goes in and what goes out of the game. Naka was a strong team leader – and a good one in my view because he listened to his team as individuals – but he made clear decisions and moved on. This did not always make him popular, but that was okay. Most of the STI staff understood the importance of clear decision making but that didn't help if it was your pet idea that was shot down. This just comes with the territory. It was Naka's clear responsibility to direct the development of the game, and he didn't have a lot of time to waste arguing.

So he was sometimes seen as being harsh, but this was not really true. I have a great deal of respect for what he did and how he did it. The results stand for themselves." For all Hector's empathy for Yuji Naka, however, those

feelings weren't always shared with those lower-level staff who were less experienced in management. "Some talented members of STI who were not on Naka's team were a little bit jealous of the attention and high priority given to *Sonic 3*," Hector continues, "but this also comes with the territory and I can remember spending time counselling and encouraging them. Clearly not every game can have the built-in artistic and commercial anticipation of a *Sonic 3*, and I sometimes had to shift resources toward higher priority projects like *Sonic*. But keeping people motivated to do their best, even when their project is being raided for staff is a built-in dilemma at a place like STI and was a constant balancing act."

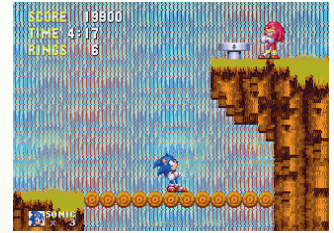
Despite such internal squabbles, *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* turned out to be one of the highlights of STI's career, up there with the likes of *Comix Zone* and *Die Hard Arcade*, and Hector remains incredibly proud of the team's achievements. "After putting in all the hours and sweat managing this process, it was tremendously rewarding to get it done great and

on time. We were all very happy with the game itself, though we barely made its release date. In the game business this is the Holy Grail.

The people at STI were truly some of the best in the business, which means they were difficult and extremely demanding but they were dedicated and could deliver. It was very rewarding to work with such talent. I also loved to meet the Sonic fans. There were so many of them, and they loved the game. It was pure fun for me to meet them and play the game with them. I am a pretty good player you know – well I used to be, anyway."

As with any project there's always something the creators wish they could have changed, or something interesting that had to be dropped from the final release. *Sonic 3* is no exception as Hector explains with an unexpected revelation. "Michael Jackson was a very big fan of Sonic and he wanted to record a soundtrack for the game," he reveals. "He came to STI and met with the team to discuss the design theme, story, and feel of the game. He then went away and recorded an entire soundtrack that covered all of the worlds. It was fantastic.

The music fitted perfectly for the game, and they had a distinctive 'Michael Jackson' sound. We had it all ready and integrated into the game when the first news stories came out accusing him of child molestation, and Sega had to back away from this collaboration. It was very late in the development process, and we had to quickly put together a complete replacement music track. Howard Drossin, STI's music guy, stepped in and did a great job, working around the clock to get it done. Despite the unexpected complications so late in the game, we were very happy with the final results. It was too bad nobody outside ever heard the Michael Jackson music."



▲ Tails' replacement, the dreadlocked Knuckles, facing off against Sonic.





BEHIND THE SCENES

SEGA RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

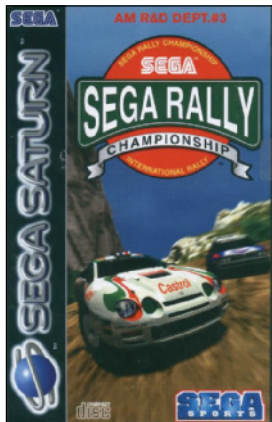
Tetsuya Mizuguchi might be best known for musically inclined titles like Space Channel 5 and Rez, but the designer rose to fame thanks to a different kind of sound – the roar of an engine and a cry of ‘Game Over, Yeeeeeah!’



■ *Sega Rally* was the first game to feature variable handling based on the type of surface you were driving on.



I WAS YOUNG, WITH NO EXPERIENCE, BUT ALSO NO FEAR, SO I SAID, 'LET'S GO!'



Released: 1994

Format: Arcade, Sega Saturn

Publisher: Sega

Developer: Sega AM-3

KEY STAFF:

Tetsuya Mizuguchi

Producer

Kenji Sasaki

Director

Ryuichi Hattori

Lead programmer

(Sega Saturn version)

Takenobu Mitsuyoshi

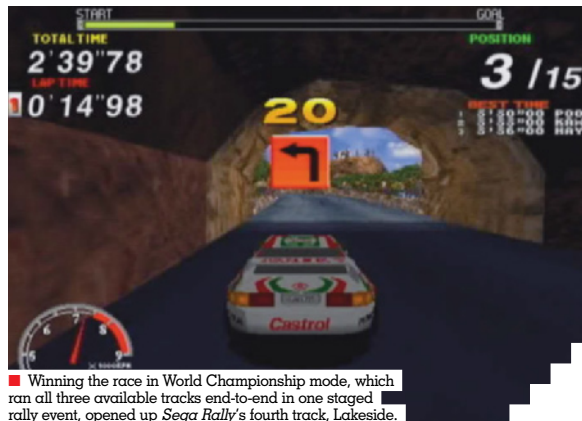
Sound composer

■ **IN THE 16** years since *Sega Rally Championship's* release, the evolution of the racing genre has been explosive. The contrast between a racing game now and a racing game then is so enormous that evaluating the impact that Sega's once-dominant racing trifecta – *Virtua Racing*, *Daytona USA*, and *Sega Rally Championship* – had on the industry could fill volumes. A quick recap reminds us that *Virtua Racing* brought the polygons, and that *Daytona USA* (itself the most successful arcade game of all time) brought a colourful, adrenaline-charged racer with a distinctive soundtrack and fantastic multiplayer competition. But *Sega Rally*... *Sega Rally* was altogether different. Not only did it usher in the era of the drift, but it did so in compelling fashion, offering a focused, minimal feature set that makes the racing games of today look excessive to a fault.

Born in an era of arcade dominance, when videogame consoles were still playing second fiddle to the powerful coin-crunchers of the time, *Sega Rally* represents the peak of Sega's arcade reign. Although the balance of power would soon shift to consoles, thanks to the emergent PlayStation, by the mid-Nineties Sega had ushered in the Golden Age of arcade classics. If Sega's silver age was represented by *Hang-On*, *Afterburner* and *Space Harrier*, then the vanguards of the new wave were surely *Virtua Fighter 2*, *Daytona USA*, *Sega Rally* and *Virtual-On*. In terms of racing, once past *Sega Rally*, arcade racing would only occasionally **CONTINUED >**.



■ *Sega Rally* was completed in ten months with 12 people. Its successor, *Sega Touring Car Championship*, was done in less than five.



■ Winning the race in World Championship mode, which ran all three available tracks end-to-end in one staged rally event, opened up *Sega Rally*'s fourth track, Lakeside.

FROM THE FORUM

Posted by:

RAINLEVEL

▲ It was brilliant, proved by the fact that it's the only game that still exists in arcades.

Posted by:

UNICRON

▲ Ahh, *Sega Rally*; it was the first racing game I ever played that I enjoyed. I remember ruthlessly honing my drifting skills on the first track and finally unlocking the Lancia Stratos, one of the best cars in any racing game ever. I still have it to this day, and two weeks ago I got it out for my three-year-old boy to play. Once he got the hang of it he really enjoyed it too... start 'em young, and all that.

Posted by:

BIG MEAN BUNNY

▲ The reason I got a Saturn, the reason that if my house was on fire the only thing I would go back inside for is my Saturn! Two cars, three tracks (Lakeside doesn't count), no needless boring levels of detail, sublime handling, fantastic music, and the unrivalled pinnacle of 'just one more go to try and beat my time' racing.

Posted by:

MENICK

▲ My mates used to go on about the superiority of their PlayStations because their racing game had more than two or three cars and three or four tracks. Yet I kept playing *Sega Rally* through the entirety of the Saturn's lifespan and beyond, while they got bored and traded in just about every racer they ever got. They had the quantity, *Sega Rally* had the quality.

Posted by:

TRESDOSS

▲ First racing game I can remember where the handbrake was actually helpful... drifting past your mates on the dual-screened arcade cabinets never got old.



■ Despite Mizuguchi's love of techno music, he found it wasn't a suitable match for *Sega Rally*, and opted to go for a "rockier, funkier soundtrack."



■ duplicate, but not surpass the innovation and excitement of this on-and-off road drift king.

Enter Tetsuya Mizuguchi. By the time he began to assemble the team that would create *Sega Rally*, he had only one project at Sega under his belt, the long-forgotten AS-1 'Motion Ride' title *Megalopolis*, itself more of a *Blade Runner*-inspired CG-movie-theme-park-style ride than a proper game. Created with the help of then-programmer/now film director Michael Arias (who recently directed the anime hit *Tekkonkinkreet*), *Megalopolis*'s hydraulic cabinet enclosure gave Mizuguchi the experience he would need to envision the high-production off-road experience his team would create for *Sega Rally*. While *Megalopolis* was created by a team of only five people, including Mizuguchi and Arias, the *Sega Rally* team would more than double in size to a 12-member staff (although by this time Arias had returned to the States to move into film production).

■■■ *MEGALOPOLIS* PROVIDED A great deal more experience to the team than just an understanding of arcade cabinets and hydraulic systems. It also marked the first project within Sega that specialised in the burgeoning field of CGI, particularly textured CG graphics. Mizuguchi remembers: "That was so tough a project, because nobody knew about CGI. 'What is a digital movie?' We learned a lot. At Sega there was no staff like that specialised in it. All the staff at Sega, they just

wanted to make a game. But this was the first visual expression project for Sega."

After the [Sega arcade centre] Joypolis-exclusive *Megalopolis* project was finished, Mizuguchi began thinking about his next project. It wasn't until a trip to Sega's European offices that the kernel for *Sega Rally* would be formed. "I wanted to make a racing game," Mizuguchi continues, "but I had to think about what the concept would be, and what the differences would be. [On a trip to Europe] I met up with people from Sega France, Sega Italy. I asked them – remember I was a new face at the time, so I didn't know so much about the industry at first – I asked them for their inspirations and their opinions. 'What kind of game do you want? What kind of vision do you have?' Most of the people had complained to Sega headquarters that they only watched the American market, for example, things like *Daytona*. So Sega of Europe people were complaining about this, but they didn't have the answers either.

"So I was watching a TV program, a sports channel, and I watched rally racing live. That was my first experience watching that. I said, 'What is this?' My original idea of rally racing was of the Paris to Dakar rally, with trucks, which is very different. But the WRC [World Rally Championship] is raced using regular cars you can buy; Toyota, Lancia. Many, many cars, cool stickers, driving into cities and forests, there are many people on the side of the road, including old people and young kids, female, male. It was like a festival, so passionate. Then it occurred to me: 'Let's make a rally game.' *Daytona* was limited to circuits – grey circuits. But with rally we could design many landscapes; nature, cities,



TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI
Producer

A Tale Of Two Packshots

The deeper meaning behind SRC's duelling covers

■ TO THE AVERAGE consumer there's nothing distinctly noteworthy about *Sega Rally Championship*'s cover art, apart from some nice layout and design, on either the original release or the repackaged XBAND-compatible *Sega Rally Championship Plus*. But closer inspection reveals a battle for more than just simple game package supremacy.

In the original release on Saturn, Lancia's Delta Integrale is in the lead, but the Toyota Celica is hot on its heels. In the re-release, the Celica has

just overtaken the Delta by a nose, signalling the shift in power from one manufacturer to the other. It wasn't just about giving each car its due; it was also about creating a bit of drama where there wasn't any previously.

SRC producer Tetsuya Mizuguchi tells us: "The Lancia Delta was a former champion car, and the Toyota Celica was the new champion car. But they never fought each other for the championship, so it was a fantasy to have two real champion cars fight in a virtual

Sega rally race. This was a big metaphor. This was paying respect to Lancia. The way the

covers are designed on the two versions, it shows a continuing story between these two cars."



WHAT THEY SAID...



Sega's kind of scary. This 3D should not be possible on Saturn. Imagine the arcade game at half the resolution and frame rate... add a touch of pixelage and that's the Saturn version. And you have to buy *Rally* anyway, because you haven't lived until you hear 'Game Over, Yeah!'

GameFan,
December 1995



I WANTED TO MAKE A WRC-STYLE GAME, BUT SEGA DIDN'T UNDERSTAND IT AT ALL

desert. So we decided to make a rally game. That was the start."

Despite the inspiration and unique angle on the racing genre, Sega management wasn't initially keen on the idea. In fact, they rejected it. Sega HQ apparently felt that none of the arcade games that had previously touched upon the rally experience had ever been big enough hits to justify developing an expensive then-generation arcade rally racer. "[They had] kind of a prejudice against rally games," Mizuguchi explains. "Sure, many rally games existed, but every rally game was of the Paris/Dakar type, just set in the desert. I wanted to make a WRC-style game, but they didn't understand at all."

"So I made a demo movie, which I think was the first case it had been done in Sega. I made a three-minute movie, just an image movie, compositing a real rally game, rally racing. And Kenji Sasaki, *Sega Rally's* director, he could make CGI movies too, so I made a composite mixture of desert, forest, jumps, sliding turns... very exciting. Then everybody changed their expressions and said 'Hmm.' But there were many arguments; for example, there's no oval. So I said 'what do you think?' They said 'No, no, no, let's make an oval rally course.' I thought we could make many, many stages - desert, city, forest, many colors, jumps, drifting, in rocky type environments. I felt I could make a very passionate new racing game, but it was a big battle."

■ ■ ■ ANOTHER MAJOR CHALLENGE Sega's young producer encountered was major resistance to using licensed cars, now a given in any modern racing game. When you consider that Sony's upcoming, four-years-in-the-making *Gran Turismo 5* purports to boast over a thousand cars, it really puts things in perspective when you consider *Sega Rally's* carefully selected two licensed rally cars, the Toyota Celica and the Lancia Delta Integrale. But the hill Mizuguchi had to climb wasn't only propped up by the bean-counters at Sega, who didn't want to incur the costs associated with licensing real-world properties; he also had to convince both Toyota and Lancia that this was something they'd want to be a part of.

"I decided to visit Toyota, but this was a new thing. I was young, with no experience, but also no fear, so I said 'Let's go!' and I met with a Toyota PR

manager. I was like a kid. I said, 'I want to make a rally game using your car.' I wanted to make a game using Toyota Celica and Lancia Delta, because they were both champion rally cars, but there was no synchronization [between the two manufacturers]. The Lancia Delta was a former champion car, and the Toyota Celica was the new champion car. But they never fought each other for the championship, so it was a fantasy setting to have two real champion cars fight in a virtual Sega rally race.

"So I went to Toyota. I brought the demo on a video tape. They hated videogames, because until then they thought videogames were a fake business. No publicity, no PR, so they really hated the videogame industry. But I went there and brought the *Sega Rally* demo - the first 3D demo with textures - and they were so surprised. They said, 'This is a game?'"

Through some tactical maneuvering, Mizuguchi was able to persuade Toyota to sign on with the project, provided that Lancia was also up for the deal. Traveling to Italy with video tape in hand, Mizuguchi went to Lancia and pitched them on the idea. Lancia liked it and **CONTINUED >**.

■ At the time, *Sega Rally* arcade units cost about as much as a real car, and yet Sega still sold around 12,000 of them. The special *DX* units, which came equipped with replica Celica bodies, were only distributed to Sega's own Joypolis centres.



The Things They Don't Teach You In School

Have you heard Sega Rally's secret voice?

■ NOWADAYS, EVERYTHING GAME-RELATED is well-documented in FAQs, cheat sites and message boards, but it's possible that even this little tidbit has escaped anyone's notice. Ryuichi Hattori, the lead programmer of the Sega Saturn version of *Sega Rally*

Championship, says: "There was one feature that was not announced about the game, which was a sort of ranking system. I can't remember the specifics now. However, if the player achieved a fast time without hitting any walls, the DJ voice that played during

the replay would be different. The lead sound guy was a good friend of mine, and we put this spec in without telling anyone else about it." So, *Sega Rally* vets. Have you discovered this subtle audio rarity?



■ One of the arcade version's real innovations, beyond all the hydraulics and widescreen monitors, was the subwoofer placed right beneath your tail, which would simulate the sound (and feel) of tiny stones rattling off your undercarriage during drifts.



■ signed up, allowing the producer to return triumphantly to Toyota to tell them the good news. It was at this point that the Celica was now ready to join the Delta Integrale in virtual battle on *Sega Rally*'s gritty courses.

Interestingly, *Sega Rally* wasn't always envisioned as *Sega Rally*. Originally, Mizuguchi's idea and inspiration almost resulted in a rally game called *Pacific Coast Rally*, based on California's famous, winding driver's heaven called The Pacific Coast Highway (PCH for short). "I felt we should use that area, so we went to San Francisco with five or six people. We had cameras for designers to shoot textures. We took two weeks to tour San Luis Obispo, Death Valley and Mexico. That was fun; it was like a road movie for a road-based videogame.

We always had our meetings in our car. It was an organic process discussing what kind of stages to make. We had many, many inspirations.

"I had experienced that area before, but the young designers and artists didn't know about it, so I said, 'Let's go.'" In discussing how the project changed from *Pacific Coast Rally* to *Sega Rally*, Mizuguchi tells us that the key factor was using licensed cars. Putting real-world rally cars in an environment not known for rally racing didn't make sense.

So the team opted to create locations that looked more appropriate, evoking a more European setting,

although the game's forest stage was actually modelled after California.

But what is it that sets *Sega Rally* apart? What is it about this particular game that launched countless would-be rally kings like *Colin McRae*, *V-Rally*, *World Rally Championship* and, ironically, even Sega's own subsequent multi-platform updates to their series? *Sega Rally* innovated on numerous levels. It was one of the first big racing games to actually use licensed cars. It was also one of the first racing games to introduce drifting physics on multiple ground surfaces, including dirt and tarmac. It deviated from the typical formula of offering oval tracks, instead creating a series of sim-like segmented courses, each with its own characteristics. *Sega Rally* is also famous for its co-pilot (voiced by a *Sega Rally* dev team member), who, amusingly, prepares you for upcoming road conditions by uttering phrases such as "Easy right, maybe!" *Sega Rally* was also quite difficult to complete, with tight time limits separating checkpoints. Not only was it tough to complete each stage within the allotted time, it was also of paramount importance to advance a certain number of places in the pack in order to come in first at race's end.

■ ■ ■ ENCOUNTERING OPPOSING CARS is also a rarity, unlike games like *Daytona USA*, where the player is always in the thick of it. The most significant factor, and one that points to the game's arcade origins, is that *Sega Rally*, from start to finish, lasted on average less than five minutes. Consider that! Tell any gamer weaned on today's feature-rich game content that there's this great racing game that's over in less than five minutes; he'd ask whether it's a free Flash game or a joke. But that's the length of a *Sega Rally* race, if not the *Sega Rally* experience.

As with most of Sega's arcade-to-console ports, the Sega Saturn port of *Sega Rally* offered minimal features beyond its Championship mode and Practice mode. Relying on its trend-setting controls,

near-perfect difficulty curve and expertly designed courses, *Sega Rally* offered the perfect combination of ingredients for gamers to continually replay the game, master their technique, shaving precious seconds off their time.

Even the experience of 'losing' in *Sega Rally* is famous, thanks to the distinctive 'Game Over, Yeahhhhh!' jingle that plays when your time is up. That line, Mizuguchi tells us, was the idea of *Sega Rally* composer Takenobu Mitsuyoshi, the man who brought the world the impossibly enthusiastic *Daytona USA* songs 'Let's Go Away' and 'Sky High.'

THE ONE ACE up the Saturn version's sleeve that didn't exist in the arcade version was the inclusion of the famous Lancia Stratos. Mizuguchi recalls, "In the Seventies, this was the monster champion car. It's so nice. The Lancia Stratos was like a super-supercar. It was a classic, but everyone in Japan and Europe knew it. In Japan when I was a kid, there was a supercar boom, and everyone had rubber erasers shaped like cars. All the kids had many rubber cars, and everyone knew about this car, the name, the detail. So we wanted to put a big surprise in the Saturn version. I remember I put the Lancia Stratos' name in the last spot in the credits roll. The car was like an actor appearing in the game: 'Starring the Toyota Celica, Lancia Delta Integrale, aaaaaaand the LANCIA STRATOS.' Drama! Everyone was like 'What!?' And the next time you played you could select the Lancia Stratos."

In the end, after all the trials and tribulations, and an incredibly short ten-month development time, Sega rolled out over 12,000 units of the arcade version of the now-legendary *Sega Rally* (which recently appeared in its original form as a bonus disc on PS2, bundled with the newer but decidedly generic *Sega Rally 2006*) to arcade owners around the world. Sold as individual arcade units, in head-to-head 'Twin' competition configurations, and even in incredibly rare, Joypolis-only *DX* editions (complete with sit-in car), *Sega Rally* provided its parent company not only with another cutting-edge racing game to add to its stable, but also provided its fledgling Sega Saturn with another exclusive killer app. It also established the reputation of Tetsuya Mizuguchi, who would go on to revolutionize

The *Sega Rally* team went out and drove real rally cars to get a feel for how they really handled. Producer Tetsuya Mizuguchi even wrecked a Toyota Celica for his efforts.



MY ORIGINAL IDEA OF RALLY RACING WAS PARIS TO DAKAR, WITH TRUCKS, WHICH IS DIFFERENT

and kick-start another genre – the music game – with *Space Channel 5* and *Rez*.

While countless racing games have gone off-road since, including Sony's *Gran Turismo* series, which eventually included rally racing as an additional mode, few have ever approached *Sega Rally*'s pure, near-perfect racing package. Furthermore, as modern gamers demand quantity in addition to quality, it's doubtless we'll ever see the likes of a *Sega Rally* again. It's a game from a different era, and even Sega's own attempts to bring the series up to speed with modern expectations have seen the franchise lose a bit of what made it so special in the first place. But maybe, with Sega's focus on bringing arcade-perfect ports of older Model 2 games to XBLA and PSN, we will have a chance of hurtling through the dunes in a Toyota Celica or Lancia Delta Integrale once again.

We'd love the gang to get back together and create *Pacific Coast Rally*, the original idea behind what would become *Sega Rally*.



>. A GAMING EVOLUTION



While far from a rally game, Sega's *Virtua Racing* pioneered the leap from overhead 2D racing into the world of three dimensions.



If any rally series did a bang-up job of carrying the torch that *Sega Rally* originally lit, it's Codemasters' ode to The Flying Scotsman.





"You can't see it here, but take my word for it: the water in this sewer has some impressively animated reflections."

"Hi, I'm Peter Morawiec, designer, lead artist and voice actor on Comix Zone."



BEHIND THE SCENES

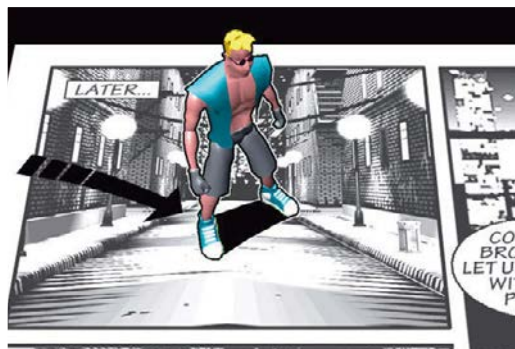


"I GOT YOU NOW, LILL' BUGGER!"

COMIX ZONE

Released: 1995 Format: Mega Drive Publisher: Sega Developer: Sega Technical Institute

RELEASED DURING THE ADVENT OF THE 32-BIT ERA, SEGA'S COMIX ZONE NEVER REALLY GOT THE ATTENTION IT DESERVED BUT GAINED A STRONG CULT FOLLOWING IN LATER YEARS. NOW GAMES™ MEETS THE DESIGNERS BEHIND THE MEGA DRIVE'S MOST ORIGINAL BRAWLER AND PONDER'S WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED HAD IT BEEN MADE THAT LITTLE BIT EARLIER



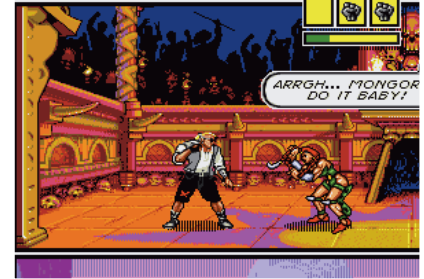
This concept art shows how Comix Zone 2 might have worked on Saturn or Dreamcast.

Comix Zone's story begins with Peter Morawiec, an Eastern European artist who was hired to work at the Sega Technical Institute (STI) in America in 1991. The new studio had been set up as a joint project between Sega of America and Japan's Sonic Team in order for the Japanese talent to tutor up-and-coming Western developers. Morawiec's first task within the studio was to create the art for the highly impressive special stages in *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, but by the following year he had graduated to the position of game designer on *Sonic Spinball*.

During the development of *Spinball*, Morawiec put together a design for a completely original Mega Drive project, which, according to STI manager Roger Hector, was one of the best design pitches the company had ever seen. "Peter came to me one day and wanted to show me a video he had made," recalls Hector. "It was an animation that he had created to illustrate a game concept where the player must solve each frame of a literal comic book, page by page. It was a breathtaking job he had done all by himself. He'd captured the entire essence of an original idea and illustrated it beautifully while being highly animated and set to music. It was fantastic. Easily the best presentation of a game concept I had ever seen. There was no doubt, after viewing it, that this was a game that STI had to make."

Morawiec explains the processes that led to his concept video. "Growing up in Eastern Europe I very

"Hi there, I'm the title screen to Comix Zone. See how I've replaced the C with an X. That's because I'm damn cool."



You won't get anywhere on this panel unless you move one of the rocks over that hole with the bats coming out.



much loved whatever Western comics filtered through – Asterix & Obelix, The Smurfs and so on. but it wasn't until I came to the US that I discovered all the comics and graphic novels catering to teens and beyond. Much of this was thanks to my Sega co-workers who were ardent comic book fans. The idea to make a comic book-themed game occurred to me while perusing the aisles of a Palo Alto comic book shop with those Sega buddies on a lunch break. I figured that by merging these two popular mediums we could create something very cool and unique. I then created an animated demo on my Amiga and pitched

allow us to explain its genius. The player takes control of Sketch Turner, an artist who has been transported into the pages of his own comic book by the supervillain he created. Within the physical confines of the comic itself Sketch must physically move through each panel and every page, fighting off his own creations and solving special puzzles as he goes. As well as demonstrating a fairly solid fighting system, *Comix Zone* really stood out for its inventive level design. Sketch could move through the comic's panels in a variety of ways, by leaping between the borders of each image, ripping through them or by dropping

AUCTION ACTION

Rare comic book auctions may be ten-a-penny on eBay but 'Comix' auctions don't come along so often. The original Mega Drive game is in plentiful supply while the free soundtrack is a little more valuable, as is the scarce Game Boy Advance conversion. The real money, however, is in the Japanese Mega Drive release. The game was released in very small quantities and is thought to be one of the rarest Mega Drive games in existence, often fetching in excess of £200. Work-in-progress material has been known to crop up for auction too, as Peter Morawiec found much to his surprise when a friend emailed him a link to an auction for a 100-page *Comix Zone* design document from 1994. For fans of the game, the pictures that appeared in the auction (and are reproduced here) offer a rare glimpse into the internal design process at Sega.

"THERE WAS NO DOUBT AFTER VIEWING IT THAT COMIX ZONE WAS A GAME THAT STL HAD TO MAKE"

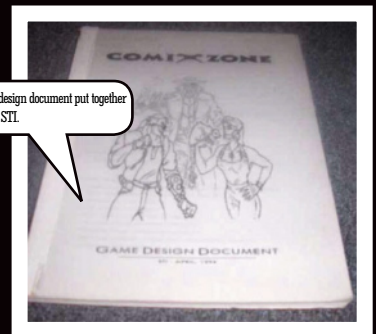
ROGER HECTOR

it to management. They gave it the thumbs up but it wasn't until after *Sonic Spinball* that we had an official go-ahead."

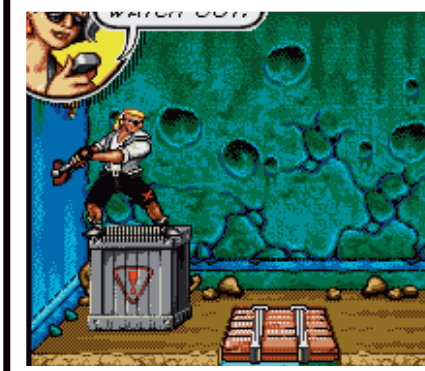
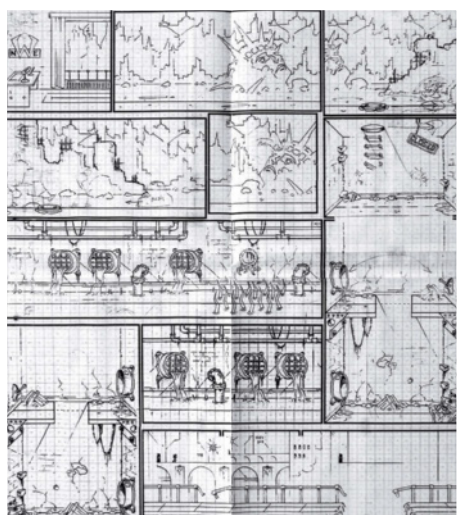
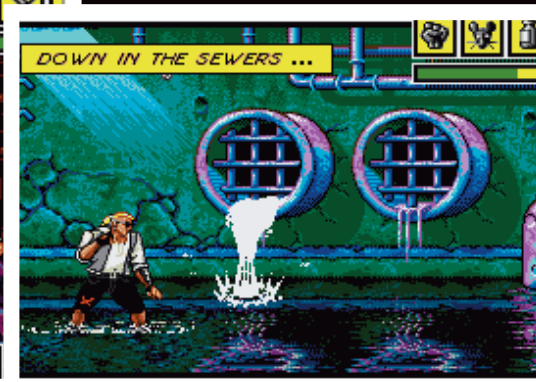
The original concept video for *Comix Zone*, as well as the hand-drawn level designs, reveals that the final game differed little from the initial idea. Almost everything from those original designs is present in the game and works terrifically, making for one of the most fun and original beat-'em-ups on the Mega Drive. For those who haven't actually played *Comix Zone*,

down to the one underneath, which added a non-linear element and a little replayability to the game. It was so well done that the player really felt as though they were trapped inside a comic book and literally fighting their way through each page. An extra layer of depth was also added by being able to rip parts of the pages. Sketch was able to tear a piece of the page from the background and fold it into a paper plane to be thrown at the enemies while his pet rat, Roadkill, could sniff out and uncover hidden power-ups from

The extensive design document put together by the team at STL.



"The intro screens show how I was sucked into my own comic - by the bloody neck Gah!"



behind pages.

Roadkill could also be used to solve some puzzles as his small size allowed him to enter hard-to-reach areas and activate switches. For most *Comix Zone* players he became an essential part of the gameplay and a much-loved feature in the game. For such an important element, however, nobody seems to know exactly who can be credited with coming up with the idea. "To be honest, I don't remember exactly," says Morawiec. "We were a closely knit core team and we would oftentimes brainstorm together. Sidekick characters were pretty much a must back then, but I was looking for a sidekick who wouldn't get in the way of the main character. I think either Howard Drossin (the composer) or I came up with the rat idea, it fit those requirements nicely and made for a fitting pet for Sketch, who was a tough grunge-rocker type of guy." Regardless of who invented Roadkill however, his inclusion was just one of many small touches that built up to make *Comix Zone* such a fun and unique game to play, as well as a testament to

the masterminds behind its design.

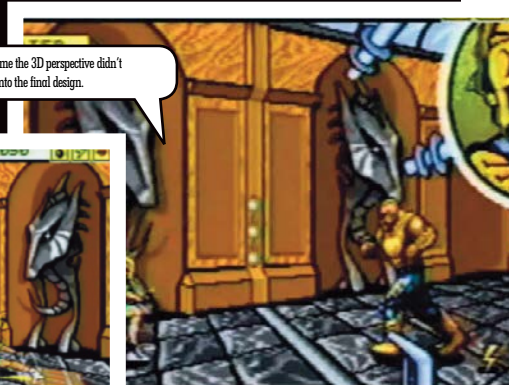
If *Comix Zone* is a triumph of game design, then, it equally represents a masterclass in programming. The coder at the helm of *Comix Zone* was Adrian Stephens, an STI newcomer who became good friends with Morawiec and even went on to found an independent studio with him in 1996. "I had been recruited by STI to work on Saturn games because of my 3D experience," explains Stephens. "But when the Saturn was delayed, I needed to find another project to work on in the meantime, and Peter Morawiec had a great idea for a Genesis game that sounded like an interesting challenge. I performed all the programming of the game and tools and was also the director of the technology involved. Getting the game to fit in 2MB, and dynamically decompressing and paging in and out graphical elements while the game was running was a big challenge. We needed to be able to scroll across a large page of graphics that not only wouldn't fit in the VRAM all at once, but actually wouldn't all fit in RAM

either, so a lot of the processing power was devoted to frantically decompressing data in the background. If you try to compress a bunch of Genesis ROM images you'll find *Comix Zone* will shrink the least. That's testament to how compressed everything in it is already. We really managed to pack a lot into that 2MB. I was also quite pleased with the speech bubbles. Consoles like the Genesis were not really designed with things like proportional fonts and dynamically generated graphics in mind, but we got it to work."

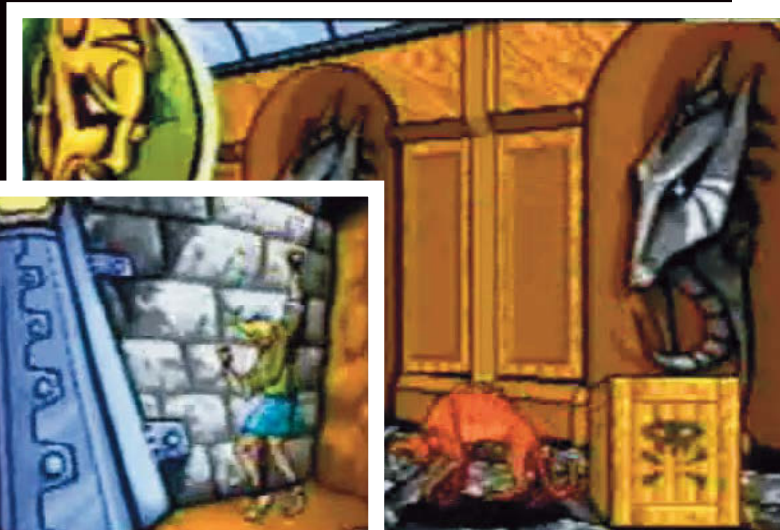
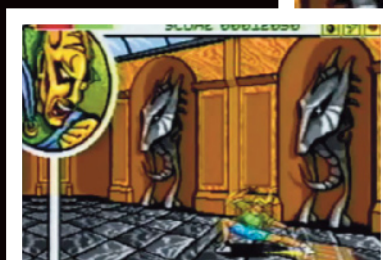
What's also astounding about the use of memory in *Comix Zone*, is the unusual number of sounds to be heard. The actual musical score was composed by Howard Drossin in an appropriately grungy rock style, with heavy guitars and drums throughout. Interestingly, the soundtrack was reworked for CD and re-recorded with real instruments, with Drossin himself playing the guitar, and a friend adding vocals to the original instrumental tracks. The CD was given away free with the original production run of the game. And for those



The original concept video for Comix Zone was created on an Amiga.



It's a shame the 3D perspective didn't make it into the final design.



This move, like many others, made it into the final game just as it was envisioned.



who heard it, it added a new layer of depth to the game itself, as hearing the chip music allowed the player to form a much grander soundtrack in their own heads based on the CD they had previously listened to. It's a strange phenomenon that is peculiar to the 16-bit age as a handful of publishers (most notably SquareSoft) would occasionally release orchestrated

villains. "It was just some silliness at Howard's studio. Gravis was a robot, so I wanted a synthesised, metallic-sounding voice. Howard would always be teasing me about my accent and wanted to immortalise my voice within the game. We recorded the phrases, then applied various filters to get the desired effect. I don't speak that way, trust me."

"I REMEMBER ASKING ROGER HECTOR IF IT HAD AT LEAST BROKEN EVEN, AND HE SAID 'NO!' AS IF IT WERE A STUPID QUESTION"

ADRIAN STEPHENS

scores of their in-game music, which often had the unexpected side effect of allowing the player to understand exactly what kind of sound the composer had originally aimed for. With the dawn of CD-ROM as a videogame medium, however, this phenomenon quickly disappeared, making *Comix Zone* one of the last games of its kind.

As well as the excellent rock soundtrack, *Comix Zone* also pushed the Mega Drive's audio capabilities to their limit with a series of character voices that were actually recorded by the game's developers – Peter Morawiec voiced Gravis, one of the game's recurring

Despite its technical achievements, however, *Comix Zone* was far from a perfect game. Granted, it was wholly original and cleverly constructed, but it was also extremely difficult. Very few of the enemies can be easily defeated without Sketch taking some damage – a situation made much worse by the fact that there are no extra lives and only one Continue, which is only awarded once on the second stage and once on the third. "I wish we hadn't cranked up the difficulty at the last minute, which made it nearly impossible to finish, at the urging of the test department," says Morawiec. Stephens adds: "We had a very comprehensive and



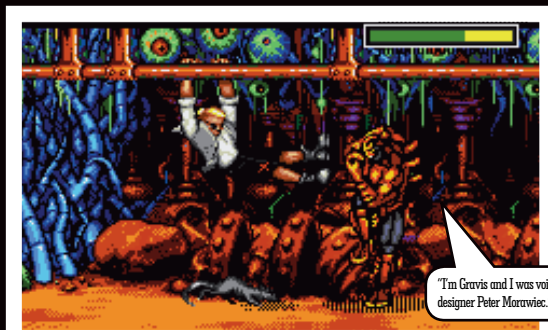
FROM GENESIS TO GBA

Released in 2002 in very limited quantities, the GBA version of *Comix Zone* is something of an unknown quantity to most fans, especially as the European version was inexplicably absent from the UK. Us Brits aren't missing out on much, though; the screen size was reformatted to fit the small GBA screen and resulted in the edges of each adjacent panel being removed from sight. Fans of the game subsequently complained that the new layout lessened the illusion of being inside a comic and made the game feel more like your traditional beat-'em-up.

Roadkill locates and retrieves one of the game's hidden power-ups from behind the comic page.



YEAH, I CAN'T WAIT



"I'm Gravis and I was voiced by my own designer Peter Morawiec."

complicated scripting system for enemy AI that I'd probably do differently now. Peter has always wanted more control over things like that than is probably good for him. Generally, it probably would have been better to keep things simpler and get the game out sooner than we did."

Having spent so long in development, *Comix Zone's* biggest problem was that it hit retail so late on in the Mega Drive's life. The game debuted in the States in early 1995 but didn't reach a global audience until October of the same year. By this point the PlayStation and Saturn had both been launched worldwide, causing many gamers to abandon the old formats in favour of the newer and more exciting three-dimensional graphics, which these newer consoles offered. Needless to say, *Comix Zone* did not sell particularly well. "It was a shame," says Stephens. "Our timing was definitely off. I remember asking Roger Hector if it had at least broken even, and he said 'No!' as if it were a stupid question. It also affected our ability to move onto Saturn development ourselves, and I think neither STI nor the Saturn ever recovered from that. Of course, the Saturn would have been a huge success if it had been unleashed upon it from the start," he adds jokingly.

As we all know, sales figures are often completely unrelated to the quality of a game and in *Comix Zone's*

"I DEVELOPED A QUICK PITCH FOR A 3D-BASED COMIX ZONE, THERE WERE SOME ENQUIRIES FROM MARVEL AND A LOT OF INTEREST FROM JAPAN, BUT NOTHING EVER CAME OUT OF IT AS FAR AS I KNOW"

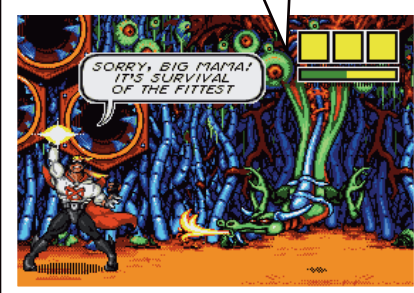
PETER MORAWIEC

case they are totally irrelevant. Over a decade after its initial release, the game is still managing to build up a strong cult following as an increasing number of Sega fans are now discovering the game for the first time. The original cartridge can be found for around the £2 mark in most games shops while the game also tends to crop up on retro compilations quite often. Yojiro Ogawa, head of game design at Sonic Team (see page 88), is known to be a huge fan of *Comix Zone* and was personally responsible for including the game as a bonus in *Sonic Mega Collection*. The game has also made appearances on the *Sega Smash Pack*, *Mega Drive Collection* and Wii's Virtual Console, as well as ports to Game Boy Advance and PC, making it one of the most re-released Mega Drive games in the history of Sega's back catalogue.

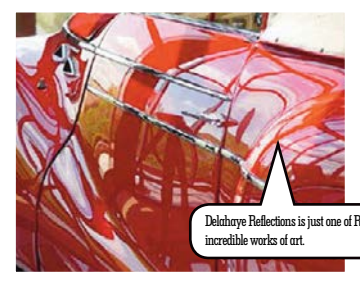
Comix Zone has never been more popular and the game is destined to become more than simply a cult classic as it continues to receive the level of exposure it has enjoyed over the last couple of years: a fact the development team couldn't be more pleased about. "I think it's still one of my better games and I constantly meet people who remember it fondly," says Morawiec. "It was pretty unique and we actually pulled it off, which wasn't all that easy on the Genesis. It was my first original game, which I was involved in *A-to-Z*, so it was very exhilarating for me to see the final product hit the shelves."

"My children were interested in playing it a couple of weeks ago so we downloaded an emulator and found the ROMs online," reveals Stephens. "It's very odd to see something you created so long

"I'm the first boss of the game. I look pretty threatening but I'm a pushover."



There are multiple ways to beat this chop, including pushing a flaming barrel underneath his face.



Delahaye Reflections is just one of Roger Hector's incredible works of art.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

ago under such different circumstances. I think it all seemed a little simple to them, just 2D, so they couldn't understand why it took so long to make. And to be honest, neither could I, though I remember it all seeming very involved and complicated at the time. Anyway, it inspired my son to make an animation of himself being sucked into his drawings, so it was all worth it in the end."

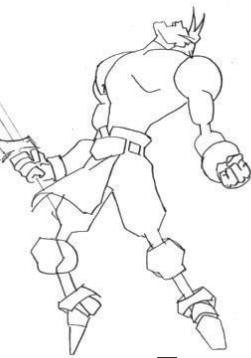
Our *Comix Zone* story doesn't quite end here, though. As STI was focused on developing character-based games, the potential for sequels was always considered and *Comix Zone* was no exception. "We began working on a Sonic-themed Saturn game as our next project," says Morawiec, presumably referring to the cancelled *Sonic X-Treme*. "I developed a quick pitch for a 3D-based *Comix Zone* during some downtime, including a sample storyboard, which showed how the character might transition in and out of comic book panels in a 3D

implementation. I seem to recall that there were some enquiries from Marvel and a lot of interest from Japan to create licensed *Comix Zone* games, but nothing ever came out of it as far as I know."

With Sega Japan's obvious love for the *Comix Zone* series, it seems possible that a 3D sequel may some day emerge, although the question remains whether the page-turning mechanic of the comic book world could even work in three dimensions. Besides which, both Morawiec and Stephens have long since left Sega so a brand new development team would have to be used. The realistic assumption is that *Comix Zone* will remain a one-of-a-kind oddity, to stand alone and live on, not through overused character licences, but through the merits of its own individual and unchallenged gameplay.

Special thanks go to Peter Morawiec for kindly taking the time to unearth all the archive material for this feature.

Not everyone involved in the making of *Comix Zone* stayed in the games industry, so here's a rundown of what they did next. The vast majority of the design team, including Peter Morawiec and Adrian Stephens, remained at STI through the development of *The Ooze* and the cancelled *Sonic X-Treme* before founding independent developer Luxoflux and making *Vigilante 8* and *True Crime*. Kunitake Aoki, the only Japanese person to work on *Comix Zone*, eventually joined Nintendo and worked on *Metroid Prime: Hunters* and *Mario Vs Donkey Kong*, among other games. Composer Howard Drossin and STI boss Roger Hector eventually both left the industry. Drossin went on to compose the scores for a slew of Hollywood movies, including *Blade Trinity* and Jet Li's *Danny The Dog*. Hector, meanwhile, now owns a custom sports car manufacturer known as Anteros Coachworks and has become a well-respected fine artist, specialising in photorealistic automobile art.



BEHIND THE SCENES

GUARDIAN HEROES

Easy to overlook at the time, thanks to its home on the Saturn, Guardian Heroes is now getting a second chance to prove its greatness on Xbox Live Arcade. We speak to Treasure to find out how this overlooked masterpiece came to be



Released: 1996
 Format: Saturn
 Publisher: Sega
 Developer: Treasure

KEY STAFF:

Tetsuhiko Kikuchi
 Executive Producer
 Masaki Ukyo
 Executive Director
 Masato Maegawa
 Management



IT WAS 1996. In the UK, Britpop had recently sparked into existence, co-existing with the emergent mainstream dance music and club culture. East 17's 'Stay Another Day' had just topped the Christmas charts (to be replaced by the criminally bad 'Cotton Eye Joe' early in the new year). Action bluster was all the rage at the box-office, with the likes of *Waterworld*, *Braveheart*, *GoldenEye* and the slightly more sophisticated *Seven* topping recent film charts.

In Japan, recent movie releases included *Ghost In The Shell*, *Hana Yori Dango*, and *Shall We Dance?*, and even *Godzilla* was still going strong, with its 22nd instalment (*Godzilla Vs. Destroyah*) topping the box office for the entire year. Céline Dion, meanwhile, was the first international artist to reach number 1 on the Oricon Singles Chart in over ten years with 'To Love You More', thanks to its appearance on the soundtrack of TV drama *Koibito Yo*. In the world of manga, *Initial D* had just appeared, and *Cardcaptor Sakura* and *Old Boy* were on the verge of doing so.

Most importantly, in the year or so since the release of Sony's PlayStation, the polygonal splendour of games like *Ace Combat*, *Tekken*, *WipEout*, *Warhawk* and *Ridge Racer* had proved that games had crossed a major new technological frontier. Even on the Saturn (which, notoriously, hadn't been designed to handle all of those newly fashionable polygons), the likes of *Virtua Fighter 2* and *Virtua Cop* confirmed the ascendancy of three dimensions. Heck, even the SNES was getting in on the polygonal act with the *Donkey Kong Country* series, then about to receive its second chapter. But Masato Maegawa and his small band of fellow travellers at Treasure simply didn't care.

He didn't, and still doesn't, watch movies. He didn't, and still doesn't watch anime, **CONTINUED >**

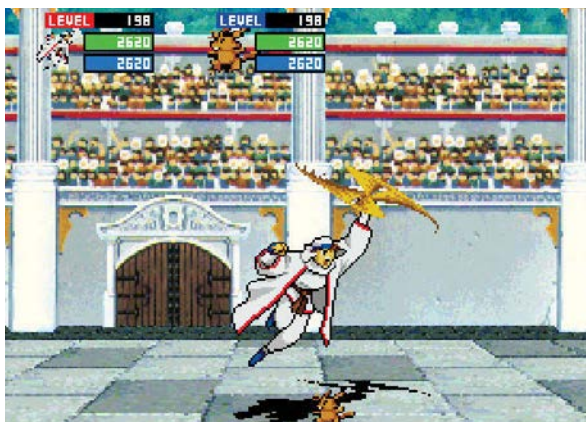


Guardian Heroes' Undead Hero was a neat touch, an NPC ally that could be given simple commands by the player.



WE CREATED THE COMPANY TO MAKE THE GAMES WE LIKE IN THE WAY WE LIKE





As was fashionable with high-end 2D games of the time, *Guardian Heroes* enabled players to jump between several planes of perspective as and when they wanted to.



Way ahead of its time, *Guardian Heroes* blended the ageing scrolling fighter genre with RPG mechanics years before the current crop of XBLA games did the same.



FROM THE FORUM

Posted by:

GRIZZLY

▲ Easily my favourite game on the Sega Saturn. Nothing says 'chaotic fun' more than a ninja dressed in green, juggling a screen filled with enemies.

Posted by:

MFNICK

▲ Had no idea what to expect when I first put it in, but as soon as I beat up the first dude and shouted, 'It's like *Streets Of Rage!*' I was immediately won over. Then I found out how to control the big gold dude with the huge sword, all the moves, all the different dialogue options. Next thing I know I've lost hundreds of hours finding everything in the game and exploring the story with all the characters. I even spent a ridiculous amount of time in the battle arena where I was able to play as all the awesome, screen-filling mofos from the story mode. This was the game I played most with my mates, one of my favourite of all time, and the first that made me take notice of Treasure, as I'd never played their games until this.

Posted by:

UNKNOWNQUANTITY

▲ Definitely one of the games all Sega Saturn owners should own, and a defining moment in 2D side-scrolling beat-'em-ups. I don't think I ever found every game path, and the multiple endings made more playthroughs a must – and playing with mates was always fun. It was like playing an animated *Golden Axe*, but with cooler characters and a much better storyline – from memory, something about spirits and a special sword? Heck, just writing this makes me want to set my Sega Saturn back up...

■ The interior of Treasure's office pays tribute to many of the developer's past glories. It's easy to forget just how many great games it's made.



joyful to play today as it was back then, regularly appearing on lists of the best Saturn games, and still capable of fetching prices of over \$100 (or £60) on auction sites. And yet, at a time when the polygon had just proved itself as the apex predator of the videogame ecosystem, *Guardian Heroes* was resolutely and unapologetically 2D.

■■■ ASIDE FROM THE terrible artwork, the US box gave a small hint of what to expect from the game: "An Enchanted Sword falls into the hands of a band of young heroes. Assisted by a Knight and a Golden Undead Warrior, they begin their quest to change the fate of their entire kingdom." The European release came a bit closer to distilling the glorious havoc that the game was about to unleash on your screen: "Hack, slash and burn through hordes of androids, zombie warriors and goblins as you select your route through over 30 gripping levels, or battle it out in frantic six-player mode with over 45 characters to choose from!" Even that, though,

is just a faint echo of the epic explosion of brilliance that *Guardian Heroes* was about to let loose on an unsuspecting world. This was the side-scrolling beat-'em-up taken to its illogical conclusion: complete and utter insanity, and completely and utterly compelling.

Wandering into Treasure's current headquarters, a few blocks away from a completely average intersection in suburban Tokyo, gives few hints that you are about to enter the heart of such an especially untrammelled, unhinged variety of videogame genius. Stepping out of the elevator into a tiny corridor and then into a small, slightly tatty reception area, you could easily be entering a small-town estate agent's office, or an accountant's – an impression that is only slightly dispelled by the videogame posters and the couple of coin-op cabinets that line the walls of an otherwise nondescript boardroom. So, when CEO Masato Maegawa enters the room, it is almost no surprise that he sports a sensible haircut and suit to complete the illusion of normality. Appearances can be deceiving, however. Maegawa is truly an enfant terrible of electronic art, and there are few people better placed to tell the story behind the creation of *Guardian Heroes*.

"When we made the game we had already created a game for the Mega Drive called *Yu Yu Hakusho*, and we wanted to evolve that to create a more original game – to develop even

■■■ read comics, listen to music, or even play too many games outside of his favoured genres. Instead, he and the tiny team of prodigiously talented pixel geniuses at Treasure were quietly getting on with making some of the greatest games to appear on Sega's ill-fated console – some of the greatest games in videogame history, in fact. One of those games, which you might have heard of, was *Radiant Silvergun*. Another was *Guardian Heroes*.

Guardian Heroes owed its name to Treasure's earlier Mega Drive title, *Gunstar Heroes*, but borrowed little else apart from a single cameo from that game's final boss. Oh, and Treasure's trademark ability to confound expectation and twist genres into almost unrecognisable shapes, creating beautiful, joyful confusion and mayhem in the process. *Guardian Heroes* is the last great scrolling beat-'em-up, as



MASATO MAEGAWA
CEO, Treasure



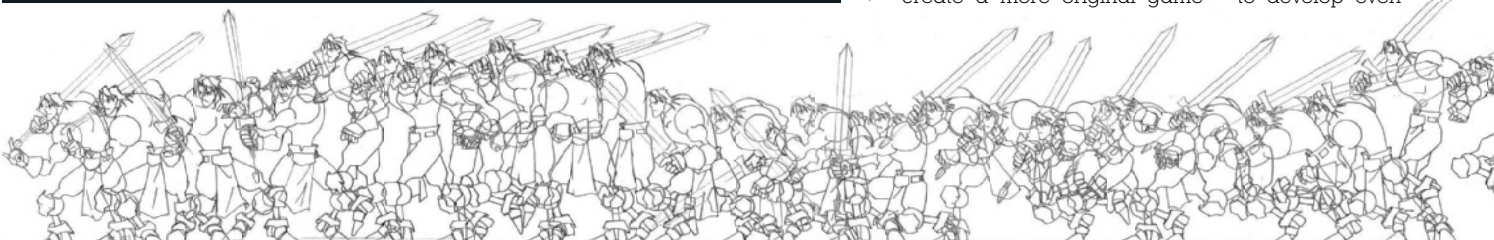
Double the fun

■ THE SATURN version of *Guardian Heroes* required about 70 people to put together, all told – thanks mostly to the outsourced team working on the in-game full motion video.

The Xbox Live version, by contrast, has taken only seven people

to convert – but you needn't worry about anything going missing in the process. The Xbox Live version contains everything that the Saturn version did, and more besides: "All of the elements you've seen in the Sega Saturn version will be in the 360 version

as well," says Maegawa. "However, we've been adding many new elements, such as 12-player online battle. So it's not just a port; it's going to be a new game as well. As for whether there are any Easter eggs, I'm not going to tell you."



more madness and excess," he says, explaining the genesis of the game. "That was how the project started. And that was the moment when absolutely everybody was creating 3D games, so we wanted to make a 2D game." Indeed, then, as now, Treasure, paid little heed to commercial pressure or prevailing fashion: "We created the company to make the games we like in the way we like. And nothing has changed since we started the company," Maegawa says, summing up the company's boldly admirable philosophy – a philosophy made carnate in *Guardian Heroes*.

Like all other beat-'em-ups, the premise was simple: move from one side of the screen to the other, smashing anything in the way. But added to this were tweaks that upgraded the combat mechanics to levels of complexity that matched those of fully-fledged static beat-'em-ups like *Street Fighter*, yet still plunged players into headlong violence against thronging hordes of assailants.

Instead of being free to wander around the screen and take on those roving mobs, players could switch between three planes of movement by tapping the Saturn pad's shoulder buttons, which freed the developer to use the rest of the pad to enable more sophisticated, *Street-Fighter*-style commands and combos, and even for characters to leap and jump. Melee attacks combined with magic strikes that were contagious, snaking and chaining their way across the screen as they infected everyone in cascading waves of delirious onscreen effects. It was a bedlam and anarchy that was matched by a development process that was every bit as haphazard – at least compared to the modern, regimented approach to development. "We didn't use any special tools to make the game," explains

■ *Guardian Heroes* didn't just have huge screen-filling bosses; it had huge screen-filling bosses you could play as in the brilliant versus mode.



■ The roster of 45 playable characters was, and still is, pretty comprehensive, ranging from the rather unpromising 'fat citizen' and 'weak citizen' to the rather more mean and nasty goblins and zombies.

WE TRIED TO IMPLEMENT UNIQUE SYSTEMS TO MAKE IT MORE CHAOTIC AND COLOURFUL

Maegawa. "The game design document was just a three page outline. We just sort of created the game using trial and error."

Perhaps the game's innovations are why it's still fondly remembered today, surmises Maegawa, when pressed on the issue. "Compared to standard 2D-scroll action titles, we tried to implement several unique systems to make it more chaotic and colourful, like the three layers, the vertical movement, and we tried to give gamers something unexpected. So maybe that's why it had a strong impact on players."

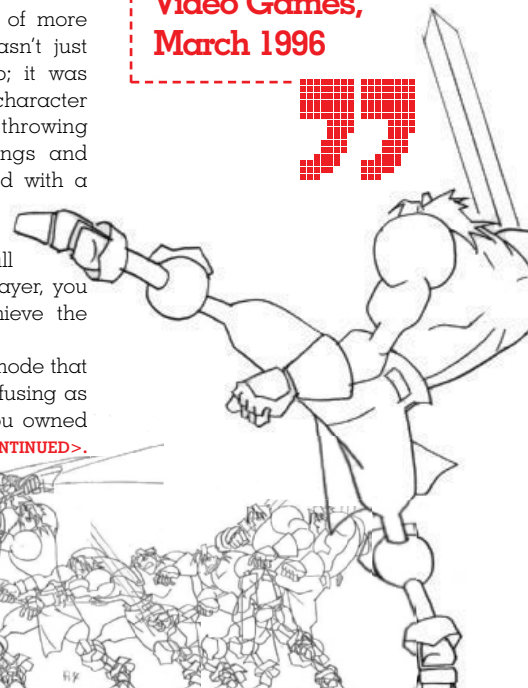
■■■ INDEED, IT WASN'T only a case of more advanced combat: *Guardian Heroes* wasn't just a superbly honed scrolling beat-'em up; it was also a genre-bending one, borrowing a character development system from RPGs and throwing in a multitude of different paths, endings and unlockable characters. The game started with a fairly traditional band of adventurers – warrior, wizard, ninja and cleric – but if you wanted to unlock the full complement of characters for the multiplayer, you had to choose the right path and achieve the right ending.

And yes, it also featured a multiplayer mode that was every bit as hectic and silly and confusing as the single-player game – especially if you owned a multitap, which enabled six players **CONTINUED>**.



It's our cover and we've given it eight pages! What more evidence do you need to tell you that we've been gripped by *Guardian Heroes* fever?

Computer & Video Games, March 1996



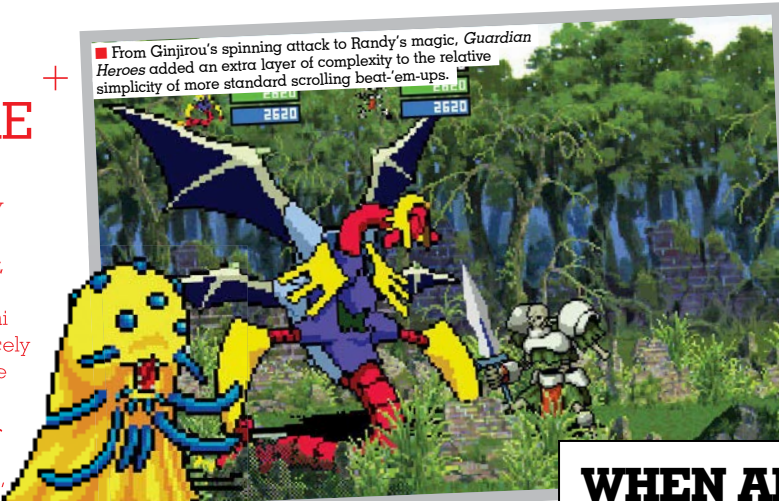


TREASURE BOX

■ TREASURE IS TRULY a treasure; a tiny, independent developer, founded in 1992 by a group of former Konami employees and as fiercely committed, today, to the independent spirit that fuelled them back then. Ignoring passing fads and fashionable trends, they have consistently created games that push the envelope of artistic ingenuity, resulting in some amazing masterpieces and remarkable oddities, and occasionally threatening the very existence of the company. "As I mentioned earlier, our policy is to create games that we want to create, which might lead to financial crisis occasionally," Maegawa tells us.

"However, we've been in this industry for 18 years now." Indeed a softography that includes the likes of *Radiant Silvergun*, *Ikaruga*, *Bangai-O*, *Alien Soldier*, *Sin And Punishment* and *Gradius V* suggests that the company's doing something right.

■ From Ginjiro's spinning attack to Randy's magic, *Guardian Heroes* added an extra layer of complexity to the relative simplicity of more standard scrolling beat-'em-ups.



■ to take part at once, in the sort of unadulterated craziness that prefigured the massively multiplayer deathmatches that are more commonplace in today's more connected gaming age. It was also full of the sort of glorious gaming non sequiturs for which Treasure is occasionally fond of, full of mismatches and unbalances – absurdly underpowered characters competing with preposterously planet-sized ones – making it every bit as comic as it was competitive. It also cemented multiplayer as Maegawa's personal favourite part of the game: "The story mode was fun, but at that time there weren't any other games where you could play together with six people, and playing together with six people really brought the mayhem to a crescendo. So of course I like the story mode but, to be honest, six-player versus mode is the bit which I like the most."

Perhaps the only major drawback with *Guardian Heroes* – apart from its capacity to hurt your eyes with the sheer intensity of the action – was that, like many of Treasure's games, it was released in limited numbers, which partly explains the high prices it still fetches on the internet (though that isn't to say that you can't get it for decent prices if you shop around).

■■■ SO WHY ARE Treasure games so rare? Maegawa laughs. "Well, that's because the number of orders we received for the game wasn't very high, so when all of the hardcore fans went out and bought it, it sold out. So I think that's why it still has a premium price when you see it on web auctions." That limited availability also partly explains the relatively muted reception that greeted the game upon its release. From Treasure's perspective, the

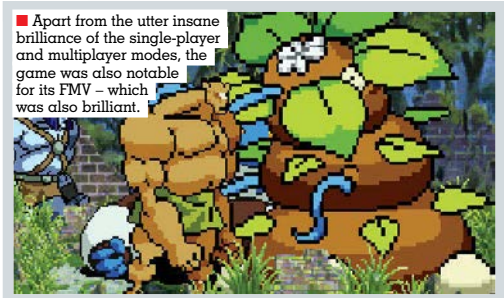
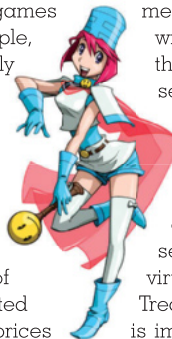
sales and reviews were perfectly acceptable. "The sales were pretty good, so we were fairly satisfied," says Maegawa. "And the reviews... of course the reviews contained various opinions, but in general the game received good reviews, so we were pretty happy."

But there were certainly some reviewers and players who felt confounded by some of Treasure's design choices, as he goes on to explain: "At that moment there

WHEN ALL OF OUR HARDCORE FANS WENT OUT AND BOUGHT IT, IT SOLD OUT

were a whole bunch of one-on-one 2D fighting games where the characters and combat were balanced pretty well, but we wanted to create more multi-character, more chaotic games, and we gave players the freedom to create their own game balance – they have the option to change it from the menus. So some people were not very impressed with that. But that was just a minority, and I think the majority of people who played the game seemed to like it."

Still, it's only with the passage of time that the game seems to have finally acquired its richly deserved recognition as one of the greatest games of all time. And yet, like many of Treasure's games, few other developers seemed to draw any lessons from its spiky virtuosity – except, perhaps the lesson that Treasure's particular brand of development genius is impossible for others to recreate. In spite of the way the developer seems to be able to combine



■ Apart from the utter insane brilliance of the single-player and multiplayer modes, the game was also notable for its FMV – which was also brilliant.



wholly original game designs and bafflingly complicated onscreen overkill with a crowd-pleasing simplicity and spontaneity, achieving such a marvellous sweet spot of success in the process, no other developer ever seems willing (or perhaps able) to draw inspiration from the sublime brilliance of the likes of *Guardian Heroes*.

So it still stands alone at the pinnacle of its genre. There was a sequel, of sorts, but it failed to match the heights scaled by the original: *Guardian Heroes Advance* was released on the GBA in 2004 (eight years after the original), one of Treasure's rare duff notes in a softography of otherwise symphonic brilliance. It maintained the mix of melee and magic, but transported the action from the medieval fantasy scenario of the first game to a futuristic sci-fi setting. It also lost the tri-planar movement in favour of a more standard interpretation of the scrolling beat-'em up genre, disappointing reviewers in the process.

■■■■ EVEN SO, IT'S not so much that the game is bad; more that it just fails to live up to the benchmark established by the brilliant original – fails to live up to the thousands of small joys that you could experience on the Saturn. The almost comically inappropriate music. Juggling enemies to rack up experience (at the risk of bad karma affecting your ending). The FMV cinematics. The character designs; with sprites drawn from Treasure's seemingly inexhaustible stores of perfectly designed little pixel people. The way the screen zoomed in and out to focus your attention on the chaos. The ongoing assistance provided by The Undead Hero – surely the least annoying AI partner in the history of games ("We put in The Undead Hero to help out people who are no good at action games," explains Maegawa). Just the sheer ridiculousness of not being able to see your character because of the incredible multitude of enemies and effects crowding the screen.

These are the things that were missing from the sequel. And with no current plans for any further sequels (although when asked about this Maegawa turns to our Sega PR chaperone to give a quick comic plea: "We really want to make one please, Mr Sega!"), it means the only way to enjoy them again



■ "With this title Sega let us work fairly freely," says Maegawa, explaining Treasure's relationship with the game's publisher. "At that time everybody was making 3D games, so the fact that Sega also saw the value in 2D games allowed us to work on it very easily."

is to play the original. Until later this year, that is, when the game will be released on Xbox Live Arcade, a feat that shouldn't go unrecognized, given that the Saturn is notoriously one of the hardest systems to port from.

"The biggest challenge was that when we were done with the Sega Saturn version we stored all of the source code onto DAT," explains Maegawa, apparently confirming that the company's approach to the archiving process is as haphazard as the action in some of its games. "So at the beginning of the project we had to retrieve the source code, but we had no environment to read the tapes! So actually we had to borrow equipment from Sega – and Sega had to gather various different parts from different divisions so that we could create one complete environment to play them back. But somehow we were able to retrieve the source code. So actually that was the toughest part of porting the game to the Xbox."

Apart from that, apparently, the process has been plain sailing. So even if you can't afford the eBay prices, you will soon be able to savour a taste of one of the Saturn's most entertaining masterpieces. And you really do owe it to yourself to try it. It truly is a rare gem of a game.



>. A GAMING EVOLUTION

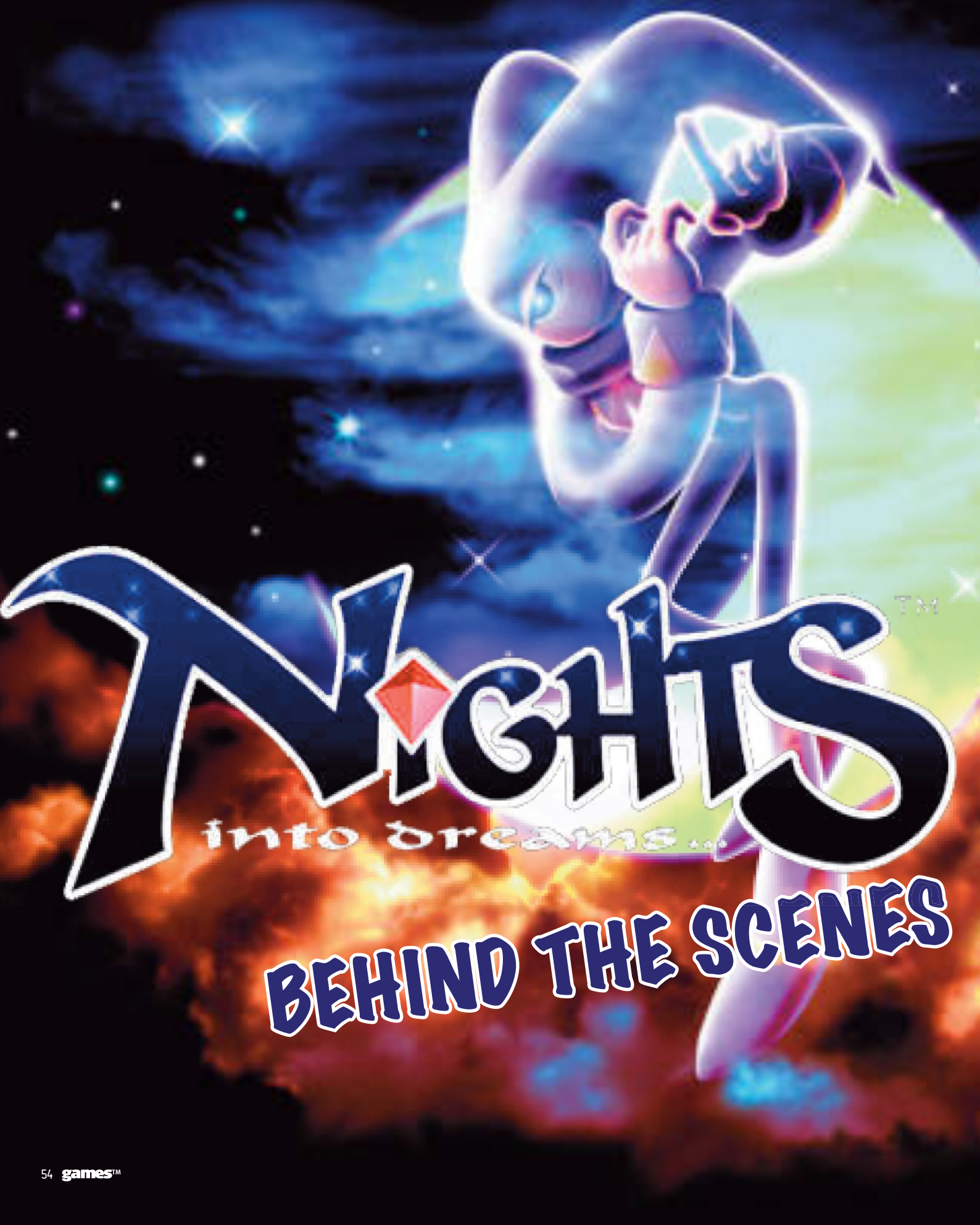


Treasure's first stab at the beat-'em-up, *Yu Yu Hakusho*, was based on a Japanese comic, but was sadly never released in the West.



Apart from the name, the official sequel to *Guardian Heroes* bore little relationship to the classic original – more's the pity.





Nights TM

into dreams...

BEHIND THE SCENES



IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW, YUJI NAKA TAKES SOME TIME AWAY FROM HIS TOP-SECRET PROJECTS AT PROPE TO CHAT WITH GAMES™ ABOUT ONE OF THE GREATEST SEGA GAMES OF ALL TIME: THE WONDERFUL NiGHTS INTO DREAMS

◀ Yuji Naka: the man behind NiGHTS, Sonic and so many other classics.

Yuji Naka, and his former development studio, Sonic Team, may well be most famous for creating *Sonic The Hedgehog*, but over the years the veteran game designer has been responsible for so many more significant videogames than the 'hedgehog with attitude'. You name it, *Phantasy Star Online*, *Burning Rangers*, *Samba De Amigo*. Naka has been responsible for a list of classics so long it could rival the work of even Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto. Of all his games however, there is one that stands head and shoulders above the rest. It is still one of the most inventive and original games of all time and is dearest to the heart of almost every long-time Sega fan. We are of course referring to the wondrous *NiGHTS Into Dreams*.

1996 was a landmark year for 3D platformers, with every major console playing host to a game that revolutionised the genre. N64 launched with *Super Mario 64*, and the multiformat *Tomb Raider* found its natural home on PlayStation. The Saturn, meanwhile, was bestowed with *NiGHTS*, a platform game so unique, so completely unconventional that it's hard to call it a platformer at all. And while Mario and Lara leapt into the history books, *NiGHTS* was somehow forgotten by all but the hardcore. Those who do remember it however, know that *NiGHTS* was a sublime experience. Its goal – to fly a floating jester-like creature through the dreams of two children, collecting orbs and comboing 'links' between checkpoints – was unlike that of any other game, yet it was typical of just how different Sega was to its competitors in the mid-Nineties.

Pinpointing *NiGHTS*' inspiration is not easy. Though its speed and motion vaguely recall the fluid movements of *Sonic*, there really isn't a game like it, so it's unsurprising that Naka found inspiration from outside the television screen. "*NiGHTS* has been inspired by various titles and characters," he says, "I personally think that it was inspired by my very favourite, Cirque du Soleil's *Mystère*". A brief look at the Las Vegas stage show, in which graceful masquerade characters bounce and soar through a dream-like landscape filled with mesmerising patterns that shift with the action, certainly throws up a few similarities. The visual likeness between performance and game shows exactly where *NiGHTS*' fluid movements originated, but how did Naka intend to transfer those movements into the hands of the player?

Of course, *NiGHTS* could function normally with a standard Saturn control pad, but the ease

with which the main character could glide through the air, diving, looping and pirouetting at will, was at odds with the controller's stubborn digital D-pad. A custom controller, specifically designed for the acrobatic needs of *NiGHTS* was just what Sonic Team needed. "The analogue pad was a must-have item in terms of having the players experience the great feeling of flying in the air. Also, this might be a secret but the first person who touched the trial version of the analogue pad was actually Steven Spielberg. When he visited Sega, I did a presentation of *NiGHTS*, and that is when he touched the pad," recalls Naka with some pride for the innovative controller that launched alongside the game just 12 days after *Super Mario 64* debuted with its own specially designed controller. The impact of Nintendo's pad quickly resonated throughout the industry with other companies soon redesigning their own pads to match. In some ways this was a shame as the limelight could so easily have shone on Sega's controller had release schedules been different.

As with Nintendo's own landmark, Sega's controller brought the player closer to the game, involving them in the action as no other had done before. It was a feeling that Sonic Team had persevered long and hard to achieve. "Expressing the feeling of flying in the air and the creation of a totally new system was very challenging and required trial and error," says ▶



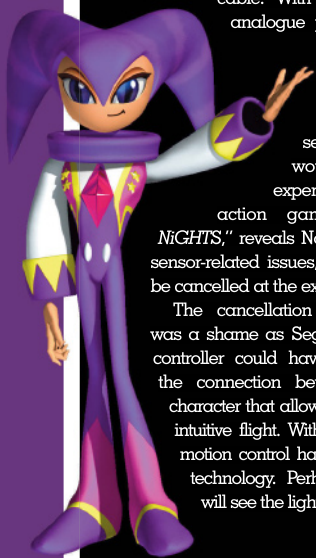
Released: 1996
Format: Saturn
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team

NIGHTS 2: THE TRUTH

Of all the games without a full sequel, *NiGHTS Into Dreams* is perhaps the one single game that most often receives requests for a follow-up. Naka himself has often stated that he's reluctant to create a sequel because he feels that the original is far too special to risk tarnishing with an inferior successor, but the truth is that an official sequel was once in the works. The truth lies in the Saturn's analogue pad and its mysterious detachable cable. "With the cable part of the analogue pad being able to disconnect, we

had been testing a controller with an inclination sensor, so the users would be able to experience a 3D flying action game named *Aero NiGHTS*," reveals Naka. "However, with sensor-related issues, the project had to be cancelled at the experimental stage."

The cancellation of *Aero NiGHTS* was a shame as Sega's motion-sensitive controller could have further improved the connection between player and character that allowed for such smooth, intuitive flight. With the launch of Wii, motion control has become a proven technology. Perhaps *Aero NiGHTS* will see the light of day after all.



Naka. "The intention was to have the players feel synchronised and reflect itself to the playing character. This is the reason why we tested quite a lot of different patterns. I remember having to narrow them down."

The relationship between the player and the gameworld was obviously of the utmost importance to Sonic Team, who strove to inject as much emotion into the game as possible, so much so that the results often surprised Naka himself. "Since *NiGHTS* was created to affect as many people as possible, we researched a lot of colours and meanings of things by using different methods including dream diagnosis. I remember crying when checking the in-game movies. I have actually developed many games, but this was the first and last time I was moved by my own game," he unexpectedly admits. Continuing on the subject of emotion, he reveals that: "The part I feel most proud of is that we succeeded in affecting people without using words. In recent games, characters speak words and I feel that worldwide, people are less likely to play by sharing the same emotions and feelings. Many people wrote to us saying that *NiGHTS* had affected them very much, and our staff were also very overwhelmed by it."

Where *NiGHTS* impressed on an emotional level, it equally made waves in the technological department. Although utilising full 3D polygonal graphics, most of *NiGHTS* had originally been designed to play on a 2D plane with fixed camera angles determining the course of the action. Yet the power of the Saturn, which was predominantly designed as a 2D console,

would run out and the main character would transform back into a human and plummet to earth ready for the player to guide them back to the start before a rampaging alarm clock caught up and awoke them. It was a slightly nightmarish scenario but one that technically pushed the Saturn further than anyone knew possible as the children could roam the 3D landscape with full analogue control. Later games like *Tomb Raider* and *Burning Rangers* would push Saturn's 3D capabilities even further, but back in July 1996, *NiGHTS* proved just how much everyone had underestimated Sega's underdog console.

Innovations followed in AI too. Sonic Team began experimenting with what would become the A-Life system: a feature that would reappear in Dreamcast's *Sonic Adventure* but would remain an under-appreciated addition among most players. "The A-Life was developed with the team's desire to show the life of living creatures in a very realistic environment throughout the game. The characters performed much better than I had imagined so I enjoyed it very much," explains Naka. The A-Life creatures took the form of cherub-like beings, called Nightopians, which hatched from eggs, roamed the game's landscape and evolved differently depending on their experiences. Some would learn to play musical instruments, some would breed with the indigenous enemies to create new life forms and others could even die tragically if the player

"I REMEMBER CRYING WHEN CHECKING THE IN-GAME MOVIES. THIS WAS THE ONLY TIME I WAS MOVED BY MY OWN GAME"

allowed Sonic Team to do much more with the game than they had anticipated. "At the start we thought that developing in full 3D would be very difficult so we created a 2D/3D system for *NiGHTS*, however, in the midstream we started to think that it might be possible and started to experiment. The result was great and that is what came to be Claris and Elliot's on-foot section." The section he refers to happens when the time

flew too close to them. In reality, the Nightopians had zero effect on gameplay, but they were one of the many fascinating incidental parts of *NiGHTS* that kept dedicated players returning to explore the gameworld.

Upon release, *NiGHTS* scored well in most specialist magazines, but failed to have any significant impact on the charts thanks to the Saturn's poor sales in the West. Still, the game was adored by well-informed Saturn owners encouraged to play it by enthusiastic reviews in the likes of *Mean Machines* and *Computer & Video Games*. Those who put the time into *NiGHTS* were rewarded with a quite unexpected experience. Though some thought the game too easy because levels could be completed by merely collecting enough orbs and swiftly moving on to the next level, they had mostly missed the point. *NiGHTS* was a game that asked its players to replay every level, perfecting their route around the twisting courses so that they could combo 'links' together by moving through every on-screen ring as quickly as possible without missing any. In essence, it was the only platformer of the time that could be truly played as a score-attack game, and would go on to influence many

◀ Cirque Du Soleil's *Mystère*: the visual inspiration for *NiGHTS*.





"THE FIRST PERSON WHO TOUCHED THE TRIAL VERSION OF THE ANALOGUE PAD WAS ACTUALLY STEVEN SPIELBERG"









forthcoming videogames including several rhythm-action titles and even the *Tony Hawk's* series, though few realise it.

This would be the point at which most behind-the-scenes features come to an end, but for Sega fans there's something about *NiGHTS* that is even more precious than the game itself and we couldn't resist asking Naka about it. *Christmas NiGHTS* was a two-level demo of *NiGHTS* given to Saturn owners as a Christmas present in Japan in December 1996, and in the UK the following December. The disc was more than just a simple demo however; the Saturn's internal clock knew when it was being played, and changed the game accordingly. It would play like an ordinary demo until Christmas time when the setting and characters would magically go all festive with tinsel, presents and Christmas trees everywhere. Finishing the demo rewarded the player with a random 'gift', some of which were very simple illustration galleries while others were incredibly special such as the Karaoke mode or even the level that changed the main character into Sonic the Hedgehog, and the level's boss into Dr Robotnik. Due to its inventive twist on the *NiGHTS* formula and the fact that the game was completely free, *Christmas NiGHTS* is as well loved as the game itself. To this day, many Saturn owners will habitually dust off the decade-old classic every Christmas to re-live the joy of playing this

unique videogame. So how did *Christmas NiGHTS* come about?

"*NiGHTS* was the last title I contributed to as a main programmer and also the time that a position as a producer started to become clear," explains Naka. "In order to introduce the title to as many people as possible, I created promotional assets such as videos and pamphlets. However, most of all, by creating *Christmas NiGHTS* I was able to plan services for fans – it was a good challenge for me. The creation of *Christmas NiGHTS* had two purposes. [It] was to create a wonderful game and let as many people as possible know, and it was also a Christmas present for the fans from us. To tell the truth, I am a fan of [*Lemmings*], and at the time I was developing *Sonic 2* – I was in the United States. One day, when I went to the store, I found a product called *Christmas Lemmings* and that felt like a Christmas present from the creator of *Lemmings*. I wanted the fans to feel that same happiness through the game that I created."

So there you have it. Although Naka admits that *Christmas NiGHTS* was intended as a marketing tool, it's heart-warming to see how much he considered the happiness of Sega fans. In fact, *NiGHTS* is one of the last Sega games we can remember that felt so special. It was a magical experience that bewildered the uninitiated but permanently endeared itself to any who gave it a whirl. If you've never played *NiGHTS Into Dreams* then we implore you to hunt down a Saturn and give the game a try. But then, we're sure that our readers know a truly special Sega game when they see it. After all, it was voted the twelfth best game of all time in issue 42, a fact we felt compelled to relay to Naka. And his response? "I am very happy to see this. I am also a big fan of *NiGHTS* so I am overwhelmed that it is loved. Thank you very much."

種 地	スタッフ	ボリューム極小	
地上のブレーキ	キュキュッ	祭服によるブレーキ	
少年達のジャンプ	ピヨーン		
ナイトのジャンプ	ビュイーン	とにかくゲーム中ほとんど飛んでいるので重要!	
圓み攻撃	シュフィン	空円を切り裂く	
接触音	タッ	ボリューム小	
直接攻撃	ポイーン	少しエコーをかける?	
カベへのバウンド	ポウヨーン	カベに当たって総ね返る	

▲ A design document showing some of *NiGHTS* acrobatic moves.

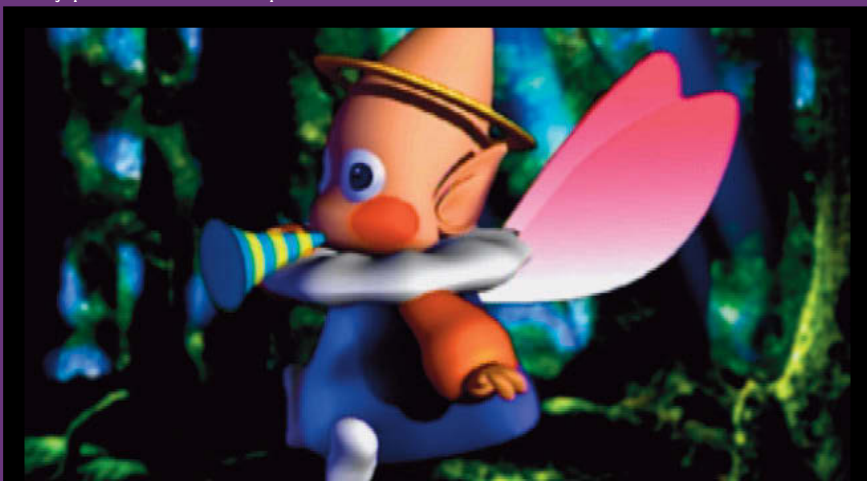
SOME OTHER NIGHTS

Sonic Team may not have produced a true sequel to *NiGHTS*, but that hasn't stopped them sneaking references to it into some of their other games. Here are a few that obsessive fans should try out: characters from *NiGHTS* make cameo appearances in *Burning Rangers*, *Sonic Shuffle*, *Billy Hatcher* and *Sonic Riders*. *NiGHTS* pinball tables appear in both *Sonic Pinball Party* and *Sonic Adventure*. A short Game Boy Advance version of *NiGHTS* can be downloaded from GameCube games *Phantasy Star Online* and *Billy Hatcher*. Finally, the PlayStation 2 EyeToy game *Sega Superstars* features a *NiGHTS* mini-game in which players must outstretch their arms to actually fly through *NiGHTS*' levels.



▲ *NiGHTS* flies into action on PlayStation 2.

▼ A *Nightopia*: the first incarnation of Naka's A-Life system.



Retro

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Retro
Feature

PUT A ROBOT IN YOUR VIDEOGAME AND YOU'LL AUTOMATICALLY REGISTER A FEW PINGS ON RETRO'S INTEREST-O-METER. ADD ONE OF THE STRANGEST YET ULTIMATELY BRILLIANT CUSTOM CONTROLLERS, AND THAT METER IS LIKELY TO EXPLODE IN A SHOWER OF IMMEASURABLE JOY. SEGA'S VIRTUAL ON MANAGED JUST THAT WHEN IT DEBUTED BACK IN 1995, SO JOIN US AS WE PAY TRIBUTE TO ONE OF THE GREATEST MECH GAMES OF ALL TIME...

VIRTUAL



Way back in its golden era, Sega was notorious for “bringing the arcade experience home”. From its earliest console and computer games to the ‘death’ of the Dreamcast in 2001, its core purpose was to deliver as close an approximation to the original arcade game as possible. While console technology didn’t always allow for accurate recreations of the graphics and sound, Sega usually managed to replicate the feel of an arcade game by releasing special peripherals. Ranging from the generic, such as arcade sticks and light guns, to the more exotic, like *Samba De Amigo*’s maraca controllers each accessory was always durably built and crucial to making the gameplay experience as fun as on the large coin-op machines. With its rich history of arcade conversions, Sega has produced plenty of custom peripherals worthy of recognition, but it is the *Virtual On* Twin Stick that holds a particularly special place in our hearts.

The arcade version of *Virtual On* was developed in 1995 by Sega’s AM3 arcade division, which later became Hitmaker before being dissolved back into Sega in 2004. The coin-op, running on the Model 2 hardware, initially appealed to Japanese gamers because of its ten familiar mech characters. Known as *Virtuaroids*, the sleek and agile giant robots were designed by Japan’s most famous mech designer Hajime Katoki, who was responsible for almost all of the *Gundam* anime designs of the late Eighties and early Nineties as well as the robots of the incredibly popular *Super Robot Wars* videogame series. Mech ‘characters’ like Temjin and Raiden drew from over 15 years of *Gundam* designs to exploit the massive popularity of the genre among the Japanese youth that had been starved of high-quality robot combat games before *Virtual On*.

If Katoki’s stylised mech designs reeled gamers toward the *Virtual On* cabinets it was the dual-stick control system – which sought to

ON



▲ Australian VO player competes in the Virtual Century 2000 tournament in Sega World, Sydney.

KICK VIRTUAL ASS

HERE AT RETRO we can talk about the history of *Virtual On* until the cows come home, but when it comes to offering in-depth play strategies we'd rather let the experts have their say. That's why we tracked down two hardcore *Virtual On* players to talk about their preferred method of robo-combat...

"My current main VR is Apharmd," recalls David Li of Alabama, USA. "His armour, power and, most importantly, speed allow him to mow down almost anything save for a steady Raiden." Which leads us on to James, Webmaster of virtualon.net and a founding member of the Sydney Virtual On Club. "Without a doubt, Raiden is my favourite. Known for having the most powerful attack in the game, his laser could decimate a careless opponent in a fraction of a second. Of course, he was also known as the slowest VR, but, in the hands of an expert, he was able to show surprising agility. His melee attacks were considered useless until I discovered his underused shoulder ram was actually the fastest close-combat attack in the game. This turned the tables on the traditional close-combat characters."

simulate the feel of piloting a giant robot – that kept them hooked on the game for years to come. Each cabinet featured two sticks and four Fire buttons used in conjunction to control a 'mech' in a one-on-one arena battle. With fights that required fast movement and swift reactions, mastery of the controls was essential and new players soon got their steel backsides handed to them if they didn't know the basics of *Virtual On's* manoeuvres. Both sticks had to be pushed in the same way in order to move in a chosen direction – and while pushing one forward and the other back would turn the mech on the spot, pulling the sticks away from each other would force the mech to jump hundreds of feet into the air. Pushing the sticks together would make them block attacks. Though the controls could initially seem overwhelming, once these basic instructions were understood it became a simple matter of building on the commands and inventing strategies to out-duel any opponent.

Since *Virtual On* cabinets could be linked together for two-player battles, it played like a 3D brawler and is best thought of as a competitive game since each mech featured its own strengths and weaknesses that needed to be considered in order to progress to the final boss. As such, communities of VO players soon built up in Japan – where the game is still played at tournament level – and dedicated players began shaping and sharing their combat strategies on the Internet. In comparison to its Japanese reception, *Virtual On* failed to take off in the UK. The unfamiliar controls were seen as a barrier by many of the British players who got to try out the machines, while the anime-inspired designs had little impact on a public who wouldn't see *Gundam* on their television screens for at least another five years. As such, the innovative fighter only managed to gain acceptance among the most hardcore Sega fans and anime lovers. Following a lacklustre reception from Joe Public, the arcade machine received only a limited distribution, although it did find a foothold in the bigger arcades across the country, where a greater number of more informed gamers played.



▲ Tenjin is the 'Ryu' of *Virtual On* – a good all rounder that everyone likes to use.

joypad but felt incredibly clumsy, especially to newcomers, and lost half of what made the arcade version interesting to begin with. As always, Japanese gamers were treated to the full meal deal as Sega produced enough Twin Stick controllers for everyone. With a Japanese copy of the game (running in 60Hz as nature intended) and one or two pairs of Twin Sticks, the game truly came to life. Being able to play the game in the comfort of the home meant that players could practice for the viciously competitive arcade battles cheaply and conveniently.

The arcade version was, in typical Sega fashion, graphically better than everything before it, eclipsing even the gorgeous looks of *Virtua Fighter 2*. Saturn, built around 2D architecture as it was, could never hope for an arcade-perfect port, but the conversion team at Sega certainly made a port to be proud of. The major difference was that the Saturn version had to be tuned down to a low resolution and 30fps in order to keep the essential speed as high as the arcade version. Concessions obviously had to be made to convert the title but, as a Saturn game in its own right, *Virtual On* had some impressive tricks up its sleeve. Several explosions featured difficult-to-achieve transparency effects and the two-player split-screen mode still ran at the full 30fps.

Any presentational differences were largely irrelevant as the gameplay and controls were a

“THE GAMEPLAY AND CONTROLS WERE A HUNDRED PER CENT ACCURATE THANKS TO SEGA’S SUPERB CONTROLLER”

Despite its scattered UK fan base, *Virtual On* developed a strong worldwide community and soon became a firm favourite at local meets and tournaments. So when news of a console version spread, it set the hearts of certain Sega fanboys aflutter. When the Saturn port arrived in Europe, however, it brought with it a wave of disappointment as eager *Virtual On* players found that the much-anticipated controller wouldn't make it to our shores. The game could of course be controlled with Saturn's

hundred per cent accurate thanks to Sega's superb controller. Anyone who has sampled the delights of the sublime Saturn Arcade Stick (the Japanese one, not the horrible European thing) will know that when it comes to custom controllers, Sega builds them strong, tough and durable so that they can withstand the sort of pounding that they'd receive in a public arcade, and the Twin Stick controller is no exception. Its build quality is second to none; made from a combination of metal and plastic parts it feels solid and resistant without restricting movement. Despite its durable design,



the controller feels quite light and can be played in the lap as well as on a flat surface. In terms of design, the controller looks very classy. The unit is white to match the redesigned Japanese Saturn, and is decorated to resemble the panel art of the coin-op. Overall, the peripheral screams quality in both looks and usability; it is a first-class Sega product that deserves to be the centrepiece of anyone's Saturn collection.

Like many other custom controllers, the Twin Stick was an expensive purchase back in 1995, and the price has steadily risen as the device has increased in rarity. At the time of writing we could find only one set of sticks on eBay for the princely

“IF YOU ABSOLUTELY NEED TO HAVE THE BEST ARCADE GAMES THEN VIRTUAL ON AND ITS CONTROLLER ARE QUITE SIMPLY ESSENTIAL”

sum of £80 including postage. That's a lot of money for a controller, so interested buyers really have to love *Virtual On* to be able to put up the cash.

Thankfully, there are a handful of relatively undocumented games that also work with the sticks so, if you can track them down, they'll add value to the purchase. *Mobile Suit Gundam Side Story 2*, for example, appeared shortly after the release of *Virtual On* and officially made use of the Twin Stick. Unlike the Sega game, *Gundam* is a single-player-only experience with missions and objectives rather than arena battles. The game controls similarly to *Virtual On* (with lock-on and dodge commands added) but pits the player against multiple opponents as well as tanks and other non-robot enemies. As *Virtual On* is intended to be a multi-player game at heart, *Gundam Side Story 2* offers a more complete solo experience and is a welcome distraction from the main event. The imaginatively titled sequel *Gundam Side Story 3* appeared a year later and, unless you count the release of *Virtual On* for Seganet (an online version of the game), it is the last of only three games to officially make use of the Twin Stick. There are, however, several games that can be modified to use the controller.



▲ Every Virtuaroid has a working Saturn on its back or a Dreamcast in the sequel.

Just about any game with configurable controls could be set up to use the Twin Stick unit although there are only a few titles where their use would be appropriate. We wouldn't recommend you play *Street Fighter* with them, for example. Other giant robot games are probably the best to make use of the sticks and, let's face it, if you're willing to spend £80 just to play *Virtual On* then it's a safe bet that you're into your towering mechanical monsters. Game Arts' *Gungriffon* (and its Japan-only sequel) is a good place to start. Switch the control option to Type B and this *Steel Battalion*-esque sim will work a treat with the sticks. The game is a lot less arcadey than *Virtual On* and *Gundam*, so the controls aren't

quite as intuitive, but once you get used to them it becomes a very enjoyable simulation. As in *Gundam Side Story*, the mech is controlled from a first-person perspective to create an immersive feel. The left stick controls the looking direction while the right stick accelerates and decelerates the mech. With such wildly different controls to its peers, *Gungriffon* feels more realistic (for want of a better word) as it creates the illusion of actually operating a huge machine rather than being in direct control of it – think of it as the difference between driving a car and actually being a car.

The *Gungriffon* and *Gundam* games can all be picked up for less than a tenner these days, so if you already own the Twin Sticks, they're a quick and easy way to expand the use of the peripheral. It's also worth experimenting with your existing collection of games since you never know what will work well with the sticks. One of Retro's secret informants tells us, for example, that TechnoSoft's *Hyper Reverthion* and *Steeldom* are both compatible, although the elusiveness of these import-only games means that we've so far been unable to confirm the fact.

Regardless of whether you sample any of the other games, the original *Virtual On* should be reason enough to pick up the game and a set of sticks. As home conversions of classic arcade games go, it is among the best. With its fast, intense gameplay and one of the greatest custom controllers of all time, *Virtual On* stands proud as a unique experience and is a monument to Sega's remarkable dedication to its home users. If you absolutely need to have the best arcade games in the comfort of your own home then *Virtual On* and its controller are quite simply essential.

Thank you to the Video Game Centre for kindly supplying *Gungriffon*. For all your Saturn needs visit www.videogamecentre.co.uk

WHAT EXACTLY IS A TANGRAM?

WHILE IT'S BLATANTLY obvious that we have a soft spot for the original *Virtual On* and its Saturn conversion, the consensus among the VO fan community is that the arcade and Dreamcast sequel, *Virtual On: Oratorio Tangram*, is the superior game. "*Oratorio Tangram* is one of the reasons I own a Dreamcast at all. If I had to pick one *Virtual On* game to own, this would be it," claims *Virtual On* community member, David Li.

Like the Saturn game, the Dreamcast version of *Virtual On* came with its own excellent quality Twin Sticks – which were produced in extremely small quantities – and, thanks to the console's raw power, managed to match the visuals of the arcade version easily. The one feature that really sets *Oratorio Tangram* apart from its predecessor, however, is its ability to link to another Dreamcast for multi-player matches using two machines and two TV sets for the full arcade experience.



COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Your monthly guide to collectable retro treasures



PANZER DRAGON SAGA

If you'd like games™ to feature you and your prized possession in Collector's Corner, email us at retro@imagine-publishing.co.uk

DETAILS

FORMAT: Saturn
YEAR: 1998
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Team Andromeda
EXPECT TO PAY: £80-£100



EXHIBIT A: The original packaging consists of two plastic cases parcelled together in one big cardboard box. Finding the whole lot together is pretty tricky.

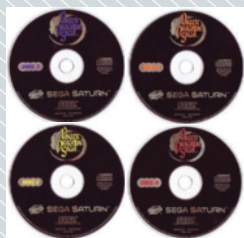


EXHIBIT B: *Panzer Dragoon Saga* came on a whopping four CD-ROMs. Make sure they're all included in the lot you go for.



EXHIBIT C: If you just want to sample *PDS* then you may like to track down issue 31 of *Sega Saturn Magazine*. It came with the first disc mounted to the cover and is slightly easier to find.

Why It's Rare

ALTHOUGH DEVELOPMENT of *Panzer Dragoon Saga* began at the same time as its predecessor, *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*, the production suffered numerous delays due to the ambition of the project, and even as a result of some deaths within the studio. And by the time the game was released in the summer of 1998, Sega Saturn's commercial viability had diminished so much that it hardly seemed worth bringing out any more games. Only a handful of Saturn titles were released that year in the West and *Panzer Dragoon Saga* was among the last, receiving a limited production run of just 6,000 copies in the United States and a few thousand more in Europe.

After being hyped up to unprecedented levels by Sega magazines of the time, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* was snapped up within the first few weeks of its release by a small but loyal user base of Saturn owners, and was rarely seen again in videogame stores. This quickly led to inflated but justified prices among collectors. Finding the full four-disc release is now quite difficult – not to mention expensive – though the first disc alone is relatively easy to find since it was actually given away free with the May issue of the UK's *Sega Saturn Magazine*.



Worth Playing?

■■■ OF ALL THE games featured in Collector's Corner to date, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* is by far the best. Made at the peak of Sega's experimental risk-taking era, it epitomises the period with a game that made little financial sense but was a brilliantly unique creation through and through.

The blend of RPG and on-rails shooter didn't seem like an obvious mix at the time but turned out to be a wonderfully playable experience that used the best of both genres and none of the bad. The art style and presentation, meanwhile, though influenced by countless fantasy films and novels, was

more than the sum of its parts and helped create a game world that compelled the player to see everything it had to offer, playing through all four epic discs of content without ever growing bored. When critics call *Panzer Dragoon Saga* a masterpiece, they're not exaggerating for a moment, which only makes the game's scarcity all the more tragic. Worse still, Sega has recently revealed that the source code was lost years ago, making a modern port extremely unlikely. If you want to play it then the expensive Saturn route is the only one to take, but we can assure you it's worth every penny.



FACT!

The Japanese version of the game, named *Azel: Panzer Dragoon RPG*, is actually very common. Too bad about the language barrier.



I'VE GOT ONE

Name: **Damon Locke**

Occupation: **Project Manager**

■■■ Why collect Saturn games and what drew you to *Panzer Dragoon Saga* in particular?

I started collecting Saturn games because at the time Sega made the best arcade games and Saturn had promised arcade-perfect conversions (which didn't quite turn out to be true), and as a massive fan of *Virtua Fighter* and *Daytona*, I was a day-one buyer of the console. I'd bought the previous *Panzer Dragoon* titles but was surprised to hear that the third game in the series would be an RPG. At the time, I was not sure about it as I'd never really played RPGs before.

Tell us how you found the game.

I never had to hunt around for this one as I have for some of my other games. I bought it sealed on the day of release from a local Electronics Boutique for the RRP. I've personally never seen another on a shop shelf since that day and I doubt I ever will.

What condition was it in, and how much did you pay?

I bought it brand new on its day of release. I think I paid £35 and very nearly didn't buy it because *House Of The Dead* was released that day and I had wanted that more. I am glad I did now though. I take very good care of my software but over time have given this title just a little bit more care and attention due to its rarity.

Do you play PDS, and if so, what do you think of it?

I admit I've only played through and completed this game once, but I recognise it as a masterpiece – there are very few games that totally immerse you in the world created within it (only *Shenmue* and *Shadow Of The Colossus* spring to mind). It took me a long time to complete perhaps due to my previous inexperience with RPGs, but it was a fantastic introduction to the genre and I really must revisit it someday.

Finally, would you ever consider selling *Panzer Dragoon Saga*, or is it yours for life?

Regardless of the price this can sometimes go for, I would never ever sell it. From its sophisticated graphic style, its ambient soundtrack, and unusual story, right down to the artwork on the back of the two cases that house the four CDs, everything about it oozes class.



BEHIND THE SCENES

BURNING RANGERS

Burning Rangers couldn't save Sega's Saturn format from going up in flames, but that was only because the Rangers' arrival at the scene of the disaster was too late. We talk with firefighter extraordinaire Takao Miyoshi about a late Saturn classic



BURNING RANGERS FEATURED AMBITIOUS, FORWARD-THINKING TECHNOLOGIES



Released: 1998
 Format: Sega Saturn
 Publisher: Sega
 Developer: Sonic Team

KEY STAFF:
 Yuji Naka (producer)
 Naoto Oshima (director)
 Takao Miyoshi (game designer)
 Naofumi Hataya (sound)

IN AN ALTOGETHER more innocent age, now just out of sight in the rear-view mirror – the optimism-fuelled Nineties, when people still smiled in public – and with Sonic Team at the apex of its collective performance, the charismatic Burning Rangers were sent out to save lives in Game World. There was camaraderie and fire extinguishers, hell, they even had their own theme song.

Blame it on the inexplicable cravings of Western gamers en masse or perhaps the global malaise felt in recent years, but it can seem as though games whose very reason for existing is to facilitate the desires of those who wish to terminate the existences of game characters (whether modelled on humans, aliens, or monsters) have never been more popular. *Burning Rangers* combined ambitious, forward-thinking, advanced technologies with the admirable notion of rewarding the preservation of in-game characters. It was a good kid, all right – one hundred per cent enthusiastic in embracing life and conveying a palpable sense of gratitude from NPC to Burning Ranger during memorable rescue scenes.

Takao Miyoshi, now of Sega's Global Entertainment R&D 3 studio but a key designer at Sonic Team in 1997/1998, laments that things have changed. "I think that there are enough brutal, bloody games out there now. It would be good if more 'heart warming' game experiences were being produced."

Little more than an anime-inspired sci-fi adventure, *Burning Rangers* revealed a surprising depth of character to those who respected its style and were prepared to dig beneath its surface. Crucial to its central tenet – when threatened, **CONTINUED >**



FROM THE FORUM

Posted by:
RIVAONI

▲ I loved receiving mail from those you'd rescued once the rescue was over.

Posted by:
ALISTAIR THOMAS

▲ I loved this game. I played it at a time when I played every game to death, and this was no exception. I loved exploring the levels and trying different things on each playthrough. It was before its time. I think it's due for an update/remake, as a lot of people missed out first time around.

Posted by:
CRAYMEN EDGE

▲ *Burning Rangers* was great fun and felt very innovative, but it was definitely hindered by the hardware. It would be great to see what a game like this would be like if made today now that developers have a few console generations' worth of experience at making 3D action games.

Posted by:
RAINLEVEL

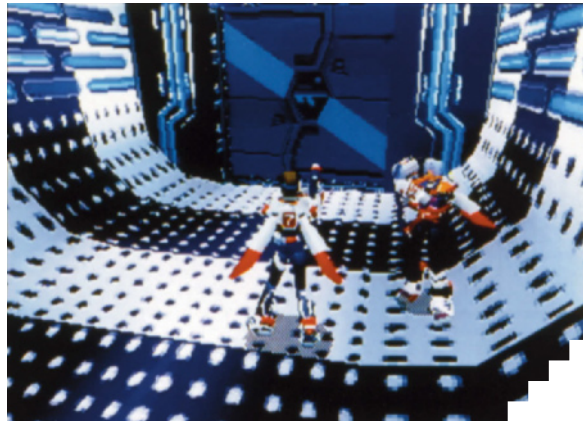
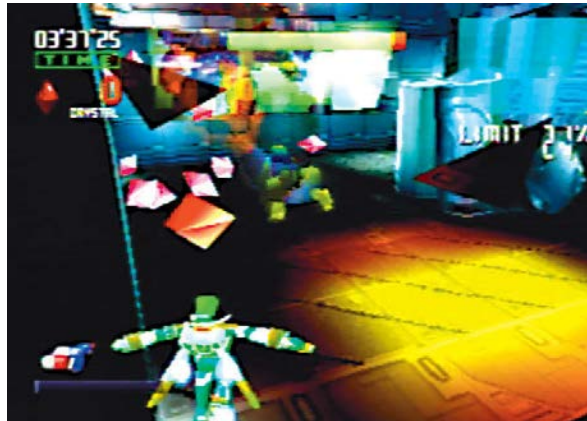
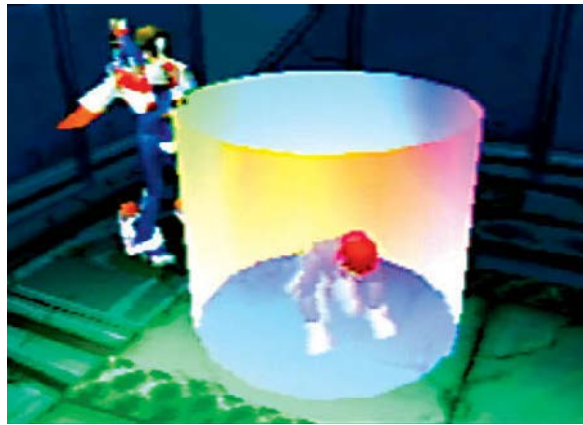
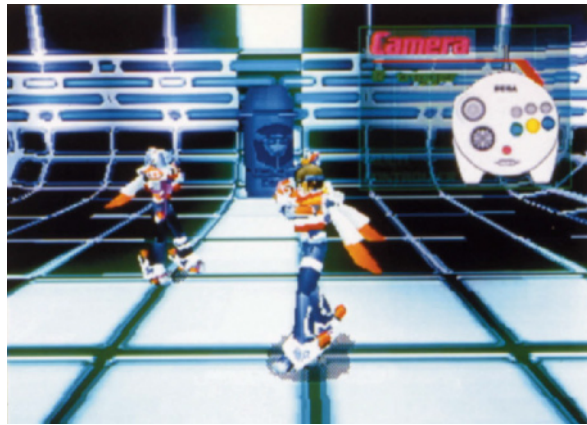
▲ Really, Sega should have just held onto it until the Dreamcast came out like it did with *Shenmue*. The Saturn was already on its last legs and the leap in power would have been hugely beneficial.

Posted by:
REDLEADER30

▲ *Burning Rangers* stands the test of time as one of the best and most original games ever made and is a unique gaming experience from start to finish.

Posted by:
BIG MEAN BUNNY

▲ *Rangers* was special as it came at a time when even the most fanatical Saturn fans had given up the fight. It may have had the usual Saturn issues, but I hadn't been as impressed by a game since *Tomb Raider*.



human lives should be saved and preserved at any cost – was the *Burning Rangers*' collective lifesaving power, supplied with futuristic firefighting equipment. The sci-fi element of the game's story establishes the Burning Rangers as a group of Earth defenders, working against threats such as a massive spaceship on a collision course with the planet. In practice, this setting was used as a means of shoehorning firefighting heroes Shou Amabane, Big Landman, Lead Phoenix, and heroines Chris Parton, Iria Klein, and Tillis – the titular Burning Rangers team – into scenarios where fires and explosions were breaking out, buildings were collapsing and lives were being endangered.

This was a deliberate play on Sonic Team's part, as Miyoshi explains: "Our first inspiration came from the explosion and building destruction scenes of Hollywood movies. We just wanted to describe the heroism of lifesaving in that loud, explosive type of setting." *Burning Rangers* was the actualisation of that idea, a game driven by heroic acts and perpetuated by the thank-you notes of grateful survivors. "From our first concept draft," Miyoshi adds, "we had this idea of creating a game where, as the theme of *Burning Rangers*, the player would have to rescue people. As one aspect of that idea, we wanted to incorporate the excitement and image of typical Hollywood films in our game, and to do that we decided on a game style with heroic characters who would bravely negotiate explosions and fires in order to save lives."

IRONICALLY – AND REGRETTABLY in light of the Saturn's incidental role in the ultimate demise of Sega as a hardware manufacturer – *Burning Rangers*' message of survival was issued too late in the 32-bit platform's lifetime for it to ever receive due gratitude from its host machine. Nine months to the day after *Burning Rangers*' Japanese release, Sega birthed Dreamcast. Saturn was left behind and *Burning Rangers* was largely forgotten before it even had a chance to properly establish its merits. Its plight was further hindered by the indifference of many Saturn owners at that late stage in the format's life, when third-party support had all but evaporated and even its staunchest supporters in print – most notably Emap's *Official Sega Saturn Magazine* – were about to be discontinued.

However, Sonic Team's initial concept work on *Burning Rangers* began in the autumn of 1996 when the Saturn was still in with a realistic chance of

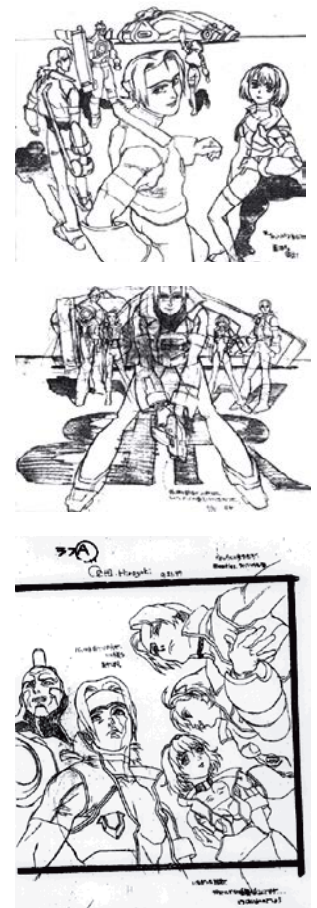
Burning Rangers used transparency effects and lighting, which were rarities in the field of Saturn game development, to achieve some remarkably pretty infernos.



IT WAS FORGOTTEN BEFORE IT HAD A CHANCE TO PROPERLY ESTABLISH ITS MERITS

finishing higher than last (read: third) place in the 32-/64-bit console race. Development of *Burning Rangers* was swift, building on three-dimensional game production techniques learned during Sonic Team's work on *NiGHTS*, which was out of the door by May 1996. However, in retrospect it's easy to stamp the whole project as a misfortunate victim of bad timing. "From the initial planning stage to release, *Burning Rangers* took us about a year and a half," Miyoshi recalls, "although the actual development and coding was done in less than a year. There were 31 people on the team: three game planners, six programmers, twenty designers, and two sound producers."

Prior to beginning work on the game proper, Sonic Team's programmers and designers took care to evaluate the potential for fire effects and explosion routines, which were crucial to the complete realisation of *Burning Rangers*' design brief. Although obviously limited by the modest rendering capabilities of the Saturn hardware, *Burning Rangers*' blazes



These character sketches can also be found on the official *Burning Rangers* website, which is amazingly now in its tenth year.

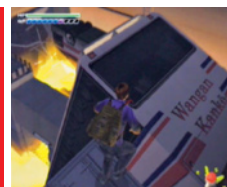
>. A GAMING EVOLUTION



Human's 1994 2D Super Famicom title *The Firemen* provided a clear example of the possibilities of team-based firefighting gameplay.



Irem's PS2 survival-rescue crossover *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi* (aka *SOS: The Final Escape*) revisited *Burning Rangers*' themes in a more realistic environment.



We Are Burning Rangers



WE ARE BURNING Rangers, included in the double jewel case of

Burning Rangers' Japanese pressing, was a three-track three-inch CD containing the theme song, penned by Naofumi Hataya, along with cuts of opening theme *Burning Rangers Angel Of Fire*, and ending theme *I Just Smile*. The full soundtrack CD (sold separately) now fetches in excess of ¥12,000 on the Japanese game CD market. This is either a clear indication of its scarcity or a consequence of the music's magical pop-jazz-gum power. To quote from the wisdom of *We Are Burning Rangers*: "They will never let you down / Max power Burning Rangers / Wow / Don't lose your hope now".



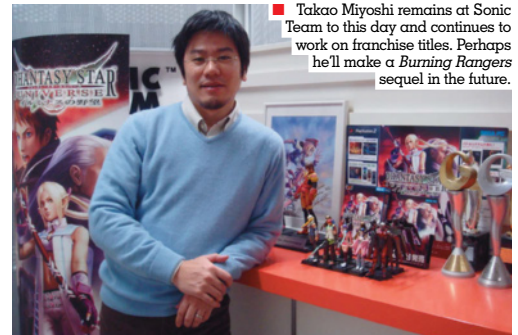
retain a surprising degree of dramatic effect when seen today: blocky sprites are cleverly disguised with seemingly authentic patterns of movement, transparency, and lighting effects, and the use of multiple tones of fire.

Miyoshi explains the impetus that propelled development beyond the initial *Burning Rangers* concept: "We spent quite a lot of time during the testing phase just checking how far we would be able to take the flame effects – how pretty we could make the game's fires. In the first test ROM we produced, we were able to achieve some quite beautiful fire effects, so we felt we could go with this idea."

The great strength of the Saturn hardware was its sprite-pushing power, and only a handful of its 3D games – tellingly those produced in-house at Sega by its most talented teams – were technically proficient to the point of attracting envious looks from PlayStation and Nintendo 64 owners: Team Andromeda's work on the *Panzer Dragoon* series; AM3's mightily impressive Saturn conversions of *Sega Rally Championship* and *Virtual ON*; AM2's *Fighters Megamix*; and Sonic Team's *NiGHTS Into Dreams* and *Burning Rangers* all provided powerful examples of 3D gaming on a 2D-orientated format.

Miyoshi is rightly proud of his team's work with *Burning Rangers*, noting that few contemporary games, whether on the Saturn or on other platforms, were as ambitious. "At that time there were very few games that used polygons in three-dimensional spaces for acrobatic gameplay and permitted exploration. I think *Burning Rangers* was noteworthy in that it did both of these things."

If anything though, Sonic Team was over-ambitious with its design work here. The frame rate was inconsistent, generally struggling to reach 30fps, and that did occasionally impact on control of the Rangers. As a result of frame rate issues and convoluted level layouts, *Burning Rangers*



Takao Miyoshi remains at Sonic Team to this day and continues to work on franchise titles. Perhaps he'll make a *Burning Rangers* sequel in the future.

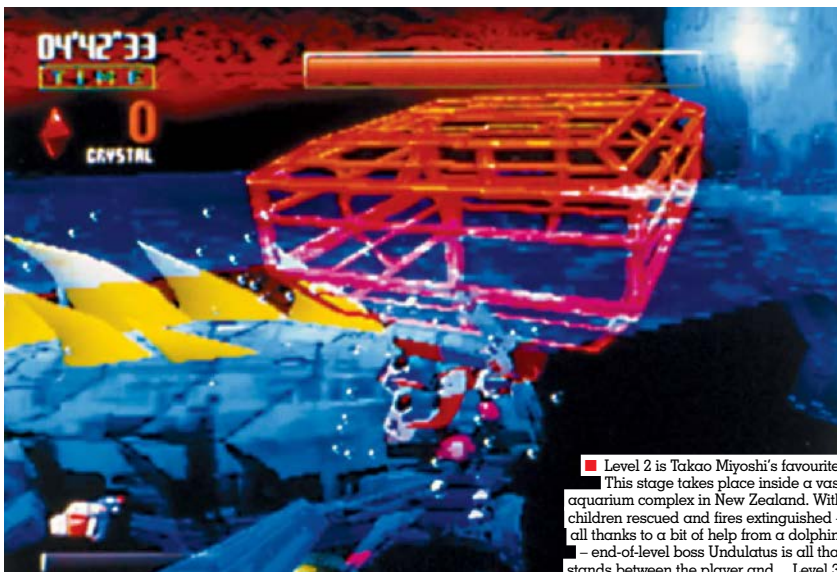
THE GREAT STRENGTH OF THE SATURN HARDWARE WAS ITS SPRITE-PUSHING POWER

felt disorientating, even dizzying at times. By holding the Saturn controller's Y button, it was possible to stand still and take a 360-degree look around the environment – a welcome feature that enabled the player to regain a sense of direction. However, this facility could only ever provide brief respite and was rendered dangerous because of the constant threat of fire breaking out in the vicinity of a stationary Ranger. Exacerbating the situation was the absence of a map. Sonic Team made a conscious decision not to include such a feature – the payoff was spoken navigation assistance.

■■■ INSTEAD OF OFFERING any visible 'You are here' style crutch, Sonic Team dispensed with years of adventure game tradition, replacing maps and diagrams with audible guidance from fellow *Burning Rangers*. Not only did this neatly emphasise the game's ethos of teamwork and support, but it also served to amplify the senses of tension and fear. Miyoshi elaborates: "We made a specific point of developing the game's sound – particularly the voice acting – and the audio navigation system in such a way that we could fully convey the sense of being in a 3D space, and of being caught up in a dramatic scenario."

By pressing X or Z, the player's Ranger character was able to call other team members for help, receiving instant responses along the lines of 'Keep on walking down that corridor and turn left at the end, but beware of flames bursting from the doorway'. This support was so important that *Burning Rangers*' first loading screen carried a reminder to warn players that the game featured an audio navigation system and was therefore best played with the sound on.

In the final build of the game, professional voice actors played the roles of the *Burning Rangers* and those rescued by them (inevitably the Japanese cast and script generated a significantly more assured **CONTINUED >**



■ Level 2 is Takao Miyoshi's favourite. ■ This stage takes place inside a vast aquarium complex in New Zealand. With children rescued and fires extinguished – all thanks to a bit of help from a dolphin, ■ – end-of-level boss Undulatus is all that stands between the player and... Level 3.



What They Said...



Each stage features some intricate and visually astounding level design, with Sonic Team pulling out all the stops to create some incredible set pieces, the likes of which Saturn owners have never seen before

Sega Saturn Magazine, Issue 29, March 1998



performance than the dodgy translation and English dub of the PAL release), but Sonic Team had to make do with its own placeholder sound files during development, as Miyoshi wryly reminisces. "We had a lot of fun with the alpha and beta versions of *Burning Rangers*, as we sampled our own voices for characters in those builds. It was really amusing to hear close friends and colleagues crying for help and saying things like, 'Thanks for rescuing me' and 'I'm still scared'."

Rescuing the helpless was a significant aspect of the game, and Sonic Team made a point of emphasising the communication between the *Burning Rangers* and the beneficiaries of their lifesaving services, where those rescued would write notes of gratitude and send passwords – which could be used to unlock special game features – as virtual presents. Miyoshi's favourite aspect of *Burning Rangers* is the correspondence between these two parties: "I really like the fact that you receive emails from the people you've rescued, and also the way things are set up randomly so that you can receive passwords after rescuing 'rare' victims." Among those to be rescued were Sonic Team leaders Yuji Naka and Naoto Oshima, and soundtrack composer Naofumi Hataya.

The music employed in *Burning Rangers* was in many ways typical of mid-Nineties Japanese anime soundtracks: bursting with positive thoughts (see *We Are Burning Rangers*) and overloaded with synthpop flourishes. "Naofumi Hataya composed his music to suit the overall game concept," Miyoshi reveals. "Rather than writing pieces in reaction to specific scenarios. The soundtrack was actually re-written several times during the development of *Burning Rangers*, so the audio work gradually began to evolve alongside the team's production of the game itself."

OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES of *Burning Rangers* included the game's use of colour coding to explain the severity of individual situations, whereby the status of doors (ranging from accessible, inaccessible and requiring a switch to be hit to open them, and locked) could be ascertained with a glance at the colour of the doorway – with blue, yellow, or red each signifying something to the player. Similarly, the strength of fires was linked to the colour of the flames (orange, blue, green, or pink), and areas where heat was building up in or behind walls were likewise described in various tones according to the level of danger presented.

Control of the *Burning Rangers* was, as Miyoshi puts it, "Acrobatic". A quick tap of down on the D-pad/analogue pad (see *Analogue X Digital*) worked to create a nifty backward somersault, for example, which was endlessly useful in escaping from sudden bursts of flames. Interestingly, *Burning Rangers* pre-empted *Ocarina Of Time*'s automatic jumping system to remove the danger of accidentally falling through small- to medium-sized gaps in the flooring,



■ A basic training mode prior to Level 1 ensured that the player mastered the unusual controls and acrobatic character movement before entering red-hot danger zones. The lectures here were fully voiced, setting a precedent for the rest of the game.

THE SCAN VISOR WAS ONE OF THE MOST DIVIDING ELEMENTS TO MAKE IT INTO A GAME

although each of the *Burning Rangers* could jump (and boost in mid-air to perform a double-jump) in order to scale higher locations.

Despite this, Sonic Team had gameplay ideas to spare once the final *Burning Rangers* ROM had been sent to the disc-pressing factory. A combination of time restraints and hardware limitations meant that some promising features were ultimately impossible to work into the game. "We really wanted to include more set pieces that showed the teamwork of the *Burning Rangers*," Miyoshi admits. "For example, in one scene where Shou was trapped in a small

room, we were planning to suddenly give the player control of Big Landman, who would have needed to enter the room from an adjacent area by destroying the wall between him and Shou, and then Big would have secured an escape route for Shou. We wanted to include a system where brief side stories such as this would be collected."

In the end, as it contained only four levels, *Burning Rangers* drew parallels with *NiGHTS* for its assumed brevity. But the notion that *Burning Rangers* and *NiGHTS* failed to offer a sufficient volume of gameplay is quite ludicrous – both games could be replayed in imaginative and interesting ways, and both used lettered grading systems to provide clear incentives for self-improvement. *Burning Rangers* even went so far as



TAKAO MIYOSHI
Game Designer



■ *Burning Rangers* was fully compatible with the Saturn's 3D analogue controller, but Sonic Team's priority in development was to calibrate the game for effective control with the standard (digital) Saturn pad. The game still plays better with analogue control.



■ Sonic Team deliberately opted out of including a map on the screen overlay. The graph indicates how dangerous the area is becoming, and how close the danger is to hitting a predefined limit.

to offer a random level generator upon defeating its final boss, remixing its four basic levels with a seemingly endless variety of layout alterations and random positioning of victims and level furniture.

■ ■ ■ **WE ASK MIYOSHI** which stage he was most pleased with. "The offshore facility stage, the second level. That scene with the dolphin left a lasting impression on me." It had a similar effect on us, too, and we would encourage you to search for a Saturn copy of *Burning Rangers* to experience this (and other set pieces, including the three-dimensional tunnel-based shoot-'em-up mini-game) for yourself. We would, that is, were it not for the likelihood of *Burning Rangers* being remade in the near future. Sega's current remake policy doesn't seem to make a lot of sense, with *NiGHTS* being remade on the PlayStation 2 but only released in Japan, and *Sega Bass Fishing* being remade... full stop. But there's no doubting the fact that Sega deserves more from *Burning Rangers*, and if that necessitates a remake in some form, so be it.

It's surprising that subsequent games have generally neglected to use sound in such an uncompromising way as pioneered by *Burning Rangers*. Only *Soundvoyager* – released in 2006 on Game Boy Advance as part of Nintendo's Japan-exclusive bit Generations series – springs to mind as a game outside the rhythm-action field that forces its players to listen in order to progress, and that experiment also worked wonderfully well. Similarly, the rescue-survival theme in such a humane form has largely disappeared, with only Irem's very enjoyable *Zetta Zetsumei Toshi* games managing to vaguely replicate the heart-warming nature of *Burning Rangers*. There are many lessons that can be learned from *Burning Rangers* for players and developers alike. Perhaps it was ahead of its time, or maybe its time is yet to come.



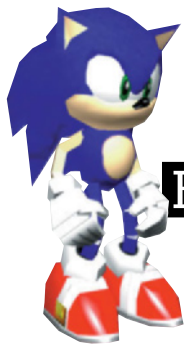
Analogue X Digital

Controller design decisions

ALTHOUGH IT NEVER became a standard in the manner of Sony's subsequent Dual Shock or Nintendo's N64 controller, the Saturn's analogue controller (curiously described by Sega as a "3D controller") was originally built for use with *NiGHTS* but was also fully compatible with *Burning Rangers*. We ask Takao Miyoshi whether Sonic Team designed *Burning Rangers* primarily for the standard Saturn controller, or for the analogue pad. "We developed the game with the normal Saturn controller in mind, to make sure it was fully playable with that. That was our priority," clarifies Miyoshi. Strangely, we reckon the game has always felt more natural when played with the analogue controller...



■ Shou and Tillis, *Burning Rangers*' two leading characters, were charismatic and easily identifiable. Other members of the *Burning Rangers* team also came into play, while off-screen support was given through radio contact.



BEHIND THE SCENES

SONIC ADVENTURE

Ten years after the release of Sonic Adventure, director Takashi Iizuka speaks to games™ about the making of the most pivotal game in Sonic Team's flagship series



Released: 1998

Format: Dreamcast

Also On: PC, GameCube

Publisher: Sega

Developer: Sonic Team

KEY STAFF:

Takashi Iizuka

(Director)

Yuji Naka

(Producer)

Kazuyuki Hoshino

(Art Director)

Tetsu Katano

(Lead Programmer)

Yuji Uekawa

(Character Designer)

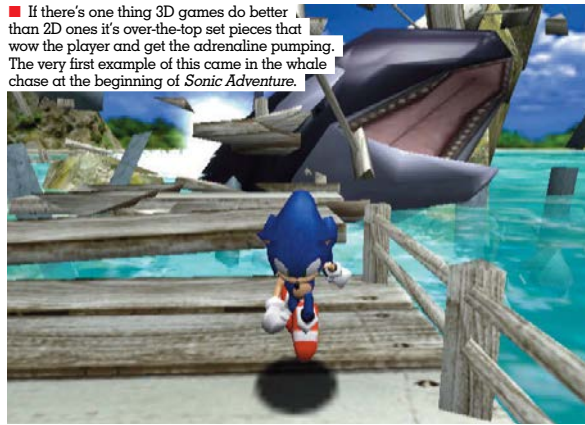
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG and the third dimension. It's a relationship that's never quite achieved perfection but has nevertheless fascinated gamers for over a decade. Where Sega's chief mascot was once considered Mario's equal, with the release of *Super Mario 64* the balance of power shifted as Nintendo created the mould for 3D platform games and Sega awkwardly shuffled its feet. The Saturn console came and went without a Sonic platform game; it was left to Dreamcast to realise Sonic's 3D debut. But what a debut. Visually superior to *Super Mario 64*, featuring character-based quests and blisteringly fast gameplay, it was classic Sonic and much more besides. And while the last decade of 3D Sonic games has been a mixed bag, the 1998 original remains the finest non-2D work to date.

The pioneering *Sonic Adventure* was directed by Takashi Iizuka, the man responsible for the level design of *NiGHTS Into Dreams*, who subsequently rose through the ranks of Sonic Team as Yuji Naka took to a more hands-off role. Tellingly, Iizuka pinpoints 1996 – the year of *Super Mario 64*, *Tomb Raider*, and *NiGHTS* – as the year he began work on what eventually became *Sonic Adventure*. "It all started when I mentioned that I wanted to create a Sonic action game where you could play and enjoy the story together," he recalls. "At that time Dreamcast didn't exist and we started to experiment on Sega Saturn. However, as soon as the console prototype was complete, we shifted to Dreamcast."

With the specifications of Sega's newest console still under discussion during *Sonic Adventure's* pre-production phase, Iizuka had to be careful not to make the game too ambitious but also found that the flagship title gave him some influence over hardware development. "We were working together when Dreamcast was still a prototype," Iizuka recalls, "and had to imagine what form the final **CONTINUED >**



■ If there's one thing 3D games do better than 2D ones it's over-the-top set pieces that wow the player and get the adrenaline pumping. The very first example of this came in the whale chase at the beginning of *Sonic Adventure*.

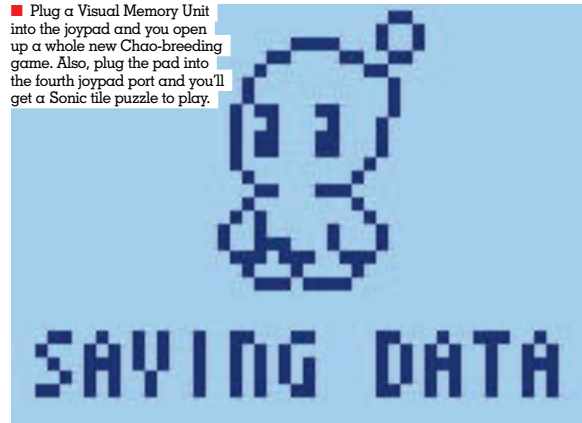


I WANTED TO CREATE A SONIC GAME WHERE YOU COULD PLAY AND ENJOY THE STORY





■ Plug a Visual Memory Unit into the joypad and you open up a whole new Chao-breeding game. Also, plug the pad into the fourth joypad port and you'll get a Sonic tile puzzle to play.



■ The snowboarding level is one of the best remembered in Sonic history and made a brilliant comeback in the streets of San Francisco in *Sonic Adventure 2*.

FROM THE FORUM

Posted by:

CRAYMEN EDGE

▲ The bit where the killer whale is chasing. Destroying the jetty behind you was jaw-dropping the first time I saw it.

Posted by:

DELBOY84

▲ Easily the best of the 3D Sonic games. Made my jaw drop the first time I saw it in action as I was always more a Sonic than Mario kinda guy. Sadly the series has been declining ever since....

Posted by:

JAY-

▲ Brilliant game, not so brilliant QA. A few more months of development to iron out the bugs and people would discuss *Sonic Adventure* in the same way they talk about *Mario 64* I reckon. The set pieces were eye-popping for the time.

Posted by:

RAPIDMOLLUSC

▲ First game I bought for my import DC and loved it. Didn't understand a word of what was said, so the fact he spoke was irrelevant to me. Hell, I even had fun creating/breeding Chaos and racing them... after all, everyone wanted a little Black Devil one.

Posted by:

RIVAONI

▲ As with *Sonic Adventure 2*, loved Sonic's bits, couldn't stand the rest. Favourite level was the city one at night, can't remember its name, but I remember getting into a bit of a competition with a mate to try and get the best time on it.

Posted by:

SURLY

▲ I remember getting my Dreamcast around launch and a line my mum came out with on the day I first played it always seemed to stick with me: "Oh look, he leaves footprints in the sand." I'm telling you, that game was epic.



■ Sonic and Tails ride into the danger zone in one of *Sonic Adventure*'s best cut-scenes.



WHAT THEY SAID...



The sheer size of the game is awesome and you can find new things about each stage each time you play. There's so much to *Sonic Adventure* that you'll never get bored

Dreamcast Magazine, Issue 1

■ game would take, such as how many polygons we could use and how fast processing would be. Of course, there were times when we had to restart from scratch. However, with the hardware still in development I think it was a merit for the *Sonic Adventure* team as we could send requests to the hardware side. The analogue stick was developed as per our request from the software development side. In Sonic's 3D game, where things change dynamically, the analogue input was a requirement. The VMU, however, was a suggestion from the hardware development side. Although it was small, being able to carry a device with a monitor was an interesting idea so we used it for nurturing the Chao in *Sonic Adventure*."

Despite Sonic Team's late start, truly 3D games were still in their infancy around the mid- to late-Nineties and Iizuka was aware of the form's limitations. "At that time, 3D action games still had problems," he explains. "Regardless of the merit of being able to walk in 360 degrees, it had created a difficulty in gameplay as users did not know where to go. So, in *Sonic Adventure*, without losing where the destination is in 3D, we aimed to create an exhilarating game that would provide players with a sense of 2D action. The dynamic changes of the camera system were integral to this motive so we had a huge trial-and-error process to make them work."



TAKASHI IIZUKA
Director

Using these techniques, Sonic Team was able to transform the rollercoaster gameplay of Mega Drive *Sonic* into 3D quite successfully, yet Iizuka wanted *Sonic Adventure* to be more than just a pure platformer. "During the planning stage, we had been calling the game *Sonic RPG*. That's how much we had been aiming to make an action game where stories progress through adventures around the world." Sega didn't just want to create a sequel, it wanted to expand the Sonic universe, giving players the opportunity to explore the fictional world and get to know it in a way that was not possible in the 2D games. To realise such ambition, *Sonic Adventure* needed a landscape that players would want to explore and so Sonic Team set about creating a series of rich tropical environments for which it took inspiration from real-world locations.

"When we completed the original plan and story outline, six team members went to see the ancient ruins in Latin America," recalls Iizuka. "Travelling through countries such as Cancun in Mexico, Guatemala, and Peru we visited the famous Maya and Inca ruins. We did not have the internet at that time so we had almost no information about the locations. However, in order to create a 3D environment, we had to see them for real so we could make full use of them for 3D model textures. Of all the places we visited, the Tikal ruin in Guatemala and Machu Picchu in Peru had the greatest influence on *Sonic Adventure*."

■ ■ ■ For the player to fully experience each of these rich virtual environments, Iizuka hit upon the idea of multiple playable characters, each with their own unique gameplay characteristics. While Sonic provided the fast, furious gameplay we all expected, his host of friends could be used to see the world from several different angles. Tails, for example, could fly to previously inaccessible places while Knuckles could climb most walls to reach the heights that Sonic couldn't. "We wanted to make full use of the 3D play field with various types of gameplay," explains Iizuka, "which is what inspired the whole idea of having multiple characters. And the characters were designed around the movements and abilities we needed them to have."

Though most of these additional characters were sourced from previous entries in the Sonic series, two new characters were designed to fit the gameplay that Sonic Team had in mind. The first was E102 Gamma, a flying robot who could lock on and shoot multiple enemies at once, transforming the game into a score-

>. A CHARACTER EVOLUTION



Sonic Adventure saw Sonic overhauled for a new generation. Less tubby than before, his super speed seemed more plausible.



The redesigns continued post-*Adventure*, with Sonic becoming even skinnier and more cool. Yet somehow less lovable.





+ Re-release Adventure +



■ FOLLOWING SEGA'S painful but inevitable decision to abandon Dreamcast and become a third-party publisher in 2001, *Sonic Adventure* was re-released as a special edition on PC and GameCube in 2003. Dubbed *Sonic Adventure DX: Director's Cut*, the re-release offered enhanced graphics and sound, as well as a new Mission mode: 60 different mini-objectives that allow the player to unlock bonus items, including 12 playable Game Gear Sonic titles. In addition, the GameCube version made use of the console's GBA connectivity so players could enjoy Chao nurturing on the go or transfer their Chao to a copy of *Sonic Advance*, *Sonic Advance 2* or *Sonic Pinball Party*. Compared to the Dreamcast original, the re-releases generally received lower scores from the press, but this critical shift can largely be attributed to rising expectations between one generation and another.


attack target game. The second character, meanwhile, was envisioned to realise a fishing adventure and became Big the Cat, one of the least popular Sonic characters with gamers but a real hit with Iizuka himself. "In comparison to the others, Big does look peculiar," he says, "but he is one of my favourite characters so I have had him appear in several other videogames since."

Sonic himself received the biggest facelift since his 1991 debut. Yuji Uekawa's new design discarded Sonic's podgy frame in favour of a slimline look befitting his speed. Quite unexpectedly, Sonic also found a voice. "We had a lot of mixed reactions when we first decided to make Sonic talk. Of course, no one knew how he should sound at the time, so we took a long time to choose the perfect voice everyone agreed on. We gathered various samples and I recall continuous discussions with Mr Naka and the team members. However, what we were looking for was clear. We all agreed on Sonic's simple and cool attitude, so that was one part where our opinions stayed constant and never collapsed." After several auditions, the role went to Ryan Drummond, an actor whose previous experience amounted to one-off appearances in television shows such as *Baywatch*, but who has gone on to enjoy several starring voice roles following his breakthrough as Sonic.

■■■ While discussing the characters in *Sonic Adventure*, we must not overlook the other, less-obvious hero who was introduced in the Dreamcast game. We refer, of course, to the Chao, a lovable little AI creature that could be crossbred with other creatures and raised like a virtual pet similarly to the Nightopian 'A-Life' creatures of *NiGHTS Into Dreams*. "The A-Life we used for *NiGHTS* was very well reviewed by the consumers, as well as us developers, so implementing that into a Sonic world was something I had in mind from the early stages of development," reveals Iizuka. "In *NiGHTS* it only functioned to give colour to the world, but in *Sonic Adventure* I was hoping to make it something the users could actually touch and raise. Moving around in the 3D environment, as well as being able to intentionally evolve the development of the AI, was way more challenging than what we had achieved in *NiGHTS*. We took a very long time to finalise the Chao design. While being a unique and appealing character, the fact that it has to change form as it evolves

meant we also had to make the design as simple as possible. These points actually did contradict each other, but we felt that both features were necessary."

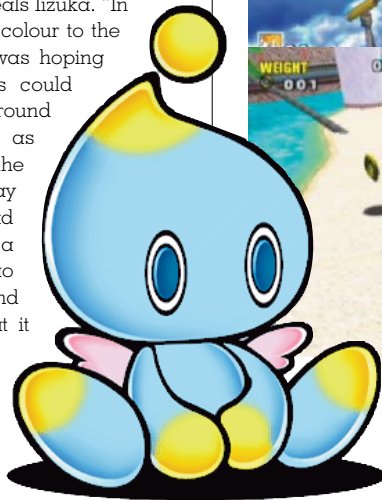
After nearly three years of inventive design and development, *Sonic Adventure* launched in Japan in December 1998, followed by a US and European release around nine months later. Despite an initial print run of faulty discs in the US, the game received critical applause, many admiring the sheer scale of the game and the way it retained and expanded upon the essence of Sonic without simply imitating *Super Mario 64*. And though Dreamcast failed as a commercial gaming platform, *Sonic Adventure* remained one of its brightest stars, selling more than 2 million copies and spawning an equally successful sequel – a relief for Iizuka and the rest of Sonic Team, who had invested so much time and effort in creating the first real 3D Sonic title.

"We had a lot of strain on the work, more than we had expected," comments Iizuka. "We had to develop six titles' worth of different action games, as well as six sequences of computer-generated cut-scenes for each character, so there was an unbelievable amount of work. The game size was always expected to be very big, right from the pre-production phase, and there were times when we thought of reducing the size along the way, but we finally managed to create the game we had hoped for and wanted to create from the beginning. Because of the team's hard work, we ended up with a very satisfying game filled with rich variety." 

ALTHOUGH BEING 3D DOES HAVE ITS MERITS, USERS DID NOT KNOW WHERE TO GO



■ Big the Cat's fishing mini-game made for the slowest Sonic game ever and didn't go down so well with fans. The character remains a firm favourite of director Takashi Iizuka, though.





Sonic Yoot

games™ meets noted author, game designer, philosopher, photographer and staunch Apple enthusiast Yoot Saito to discuss simulation games, voice recognition and acerbic-talking fish men

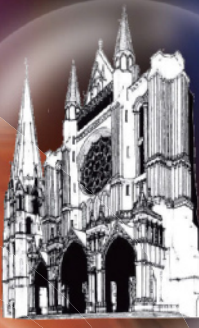
YOOT SAITO IS an intellectual. He has a number of books to his name, he attended a prestigious Tokyo university, and is full of wit and spark. He is also a playful, occasionally impertinent individual for whom videogames represent a unique creative outlet, and this has led to his gameography consisting largely of titles that are either difficult or impossible to categorise. There are common themes to be found throughout his oeuvre – communication, simulation, unusual player-character relationships – but the general rule with games from Vivarium (Saito's Tokyo studio) is to expect originality in its boldest form.

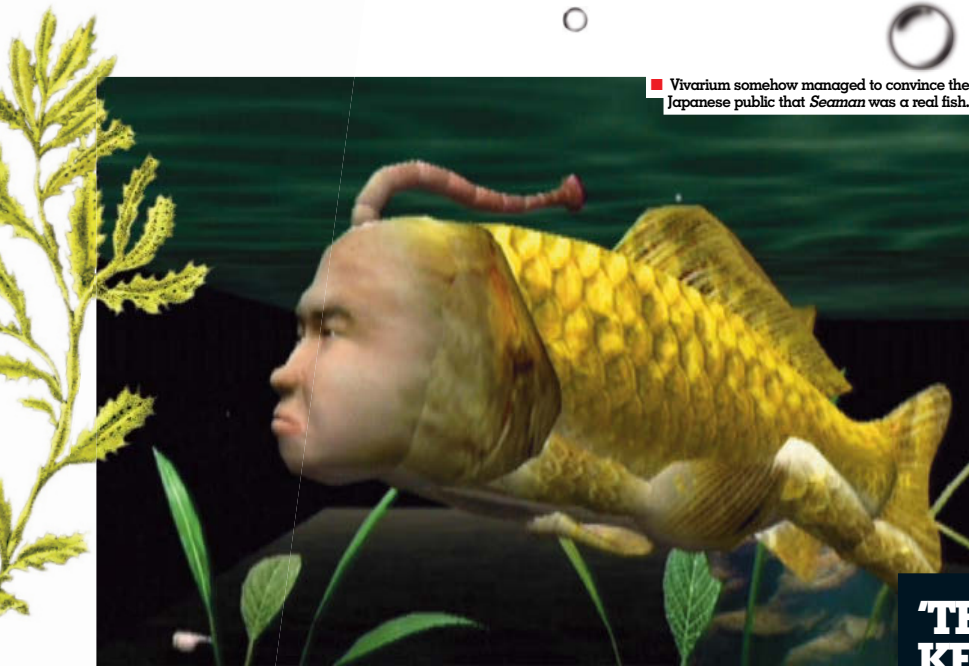
Saito's further education was spent at Tokyo's Waseda University, where he studied science, engineering and architecture. Perhaps surprisingly, he was not at all interested in producing games while he was a student. "I thought games as a form of entertainment were a waste of time,"

Saito reflects. Fortunately for anyone who has ever experienced the unhinged joy of a Saito production, his stance soon changed when he discovered what he describes as the "wonderful presentation techniques" of simulation games. In particular, one title had a profound effect on his appreciation of this medium: "Experiencing *SimCity* on a Mac with a monochrome screen was what motivated me to want to produce games. I had played many other games before that, but I hadn't been interested in making my own games until that point. I think that's why, even now, my productions are always strongly coloured with values that are important to the simulation genre."

After graduating from Waseda, Saito immediately found employment at a publishing house. "This was a really big company I had joined," he recalls. "I was part of a team that was researching 'The Future of Information Media and New **CONTINUED >**







■ Vivarium somehow managed to convince the Japanese public that *Seaman* was a real fish.

to the attention it received from a certain sim design demigod. Saito says: "As soon as the Mac version became a hit in Japan, the president of Maxis, Jeff [Braun], got in touch with me. The author of *SimCity*, Will Wright, apparently told him that my game was 'interesting', so Maxis immediately decided to contact me to discuss the prospect of a worldwide release for *The Tower*. As *Sim Tower*, it became a big hit in Europe and the States. I feel really honoured by that."

■■■ UNFORTUNATELY FOR SAITO, his newfound international publishing ally was about to be absorbed by Electronic Arts. From a Western perspective this would perhaps not appear to be a major obstacle to an ascendant indie developer, yet cultural and linguistic factors here conspired to prevent Saito from building on his initial success with *Sim Tower*. "Once Maxis was drawn in by EA, I didn't really know

"THAT'S HORRIBLE! HE KEPT ON YELLING. THIS INTENSE REACTION WAS A GOOD SIGN

who I should speak to about doing another game. I wanted to work on various other projects [with EA], but when things turn into big business, especially as far as we Japanese are concerned – because of the language barrier – we can't just pick up the phone and talk. So a lot of chances go begging, which is a real shame."

Worse, things at OPeNBook, the development studio Saito had founded upon leaving his first employer, began to deteriorate after an ill-advised merger compromised the company's values. "OPeNBook was the first development studio I had established," Saito says, "and I still think of it as though it were a child of mine. The inspiration behind the naming of

Business'. My first game was a Mac/DOS title put out by this company... Under the pretence of it being a project linked in with 'The Future of Information Media', it was released as something termed 'Simulation Media'. While I was working on that title, I was always thinking ahead and looking for new themes. One of those ideas I had was simply 'elevators and skyscrapers'. In the end, this publisher refused me the right to make a new title on the grounds that it was 'not a games company', so I didn't hang around there for long. Instead I became independent and produced *The Tower* at my own expense."

The Tower (see Climbing The Tower) was a hugely successful venture: not only did it do brisk trade in Japan, but it also earned an award from the Nikkei newspaper for its creator and, eventually, went on to become an international bestseller thanks in part



■ Yoot Saito isn't just an inventive game designer, he's also the author of two books.

YOOT IN PRINT

The other string to Yoot Saito's bow

■■■ SAITO HAS written two books on the subject of Apple. The first deals with Apple's early presence in Japan. "I found an old Apple II for sale as junk in Akihabara," he says, "and on the back of the unit there was a sticker of Toray [a large Japanese synthetic fibre manufacturer], which read 'Master Distributer'. I had a great degree of familiarity with Toray, but I found it really strange that the company had at some point been marketing Apple II hardware. This had evidently occurred before I had even thought of buying a Mac/Apple, so I started to ask older Mac users about this.

My research eventually turned into a book, written from a perspective that explains how the seemingly strong-willed, extravagant Apple brand was being carelessly brandished by this large Japanese company. That made for a very amusing story.

The other book I penned," Saito continues, "stems from a strong desire to meet and talk directly with the people behind the creation of Apple, the Macintosh, the mouse, and so on. A magazine called *MacWorld* (Japan) was producing a tenth anniversary special issue to celebrate the inception of the Macintosh, so I pitched a feature

article where I would interview these people. Apart from that chance, I thought there wouldn't ever be another opportunity for me to talk with those people. Anyway, I was able to interview about 15 people thanks to this opportunity. In preparation for those interviews, I read through every available reference/document many times, just like a university student preparing for an exam. I then spent a few months going around the west coast of America. I discovered the history of the invention of modern computers there. I still treasure the knowledge I acquired from those interviews."





CLIMBING THE TOWER

■ THE GAME THAT landed Saito a Best Young Manager/Venture Of The Year award from the Nihon Keizai Shinbun is a simulation of "towers and elevators", where the objective is to build and maintain a multi-faceted skyscraper. "The Tower was initially a Mac game," Saito says, "and it was produced by a two-man team – me and a freelance programmer called Abe-san. I did the basic graphic design in monochrome, setting it in motion with a Hyper Card. Next I coloured it with 16 colours, checking the presentation made clear to the user the intended difference between buildings such as offices and hotels. Towards the end of development, the Mac's performance was starting to increase, so to switch the designs I'd produced in 16-colour mode to 256 colours, I enlisted the help of designer Horita-san. Thanks to his craft, *The Tower* featured some lovely palette animation, and the day-to-day happenings within the buildings were presented in vivid detail." The game debuted on OS9 and Windows 95 in 1994. Locally, Japanese Saturn and 3DO versions of *The Tower* were released in 1996. Rebranded as *Sim Tower* for its release in the West, *The Tower* also spawned a number of sequels.

For Japanese Ears Only

The evolution of Yoot Saito's *Seaman*

■■■ "Voice recognition technology can never be 100 per cent complete," says Saito. "Even humans can't recognise everything. Therefore, in many instances voice recognition is not so much a technical matter as it is one of exercising the user's mentality. I learned various

things from the experience of developing *Seaman*," he concludes, and it's clear that the benefit of these lessons was utilised in the creation of *Seaman 2*, which appeared in Japan as a PS2 release in 2007. Unlike the original, the sequel leaps out of the water and finds the player

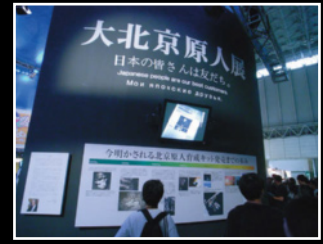
interacting with a Peking Man in a tropical island setting. Alas, there are no plans for an English-language release of *Seaman 2*, although the thematically similar *Gabo* would have been released internationally were it not for Apple's decision to refuse its presence in the App Store.



■ *Seaman 2* put in a couple of strong showings at TGS 2006 and 2007.



■ The sequel made use of the mic accessory bundled with the PS2 adaptation of the original.



■ Vivarium and Sega promoted *Seaman 2* at Tokyo Game Show 2006.

the company was that I wanted to take some valuable knowledge that had been thoughtlessly abandoned in the recesses of a laboratory, and freely distribute it to people in a format they could easily understand."

For a while things seemed to be progressing in line with Saito's aspirations. Eventually, though, a bad decision or two led to Saito becoming disillusioned with what he had created: "Unfortunately we ended up merging with another studio and the atmosphere turned sour. The development studio is like an orchestra or a band – it has to stick with one concept. When there are continual member changes, the studio will die."

■■■ LUCKILY, SAITO – dismayed and at a loose end – upped and exchanged Tokyo for the West Coast, home of his beloved Apple. This, in turn, led to the creation of Saito's most famous work. "After the merger," he reflects, "OPeNBooK suddenly had a far greater number of older employees. I tried to make good use of their potential by increasing the volume of things we were planning to do as a company. Yet even though I was the majority shareholding owner, it became really difficult for me to continue working with this company. Because of this I decided to go to California and set up a new studio there. That's where *Seaman* was developed initially: it was being produced with the American market in mind. After a while, Sega requested that I return to Japan and complete *Seaman* as a Dreamcast game. I had no desire to return to OPeNBooK, so that's when I formed the Vivarium studio. This studio's atmosphere was far livelier and full of energy: we felt strongly from the start that we were making new things."

Saito relates how Shoichiro Irimajiri (who was guiding the company through a transitional period

as the Saturn was phased out and the Dreamcast beamed in) instigated this deal: "When I was making *Seaman* in California, I had a phone call from Sega president Irimajiri-san. 'Let's have dinner', he said. It was my birthday, as it happens, and so we went to a sushi bar and talked about various things. I had my Powerbook with me and it contained a prototype of *Seaman*, so I showed this to him and – perhaps partly because we were in this sushi bar, surrounded by and eating raw fish – he repeatedly shot back

with 'That's horrible!' He kept on yelling 'Horrible!' This intense reaction was a good sign, though. It convinced me that this game could sell. Then, later that night, he proposed that I develop *Seaman* for the Katana [Dreamcast's codename at the time]. Irimajiri-san had been president of Honda America and was a genius of an engineer, but while he was knowledgeable about computer stuff, it seems he'd never seen such strange software – apparently that's why he was so interested in it."

Curious as it may have seemed at the time, *Seaman* was born of Saito's realisation of the bizarre potential in a slightly modified pet/owner relationship. "The reason that I unified a human character with a fish was simple," Saito explains. "It struck me that when I was in my own room, in my own private environment, I was being peeped at by a pet... and if you put that in words it sounded quite shocking. To that concept I just added a face and a voice to a pet designated as a tropical fish that lived in a fish tank. More than the concept itself, the fact that so many people collaborated to complete the production of a game based on this apparently stupid joke of an idea made it a very significant project."

Saito's "stupid joke" of a game concept was fresh and unique: Aki Maita's Tamagotchi **CONTINUED >**



■ Leonard Nimoy recording narration for *Seaman* in 1999.

PINBALL WIZARDRY

The making of RTS/pinball hybrid *Odama*

■ ■ ■ "I APPROACHED NINTENDO with the concept for *Odama*," Saito reveals. "I made the suggestion to them many times over." Eventually they bought the idea, and Saito's unique approach to pinball/RTS made novel use of Nintendo's plug-in microphone released for use with GameCube

software. "Communication between the player and the game is vital," he says. "I don't like games that contain movie sequences. Such games make for experiences where the player's existence seems to be insufficient. Games should be designed from the ear. It goes without saying that the ear is an

input. When the audio is interesting, the game changes into something that's very novel and original. Nintendo showed that it recognised this through the development of game hardware where that cooped-up feeling was surmounted by the addition of touchpens, nunchuks, and so on."

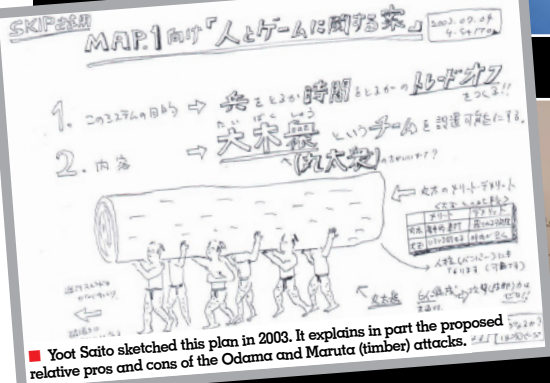
■ This overview of *Odama*'s distinct appeal was prepared for *Famitsu*, first printed in promotion of the game's 2003 release.



■ Saito plans the "rotation" of dancing construction workers from the feudal era...



■ ...and jots a human bridge...



■ Yoot Saito sketched this plan in 2003. It explains in part the proposed relative pros and cons of the *Odama* and *Maruta* (timber) attacks.

© 2006 Nintendo/VIVARIUM



■ A scene from Vivarium's underperforming late GameCube release, *Odama*.

■ ■ ■ phenomenon had already been established in Japan a few years earlier, but to categorise *Seaman* merely as a similar type of 'virtual pet' would be wide of the mark. The player-character relationship proposed in *Seaman* is unique and is moored in Saito's own dry sense of humour. To an extent, however, Dreamcast hardware and sound library limitations necessitated *Seaman*'s notoriously acerbic turn of phrase, as Saito explains: "I think that players wish for relationships with characters who will actually come to life for them. In order to make the player think of the character as a sentient being, the player's conversation must be seen to be understood: the dialogue should be similar to that of a movie, with the player feeling as though the other party really understands what he/she is saying. In order to realise that no matter how we went about it, *Seaman* ended up speaking in a harsh and scathing manner... just like a mother scolding her son. But that harshness is actually underlined by affection, so

■ *Odama* featured some imaginative levels towards the end, but few people persevered long enough to see them.



when you hear it it's not something that makes you feel upset. It's not slander. It's a warning for the sake of the person who is being admonished. That's why *Seaman* doesn't merely say impolite things - he also praises and peps up the user. However, players had never previously been admonished from within the screen of a game, so I think that's why it made such a great impression on people."

■ ■ ■ SUPPORT FROM SEGA was crucial because of the scale of Vivarium's ambition. "Thinking back now," Saito muses, "I suppose developing *Seaman* was a very difficult job, but at the time it was also a lot of fun. Nervous excitement has a magical power in that it makes difficult work feel easy. We overcame many hurdles I think. First we had to persuade Sega to help with mic input and with the preparation of a voice-recognition library. Those were big things. Happily, Sega gave us support whenever we needed it. I'm grateful for that. However, I didn't realise this at the time, but I was apparently teased a lot by Sega staff as they were saying 'There's no way that repulsive-looking thing can ever be a hit'. [Laughs.] Certainly there wasn't any previous record of a disgusting, cheeky game character landing a hit with a home console game, so I suppose you could argue that the teasing was justified."

Despite Sega staffers' derision, *Seaman* became one of the first significant Dreamcast successes in Japan, selling nearly four hundred thousand copies and in the process becoming an unlikely social and cultural phenomenon. That its rapid uptake by all corners of Japanese society can be attributed to the ingenious marketing tactics of its creator is truly remarkable. Saito himself explains his actions: "I fabricated a foolish-sounding story to expound the obviously spurious claim that 'This mysterious fish once really existed'. I next came up with a way to surreptitiously get this reported in the media as fact. The story would be the basis of the trick, so I put a great amount of work into research before creating the story. A little while after *Seaman* went on sale, Japanese TV stations began to play along with the joke - they also mixed in their own humour - and in the end, thanks to this fanciful story being reported in the media, lots of people started to actually believe it. '*Seaman*, that fish, really existed' became



CONVINCING NINTENDO TO SPEAK

■ Saito was consulted on audio issues during the development of the Wii Remote: "When I was asked 'Saito-san, what kind of things would you like to use this Wii controller for?' I answered 'I want to use it as a mobile phone'. You see, to my eyes the Wii Remote is shaped just like a mobile phone. I was at a yakinikku [Korean BBQ] restaurant in Kyoto with Shigeru Miyamoto and Satoru Iwata, and there I strongly put across my idea that while attaching a microphone to the Wii Remote's expansion port would not be a problem, it would be far better to make sure the Remote featured a built-in speaker that could easily be brought next to one's ear. The finished Wii hardware and various mock-ups, as well as details of basic methods it used, had already been announced to the press a few days earlier, so at first Iwata-san and Miyamoto-san seemed to be thinking, 'You're asking us to do this now?' Later on, however, after we'd talked a great deal about the idea, it seems their switches were flicked. As we were finishing our meal, I went to the toilet and when I returned to the table I found them talking enthusiastically, which is when I realised they were going to run with my idea. Still, it goes without saying that it was Nintendo who made the decision and took the risk. In that regard, the decisiveness of Nintendo's people is terrific."



■ The concept art for Saito's *Odama* depicts the bizarre human drama that is only seen from far above in game.

DEVELOPING SEAMAN WAS A DIFFICULT JOB, BUT AT THE TIME IT WAS ALSO A LOT OF FUN

something of an urban legend. Of course I knew that eventually I'd be found out, but I think intelligent people appreciated the joke and as a result were attracted to the game."

■■■ SEAMAN'S SUCCESS IN Japan was "far in excess" of Saito's expectations, paving the way for a Japan-only sequel on the PlayStation 2. Even today, a decade on from *Seaman*'s appearance in the public consciousness, it remains a well-known property in Japan. For its creator, the public's reaction was particularly rewarding: "Major comedians were presenting *Seaman* parody material on national television, and when a famous baseball player was recuperating from an injury, he told reporters that he was spending his time with *Seaman*... it had clearly become something of a social phenomenon. I remember many instances when I would be having a drink in a bar and the people sat next to me would come out with things like 'I'm playing *Seaman*, and you'll never guess what he said to me today...' Overhearing such conversations and seeing the

reactions of celebrities was a real privilege for me as the game's creator."

After developing *Seaman 2* (see For Japanese Ears Only) and *Odama* (see Pinball Wizardry), Saito and his team came full circle to again develop a videogame for one of Apple's platforms. *Gabo* is/was an iPhone game that is loosely related to *Seaman 2*, and yet for some strange reason it was turned away by the App Store gatekeepers. Looking to the future, Yoot Saito has found an altogether new objective: "I would like to make films. It's a dream I've had since being a child, and I'm now proceeding with preparations for that. I think I've learned an awful lot from developing games, particularly in terms of story composition and techniques for generating empathy, and now I'd like to apply those things to film production."

GIFT OF THE GABO

The Vivarium iPhone game you'll never get to play

■■■ WITH THE PEKING Man of *Seaman 2* reappearing as its protagonist, *Gabo* was intended to be a portable extension of some of the basics of Vivarium's previous titles. Unfortunately, Apple rejected it citing "unpleasant presentation". Saito has since given up on attempting to release *Gabo*. "I sense that Apple is becoming more conservative than Nintendo," Saito says. "I can only wait until there is

some new blood there - people who can accurately evaluate a game. I'm working far away from iPhone now, but I hope to return with a new idea and make a fresh attempt to release an iPhone game."

In spite of his frustrations with the *Gabo* experience, Saito remains an admirer of the iPhone as a development platform: "Its high level of compatibility and elasticity sets it apart from the likes of the DSi.



■ Perhaps little *Gabo* was too underdressed to be accepted by Apple's QA department.



■ We think the world of Saito's games, so let's hope he returns with a new iPhone project soon.

GAME CHANGERS

SHENMUE

Released: 8 November, 2000 Publisher: Sega Developer: Sega AM2 System: Dreamcast

In the last quarter before *Shenmue* shipped, it still had over 10,000 'actions' to be made on its bugs. The QA team worked 24-hour days to get everything ready in time.



One of Sega's most influential games, *Shenmue* was a ground-breaking force in the open-world genre, and represented the height of Sega's creative prowess. Known for its spectacular budget and feats of engineering, *Shenmue* changed the gaming world. We examine just how it managed to do so...

■ ■ ■ *SHENMUE* WAS ORIGINALLY planned to be an extension of Sega's esteemed *Virtua Fighter* series – an RPG addition to the fighting game's world on the Sega Saturn. The source code of *Shenmue* still reflects this – right from the way the game was built to the character models and scripts they run on (protagonist Ryo is still referred to as 'AKIR' in the code, for example, harking back to his original form of *Virtua Fighter's* Akira).

As sales of the Sega Saturn began to wane in North America, it became clear to the Japanese branch of the publisher that something drastic needed to be done – the company had already sunk a considerable amount of budget into the title, as well as two years of development time, and it was quickly becoming evident that launching *Shenmue* on the Saturn wouldn't return

the capital. *Shenmue's* earliest form was re-worked, renamed 'Project Berkley' and adapted for the Dreamcast – which was still due to launch.

■ ■ ■ Under its new title, *Shenmue* managed to attract a team of 87 programmers – an insane undertaking for a game that would release in 1999. Lead systems programmer Tak Hirai has stated that simply debriefing with each programmer after a milestone was completed would take 14 and a half hours – and that was only if he took ten minutes with each staffer. As strenuous as this was it did have overall positive implications for Sega: Hirai was in charge of streamlining the programming language and pipeline for the Dreamcast, so everything he learnt from his team fed directly into the architecture

THE ANATOMY OF SHENMUE

SHENMUE MAY HAVE BECOME THE BENCHMARK TO WHICH ALL OPEN-WORLD GAMES WERE JUDGED, BUT HOW DID IT COME TO BE?



VIRTUA FIGHTER

★ The game's working title on the Sega Saturn was *'Virtua Fighter: Akira's Story'* – intended to be a game about the fighting game's hero.



NINETIES RPGS

★ In the research phase of the game, Suzuki played through practically all of the JRPGs from the Nineties, and was unimpressed by the scant interactivity he found there.



EIGHTIES ADVENTURES

★ After RPGs, Suzuki moved onto Eighties adventure games: he enjoyed world-building, but wanted to make something more player-focused.

of the Dreamcast. Long story short: without *Shenmue*, Sega's last console wouldn't have been the powerful, impressive beast that it was.

But *Shenmue*'s influence extended far beyond simple hardware upgrades – the software showed off in-game is still impressive, some 16 years later. Hirai has noted that making everything feel completely natural – making the player truly feel 'at home' in *Shenmue*'s world – is a testament to how many 'invisible' features are going on behind the scenes. In-depth mechanics like the weather system, the day/night cycle and a massive 300 non-player character roster all had to work cohesively to make sure the game didn't crash or burn out the Dreamcast's processing potential.

As such, Hirai notes, all NPCs and weather effects were intentionally placed in certain areas so that the Dreamcast never had to render more than it was capable of at any one time. Think of it like a heat map – where if one section of the game was reading 'too hot', features were moved or altered so that the world would still work, but run at a less hungry rate. For a game released in 1999, these are amazing features. At the time, we'd never seen an open world like this before; for its day, *Shenmue* was the closest thing to a living, breathing virtual world a player could ask for.

SHENMUE WAS THE CLOSEST THING TO A LIVING, BREATHING VIRTUAL WORLD A PLAYER COULD ASK FOR

KEY FACTS

■ Yu Suzuki's original plan for *Shenmue* was a game that lasted 45 hours, split into 'fighting', 'training', 'linking', 'moving', 'conversation' and 'dungeon' denominations.

■ Suzuki has claimed that if his team hadn't compressed their initial vision, *Shenmue* would have been 'between 50 and 60 discs' in size!

■ The design motto for *Shenmue* during development was simply: 'leisurely, fully, gently'.

It was partly to do with the scope and scale of the world but the little details were what really helped to solidify *Shenmue* as a deeply immersive experience. Like Ryo's shadow; it fell at a different angle depending on the time of day. And there were individually animated fish that swam around in a koi pond. Birds scattered and flew away as you approached them; there was a stray cat that you could look after; you could build a collection of capsule toys; you could spend all your hard-earned wages in a realistic videogame arcade if you wanted to. All of these small additions to the game required lines and lines of code, hundreds of textures or assets, and countless hours of work. And for what? A potential small reward, a missable cutscene, a small moment of extra immersion for the player.

■■■ *Shenmue* is remembered fondly for the way it coaxed players into a false sense of security in this new, exotic yet domestic world: it was a level of escapism and immersion that games until this point hadn't offered. It was a simulator, at its core, putting you in the shoes of a kid who not only wanted revenge for his dead father, but also wanted to be a better person, a stronger person. It's a coming of age story that isn't scared to show you the dirt under the fingernails of life in Eighties Japan, it's a game that pushed console hardware further than it had been pushed before. It was a game whose legacy is undeniable.

Without *Shenmue*, it's likely that we wouldn't have made such strides into the open world genre so quickly (and so adeptly), it's likely Sega would have died a miserable death long before it stopped producing hardware, and it's likely that a lot of gamers' tastes wouldn't have been shaped the way they have. *Shenmue* was a watershed moment, not just for Sega, but for the industry at large, too.



GAME CHANGERS

8 OTHER GAMES WITH UTTERLY MENIAL JOBS

ONE BIG ASPECT OF SHENMUE'S GAMEPLAY WAS INDULGING YOURSELF IN MENIAL JOBS. THIS SET OFF A TREND THAT'S BEEN KEPT ALIVE AND WELL UNTIL THIS VERY DAY. HERE ARE OUR EIGHT FAVOURITE POINTLESS TASKS IN GAMING



CHECKING PASSPORTS

■ THE ENTIRETY OF *Papers, Please* revolves around you – you lucky peasant! – after you've won a lottery and have the honour of protecting Arstozka's borders from would-be immigrants or terrorists. It perfectly deconstructs the way games, well, gamify things and makes you really care about your job: if you get it wrong, or do it *too* well, your family won't eat, you can't afford medicine or rent, and you *will* die. Lovely.



COLLECTING COCONUTS

■ IT'S HARD WORK, but someone's got to do it, right? Although, do they...? It's probably less strenuous than some of the other *No More Heroes* jobs – from minesweeping a beach to collecting cats, the game offered a bizarre slew of extra-curricular activities. What made it worse was doing these tasks with the Wiimote – it took quite a bit of effort to gather all the coconuts, and that slow waddle your hero did when holding the goods? Infuriating.



DOING A MURDERER'S LAUNDRY

■ WE'RE ASSUMING HERE that the laundry we're doing is that of murderers – after all, you get put in some pretty high-security prisons in *The Escapists*. Though you're supposed to be sat in this room, doing this job for about four in-game hours a day, you can actually nick one of the dirty guard uniforms to wear it after hours, which is something of a bonus.



CLEANING UP BLOOD

■ *VISCERA CLEANUP DETAIL* (yes, that's its actual name) is a game where the core conceit is that you are a *janitor*. That's it – no frills, lots of mess, you're required to turn disgusting, blood-soaked walls into their natural sparkly state. Drop debris, spill a used bucket or got blood on your shoes and you're just going to make things worse for yourself. And this is the whole game.



RUNNING A SHOP

■ THE MOST INFURIATING mini-game in the original *Digimon World* game doesn't run on logic, but on the whims of idiots that demand you sell them items at a loss, otherwise they'll tell everyone else not to bother coming. You're on top of a cliff, in the heat, the only food source for miles, and these monsters tell you to give it to them at half the cost price? The nerve.



TEACHING MATHS

■ IN *PERSONA 4*, you can power up your id (or ego, or superego – or whatever your Persona is supposed to represent) by heightening your social links: this can be achieved by romancing people, getting jobs or just being a good guy. Thing is, once you boost your confidence, you can be a bit more... aloof. Tutoring a snotty little kid might just push you over your limits...



SHIPYARD CRATE-HAULING

■ THE MOST TENUOUS and stressful part of *Grand Theft Auto V* wasn't the torture scene, it wasn't the countless driving missions, or that one part of the game where you have to go scuba diving forever, no. It was the bit where you get a job hauling shipping containers around a dockyard for about eight hours at a time. You could say, at this point, the game went 'full *Shenmue*'.



DELIVERING PAPERS

■ THIS ONE'S PRETTY self-explanatory. The game lets you choose one of three routes (Easy Street, Middle Road and Hard Way) and then tasks you with delivering as many papers as possible to the inhabitants of the suburb. The kid in *Paperboy* manages to turn up for his *incredibly* long routes every day of the week, which seems a bit much to us, especially considering that he seems to live in an area where *no-one* has any regard for road safety.

BEHIND THE SCENES SPACE CHANNEL 5

Strap on those dancing shoes and feel the rhythm of the music. *Space Channel 5* introduced an infectious beat that's still felt today, as producer Tetsuya Mizuguchi explains



Released: 6 October 2000
Format: Dreamcast, PlayStation 2
Publisher: Sega
Developer: United Game Artists

KEY STAFF:

Tetsuya Mizuguchi
Producer
Takashi Yuda
Director
Yumiko Miyabe
Art director
Takumi Yoshinaga
Story & game design director



IN TERMS OF its place in musical gaming history, Sega's *Space Channel 5* was far from the first modern-era music-rhythm game to make it to market. *PaRappa The Rapper*, *Beatmania* and little-known PlayStation oddity *Fluid* (aka *Depth*) all preceded it by a few years. Nor was *SC5* the first futuristic rhythm-based game – take a bow, *Bust A Move*. In fact, United Game Artists' funky, space-age groove machine is not even the most innovative beat-matching game of its era. That honour would, if we're being honest, go to NanaOn-Sha's *Vib Ribbon*. However, for all of the things *Space Channel 5* is not, it is arguably the most stylish and, for many reasons, the most iconic music-rhythm game of its time.

It's not *Space Channel 5*'s complexity that causes it to resonate to this day. Despite increasingly complex beat-matching patterns as the game progresses, *SC5* is not much more than a flashy spin on the old battery-operated memory game *Simon*. "Up, down, up, down, chu, chu, chu!" belched wave after wave of colourful, gelatinous Morolians, *SC5*'s humorous alien 'threat'. In return, the player was merely tasked with repeating the exact combination of corresponding button presses, in rhythm, via the unflappable, irresistible space reporter Ulala. The pink-haired heroine in the orange miniskirt would eventually shimmy, shake, bop and sashay her way through the game, and it is in her every motion-captured movement that the game crystallises its charm.

Everyone loved Ulala. Sadly, she would only appear in two proper *Space Channel 5* games before, in typical Sega fashion, settling into a life of relative obscurity, the licence languishing in disuse after the disbandment of original developer United Game Artists. Sure, she's made the occasional cameo appearance in other Sega games (over a dozen in fact), but it's been over ten years since *Space Channel 5: Part 2* was released, and there's no *Part 3* on the horizon.

That's no way to treat a lady, or more specifically, waste the unique charms of Ulala and the mythology of the *Space Channel 5* universe. You'd think that over the course of a decade someone [continued](#).

■ *Space Channel 5* never made it to current-gen systems, but the possibilities of a Kinect-enabled adventure are practically endless.



■ If *Space Channel 5* taught us anything, it's that no-one parties like a reporter.



THE TONE OF THE VOICE WOULD HAVE A BIG IMPACT ON THE GAME DESIGN





FROM THE FORUM

Posted by:

ASH

▲ I remember looking at the Japanese version of *Space Channel 5* in a game shop when the assistant told me it was "So Sega". Well I had to buy it. I spent the next few weeks shouting "My name is Jaguar!" (complete with American pronunciation) and "Chu! Chu! Chu!", much to the annoyance of my mates.

Posted by:

MR MARVELLOUS

▲ I loved its style, but the gameplay wasn't as tight as it needed to be for a rhythm game.

Posted by:

BIG MEAN BUNNY

▲ I only ever played the demo of this; however, I fondly remember that demo. It was totally mad to me at the time and used to be one of those games I would put on to show people that were over as a kind of "check out this weird game!"

Posted by:

SHINYMCSHINE

▲ For me I'd already "checked out this weird game" by playing and enjoying *UmJammer Lammy* on the PSone, so *Space Channel 5* just didn't really hold much more than a passing interest in its approach or gameplay.

Posted by:

MERMAN

▲ The word that springs to mind is bonkers. But as a fan of rhythm action, the original is sublime with its kooky style and catchy music. I keep trying to get perfect scores on the Dreamcast but it eludes me.

While it looks like fun and games, moving to the beat was vital to the survival of the human race.





WHAT THEY SAID...

"I think back on all the incredible games I've played on all the various systems out there, and I can't imagine myself having smiled and laughed more than with Space Channel 5"

IGN, Anoop Gantayat



could scare up a motion-controlled game for Wii or something. SC5 was, after all, designed to be accessible to all sorts of gamers. But it wasn't always that way. United Game Artists leader – and, later, Q Entertainment chief creative officer – Tetsuya Mizuguchi tells us that Ulala didn't start out quite so humble: "The first idea of *Space Channel 5* came from two designers: Mr Yuda and Mr Yoshinaga," he says. "Mr Yuda is an artist and designer, and Yoshinaga is a game designer, so both of them made the first concept video of *Space Channel 5*. Mr Yuda is my very good friend; we entered Sega in the same year at the same level, so he said, 'Please look at this video and give me some feedback and give me your opinion.' So I watched the video and it was very cool – a female dancing with aliens in the future. The music was very good, too, kind of jazzy. But the atmosphere was *too cool*, and the female character was *too cool*, like a slender model. Not humble, not attractive, no colours; just *too cool*."

"I felt this was boring," Mizuguchi continues, "and there was no game yet. I said we have to change this into something more entertaining. And then Yuda asked me to join the project as a producer, and to make it together. That was the start. I changed the game design and the characters and story, but I really loved the music. It was *Mexican Flyer*, which was the original song they chose."

With this demo video as his launching point, Mizuguchi elaborates, "I wanted to make a new wow experience. The game should be very simple, but as you continue to play the game I wanted you to have a big, big emotional chemistry. It's like a musical... musicals are very ridiculous when you think about how people in real life just break out in song, suddenly. But this singing enhances the emotion and drama, so [they're] a very fun thing."

His interest in musicals from the Fifties is certainly apparent, but perhaps the biggest influence on Mizuguchi – not only with SC5, but his games in general – might have been the advent of MTV.

"The musical movement of the Fifties and Sixties began to disappear in the Seventies and Eighties. But in the Eighties I watched MTV music videos. I was a junior high school kid. It was so exciting to watch

■ We couldn't really tell you what's going on here; it looks like the greatest rave of all time, though.



I CHANGED THE GAME DESIGN AND THE CHARACTERS, BUT I LOVED THE MUSIC

music videos by people like Michael Jackson; it gave me goosebumps. It made me think that music and dance had some power as a big way to entertain people, so I wanted to combine these kinds of elements into a game design. The game could be simple, but as a result of the game we could feel those kinds of goosebumps: laughing, crying, any type of emotional movement and sensation. This was the first vision of *Space Channel 5*."

In terms of his influences, Mizuguchi drew inspiration from the groundbreaking video work of Peter Gabriel and, of course, Michael Jackson, who would eventually appear in both SC5 games. "I really loved Peter Gabriel's *Sledgehammer*, and also Michael Jackson's *Thriller*. Totally different types of creative directions, but using this inspiration I did many trials and experiments designing SC5. I looked at New Order and Madonna. Many, many new talents and artists emerged on MTV; New Order made *Bizarre Love Triangle*, with [video

>. A GAMING EVOLUTION

Simon > Space Channel 5 > Dance Central



SC5's call-and-response, music-meets-memory gameplay can be traced back to *Simon*, created by the Magnavox Odyssey creator Ralph H Baer.



The concept of mimicking on-screen actions with your own body – via the Kinect – hasn't changed much since Ulala's debut.





■ Not wanting to risk taking itself too seriously, *Space Channel 5* took dancers to some pretty wild locations.

director] Robert Longo. It was a new movement of experimentation; we had a big passion from the music videos of that era. So I started *Space Channel 5* in 1997-1998, maybe 15 years after the first MTV videos. I felt if I made something, I'd need to make a new form of entertainment and experience."

Another spark of inspiration came from another unlikely source: the rhythmic musical *Stomp*. Having witnessed the show's call-and-response audience interaction – something that would become a common theme in Mizuguchi's later works – he realised that this simple interplay could form the basis of *Space Channel 5*'s equally primal game mechanics. He explains: "I watched the musical *Stomp* at the time. One guy would come to the stage, and he'd clap. The audience would just stare back, like 'What?' then he'd clap again and then people would respond with a clap. When I saw that, I thought we could use that super call and response in *Space Channel 5*. So this game mechanism uses just two things: one is memory, the other thing is rhythm. Mixing rhythm and memory, we can make any type of game – it's simple. So [mimicking a typical segment of *SC5*] 'Up, down, chul! We discovered that very basic scheme of game design. Then I made a very simple game editor and we did experiments, and that became our first playable demo. I wanted something very simple, minimal, so I could see if this basic design was fun, or good or bad. I played this basic game design and I thought, 'Oh, this is fun.' Then we added characters on the screen, and that was the start."

But as development of what would become *Space Channel 5* began in earnest, the game still wasn't where he thought it should be. The call-and-

response mechanics were there, but Mizuguchi felt his team needed to think outside of the box. Like, *really* outside of the box. "In the beginning of the production," he says, "I had a struggle with the staff. The designers, including Yuda, wanted to make *SC5* with a much more cool atmosphere. But I wanted to make it much more entertaining, and funny and crazy – not cool. I wanted to change the atmosphere of the team, so I started a workshop." What sort of workshop does a producer assemble for a staff of videogame designers? "I invited a pantomime artist," says Mizuguchi, "and every week we had a two- or three-hour workshop with all staff members. Not just pantomime, but we explored how we could make people laugh just through action and reaction. We learned many things in that workshop."



TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI
Producer

■ ■ ■ One exercise found Mizuguchi himself involved, running at an invisible door, breaking *through* that door, and then stopping and posing as if frozen in time. "I was the first one who had to do it," he admits. "In front of all the team I had to do this. It was so high-pressure, and I felt so shy. But I needed to do it; I was the producer. I had to run, break the invisible door, stop and pose, and shout 'Space Channel 5!' It's so tough to make people laugh; just saying 'Space Channel 5!' wasn't so funny." The solution, as it turns out, wasn't so far away. "The teacher said, 'Okay, Mizuguchi-san, that was very good. But this time say "Space Channel 5!" and then please, please hold the pose. Keep your face in the

The King Of Pop pops in for a song and dance

■ ONE OF the most surprising cameo appearances in a videogame ever – besides Pepsiman in *Fighting Vipers* (Japanese version) – has got to be Michael Jackson's alter ego, Space Michael, appearing in the midst of the first *Space Channel 5*. Mizuguchi, who had met the King Of Pop earlier during his many visits to Sega HQ, told us that Michael Jackson saw a near-final build of *SC5* about a month before production and decided he wanted to be part of the game. Thinking that Jackson would want the starring role, Mizuguchi, while excited, knew that there was no way to put him in the game in time, at least on that level. "So at first I wanted to gently turn down his proposal, and I was thinking of excuses;

'How can we tell Michael Jackson no?' I really wanted to put him in the game, but I had no time. I thought maybe I could do just one thing, and that was to replace one of the characters in the game with Michael Jackson."

As it turns out, this is exactly what happened, which is why Space Michael is one of the later surprises in the game. The Gloved One would later reprise his role in *SC5: Part 2*, expanded to the point where he even made it onto the box cover. Unfortunately, the timing of Michael Jackson's legal battles in court caused Sega to cancel the UK release of the game. However, it is now available as a digital download.



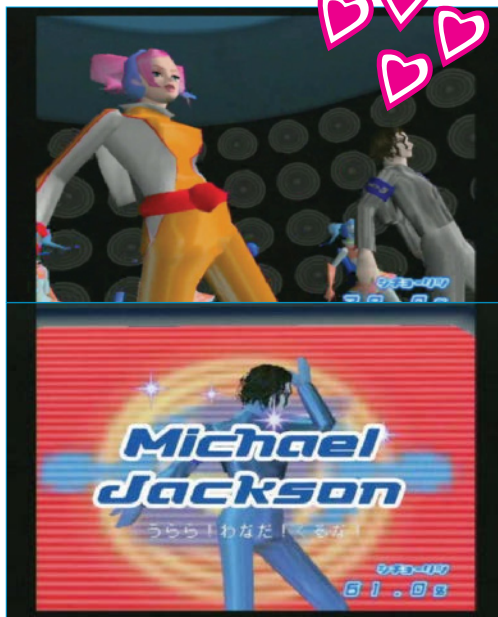


Clearly nobody informed Ulala that dance and gunplay never mix. The addition of a pop-hero certainly helps any situation, though.

same place, just freeze, for 15 seconds.' So I did it again, and after the first five seconds some staff started giggling. After ten seconds everybody was laughing out loud. This was a very important discovery."

Space Channel 5 veterans will recognise the fruits of all this unorthodox labour, in the moments where Ulala displays a penchant for holding her pose for a few moments at the end of any successful encounter in the game. With the team on the right path, Mizuguchi was able to focus on things like hunting down the licenser for the game's theme song, *Mexican Flyer*, which proved tricky because both the song and its publisher were equally obscure. Yuda, the game designer, had discovered the song on a compilation CD. It had never appeared in a film, game or commercial anywhere else prior to its use in SC5, but once they had the song secured they were able to build a visual style to match its horn-driven, over-the-top, swingin' big band sound. While her character design seems so natural and breezy, Ulala herself went through five or six major revisions before UGA's character designer, Yumiko Miyabe, ran into Mizuguchi's office one morning, confident that she had nailed Ulala's character design.

"We settled on the character design of Ulala almost near the end of the production," Mizuguchi reveals. "I remember the art director, Miyabe, came to my desk in the morning and was screaming, 'We made a baby!' She was like a mother, because she had designed the main character, so I went to her desk and looked at Ulala. At that moment I felt like we created a new life. We had many processes that we went through, of action, motion and movement. We did a lot of motion capture, so when I was



Michael Jackson was a big influence on Tetsuya Mizuguchi: through music videos like *Thriller* he learnt of the power music has to entertain.

directing the attitude of the main character, I was really putting the soul into Ulala."

ANOTHER ELEMENT OF the game that would become – at least in the Japanese version – integral to Ulala's 'soul' was her voice. Instead of hiring a famous voice actress to handle vocal duties, UGA needed someone internal, for ease of access, to be on-call at all hours for this particularly demanding vocal role. So they chose one of the *Space Channel 5* staff to perform the role of Ulala. The reason was obvious, Mizuguchi reasons: "We needed to be able to do the voice acting ourselves, because the tone of the voice would have a big effect on the impact of the game design. It affects the sense of reward. We had to do a lot of trial and error, many times. So for important characters we had to handle the roles by ourselves." Regarding the novice actress in question, "All the time she cried in the studio, because my requirements were so tough. I needed a cheerful, high-tension style, but she couldn't do that naturally, and I'd always say, 'It's not enough, it's not enough. Do it again.'"

Fortunately, the team member who supplied Ulala's voice was able to pull herself together and resume the role for *Space Channel 5: Part 2*, which discarded the pre-rendered FMV backgrounds of the first game and replaced them with fully polygonal 3D graphics. Mizuguchi tells us that he wanted more freedom in the second game, and by this time they had learned how to get more out of the Dreamcast hardware, which made FMV backgrounds unnecessary. The development of *SC5: Part 2* also took place right around the time that Sega had abandoned the hardware wars and gone multiplatform as a software-only publisher. Rez was UGA's first PlayStation 2 production, and *SC5: Part 2*, while primarily developed for Dreamcast, was

Greed is in the heart

WHILE MOST of the gaming world was fawning over Ulala in 1999, there was most certainly someone who wasn't so enamoured: Lady Miss Kier of the early Nineties dance group Deee-Lite. Kier, a club kid from NYC's late-Eighties nightclub scene turned momentary pop star, decided that Sega had appropriated her likeness without consent or compensation. She claimed that the game publisher had approached her about using her likeness, but used it anyway after she turned them down. Whether it was actually A) common sense, B) a lack of evidence to support her case, or C) merely the Sixties calling and saying, "We want our style back!" that tilted the case in Sega's favour, Kier ultimately lost the suit. Compounding the legal defeat was the fact that she was court-ordered to pay Sega's legal costs, to the tune of just over \$600,000.



■ Loot was the real heart of the game. From boxed items to enemy drops, there was always a better piece of kit to get.



shut down the last servers for the final iteration on PC. On top of building up the original game, Sega expanded the franchise to include *Phantasy Star Portable* for the PSP, *Phantasy Star Zero* for DS, and the critically panned *Phantasy Star Universe* on Xbox 360 and PC.

The series has struggled to live up to the legacy of the original game. While Sega was busy trying to top *PSO*, Capcom stole its thunder by taking the formula and adapting it into *Monster Hunter*. For various cultural reasons, the ad hoc gameplay of *Monster Hunter* on PSP proved to be far more popular in Japan than online could ever hope to be. By the time Sega realised the right direction to take the series, it was too late and *Phantasy Star* was stuck playing catch-up to *Monster Hunter*. At the same time, the PSP *Phantasy Star* games have failed to capture the attention of the West, and Sega is incredibly slow to localise and release them. It seems that only the

hardcore fans, who created their own private *PSO* servers after the game was shut down, are keeping the series alive.

Now no longer working at Sega and heading his own studio at Prope – which recently released both *Let's Tap* and *Ivy The Kiwi?* for Wii – Naka doesn't seem to mind the series' fortunes, as long as the game's fans remember what he achieved. "As the game creator, *Diablo* influenced us and we wanted to create something better. I'm happy to see others take what we did and work with it. I'm the kind of creator who wants to do something first. If I do something and others follow, I'm happy. If there was no *PSO*, *Monster Hunter* wouldn't have come out. I feel I'm lucky. You have to be there in the right place at the right time. For the younger generation it's difficult, there's so much out there already. I was lucky to have the chance to do that first."

■ Rag Rappys were the Slimes of *Phantasy Star Online* – cute, unchallenging foes that were later mined for merchandise.



>. A GAMING EVOLUTION



Often imitated, never surpassed (except perhaps by *Phantasy Star Online*), *Diablo* singlehandedly gave rise to the entire 'loot-whoring' genre.



Designer Hiroshi Matsuyama cited *Phantasy Star Online* as a direct influence on his ambitious single-player PS2 MMO series, *.hack.*





RETRO

INTERVIEW

HAIL! HE'S STILL CRAZY

Kenji Kanno is the man behind one of arcade gaming's true greats: *Crazy Taxi*. We sat down with the Sega stalwart for a good long chat

While he's worked on one other title (1997's arcade-only *Top Skater*), it's fair to say Kenji Kanno is seen as a one-series man. He's the mind behind the original three *Crazy Taxi* games, as well as the PSP spin-off *Fare Wars* and the latest in the series – a free-to-play smartdevice version known as *City Rush*. Other than that, Kanno hasn't been directly involved in the creation of a game – so it's a uniquely interesting experience to speak to the man. We did just that, trying to find out what he thinks of the series he has created and what he thinks of its lasting legacy with gamers.

Why, after all this time, have you suddenly decided to bring us a new version of *Crazy Taxi*?

Despite the perpetual popularity of racing games (and specifically open-world ones), it seems like the revival of *Crazy Taxi* has come out of the blue...

I had been thinking about it a while and wanted to try something new in the *Crazy Taxi* series. At the same time I had a chance to have a conversation with Haruki Satomi – he's currently the CEO at Sega Networks, but I spoke to him before he was CEO and he told me he wanted to bring *Crazy Taxi* to a smartphone platform. I've been working with Hard Light Studio in the UK, where *City Rush* was born.

Had you had something in mind for a long time with the franchise, or was it more of a spur of the moment thing?

A couple of years after *Crazy Taxi 3* was released I tried something different [*Fare Wars* on PSP], but after that I got feedback from various people that they really enjoyed the original *Crazy Taxi* games. So I started thinking about what I could create that would be new, to surprise people and bring enjoyment to them.

Would you agree that smartphone and tablet gaming bears a huge similarity to arcade gaming, with their focus on quick, casual play and so on?

There is a similarity between smartphone titles and arcade games – you can play the game for a short time, enjoying it very quickly and casually.

Why do you think the *Crazy Taxi* series is so enduring and popular? What is it

MY METHOD OF CREATION IS TO DECIDE THE MUSIC TRACK I'D LIKE TO USE IN A GAME BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

about the game that people love?

It's fairly difficult to answer that, because I was in the middle of it all on the team who created the game. So it's hard to answer why it has been loved by fans for such a long time. As well as the music on the soundtrack, the style of game was very new, making it very well accepted – that's probably one of the reasons why it has been loved for such a long time.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHT



It's odd to go back to 1999 and think there hadn't been anything quite like *Crazy Taxi* before – it just seems so obvious in hindsight: a

super-fast, super-silly game where you pick someone up and go from point A to point B as quickly (and safely) as possible. Simple, straightforward, surprisingly elegant (even if crazy), *Crazy Taxi* lit up the arcade scene at the end of the millennium.



KENJI KANNO – ON CRAZY TAXI – ARCADE



■ Craaaaazy jumps were often necessary to find shortcuts and more importantly, they were bloody good fun.

What was the attitude that you brought – the thinking behind the original game?

It's a bit of a philosophical answer, but in the end, play is providing or receiving the stimulation of fun. If you get the same stimulation over and over, you'll get bored, so my focus was to think about how I could give new stimulation to users who play games. So that's why it was sort of a collaboration between the music and the new game design... I was focusing on creating new ways to stimulate for fans and people who play.

Of everything you created with the first game, what is it about Crazy Taxi that makes you the proudest to look back on?

I get the chance to speak to people like journalists who speak different languages and come from different cultures, and I get



■ Crazy Taxi 3 wasn't quite as well-received as the previous two in the series.

the chance to get positive feedback on the Crazy Taxi games I created. I feel slightly awkward – in a positive way – and at the same time I feel happy and glad to receive such positive feedback. When I visited the United States and had a chance to speak with developers in America and hear they liked Crazy Taxi – I felt the same way: awkward, but happy and glad. Hearing it from people who don't speak Japanese... it just makes me feel happy.

So do you still have the same passion for the series as a whole?

Of course!

Looking back at the core trilogy, how do you feel with the benefit of hindsight?

When I look back at the series I feel creating something is difficult – in both a good and bad way. Also if I look back now I think, because it's the Crazy Taxi series, you have to hold onto something. But more than holding onto something existing, it's more important to have the courage to break something and create something new. That's more important to me now, looking back.

Is there anything in the first three games that you'd want to go back and change?

If you look at Crazy Taxi 1, 2 and 3 specifically, there isn't that much I reflect

on where we should have done something differently. When I wanted to have some features in each title, they always came from very deep in my mind and so I always felt I had done the best I could. Having said that, there are two things I wanted to actually change – one; multiplayer, and two; transition between day and night that affects gameplay – passenger attitudes, the whole atmosphere would change when time transitioned. I couldn't put those elements in the game for previous titles.

When you first had the idea for Crazy Taxi, was it easy to get Sega on board?

It wasn't that hard, because my boss was very cooperative and open to creating prototypes at the side of main projects. But I think my boss must have had a difficult time to present such a new concept to board members and management, to get through that and get a greenlight.

Of the titles released – not including City Rush – which is your favourite Crazy Taxi game?

If I'm asked that question, of course I'll say I love every game equally. But having said that it's not to do with me liking or disliking certain games, but without a beginning, the series doesn't have anything – therefore the first one was important to me.

Have you ever wanted to branch out and make different games?

Of course I'd love to make something different. If I have got nothing I would like to create, I will stop being a developer. But of course I have something!

Are you happy with how the series is seen by gamers?

As the creator of the game I purely feel glad and happy to receive such feedback from fans and users. There are some products that aren't discussed or received well, but Crazy Taxi has many people discussing it and it was received very well – this was very fortunate and it makes me very happy as a creator.



■ There's no real thing as road etiquette in Crazy Taxi, it's just you versus the clock with other cars getting in your way...

You're something of an elder statesman in the industry – what are your feelings on the state of modern gaming from a developer's standpoint?

I have a feeling that something interesting will happen – that's the feeling I get from the current state of gaming. In the past, there were clear lines – this is arcade, this is console, this is something else – there were clear lines between each section. However, now there are fewer boundaries and it feels more like something new. Of course, there are chances you might fail, but at the same time there are more chances than ever to succeed. Also, creators and consumers are more flexible than ever – so generally speaking I think something interesting is going to happen in the future of the gaming business.

Did you have to consider this flexibility when you were making *City Rush*?

I think the most important thing is to have a solid idea of what I'd like to deliver, what emotional reaction I want from players. For example, when you think about giving a present to your partner, you think 'how can I please them?' Should you send a text? An email? A letter? Go see them in person? But the essence is the same – the most important thing is to have a solid idea of how users like to have fun and how I'd like them to experience it emotionally. From a business point of view, the way the company charges is different, it's changing, so it could be from a customer, it could be from elsewhere. Companies get smarter, but the most important thing in a game is having a solid idea of what kind of feeling you want to deliver to users.

What have you found to be your main inspiration for your games?

I watch drama a lot and I try to read a lot of books – usually Japanese novels – and I watch anime, and read manga. They're my main inspirations. Out of those things,

■ Fortunately *Crazy Taxi* was moving too fast to really focus on how similar the passengers looked.



other games are probably the least of my inspirations!

In the UK, the arcade industry is all but dead. Being as involved in some of its best days as you were, how does this make you feel?

The way people live is so different to how it was a while ago – a long time ago there were no mobiles, so people had to contact each other on landlines, but just like that changed, arcades have to change, too.

THERE ISN'T THAT MUCH I REFLECT ON WHERE WE SHOULD HAVE DONE SOMETHING DIFFERENTLY

But the arcade is where people can communicate in person, physically, so it's important to think of something new that can fit into how people live these days, into the environment. I'd like to create something new to fit into that new arcade environment.

And what's it like working with a British studio (Hard Light Games)?

It is very interesting working with

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHT



“ We were still in the period where something considered 'arcade perfect' was a rarity, but *Crazy Taxi* on Dreamcast was everything we could have hoped for and a bit more too. It's the game that played out as the background to a million parties around the world back in 2000. With the addition of a new stage to explore, mini-games and customisable rules, it still holds up brilliantly to this day.”

KENJI KANNO – CRAZY TAXI – DREAMCAST



British developers. The most interesting thing, I thought, was how the British team thought up new ideas I didn't think I could have come up with. British developers think in a similar way to Japanese – it's inspirational. Hard Light is British, but I have worked with a US studio before – I found it interesting to see the difference between how US and UK studios work.

Is it easy to keep the core experience familiar to gamers when you're working with these studios that have difference working methods?

No matter if the development team is based in Japan, the UK, wherever, it's always difficult to create something. The most important thing is to share ideas and why each person thinks in a certain way, why a certain person thinks a process would work in a certain way. Matching up those ideas between each party is the most important part, so the overall approach has everyone on – more or less – the same page.

One thing everyone wants to know: is *Crazy Taxi* coming back to console?

I get that question all the time from journalists, so now my internal gauge is gradually increased. Such feedback about bringing *Crazy Taxi* to console – if I get more feedback like it – will fill up the internal gauge, and when it reaches maximum it'll come!

And finally, who chose that iconic Offspring track for the original game?

I did. I chose The Offspring and the soundtrack to use on the original *Crazy Taxi*. First, I loved that music. Second, originally I wanted to create an action game. For action games it's important to have the right tempo and rhythm to match up with gameplay. So for *Crazy Taxi* it's a game about driving around a city in a crazy manner... My method of creation is to decide the music track I'd like to use in a game before anything else. With the action game, the city, that kind of tempo in mind, I went to record shops like Tower Records and listened to a lot of music, bought a lot of CDs. Out of all those I thought the Offspring and Bad Religion tracks suited my mental image best.





RETRO

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IKARUGA DREAMCAST [Treasure] 2002

■ Renowned as they are for having some of the most ridiculous bosses imaginable, shoot-'em-ups have to work pretty hard to impress in this department. And *Ikaruga*, like so many other great Treasure games, did just that. While simple in design, each of its bosses demonstrated an exquisite understanding of using the game's system, both for and against the player, intimidating with a seemingly unavoidable tidal wave of two-tone bullets. But this circular foe is perhaps our favourite, black-and-white death-cookies coming at you from literally all angles while you try to take out each of the turrets, but there's a nasty surprise waiting for you when all of one colour falls...

BEST BOSS