

# RETRO<sup>®</sup>

VIDEOGAME MAGAZINE



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# A solid look at stealth

BY DANIEL KAYSER

We honor *Metal Gear* and explore the history of stealth games.



Although I enjoyed the original NES *Metal Gear* back in the late '80s, I'll never forget the first time I played *Metal Gear Solid*. It was during E3 1998 in Atlanta, GA where I fittingly snuck into the show with a badge obtained by my buddies. After absorbing every bit of insight and media pertaining to the project, my expectations flew through the roof. Thankfully, the demo didn't just meet my expectations, but exceeded them in every way. My buddies and I would return home (telling tales of our experiences with the demo all the while) to immediately order the Japanese import version, which we somehow managed to beat. Later, on a memorable September day, I took the day off from my job as assistant manager of a retail software store only to briefly show up in the morning to snag my preordered American version.

For all of the innovative gameplay ideas, must-play moments, and influential aspects of the *Metal Gear* franchise, I believe its ability to make meaningful memories like these is what elevated it to gaming greatness. Behind every successful encounter with a menacing boss or botched attempt to take down a patrolling guard lies a story that we feel unique to our own experience. Creating and sharing these stories gave these moments, and *Metal Gear* itself, a special place in our hearts.

Now, as we collectively gather to embark on the latest (and final) chapter in the *Metal Gear Solid* series, this issue is dedicated to honoring the franchise and exploring its impact on the stealth-gaming genre. From *Castle Wolfenstein* to *Thief: The Dark Project*, *Splinter Cell*, *Mark of the Ninja* and many, many more, we'll examine what stealth has been, and what it will become, in this edition of *RETRO Videogame Magazine*.

I hope you'll enjoy our team's take on the impact of *Metal Gear* while sneaking us a note about your thoughts on the genre via Twitter @ReadRETRO. After all, when it comes to celebrating stealth, there's no need to hide! Thanks for reading!



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Photo by Manyia Susoev

# RISE FROM YOUR GRAVE

BY CHRIS AINSWORTH

## THE RETRO GUIDE TO CARTRIDGE CLEANING.

**T**his month, by request, we are talking about the sometimes monotonous (yet deeply satisfying) task of cleaning videogame cartridges!

Over the years, videogame collecting has amassed a slew of apocryphal maintenance methods, and while some of 'em are harmless (okay, blowing on the cartridge likely didn't do anything, but the act of reseating it in the process probably did), others can result in genuine damage to your hardware.

In the interest of both science and the longevity of my own personal collection, I've

tested many of the frequently touted methods, researched material interactions, and experimented on a cartridge or two. Here, in honor of the brave and selfless sacrifice of *Arnold Palmer Tournament Golf*, I offer what I've determined to be some of the safest and most effective ways to maintain and restore a videogame cartridge.

### Cleaning the Edge Connector

This is the easy part. To clean well-kept contacts, **91% isopropyl alcohol** is readily available and will remove most contaminants, but for worn edge connectors (especially in cases where the gold plating has

abraded) use **DeoxIT**, a plastic-safe contact cleaner that clears oxidation and helps seal the surface from further wear without losing conductivity. DeoxIT is comparably expensive, so start with a round of cleaning with alcohol and then make a final pass with the contact cleaner.

To clean the connectors, first give the cart a **quick blast of air** to clear out the dust. Dip a **cotton swab** (lint-free if possible) into the alcohol and run it across the contacts with continuous pressure, replacing the swab whenever it starts to blacken. If the edge connector is in rough shape, be sure to rub parallel with the contact

fingers — it's slower, but will reduce the likelihood of lifting a finger from the board. Once any remaining alcohol has evaporated, apply DeoxIT directly to the contacts, let it sit a moment, then wipe them down with a cotton swab.

Follow the cleaning with a final shot of air to remove any stray bits of debris, and consider your contacts cleaned.

By the way, if you find yourself cleaning hardware frequently, skip the can of compressed air and buy yourself an **electric duster**.

### What Not to Do

Stay away from sandpaper. During manufacturing, edge connectors are plated in multiple thin layers of material, and it doesn't take much to remove a microns-thick outermost layer of gold. Once that gold has been worn away, you're left with less conductive and more corrosive base metals. In fact, stay away from abrasives in general (including Brasso), and for the love of god don't use steel wool — not only is it bad for the cartridge, those leftover little shards of metal can easily work their way into the cartridge shell and cause all sorts of electrical mayhem.

If you must remove material during cleaning, use a "magic eraser" (melamine foam). While it too is an abrasive, it's an incredibly fine and squishy one that'll do far less damage to the contacts.

Speaking of erasers, some collectors evangelize pencil erasers as cleaners, but I'd avoid them due to (yet again) abrasion and the residue they leave behind, and never use a harder ink-specific eraser. **Specialized art erasers made of vinyl** are a much better choice and won't be as harsh on your hardware.

### Cleaning the Shell

Every cartridge that enters my collection receives a thorough cleaning, and that includes the cartridge's shell. 30 years of being pawed by grubby hands can lead to a load of grime, and the first thing you'll want to do is give the thing a good wipe-down.

My preferred general cleaning agent for cartridge shells (and controllers, cables, and consoles) is a **Lysol Dual Action Wipe**, a soapy wet-nap product with both a rough scrubbing side and a smooth side. Sturdy but soft enough not to damage plastic, the wipes are great for removing crud and residue. Be careful of wipes that are too wet, you may want to wring it out gently to prevent moisture from seeping into areas it doesn't belong.



For crevices or heavily textured surfaces, use a **soft bristled toothbrush**, preferably not the one you brush with every day, followed by a quick wipe-down.

### Stickers!

Some dumb rental shops applied stickers to all of their games 20 years ago. Now you're left with a different form of sticker shock. To remedy, use **Goo Gone**, a citrus-based adhesive remover that's safe on plastics. Squirt a bit on the sticker or residue, let it sit for a few minutes, and then wipe it off with a terry cloth. You can even apply a dab over coated labels to remove a stubborn price tag, but use only the smallest amount, as you don't want to give the Goo Gone enough time to soak into the cart label itself.



For larger heavy-duty stickers applied directly over the label (hi Blockbuster!), don't risk the original artwork by trying to soak it with Goo Gone. Instead, use a **heat gun** (on low, don't cook it!) or a hair dryer to soften the sticker's adhesive, and then slowly peel it back with your fingertips. Once the cartridge has cooled, you can then sparingly apply Goo Gone and quickly wipe it down to remove the remaining residue.

Incidentally, this is the same process you'd use to remove the cartridge's label itself, so be careful!

### QUICK TIP!

Need to clean a cartridge socket? Give it a quick blast of air, followed by DeoxIT. Wrap a coffee filter around a credit card and insert it into the socket a few times, replacing the filter as soon as it gets grungy. Repeat if necessary.

Don't use Goof Off, another similarly marketed product. It's powerful stuff, and yeah, it'll remove those stickers, but there's a good chance it'll eat your cartridge, too. Don't use nail polish remover either, the acetone will have a field day with your plastics.

### Marker Stains!

Did some kid sign their name to all your games 20 years ago? No worries, with just a little bit of work it'll be like they never existed!

While alcohol will remove marker stains, refrain from using it anywhere near labels, as it will just as happily lift ink from the label as well. This is where you'll want to bring out a lightly moistened **Magic Eraser**, giving you more control over the working area. Again, while very fine, these things are abrasives, so be careful when scrubbing textured plastic. In the case of a heavily textured surface like the face of a NES cartridge, a bit of Goo Gone, a toothbrush, and some patience will help clean things up.



If permanent marker has been applied to a glossy label, you can remove it by moistening the marked area with another marker (try a **dry erase marker**) and wiping it down. This may take several applications, but it should clear up the marker nicely. By the way, you can impress your office mates by using this same method to remove Sharpie from a whiteboard, too.

If the marked label is uncoated or worn, there's not much you can do to remove the marker without damaging the printer ink below. In this case, I'd recommend **legally changing your name** to match that on the cartridge. ☹️

**CHRIS AINSWORTH** (@driph on Twitter, say hello!) is a game designer and writer in Las Vegas, Nevada. He has been an avid gamer since that first satisfying click of a Star Raiders cartridge into the Atari 400, and blames the membrane keyboard for his two-finger typing style.

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# LICENSE TO THRILL

## SPY GAMES IN PINBALL

BY PRESTON BURT

Over the years, pinball machines covered a variety of themes: space, monsters, racing, superheroes, and even aerobics (*Hardbody*, don't ask). But where are the spy pins? As much as the world needs a *Metal Gear* or *True Lies* game, none exist. When you think about it, it kinda makes sense. Pinball machines need to be flashy and colorful and as "in your face" as possible to try and lure the next quarter from a passerby's pocket. Spying relies on stealth, subterfuge, and slipping in under the radar, so pinball as a medium hasn't really figured out how to best utilize such a great theme. Despite that, let's take a look at some of the few tables that rely on stealth to snag your quarters!

### SPY HUNTER

Of course they made a *Spy Hunter* pinball. In 1984, the video arcade version of *Spy Hunter* was red hot, and just like similar videogame properties *Pac-Man*, *Defender*, and *Q\*bert*, if a game was popular, then surely it would be a good fit for a pinball machine, right? In this instance, it was! Bally designer Greg Kmiec brought us this game despite his original intention to make a jukebox-themed design. The most notable feature is the incredible artwork by Tony Ramunni and the same Peter Gunn theme featured in the videogame. Though not a fast-playing game compared to today's standards, it's satis-

fying enough in its gameplay that it sold 2,300 units — a respectable sales number for a much more successful arcade game.

### AUSTIN POWERS

"Yeaaaah Baby!" Ah, nevermind. I can't muster up the enthusiasm. This game is horrible. Let's just pretend it doesn't exist. Moving on...

### GOLDENEYE

For a spy-themed movie property that actually executes well (no pun intended), look no further than *GoldenEye*. While it can never compare to the runaway hit Nintendo 64 game of the same name, the silverball version released by Sega Pinball in 1996 nonetheless still stands the test of time much better than the actual movie it was based on. The highest-grossing Bond movie at the time translated well to pinball with a pop-up ramp and a satellite toy capable of catching and holding a pinball. With its familiar fan layout and three easy-to-access ramps, this game plays fast and includes multiballs and plenty of eye candy for those who like things "shaken, not stirred." Just be careful not to tilt.

### MATA HARI

Danger! Intrigue! Sex Appeal! My favorite spy-themed game is one that doesn't come from movies or videogames, but straight out of the history books. Mata Hari was an exotic dancer convicted of spying for Germany during World War I

and was executed by a firing squad in France. Her mystique and allure has intrigued men for decades, and was a fantastic pick for a theme by Bally in 1977, selling a stunning 16,000 units. Created during a transitional period for pinball, most examples of this game are the digital "solid state" version, but a few rare gems are traditional electromechanical (EM) models. Both versions feature the same distinct artwork and simple gameplay — knocking down drop targets, and lighting both A & B lanes to score points to add to your bonus multiplier. Deceptively easy, this game is a perfect pairing of theme and gameplay and should be a welcomed secret agent in any game room.

So is that it? Essentially, yes. Despite a wealth of available material, it seems that the spy genre is a mostly untapped resource in pinball. *Metal Gear*, *Mission Impossible*, or even *MAD Magazine's Spy vs. Spy* would make fantastic pinball tables, but I guess we'll just have to wait for a game in the future. Don't worry, I'm sure one will sneak up on us when we least expect it. 🕵️

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** We would like to apologize for attributing this column to the wrong author in Issue #8 of *RETRO Videogame Magazine*. That article was in fact penned by our resident pinball wizard, Preston Burt.

**PRESTON BURT** co-hosts the *Gamerroom Junkies Podcast*, and is an organizer for the *Southern-Fried Gamerroom Expo* in Atlanta. Follow him on Twitter @nocashvalue80 or drop him a line at nocashvalue80@gmail.com.



# HOMEBREW HEAVEN

BY MICHAEL THOMASSON

## HERE'S WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW COMMUNITY.

### DOUBLE VISION

A historic homebrew milestone has just been reached, one difficult to believe and one which few would have ever guessed possible. The ColecoVision had just shy of 150 commercial releases during its heyday, but with the recent explosion of hobbyist development on the ColecoVision, there are now more homebrew releases than original official retail releases. Simply amazing!



While on the topic of Coleco's only console outing, it seems that *UWOL: Quest for Money* is making the rounds once again. After originally being coded for the Spectrum Sinclair in 2009 and later appearing on the CPC Amstrad, Sega Genesis, Super Nintendo, and Android, it is finally the ColecoVision's turn.

CollectorVision has been publishing homebrew titles for several years now, originally on the ColecoVision and later branching out to the Intellivision, VCS, and others. In a surprise move, and what may very well be the first instance of a homebrew publisher becoming a developer for modern platforms, CollectorVision just announced that it's received the greenlight from Nintendo to develop games for the Wii U and 3DS. As a result, *Justice Beaver*, in development for the SNES, will be the first game developed for a retro Nintendo platform and modern Nintendo system simultaneously.



### VIRTUAL FIGHTER

Capcom's *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting* enjoyed great success on Nintendo and Sega's dueling 16-biters, and now it's come to Virtual Boy, Nintendo's failed venture into black-and-red virtual reality. Craming all 32 megs of this enormous game onto a VB cartridge required developing a new custom cart. Even more amazing is the fact that a special adapter allows a Super Nintendo controller to be hooked up to the Virtual Boy for improved gameplay. Perhaps if titles of this quality were made for the Virtual Boy during its original launch, things might have turned out differently for the machine that couldn't. Highly recommended — if you can locate a rare copy of this underground title.

### GO AHEAD, DEMAKE MY DAY...

When a videogame is downgraded to an older system, it is often referred to as a "demark." Enter *Mallard Hunt* for the Atari VCS. Nintendo's popular *Duck Hunt* game circa 1984 is flapping its way to Atari's 1977 workhorse. A slight twist has the snarky dog replaced with a not-so-friendly duck that pops up from the grass

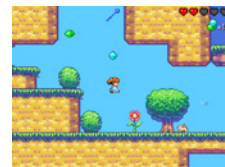


when you've depleted your ammunition and, well...gives you the bird!

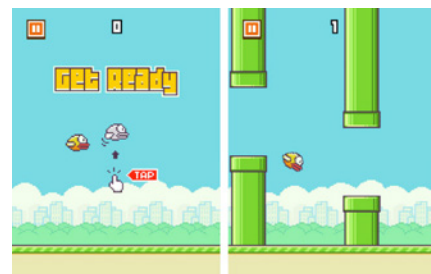
Speaking of demakes, *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest* was in the works for the ZX Spectrum, but took on a life of its own. As a result, the Sinclair machine has a unique *Castlevania* game all to itself called *Spectral Interlude*. You can really sink your teeth into this entry as it features over 150 game screens, 12 songs, and two difficulty levels.

### ALICE IN FRAMES

HuCast, the after-market publisher, has done it again! You'll be pushing blocks, eating magic mushrooms, and questing for colored keys in *Alice's Mom's Rescue*, a traditional action-platformer for Sega's mighty Dreamcast. Can you help Alice survive all 25 stages, and help her rescue her mother from the clutches of a giant raven all while wearing a pretty blue dress?



### ON THE HOMEBREW HORIZON



The popular 2013 mobile game *Flappy Bird* has already flown the coop to ColecoVision, and is flapping its way to Mattel's Intellivision. Also coming to the Intellivision, following its ColecoVision release, is a fantastic *Ghosts 'n Goblins*-inspired game entitled *Princess Quest*.

If you enjoyed the 1992 classic *Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis*, you'll be excited to know that some fanatic hobbyists have been painstakingly creating an unofficial sequel from scratch. *Indiana Jones and the Fountain of Youth* will encompass a whopping 150 hand-drawn rooms. This new quest leads our favorite adventurer to Bimini, Europe, and Asia. Before you get too excited, know that this is a long work in progress, originally started in 1999. However, progress is being made and several demos are available for download. 🦋

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# SCHWAG BAG

BY DAVID GILTINAN

SNEAKY SCHWAG FOR THE ASPIRING SPY.



## METAL GEAR SOLID SCOUT JACKET

SITE: [musterbrand.com](http://musterbrand.com)  
PRICE: \$299

As a New Englander, I can tell you how harsh this past winter season was. Makes me wish I got my Big Boss style on with this sweet utility parka. Don't let the wind chill sneak up on you while you maintain that gamer fashion! Equipped with several pockets, a detachable hood, and even D-rings for carrying ease, it's a no-brainer for the secret agent in all of us.



## FOX CUSTOM GAMECUBE CONTROLLER

SITE: [8bitevolution.com](http://8bitevolution.com)  
PRICE: \$49

As far as GameCube controllers are concerned, this is the one I consider essential no matter which mission I'm on. With the FOX logo and a paint job to match, me and my fellow *Metal Gear* fans will have something to brag about before getting in a *Smash Bros.* match. Don't head out on the battlefield without it!

## PAC-MAN AND GHOST R/C SET

SITE: [thinkgeek.com](http://thinkgeek.com)  
PRICE: \$40

Sneaking up on enemy soldiers is great and all, but sneaking up on ghosts is what I (and other retro gamers) remember most! It's not quite the same as the arcade game, but I get a thrill running this R/C set all around the house. You can even join in the fun by controlling the ghost. That, or we can just tag-team the cat.



## SOLID SNAKE NENDOROID FIGURE

SITE: [estarland.com](http://estarland.com)  
PRICE: \$48

You better believe I ordered this little guy the moment I laid eyes on him. This adorable replica of Solid Snake comes with a standee that allows him to take different action poses, complete with an assault rifle, handgun, a cardboard box to hide in, and even a low-poly head for fans of the original *Metal Gear Solid*.

## FOX T-SHIRT

SITE: [insertcoinclothing.com](http://insertcoinclothing.com)  
PRICE: \$31

No matter how sneaky I like to be, I still like to flaunt it now and again. What better way than with this shirt? You too can show off your Force Operation X pride with this lovingly printed design, complete with gold ringers. The rest of your gear? I'll call in an air drop. You're welcome.





### BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT JACKET

SITE: [gamer-heaven.net](http://gamer-heaven.net)  
PRICE: \$108

I may not secretly be a superhero, but I can still show off my *Batman* fandom in style with this awesome leather jacket! It's designed to somewhat replicate the dark knight's armor, complete with logo and six-pack. Now with the hard part out of the way, all I have left to do is get an array of gadgets and years of martial-arts training.



### ANALOGUE NT

SITE: [analogueinteractive.com](http://analogueinteractive.com)  
PRICE: \$499

Finally, playing NES games has been optimized for the 21st century. Built with the original console's hardware, the Analogue Nt allows both NES and Famicom cartridges to play in glorious HD. All original controllers (including the NES Zapper) are compatible, and an HDMI adapter lets it output to modern screens. Is it worth half a G? That's for you to decide.



### HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY SOUNDTRACK

SITE: [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)  
PRICE: \$15

If you're like me, you like to go by the rhythm of everyone's favorite bald assassin, and you can do just that with these awesome tracks. Famed game composer Jesper Kyd's best orchestrations set the tone in *Hitman: Blood Money*, and do so with lethal precision. As far as gaming soundtracks go, this is a must-listen.



### METAL GEAR REX MODEL KIT

SITE: [bigbadtoystore.com](http://bigbadtoystore.com)  
PRICE: \$75

This is one toy I wouldn't want to mess with! While not to scale for bodyguard purposes, this model kit of Metal Gear REX is still super cool to have on my shelf to keep all my other figures well protected. Equipped with its patented rail gun, missiles, and laser, this 9-inch replica is packing some serious heat to ensure any man cave remains a spy-free zone.

### CYBORG NINJA ACTION FIGURE

SITE: [gamerabilia.co.uk](http://gamerabilia.co.uk)  
PRICE: £30

Ninjas are cool, especially when they're cyborg ninjas! While there have been a few of these in the *Metal Gear* franchise, none are more badass than the original Gray Fox, which this figure is more closely based on. It comes equipped with the character's patented katana blade and arm cannon to handle any situation with deadly efficiency. 🐍



# HIGH 5: THE 5 WORST FORCED STEALTH LEVELS

REVISIT THE  
SADDEST ATTEMPTS  
AT SNEAKING.

BY LUKE MCKINNEY

**A**n action game adding a stealth level is like an Ogre Titan giving you a back massage — the best of intentions, but so crushingly bad it paralyzes you. Your burly commando is suddenly an illiterate in a library — you can't do what you're here to do, you have to be quiet, and everyone involved is annoyed that you're there. Developers argue that it adds variety. We want to argue back by replacing some of their pillows with scorpions. Everything from *Jurassic Park* to hiding in wardrobes from angry spouses has taught me one thing; when you're suddenly forced to be stealthy, it's because things suddenly stopped being fun.

With that in mind, it's time to turn our searchlights on the five worst forced-stealth sections in videogames.

## GTA: SAN ANDREAS

Grand theft auto is the least-stealthiest crime you can commit without explosions, and in the game it often ended in explosions, usually because the police caught your character five minutes into a losing argument with a stairwell. The closest *GTA* characters come to precise movement is when the rocket launchers ragdoll them through the objective. You could only be worse at sneaking up on people if you were the sun.

*GTA: San Andreas* combines these worst-possible stealth mechanics with the worst-possible stealth motivation. Stealth gameplay is most commonly meant to make you feel like an elite operative, a master ninja sparing mere mortals only because bothering to kill them would imply a lack of true skill. The Madd Dogg's Rhymes mission in

*GTA: San Andreas* has you taking orders from the world's worst rapper while he cleans a fast-food toilet. OG Loc dispatches you to death with one hand while waving a septic-fluid-soaked mop in the other, and the mission is so bad you still got the crappier end of the stick.

It was possible to stand directly in front of enemies as long as you were in slight shadow. Lab rats make better guards, and pose more genuine danger to the people walking around their facilities. The mission's only function was to make sure you don't even accidentally do anything fun for five minutes. Worse, whichever vehicle you drove to the start of the mission was gone when you finished it. This mission so utterly inverted everything fun about *Grand Theft Auto* that the game stole your car.



■ “You go play the stealth level. I’ll deal with this diarrhea, and have more fun.”



■ A bold experiment in how not to have fun.

## RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

The closest *Wolfenstein 3D* came to stealth was killing everyone else in the entire world. But the original *Castle Wolfenstein* was a stealth game, making *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*'s sneaking mission the most tragically misguided return to source outside of a salmon leaping up a sewage outflow. Instead of fighting face to face in narrow corridors, the Forest Compound mission has you standing in an open field surrounded by snipers trying not to be seen. It's such an absurd inversion the only reason you don't think it was made by Monty Python is that it's no fun.

Shooter stealth sections use a sledgehammer for dentistry: the wrong tools for a painful problem, and only an idiot would sit there and take it. You out-squat snipers by crouching and stealthily machine-gunning them in their towers. It breaks so many rules of shooter design that you have to leave one of the guards alive to win, and hates fun so much it sometimes glitched to make you lose anyway. Missions where alarms cause automatic loss



■ An idiot whose idea of “stealth” was “climbing onto a transparent underlit walkway.”

are how developers sign a franchise’s suicide note. Listen, *Wolfenstein*, the enemies aren’t meant to have buttons they press to defeat us.

### THE GETAWAY: BLACK MONDAY

*The Getaway: Black Monday* was an un-inspired shooter which somehow heard us say that and decided to punish us in advance. It had an entire stealth character, but every one of her levels wouldn’t add up to the stealth enjoyment of half a silent fart. “Sam” was a 19-year-old girl, and for the first time in videogame history, a 19-year-old girl wore a complete set of clothing and couldn’t beat up security guards. She had no combat abilities even if you snuck up behind them. This was the first escort mission where you played as the helpless idiot.

Luckily the guards were even worse at being enemies than Sam was at being a hero. If you’ve ever walked through a revolving door you’ve navigated more sophisticated level design. A Roomba cleaning around the Easter Island heads would be a better stealth game. You can vault off walls onto lighting fixtures 10 meters directly in front of security guards facing down an open hallway, and they still can’t be bothered to react. Your main power over enemies is their crushing depression at being in such a terrible game.

Sam can dash full-speed into a busy office, sound-biting about how stealthy she is, then drop between workers’ legs as long as she keeps one pixel to the left of their shoulders. Bosses have stormed into those offices to fire people while remaining less clearly visible.



■ “This game is about stunning visuals and action, so we’re going to sneak through pitch darkness.”

### UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES

*Uncharted 2* is an action-adventure, third-person, semi-cover-shooter platform game which still didn’t think it had enough descriptors. So they threw in some stealth. Game developers, please: Adding stealth features late in development is like adding elephant features late in development — the result is a shambling abomination which really doesn’t enjoy existence.

The single stealth section was a tutorial at the start of the game. But learning how to avoid conflict in *Uncharted* is like bringing your knitting needles to a nudist colony: a slow skill you’ll never get the chance to use. *Uncharted* triggers action setpieces like a movie — there’s no way to avoid them other than powering down the console, and the only time you feel like doing that is during this level.

The level was a sewer connected to a poorly lit museum, so it was a series of both literally and figuratively sh\*tty corridors, after a long cutscene about how there’ll be no action. It’s like Naughty Dog was trying to hide its entire great game by pretending that it sucked at the start. To get to all the amazing sights and gunplay you had to tip-toe through dark and boring corridors. It felt as though Drake was a child sneaking into the living room after bedtime to play the rest of his own game.

### GOLDENEYE 007

*GoldenEye 007* was one of the greatest console shooters ever made, but Bunker 2 is a level where firing a gun gets you killed, your knives act like you’re throwing them

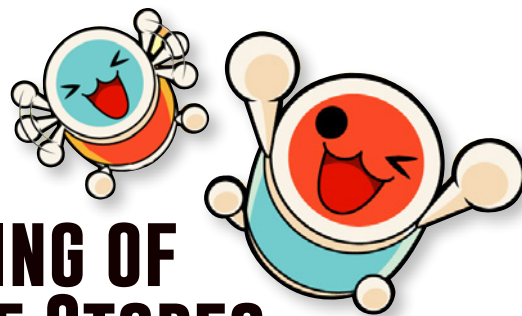
drunk on a space station, and your bare hands are an insult to the idea of combat. Single shots of a scoped KF-7 Soviet could kill guards without raising the alarm, because even for the guards playing Bunker is so hateful it takes sustained automatic weapons fire to get their interest.

But Bond aims like someone built his elbows out of supermarket shopping-cart wheels. And no one ever fired single shots of that gun. Three-round bursts when saving ammo, maybe, but KF-7 automatic fire sounded like machine guns having the best sex of their lives and was even more fun.

The worst part was how being detected spawned infinite guards, and no gamer would consider quitting. The result was an awful grind of endless death without any hope of victory. Technically you could have ended Ourumov’s threat by holing up in a good bottleneck and exterminating the entire Russian population, which doesn’t change the fact that even James Bond couldn’t make a special stealth-shooter mission fun, and all five of those words are his entire job. 🍷



■ This is how he feels, and it’s his job to play this level.



GLOBAL GAMER JAPAN

# THE VANISHING OF RETRO-GAME STORES

BY KEVIN TAMBORNINO

Japan has long been a haven for retro-game collectors. Brightly lit game stores. Row after row of old carts and discs. Games that are affordable despite being in pristine condition. Sound good? Well, you better come here soon because the retro shops are disappearing.

When I first moved to Japan in 2004 I was surprised and pleased to find that there were nine retro stores in my small town. Of those original stores, six have closed and two stopped selling retro games. Only one, appropriately named Famicom Dojo, remains. Why are the retro stores vanishing?

To be honest, they aren't all going away tomorrow. Stores with brand recognition are still doing well. Big stores like Super Potato and Mandrake are very popular. They attract millions of Japanese and international visitors each year. Unfortunately, because they are so big, they are pushing the small mom and pop stores out of business.

Retro-game download services like Virtual Console and PSN haven't hurt game prices like expected. In fact, the value of retro games has gone up considerably in the last 10 years. Unfortunately most of the benefit of this inflation never makes it to the retro shops.



In the past when you had unwanted games you could sell them back to the store. You would need to accept whatever price they offered. Now with sites like GameGavel, Rakuten, Amazon, and Yahoo Auctions, you have so many more options for selling your games. Retro stores, which can't offer as much money, have a hard time keeping titles in stock.

Lastly, there is just a diminishing interest in older games. More and more people are switching to smartphones and the Internet for their entertainment. Only dedicated collectors are still looking for physical games and they are buying them online.

There is some good news for international customers as you now have access to a lot of the games you could previously only buy in Japan. But if you are someone like me who still likes to go to game stores and hunt for bargains, you better get here quick. They're going fast.

## TAIKO NO TATSUJIN: THE BEAT GOES ON

A common misconception from people who have never been to Japan (or have only been to Akihabara) is that music games like *Dance Dance Revolution* and *Beatmania* are still massively popular. Any American TV show that has a "Japan episode" will likely have someone playing *DDR*. 15 years ago there was some truth to this stereotype. But now, outside of a small but devoted fanbase, the genre has faded in Japan. There is one large exception to this rule: *Taiko no Tatsujin*.

Often translated as *Taiko Drum Master*, this game has remained popular from the first edition in 2001 through installment 15, which is currently gobbling up yen. The happy, peppy music of the soundtrack and

the loud thumps of the drum complete the ambiance for arcades, bowling alleys, and shopping centers all over Japan.

*Taiko no Tatsujin* is played by beating the surface and rim of a large taiko drum with wooden sticks to the beat of the music. Blue and red circles move horizontally across the attached screen to indicate when you need to drum. Points are awarded for correct timing and for speed during the free-drumming sections. *Taiko* stays popular by constantly updating its track listings and forming collaborations with other media franchises such as *Yo-kai Watch* and *Super Mario*. *Taiko* is very easy to learn and even small kids can play it (on the easy modes). Of course, half the fun of these games is watching the pros. Some players will linger at machines for hours playing the same songs. They stop only for food and to take photos with their high scores.

There was an attempt in 2004 to sell the game to Americans by replacing all the anime and J-pop songs with artists like Britney Spears and Chumbawamba. It didn't do well, but I think the time is right for Namco to try again. A *Rock Band* revival is on the way and there is a new generation that hasn't developed fake plastic instrument fatigue who might be looking for something new. And, as experience shows, you just can't beat *Taiko* games. Well, actually, you have to. 🥁





GLOBAL GAMER U.K.

# HERE'S WHAT'S HAPPENING AMONGST GAMERS IN THE U.K.

BY GRAEME MASON

## YOU'RE JUST MY TYPE

One of the more enjoyable parts of writing about older videogames is talking to the people who were behind my favorite old-school experiences. I recently had the chance to meet Jas Austin, a coder of some pedigree in the U.K. who created a favorite game of mine, the Game Boy version of legendary arcade shooter *R-Type*. While the platform played host to a plethora of amazing games, the hit Nintendo handheld created numerous problems for Jas, who was producing the port of *R-Type* for developer BITS Corporation.



He told me, "We had to do some clever stuff with the hardware and sprites, because with the screen being LCD, if you turned a pixel off, it didn't disappear straight away. And a lot of the weapons, like the laser beams, I wrote a system where you had twice the amount of sprites by turning them on and off very quickly. One set one frame, and a different set second frame. It worked pretty well." Indeed it did, as the game remains an excellent conversion of the Irem classic, and netted BITS and Jas a Golden Joystick award from magazine *Computer & Video Games*, despite some slight alterations, as Jas told me. "We got told to change one of the levels because they said some of the enemies looked like fetuses!"

## JOIN THE CLUB

I mentioned in my last column that I would soon be delivering my first report from a retro shop here in the U.K. I have decided to defer this for another issue as this month

I discovered a fabulous retro arcade located in the north of England. Arcade Club is based in Haslingden, Lancashire, and is the work of Andy Palmer. "It started from one of our computer shops when we set up 10 pinball machines and 20-odd videogame machines and advertised it both locally and on the arcade forums," Andy tells me. Interest soon skyrocketed and now the club is run from a bespoke warehouse nearby, boasting a range of games from classics such as *Space Invaders*, *Asteroids*, and *Defender* to more "modern" games like *OutRun 2*, *Point Blank*, and *Street Fighter IV*.

"The machines are from my personal collection and we have been loaned a few by friends and other collectors," continues Andy. "And we also buy broken machines and fix them whenever possible, although the machines must be as original as possible. If we are able to keep them as they were played in the arcades in the '80s and '90s, we will!" At present the club is only open for four hours a week on Saturday nights, chiefly due to the age of the machines. Andy's aim is to make it bigger, with a greater selection, as at present the machines are rotated in and out as they lack the room to display them all. To see and read more about this exciting endeavor, check out [arcade-club.co.uk](http://arcade-club.co.uk).

## COMING OUT TO PLAY

The 2nd, 3rd, and 4th of May saw retro arrive in the northwest U.K., courtesy of Replay Events' PLAY Blackpool. Encompassing a bank holiday weekend, the event was well attended and there were plenty of eager gamers on hand to enjoy the festivities. Upon entering the massive room at the Nor-

breck Castle Hotel, attendees were greeted with a most awesome sight and sound — dozens of arcade machines lined up, all set to free play. Further into the room sat a dazzling array of consoles and computers from the past, including Commodore and Sinclair computers, PlayStations, GameCubes, Super Nintendos, original Xboxes, and even classic consoles such as the Atari 2600, Mattel Intellivision, and Binatone Pong.

In addition, famous U.K. developers the Oliver Twins showed off their latest creation, MMO *SkySaga: Infinite Isles* and there were a host of indie games and PlayStation 4 titles for those of a more modern mindset. To the side of the main room was a trading area containing a large variety of sellers of games, consoles, and various geek-culture items. Also adjacent the main area was a hall reserved for several talks. These Q&A sessions included the aforementioned Oliver Twins, artist David Rowe (*James Pond*, *Ant Attack*) and Andrew Hewson of legendary 8-bit developer Hewson Consultants. As if this wasn't enough, the Norbreck Hotel's private cinema played host to the first public European screening of *World 1-1*, the documentary on the story of Atari. Despite the miserable northern U.K. weather, PLAY Blackpool was an excellent event for retro fans. 🎮





# FROM THE DESK OF THE COMMISSIONER: THE POWER OF PAC-MAN



BY PATRICK SCOTT PATTERSON

The first videogame I ever played turned 35 years old just a few months ago. *Pac-Man* celebrated this milestone on May 22 and the 35th Anniversary of its North American release is coming up this October.

Here in the Commissioner's office this was about as solemn of an occasion as you are going to get. Had the Commish not been curious about the big yellow cabinet in a Texas laundromat in September 1981 this column might not be here today.

That said, I saw a shocking incident take place recently that proved not everyone respects *Pac-Man* in the way that they should. It happened on YouTube right after the debut of the trailer for the film *Pixels*, which is based around the concept that vintage arcade characters could attack the earth. A young man who I won't name here posted underneath the video that *Pac-Man* wasn't relevant to videogaming today and, as a result, the movie is stupid.

Therefore the Commissioner's Office is ratifying these new rules. Failure to adhere to these rules will result in 200 hours of community service logging incidents of screen flicker in *The Adventures of Bayou Billy*.

- *Pac-Man* set a North American arcade sales record of 100,000 units, a number beaten by only one other coin-op since — *Ms. Pac-Man*.
- Beavercreek, Ohio's David Race holds the world record for the fastest *Pac-Man* score in human history at 3 hours, 28 minutes, 49 seconds. This is over two hours faster than anyone who wears a mullet.
- Yes, the original name of *Puckman* would have been a bad idea with the font they used. Just...look at it for cryin' out loud.
- A theme restaurant based on *Pac-Man* recently opened near Chicago. No official confirmation on if they serve their bells, keys, and assorted fruits fresh or frozen.

PATRICK SCOTT PATTERSON is a veteran of the videogaming world who ate *Pac-Man* cereal when it was new, and loved every bite.

## PAC-MAN AMENDMENT 1: You Better Recognize, Son.

Saying *Pac-Man* isn't relevant to videogaming today is like saying *The Beatles* are no longer relevant in music. It is like saying that *I Love Lucy* is not relevant to television. It is like saying Michael Jordan is not relevant to basketball. It is like saying *Guitar Hero* is not responsible for 97 percent of thrift store inventory.

*Pac-Man* was the game. Yeah, sure, *Space Invaders* and *Asteroids* were big hits just before it and *Defender*, for a time, was neck-and-neck in the coin box, but none of them expanded the world of videogames like *Pac-Man* did. People of all ages, backgrounds and — dare I say it — genders flocked to arcades



and street locations to play *Pac-Man* unlike any game before it. A song about it made the Billboard top ten. A strategy guide for it made the New York Times Best Seller list. Find me any game at your local GameStop that has ever had this kind of impact and I'll ignore how silly you sound when you say "pwn" on your Xbox headset.

## PAC-MAN AMENDMENT 2: You Shall Thank Him

So, random YouTube kid who says *Pac-Man* isn't relevant to videogames today, do you like your *Battlefield* ball cap? Your *Call of Duty* dog tags? Your *Titanfall* tighty whities? You do?

Then you better thank Mr. *Pac-Man*, for without him you wouldn't have that stuff.

*Pac-Man* was the first videogame to truly break the merchandise barrier. For quite some time, *Pac-Man* appeared on so much merchandise it made KISS look humble.

You could literally wear *Pac-Man* clothing from head to toe. You could eat *Pac-Man* cereal, pasta, and even children's vitamins. There were *Pac-Man* collectible figurines, bedsheets, card games, board games, posters, book covers, backpacks, gym bags, telephones, radios, bulletin boards, trash cans, and bath soaps.



There was a Saturday morning cartoon, a first for a videogame property, as well as the aforementioned strategy guides, which kicked off a lifetime of videogame strategy books that use up 77 zillion metric tons of paper a year today.

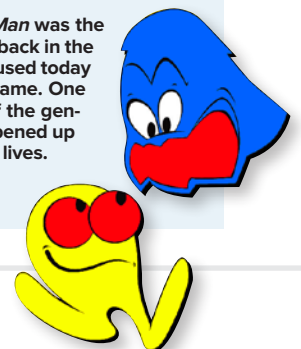
*Pac-Man* proved that videogames could make for some killer merch, so rather than knock him for being old you shall be thankful for the road he paved each and every time you hold your *Grand Theft Auto V* Trevor doll close at night.

## PAC-MAN AMENDMENT 3: You Shall Not Blame Him for Childhood Obesity

Not that anyone has, but given the media's track record for blaming videogames on all the ills of society, the Commissioner's office would like to err on the side of caution. As *Pac-Man*'s big birthday approaches, all we need is for some TV news type to learn of a kid who choked on a cherry or something in 1997 and try to piece together some tenuous yet sinister narrative.

Bottom line, for both this YouTube kid and for all of humankind — *Pac-Man* was the game that forever changed the game. Not only was it incredibly popular back in the day, but it opened up so many doors for the videogame industry that are used today that it is hard to imagine those doors opening that wide for any other game. One can even make a case that the *Pac-Man* craze is what made so much of the general public comfortable enough with computers and technology that it opened up the entire wide world of tech, which is now such a large part of our daily lives.

So you will respect that, son. End of story. 🍷



# SPIES LIKE US

BY MATT BARTON

## SHOW SOME LOVE FOR SNAKE'S COLLEAGUES IN THE WORLD OF COVERT OPS.

**W**ho hasn't dreamed of being a spy, assassin, or secret agent? These characters prefer brains to brawn and finesse to firepower, and they're willing to break inconvenient laws and moral codes whenever those get in their way. The heroic deeds of spies or saboteurs are kept out of the headlines, but that doesn't bother them at all — in their line of work, anonymity is job security. It's a dirty, dangerous, and thankless job, but, let's face it, the Bond girls are pretty good compensation.

Solid Snake and the *Metal Gear* series get most of the attention when it comes to stealthy action games, and for good reason. However, there are plenty of other videogames with badass secret agents such as James Bond, Duke Togo, Gabriel Logan, Michael Thornton, and Sam Fisher. Let's give these secret agents their time in the spotlight.

### DUKE TOGO, AKA GOLGO 13

Duke Togo hails from Japan, where he debuted in a manga series created by Takao Saito. Armed with his custom M16, Duke is a coldhearted, ruthless sniper, who attributes his success to a simple formula: "10% talent, 20% effort, 30% cowardice, and 40% luck." Luck and fear may keep him alive, but his extensive training, inhuman accuracy, and command of eighteen languages (now who's the cunning linguist?) certainly don't hurt. Secretive by nature, there's a lot we don't know about him, but one thing's for sure — you do not want this assassin coming after you.

Two games featuring the character are *Golgo 13: Top Secret Episode* (1988) and *The Mafat Conspiracy* (1990), both for the NES. These games feature a mix of gameplay modes including side-scrolling, first-person, flying, and

pan-and-zoom modes. The gameplay is difficult and eclectic, but most people talk about its raunchy moments — somehow the scenes involving sex and drugs sneaked by Nintendo's censorship board. How's that for stealth?

### JAMES BOND, AKA 007

"Bond. James Bond." That this little line has become a cliché tells you something. Charming, attractive, sly, and deadly, Bond has been thrilling audience since his introduction in a 1953 Ian Fleming novel called *Casino Royale*. I grew up watching Roger Moore-era hits like *Live and Let Die* (1973), *Moonraker* (1979), and the always fun-to-say *Octopussy* (1983). There have also been plenty of James Bond games over the years, such as On Time Software's *James Bond 007* (1983), which I played on my Commodore 64.

However, the best James Bond game is Rare's *GoldenEye 007*, a 1997 game for the Nintendo 64. At the time, first-person shooters were rare on consoles. *GoldenEye* was easy to control and had awesome multiplayer. More importantly, though, it nailed the Bond experience, giving you a taste of what it's like to be the world's most cunning spy. To this date, nobody has done it better.

### GABRIEL "GABE" LOGAN

Gabe is the star of *Syphon Filter*, a series developed by Eidetic that debuted in 1999 for the PlayStation. A former Army Ranger, Logan studied Biology and Chemistry at MIT before joining a top-secret outfit known simply as "The Agency." His resume includes thousands, if not tens of thousands, of kills.

*Syphon Filter* is a third-person game that wowed gamers with its 3D graphics and tight controls. Gabe could not only run and shoot, but kneel, roll, climb, and jump — is Gabe related to Lara Croft? You also have to

be smart enough to get through the puzzles, and while there's plenty of action, you won't be able to shoot your way out of every situation. Even if the graphics seem dated today, the awesome storyline and tight controls still make it a PS1 must-play.

### MICHAEL THORNTON

Agent Thornton is the star of Obsidian's *Alpha Protocol*, an "espionage RPG." His training and background vary depending on how you customize him, but in any case, he'll get the job done. Known for being sharp, resourceful, and two steps ahead of everyone else, Thornton had what it took to become gaming's next super agent.

Unfortunately, a slew of bugs and other issues dogged his promising debut, and *Alpha Protocol* dropped prematurely into bargain bins. Better luck next time, Thornton!

### SAM FISHER

Sam is the star of the *Splinter Cell* games, a series that carries the name of bestselling author Tom Clancy. A former lieutenant commander in the SEALs, Sam was the first field agent of Splinter Cell, a black ops project. He was chosen for his highly specialized training, which includes proficiencies in infiltration, hacking, demolitions, and Krav Maga, an Israeli martial art.

The *Splinter Cell* games are some of the best third-person stealth experiences on the market, with lots of cool innovations such as the ever-popular zip cords and snake camera. Sam can also interrogate suspects, take hostages, or protect himself with a human shield.

Sam also has a paternal side, however. After his ex-wife died of cancer, he assumed custody of his daughter Sarah, making him the only single dad on our list. 🐍



# STEALTH MECHANICS IN THE REAL WORLD

BY LUKE MCKINNEY

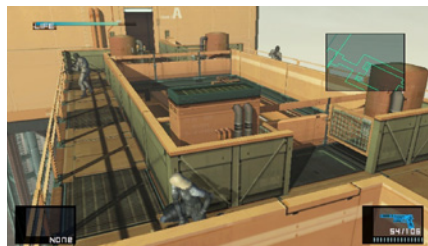
## HOW DO VIDEOGAME STEALTH MECHANICS TRANSLATE INTO REAL LIFE?

**T**his is a sneaking mission. I have to escape the building, infiltrate the business, acquire the item, and return, all without being detected. I've spent months training for this critical assignment. True, if I hadn't spent those months "training" by playing every *Metal Gear* ever made then the "get my wife the birthday present she expected an hour ago" assignment wouldn't actually be this critical, but that's irrelevant. Tell a gamer that a stitch in time saves nine and we'll just say that nine-hit-combos score more. Now it's time to use gaming's greatest stealth strategies in the real world.

### CROUCH-WALKING BEHIND WAIST-HIGH OBSTACLES

**Gaming Scenario:** She's sitting on a couch hacking her way through another dungeon. Or field. Either way she's playing *Rune Factory*. This is a perfect tutorial stealth mission: only one guard who's looking away and actively distracted. Hell, *Rune Factory* can distract people from burning buildings — when they're still inside them. All I have to do is crouch-walk behind the waist-high couch and I'm out the door.

**Reality:** "What the hell are you doing?" I, uh, I don't have a good answer. In fact, that question could probably stop 99% of



■ This could only be easier if they were playing DSes.

videogame heroes where all alien technology has failed. It turns out that crouch-walking is really obvious. Even more obvious than regular walking! If someone strolls past, you might notice them or you might not, but when they squat-shuffle like a constipated crab you're going to want to know what's going on. Which brings me to my current predicament.

### INFLUENCE AMNESIA

**Gaming Scenario:** Thousands of detections in stealth games have taught me the technique to deal with this. I gather my strength, focus my energies, and do other things which basically mean "just standing around a corner" for two whole minutes. Then I try again.

**Reality:** "Seriously, do you need a doctor?" She's still alert even though I left the room and returned! I never knew I married a final boss! (Though now that I think about it, our vows did seem to suggest that kind of status effect.)

Then again, maybe it's the videogames that are lying here. The way their security guards are all wearing matching shoes means they must have memories which last longer than 60 seconds. I think they just pretend to forget you because they're not being paid.

### DEPLOY A DISTRACTION DEVICE

**Gaming Scenario:** I've been caught twice on the very first level. If this was a game it would be asking me if I wanted to go back to the tutorial. But wait! Every stealth espionage hero has a couple of one-use emergency items to escape when things go wrong, but they don't carry enough to keep using them. Knockout gas, electromagnetic chaff, emergency teleport, they all reduce the heroes from "silent masters of shadow" to "cheapskates who have to



■ "If only Wayne Industries could afford a smoke machine." But what to use?

do everything by hand because they refuse to spend enough money on equipment."

**Reality:** Toasters are excellent distractions, because trying to wedge the handle to knock over some cutlery when it pops turns them into smoke bomb generators. Sweet! That should keep her busy.

**SECRET FILE:** Man, I hope *Rune Factory* isn't as distracting as I said it was earlier.

### HIDING IN A BOX

**Gaming Scenario:** I've arrived at the mall, and after all my trouble in the first level I know I need help. I have to deploy the big guns. Or rather, the wrapping the big guns came in.

**Reality:** This could not have not worked any more. It didn't work so hard the security guards didn't even chase me, they just asked if I had a nurse, or a nice hospital where I was meant to be. That's how bad boxes are at sneaking in: The guards think I'm screwing up at sneaking out of a different building



■ Forget Mike Tyson, this is the most powerful boxing in videogames.

## DISTRACTION

**Gaming Scenario:** Go to the left, throw a rock to the right, dash in while they're distracted. Easy.

**Reality:** I don't know how long Liquid Snake spent engineering and training those Shadow Moses genome soldiers, but he should have hired some Rent4Mall part-time security guards. These guys caught me instantly. In fact, I think they caught me quicker when I started throwing things. On the upside, they immediately stop chasing me the instant I get outside. It turns out "legal liability" is more restricting than even the worst AI.

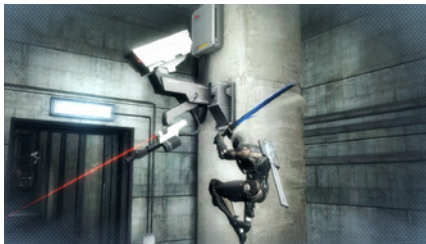
## SNEAK PAST CAMERAS

**Gaming Scenario:** I need another entry option where there aren't quite so many elite security guards, regular security guards, half-asleep security guards, or casual bystanders pointing and laughing. (They don't understand the practicality of all the straps and belts on my "sneaking suit." And my flowing bandana got caught in the automatic doors.)

Luckily the loading dock is only protected by security cameras. In videogames a security camera is a traffic light: It tells you exactly which direction to go, you just wait until the right color is pointing the right way and move to where you're headed.

**Reality:** Did you know that security cameras are placed where they see more than regular people? And they don't have giant blind spots. And not even one was slowly and loudly rotating 90 degrees every 10 seconds. I don't know which cowboy organization installed these, but I'm glad they never worked for the Umbrella corporation. What's the point of security cameras if they don't have huge, easily identified blind spots?

Oh, right.



■ A ninja couldn't be less stealthy without a surprise party and a large hollow cake.

## DISABLE THE CAMERAS

**Gaming Scenario:** One of the more unlikely scenarios overlapping between "stealth" and "action" is the stealthy hero infiltrating high-tech installations by blowing chunks of them up. It seems weird that a system designed to raise the alert if it so much as sees a stranger doesn't mind being repeatedly shot in the face.

**Reality:** Oh wow. The only thing that draws more security attention than "being seen by a security camera" is "being seen trying to vandalize a security camera by that security camera." And trying both within 10 minutes of each other raises the building's alert level to "police outside." I think videogames are only teaching us these stealth mechanics to make sure none of us know how to hide when the machines take over.

I'm in real trouble here. I need the ultimate stealth technique.

## HIDING IN VENTS

**Gaming Scenario:** No matter what else goes wrong, you can be sure that crawling through a vent will make you absolutely immune to detection. They're the closest brutal dystopian videogame corporate nightmares have to a home in the country. If games are to be believed, climbing into an air duct has all the advantages of meditation, spa treatments, and a bottle of scotch, simultaneously: None of your problems can reach you for a while. Also, it becomes hard to move.

**Reality:** You know they screw down air duct covers so that you can't get them off, right? From the games I expected them to come with ring-pulls or quick-releases or something, but these are bolted down real hard. Tearing the metal away takes ages, is incredibly loud, and the passageways revealed could barely hold a cat.

**UPDATE:** Do not attempt to investigate the passageways with a cat. They're the only thing which screams louder than the tearing metal of a duct cover, and now I'm bleeding.

Aaaaand now the guards are coming again.

And I'm leaving a blood trail this time.

Oh, hello, officer. No, this isn't my cat. Actually, I really wouldn't...yes, she does



■ Apparently Jensen's cyborg enhancements include "turning into a small remote-control car to fit."



■ There's a reason so many game characters start in prison.

scratch a lot. No, I wouldn't imagine that put you into a good mood.

## RESTART LEVEL

**Gaming Scenario:** I have been extremely caught. In games you're either caught or you're not, but in the real world it turns out there are many different degrees of trouble. I'm in most of them. If this was a game it's where I'd reset the level and retry. Well, no, first I'd grab a car and see how far I could get and how many cops I could attract. Which I did. Like I say, most of them.

**Reality:** Hmm. It turns out you can't tell a jailor that you've finished playing and would like to start all over again. Though I did find a book about Buddhism in the prison library. This could take a while. 🐱



BY LUKE MCKINNEY

# THE FUTURE OF STEALTH

**WE EXPLORE THE OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACING THE FUTURE OF STEALTH VIDEOGAMES.**

**W**e're reversing our *RETRO* engines to follow the trail of stealth games into the future, but it won't be easy. As we probably should have expected. The first future-challenge stealth faces is ever-improving graphics. Almost every improvement has focused on visuals because they make for better advertising. But "increasing how much people can see" and "ensuring millions of people see it" only makes things harder for stealth games. Back in the day we could pass the time spent waiting for a red blocky sprite to float past by counting its pixels, on our fingers. We had no problem keeping the blue blocky sprite just behind it. In the early days of Sega's *005* the simple gameplay and graphics synced perfectly.

But when fully rendered motion-captured humans walk straight past a heavily armed commando because he's 91 degrees to their left, it doesn't look realistic — It looks ridiculous. Those ever-improving graphics should add veterinary collars around their



■ And these still counted as good graphics back then.



■ "My last regret is that my friends can't see these shining green lights!"

necks. It's not like it could make their lives any more undignified. The tragic irony of gorgeously visible troops who can't actually see anything only adds to the pointless suffering of their minion existence.

This ludographic disconnect between graphics and gameplay only increases with processor ability. Shoot-em-ups got more detailed explosions, driving games feature faster-feeling physics, even sports games became more realistic by demanding that



■ That cardboard box has killed more enemy troops than every Metal Gear put together.



■ "I'm sorry Dave, I don't understand."  
"JUST LOAD THE F\*\*\*\*\* GAME YOU F\*\*\*\*\* F\*\*!"

fans pay ever more money for the exact same thing every year. But stealth games became an inversion of *Solid Snake* sneaking: Instead of a simply-rendered rectangle dropped over a master of strategy, we're dropping fantastically detailed shells over the same blocky game mechanics.

If the next-gen consoles can't see their way clear to improving our stealth games, what else do they offer? They've been focusing on (and with) camera gimmicks. Electronic eyes staring out at our every move sounds promising — they sound like a stealth game escaping into the real world — but video-game developers don't have a Q branch, so new gadgets never work properly. *Dance Central* still has problems detecting when someone's doing the YMCA, and that's the most fabulously visible a human body can make itself without brightly colored radiation. Losing a stealth game is already one of the most annoying losses possible. Losing due to motion input error will make it annoying enough to electronically induce someone into becoming the Incredible Hulk, which is the most visible a human body can become with brightly colored radiation (and therefore sucks at stealth).

Most motion sensors can only tell that you're moving, and most voice control can only be sure that something is speaking.

The fine details are a little more difficult. But for stealth that's enough! *Alien: Isolation* used those mechanics to tell if you were making noise when the alien hunted you. It was genuinely atmospheric, a powerful experience, and most importantly of all, it was optional. Unfortunately it's also been done. And like any stealth success in the real world, now that we've seen it the simple trick won't work again.

Of course we've got to mention motion controls, if only for a laugh. The only stealth game a Wiimote could simulate is a drunk trying to stumble their way to bed without waking up their partner, only to discover they've accidentally walked into a plate-glass display of wine glasses and hand grenades.

Looking further into the future means doing so through an expensive headset. The Microsoft HoloLens already sounds so much like stealth science fiction I'm disap-



■ These shades won't make great stealth games. Deal with it.

pointed that people will buy it instead of sneakily stealing it from a secret research facility. Glasses which add highlights and alerts to your field of vision? That could be the greatest stealth tool in the world!

The problem is that the dream stealth game you just imagined is an ARG (Augmented Reality Game). And the only people prepared to invest enough money to engineer one are advertisers. So you'll be sneaking through the cyber-stealth of a real-world *TRON* just to find five great deals on new chocolate bars.

Moving even further into the future means putting our skulls inside even more technology. Step forward the Oculus Rift! Just be careful not to trip over anything, because the Oculus Rift turns you into an ajnin: the exact opposite of a ninja. While

wearing the headset you're incapable of seeing anything around you, while becoming the most visible and least-cool looking person in the room. And so far the main Oculus Rift game seems to be "I write for a videogame site," which you win by writing up a feature about how it seems good but needs more work.



■ So futuristic it floats in advertising shots.

More importantly, your primary weapon in the world of stealth games is vision. Better camera beats rocket launcher every time. But if you're looking around with a headset your character won't be limited by ammunition, or stamina, but by how many times you can twist your neck to see behind you before your head unscrews.

All headsets run into the Holodeck vs. Matrix problem, which is about as futuristic as gaming problems can get. We've always imagined having holodecks or otherwise all-inclusive virtual-reality platforms to run around simulated environments, but people forget that that's still exercise. No one wants to quit *Splinter Cell* five minutes into the first level because they're winded. Nobody wants to lose at *Thief* because they're too tired to dodge back and forth in time with the guard sequence. What we really want is a Matrix connection, where we lay back while wired into a virtual body which obeys our every instruction without feeling fatigue. And we already have that with controllers.

So is there any high-tech hope for the future? Of course! Now that every modern console is basically a computer without a keyboard it's only a matter of time until they merge into a single all-seeing megacorporation. That's the natural environment of the stealth hero! Stealth games have always been a shadowy niche. For everyone who enjoys a perfect ghost run, there's an entire army of players exploding

each other in *Calls of BattleWar*. But when all gaming boxes are the same, developers won't have to waste so much time converting between platforms, which means more market share for the more specific interests as every possible customer plays and pays on the same box. You never see Bond break into the villain's base only to swear because they're using the wrong operating system for his hacking tools.

Speaking of which, stealth agents are always stuffed with the latest in portable technology, yet our smartphones already outperform almost all of it. Which brings us to the real technological race of the future. You don't find the future in exciting advertisements and glitzy promises, you look for the high-tech everyone already seems to have. Which means phones, portable computers, and the Internet, where small downloads have already triggered a true renaissance in stealth gaming.

These games don't just evade searchlights, they steer clear of the entire graphical fiasco by embracing retro visual styles. Games like *Gunpoint* and *Monaco* deliver stealth action with just the right level of visual representation. App stores, arcade downloads, and independent Kickstarter campaigns allow indie developers to experiment with alternate stealth mechanics, sneaking sophisticated stealth games into the market without having to convince big businesses too busy breaking *Assassin's Creed*.

*A.V.* is a stealth-music game, an idea so insane it should cancel itself out. *République* let expert developers get on with the mobile game they wanted to see instead of struggling on console sequels. And if I was any more excited about the unique hacker/agent co-op of *Clandestine* I'd have sneaked into their offices to play the prototype even though it's already out on Early Access.

So the real future of stealth heroes isn't serving AAA megacorporations but using mobile technology and daring plans to take the profits big businesses are too slow and clumsy to claim. Surely this is a more perfect future evolution of stealth gaming than relying on gimmicks and gadgets to leave fans of the genre in the dark. 🐱

# SNEAKING AROUND

BY LUKE MCKINNEY

## LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT STEALTH IN NON-STEALTH GAMES.

Ah, the “stealth segment.” It’s probably up there with the escort mission and mandatory tutorials as one of those moments that can reliably draw groans before they even begin. I’m not talking about games like *Metal Gear*; stealth is part of their DNA, and the entire experience is designed around using it in varied, interesting ways. This is about those times where stealth is not one of the title’s selling points, but you find yourself avoiding guards and spotlights anyway.

These sequences usually show up in action-based titles, where you’re typically more confrontational. Suddenly demanding you to be sneaky impacts two major concepts: the game’s pacing and your sense of power. Slowing down for a while isn’t a problem in itself, even in a game that emphasizes brisk, consistent action. In fact, it’s good to have a chance to catch your breath and collect yourself in between action setpieces. You see this with trips to town and sidequests in the *Zelda* series, backtracking through earlier areas for power-ups in *Metroid*, and various plot developments in *Chrono Trigger*. But the stealth segments still require you to be alert and precise. It’s like driving into a storm: You have to go slower than you’d like, but you can’t relax.

All of the above examples (and many other action-adventure games) involve growing more powerful over the course of the adventure. Stealth sequences tend to shake that up: You’ve been told that you’re strong enough to defeat enemies that come your way, then (usually only for a brief period) you’re not. Again, this is not always a problem. *Chrono Trigger*’s stealth segment hits when the characters are at a low point. They’ve failed to prevent a disaster, and they’re left weak and vulnerable.

If the game fails to sell you on this, it can feel like an un-



necessary chore. Take *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow 2*. You control the prince of darkness, Dracula himself. You’re gearing up to take out Satan! You don’t get much tougher than that. But you’re told that you can’t possibly take on one particular sturdy breed of henchman. You can easily possess and kill them from behind, but if they’re aware of you, they’re somehow unbeatable and can bring your unlife to a swift end. It feels like a very arbitrary, artificial distinction.

*Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* gets the sense of power right. You first have to sneak around when invading an imposing fortress. Link is just a kid, he’s separated from his sword, and he’s never seen real combat anyway. It’s also really satisfying to come back to the fortress later in the game and just take it by storm. Where this instance falters is in the execution. You have to move very slowly, even for one of these sequences, and it’s way too easy to get caught. Nintendo apparently realized this in the HD remake, giving you more of a warning when you’re about to be spotted, which is not an ideal solution, but at least makes it more of a pleasant play.

*Metroid: Zero Mission*, a remake of the original *Metroid*, has a better approach that rewards knowledge of the series as a whole. When you reach what you would expect is the end, you’re suddenly



ambushed and left powerless, something that takes both series hero Samus and first-time players by surprise. While in stealth mode, you’re still fairly speedy and mobile. You also get a satisfying payoff: regaining full power and wreaking havoc on the foes that plagued you while suitless.

A lot of the more standout stealth sequences are memorable because of how they allow you to avoid stealth entirely. The aforementioned *Chrono Trigger* robs you of your gear and weapons, but one character fights without them. In *Ocarina of Time*, you can take out guards with a hookshot or arrows, and you can acquire a mask in *Majora’s Mask* (*Zelda* really loves the whole “stealth segment” thing) that lets you slip by unnoticed. These options can be clever and amusing, but it doesn’t speak well of the challenges themselves if subverting them is the best part.

Still, I think giving you options is the right idea. It’s one of the keys to a single-player game’s replayability. We just need stealth segments that are appealing enough that we’ll actually be inclined to take the “normal” option occasionally. Again, I think it comes down to emphasizing what people love to play about a given game, not departing from it. Stealth is often associated with slowing a game down, but it can just as easily revolve around speed, agility, and efficiency, traits that are right at the heart of most action games. When done right, sneaking around can be a welcome breath of fresh air even in a non-stealthy game. 🐾





WE EXPLORE THE SHADOWY BEGINNINGS OF

# STEALTH GAMES

BY DAVID L. CRADDOCK

## UNSUNG HEROES

There's an adage that goes, "History is written by the victors." Many believe it was coined by Winston Churchill, but historians who attempted to trace the quote to its origin found that the trail went cold, muddled by the passage of time.

No matter who said it, the old saw rings true for videogames. Fighting, RPGs, puzzle, adventure — pick any genre, and you can trace it back to a popular title that set the blueprint for all that followed. Fighting-game designers pledge allegiance to *Street Fighter II*. Thrillseekers wax nostalgic about the first time they encountered the zombified dogs that burst through the windows in *Resident Evil's* Spencer Estate. To many, *Super Mario Bros.* is the alpha and omega of platformers.

Some popular examples are indeed the progenitors of their long and illustrious lines. In other instances, unsung heroes deserve credit. Capcom would prefer to forget the original *Street Fighter's* stiff controls and choppy animations. *Resident Evil* served up a feast of gore and horror, but *Sweet Home*, a NES horror game published by Capcom exclusively in Japan, set the table. Nintendo did create the platform genre, but with *Donkey Kong*, the first game that let you hop over gaps and obstacles, not *Super Mario Bros.*





Solid Snake is considered the forerunner of the stealth genre. He first appeared in *Metal Gear*, a top-down game founded on scarce ammunition, disguises that let you slip by guards unnoticed, and a cardboard box, the ultimate camouflage.

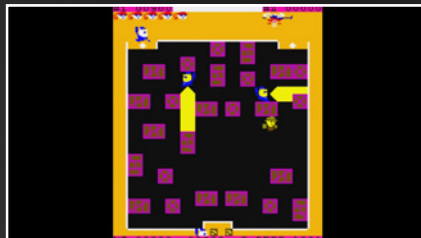
Peer deeper into the shadows of the stealth genre's lineage, however, and you'll notice other figures cloaked in darkness. You've probably forgotten all about them. Maybe you never knew they were there.

That's fine. That's just the way they like it.

### DOUBLE-OS AND NAZI CASTLES

Years before Sega went head to head against Nintendo in the 16-bit console wars, it was a coin-op manufacturer known as Service Games (SErvice GAMES). In 1981, Sega released *005*, the world's first stealth game according to *The Guinness*

*Book of World Records*. Displayed from a top-down view, *005* tasked you with retrieving a briefcase containing classified documents while evading guards that patrolled rooms littered with bulwarks like crates. When they halted, guards shone the beams of their flashlights in a different direction, giving you a few precious seconds to dart out from behind your position and dash to a new hiding spot.



Sega's *005* was perhaps too skilled at hiding. It flew under the radar of most critics and players, and faded into obscurity. *Castle Wolfenstein*, published in 1981 for the Apple II, made a bigger splash. Programmed by Muse Software coder Silas Warner, *Castle Wolfenstein* cast you in the role of a soldier charged with navigating the warrens of a fortress and assassinating the Führer.

*Castle Wolfenstein* armed you with a gun and a few rounds of ammo at the start of

each game, but skirting detection was the wiser course of action. You could wait for guards to pass then slip around them, or hold them up at gunpoint and shake them down for supplies. Donning an enemy uniform fooled low-level sentries into thinking you were one of them, but the high-ranking SS Stormtroopers saw through your deceit and opened fire.

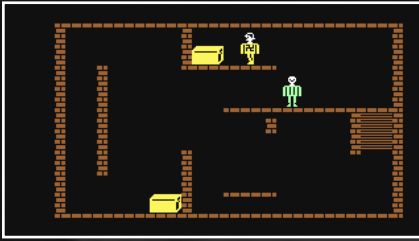
*Castle Wolfenstein's* gameplay depth and technical acumen made Warner a superstar in the hacker community. Corpses could be used to block off passageways. Enemies came running at the sound of gunshots or grenades. Locked treasure chests held ammo, keys, or bulletproof vests, but took time to pick, leaving you vulnerable to detection. Grenades destroyed architecture upon detonation. Guzzling alcohol gave you a buzz and unsettled your aim.

Arguably the most impressive feature of *Castle Wolfenstein* was Warner's sound engine. For the most part the game stayed quiet, letting you immerse yourself in ducking guards and charting your course to the nearest point of egress. One hasty move and guards bore down on you with cries of "Halt!" or "Kommen sie!" (German for "Come, you!") that crackled from the Apple II's speakers, shocking players accustomed to bleeps and bloops that only nominally qualified as sound effects.

Critics and players marveled at *Castle Wolfenstein's* tense atmosphere and technological underpinnings. In 1984 Warner outdid himself with the release of *Beyond Castle Wolfenstein*. Bodies could be stashed inside rooms and alcoves to avoid alerting guards to your presence, or piled up in doorways and hallway junctions to fashion roadblocks. The pass system, another novelty, required you to show passes permitting you to wander around your current area to guards who caught you, or bribe them to stay quiet. If you lacked money or the appropriate paperwork, the dagger, which replaced grenades, let you shut them up permanently without raising a fuss.

While both *Castle Wolfenstein* games incorporated stealth, sneaking was merely an option. Ammo was scarce, but stock-





piling it let you turn the bottom half of the game into a shooting spree. In 1987, *Metal Gear* and its protagonist, rugged spy Solid Snake, slithered onto the scene and turned heads by promoting clandestine tactics over frenetic action.

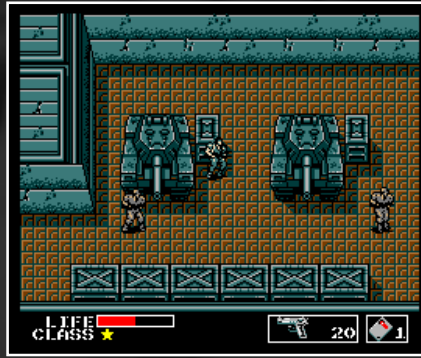
However, Hideo Kojima, the young designer at Japanese studio Konami responsible for *Metal Gear*'s design, had not set out with the intention of establishing a twist on action games.

### TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION

In its earliest stages, *Metal Gear* had as much to do with creeping around as *Pong*. Kojima had wanted to create a military shooter heavy on bullets and explosions. When the MSX2's hardware restricted the number of bullets able to be displayed onscreen, Kojima halted development. A shooter game, he reasoned, would sink like a stone if it curtailed onscreen action.

Kojima went back to the drawing board in search of a game design that could play to the strength of the MSX2 rather than fight against it. He found inspiration from two sources. The first was *The Great Escape*, a nonfiction book written by Paul Brickhill that told of the mass escape of prisoners from a German P.O.W. camp in 1944. Brickhill was one of the prisoners involved and spared no expense detailing how he and fellow captives fashioned crude tools and weapons by hand, purloined German uniforms and civilian clothing to blend in, and carried out surveillance against their captors in their desperate bid for freedom.

Kojima's second motivator, and his primary wellspring of influence for *Metal Gear* according to articles he wrote for *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*, was the *James Bond* series of films. He was riveted by the mores that defined 007's adventures: traveling to exotic locales, undertaking missions that would determine the fate of



the world, superspies whose double- and triple-crosses left his head spinning, and performing espionage rather than engaging in wild shootouts.

Inspired, Kojima revamped *Metal Gear* as a game predicated on stealth and secrecy. Unsurprisingly, Solid Snake, his protagonist, borrowed many traits from Agent 007. Snake, like Ian Fleming's prototypical spy, would travel the globe, infiltrate enemy bases, thwart terrorist schemes, and do his best to charm the pants off every woman who crossed his path.



Kojima hewed closer to *The Great Escape* than he did Bond in one significant way. Bond never left home without his trademark Beretta Model 1934 or 1935, but Snake began each mission empty-handed. All weapons and equipment were OSP (on-site procurement). Starting from scratch became a core tenet of the series. It also communicated a clear message: *Metal Gear* was no action game.

Snake's mission was to thread his way around the enemy squads patrolling the South African jungle, infiltrate a fortress called Outer Heaven, liberate a captive ally, and uncover plans for a nuclear weapon codenamed Metal Gear. With few weapons at hand, you had to duck behind vehicles, crates, and other obstructions, waiting for guards to pass before racing to the next one — a feat easier said than done.

Guards had direct lines of sight, and rarely worked alone. Upon spotting Snake,

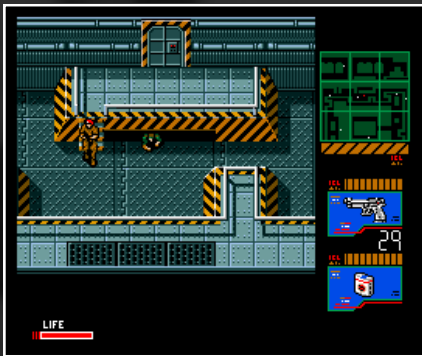
one or two exclamation mark popped up over a guard's head. One exclamation mark summoned all other guards on the screen, while two brought reinforcements swarming in from adjacent screens. Sentries were only one obstacle. Cameras and infrared sensors tripped alarms and brought the full weight of Outer Heaven's armed forces down on Snake.

With every screen, *Metal Gear* demonstrated a breadth of gameplay unmatched by its precursors. Mercenary pals skulking around Outer Heaven could be contacted by dialing their frequency on your codec, and they divulged contextual tips dependent upon which room you were in. Saving hostages boosted your maximum health and let you carry more ammo. But, on the flip side, you lost enhancements if a hostage wound up dead.

Kojima treated weapons as rewards: The more thorough you were in your exploration, the better weapons you would find stashed around Outer Heaven. Scrimping and saving ammo for a Beretta let you pick off enemies sparingly. You could plant landmines to foil enemies on patrol, guide remote-control missiles into hostile vehicles, or explode hollow walls to reveal secret passages.

*Metal Gear* offered an alternative for players interested in deviating from the glut of run-n-gun action games clogging arcades and home consoles, but the sequel, *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*, went even further. Kojima added 3D height to the 2D environments, so enemies above or below Snake couldn't see him. To keep Snake at a disadvantage, guards received a 45-degree vision cone, patrolled across multiple screens, and distinguished between different types of sounds. It was safer, for instance, to walk on dirt paths instead of metal grates.

Drawing the attention of guards or cameras triggered a three-phase alarm. The first phase saw enemies give chase. Taking cover behind obstructions was still an option, but not the most prudent one. Your best bet was to shimmy into vents or crawl underneath vehicles or shelves, maneuvers new to the series. When they lost sight of Snake, enemies progressed to phase two: Establish a perimeter and



toss the area. In phase three, things slowly settled down. Enemies who had rushed in from offscreen returned to their posts, and enemies who belonged to your current screen resumed their patrols.

As impressive as the enhancements to *MGS2*'s gameplay were, Kojima made even greater strides in the game's narrative. Set in the 1990s, the story began with an oil crisis that kicked off a tale of energy conservation, romance, and plot twists of the sort for which secret agents like Solid Snake and 007 are known. At the conclusion, Snake meets briefly with his commander before heading to parts unknown to recuperate from his adventure.

**BANNER YEAR**

In the fall of 1998, Solid Snake emerged to lead players on more espionage thrills in *Metal Gear Solid*, his first 3D outing. But *MGS* was not the first 3D stealth game.

*Tenchu: Stealth Assassins* sidled onto the scene in August, two months ahead of Hideo Kojima's masterpiece, becoming the first 3D stealth game on the market. Set in feudal Japan, *Tenchu* handed you control of ninjas who scaled buildings using grappling hooks, dashed across rooftops, and buried katana blades in the backs of targets under the cover of night.

The dark and gritty atmosphere that helped *Tenchu* garner a cult following came about out of pragmatism more than creativity. Due to technical limitations, the PlayStation could only draw so many polygons on the screen at once. As you moved forward, buildings, trees, and other scenery blinked into existence on the horizon, a glaringly obvious occurrence in games like *Moto Racer*, which constantly moved players forward. Worried that pop-

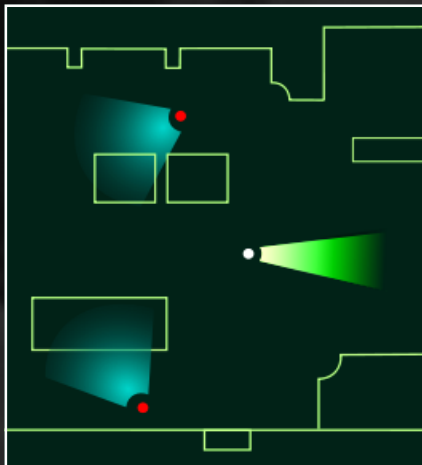


in would break players' suspension of disbelief, developer Acquire hid the undesirable effect by blanketing the game in darkness.

Although *Tenchu* never captured mainstream success, it earned high marks and appealed to players looking for a challenging, moody game that put stealth ahead of brute force, and traded bullets for blades.

Weeks later, *Metal Gear Solid* stirred the gaming world into a frenzy. Many of the genre innovations credited to *MGS* — such as the three-phase evasion sequence, a radar that displayed your position as well as the positions and vision fields of guards and cameras, and the ability to crouch behind and crawl under objects, among others — were recycled from *Metal Gear 2* and repackaged in a 3D world that felt alive and taut with danger.

Kojima and his team pushed the PlayStation to its limits in their quest to build as realistic a world as possible. Guards could track your footprints through the snow outside the arctic base where the



game was set. A SWAT team from Huntington Beach, California, gave the developers a crash course in the operation of weapons, explosives, and military vehicles. Artists painstakingly crafted the tiniest details, going so far as to design desks individually.

Harnessing the power of the PlayStation, Kojima built on *Metal Gear 2*'s storyline by directing a cinematic tour de force heavier on conversation and cutscenes than it was on tactical espionage action. More than one reviewer remarked that *MGS* felt more like a movie than a game — not surprising considering that Kojima had aspired to make movies long before he began making games.

Watershed moments in stealth games were not limited to home consoles in 1998. That November Looking Glass Studios released *Thief: The Dark Project* for PC. Set in a medieval city, *Thief* was played from first-person, cementing it as the first "first-person sneaker," a term coined by the developer and arguably a more immersive viewpoint than the third-person perspectives used by every other stealth game to date.



Sound played a crucial role in *Thief*. Each surface was assigned a variable level of noise; dirt was soft, carpet softer still, but stepping on ceramic tiles was tantamount to setting off fireworks. However, you could turn the tables and use sound to your advantage. Listening to footsteps informed you of the surface enemies were walking on and how far away they were from your hiding spot.

Other aspects of the environment could be used by or against you. Advanced artificial intelligence applied to NPCs fluctuated between varying levels of suspicion; visual and aural clues such as seeing you dart around a corner, hearing the muffled cry of an associate, spotting an open door that was closed a few minutes ago, or —

most telling of all — bloodstains from your handiwork put them on high alert. Some shadowy spots were deeper and darker than others, and a small jewel indicated how well-hidden you were.

Although *Thief* never reached the heights of *MGS*, its groundbreaking use of audio design was way ahead of any other game in its era, and many since.

### FADEOUT

Innovation in stealth games has flagged since the 2000s. Ubisoft Montreal's *Splinter Cell* emphasized dynamic lighting and delivered realistic weapons, maneuvers, and storylines rife with themes of global terrorism. In 2007, Ubisoft Montreal pushed the genre forward yet again with *Assassin's Creed*, the seminal installment in a long-running series that transports you to historical settings and asks you to blend in with crowds before dispatching targets in broad daylight.

IO Interactive's *Hitman* series started out focused on stealth but eventually gave



you the freedom to choose whether to sneak around and arrange accidents for the victims on your hit list, or go in with guns blazing.

Today, most big-budget publishers prefer to pick and choose which facets of the stealth genre to use and discard the rest. Action games from *Call of Duty* to *Tomb Raider* (2013) feature stealth elements, but they are side attractions, respites from hours spent peering down iron sights and racking up body counts numbered in the hundreds. Even new entries of *Metal Gear Solid* and *Splinter Cell* rely on bigger and bigger guns in an era when rising development costs demand

that publishers cast a wide net to pull in a bigger audience.

Stealth games are not prolific — but then, they never have been. They fly under the radar, content to let blockbusters hog the spotlight and wait for those who enjoy them to seek them out. 2012's *Mark of the Ninja* took stealth back to its 2D roots and dared you to complete missions without killing anyone, the genre's ultimate challenge. *Alien: Isolation*, a horror-stealth game that challenged you to survive against a single xenomorph on a decimated space station, was one of the biggest surprises of 2014. Not only because it was well-made — a rarity in the space of *Alien*-licensed games — but because it was a big-budget, stealth-driven game in an age when stealth games don't post numbers big enough to catch the attention of most publishers.

Gamers interested in bombastic action have droves of titles to choose from. For stealth fans, the shadows beckon, and they will always feel like home. 🗡️





s2lart 2005

# A HISTORY OF METAL GEAR

BY JEREMY PARISH

Take a comprehensive tour through the history of war, one nanomachine at a time.

This summer, Konami's *Metal Gear* series celebrates both its 28th anniversary and its eighth proper installment. The saga of Solid Snake and Big Boss just might be gaming's longest-running continuous narrative — fancy timeline or no, *The Legend of Zelda* hardly warrants consideration! — and certainly it's one of the medium's most richly developed. As the series moves toward its next major chapter, let's look back at nearly three decades of stealth action, radio conversations, and walking nuclear warhead launchers.

## OUTER HEAVEN'S GATE: METAL GEAR (1987, MSX2 | 1988, NES)

*Metal Gear* was born in Japan, but from the very beginning it seemed peculiarly suited for American tastes — an uncommon occurrence among Japanese-developed NES games of the '80s. Light on unfamiliar man-

ga and anime conventions, heavy on military aesthetics, *Metal Gear* was a shoe-in for U.S. localization despite its text-heavy nature.

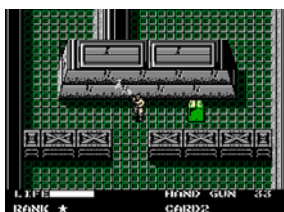
In hindsight, its western appeal should come as little surprise. Even in the mid-'80s, director Hideo Kojima was a rabid Hollywood film fanatic, and these served as the inspiration for *Metal Gear*...all the way down to the cover art, which infamously depicted protagonist Solid Snake as a tracing of Michael Biehn in *The Terminator*. That sort of brazen borrowing was fairly common at the time, but *Metal Gear's* cinematic inspirations ran much deeper than the shallow "hey, it's that thing from that one movie" that defined Hollywood riffs in Japanese games of the '80s.

In a way, *Metal Gear* felt like a *Legend of Zelda* clone with small-arms fire. Much like Link, the protagonist of Nintendo's influential action-RPG, Snake moved about from

screen to screen via a top-down perspective, gathering clues from non-player characters while tracking down keys to forage ever further into the enemy's lair. Snake amassed an enormous inventory of weapons and tools to further his cause. He even had to contend with an endlessly looping maze of screens, à la *Zelda's* Lost Woods.

In truth, though, Kojima arrived at an action-RPG style not by building from games like *Zelda* and *Ys* but rather by starting with a military action game and steadily paring away the arcade-like mechanics. When he was assigned the task of designing an army shooter, he complied...though the spirit of his creation stood in stark contrast to something like *Commando* or *Ikari Warriors*. "The MSX had many technical limitations, and I didn't want to make war games," he told the PlayStation blog in 2012. "So I decided to create something similar to *The Great Escape* — something involving an escape — and in the end I made an espionage game."

The technical limitations of the MSX platform, of course, played a major role in determining the nature of *Metal Gear*. While smooth multidirectional scrolling and the ability to handle lots of moving sprites eventually made their way to latter-day NES games, the MSX lagged behind. As





such, Kojima chose to play down the intensity of *Metal Gear's* action, pitting the player against fewer foes.

So while *Metal Gear* appeared at first glance to belong to the same family of game design as something along the lines of SNK's top-down military shooters (*Guerrilla War*, *Iron Tank*), in action it played much differently. The goal of *Metal Gear* wasn't to wipe out all enemies who stood in Snake's way but rather to avoid contact with the opposition as much as possible. While some conflicts proved unavoidable, the majority of those played out as specific encounters designed around a particular design puzzle: Using mines to destroy the massive tank blocking a key route, or taking out "Coward Duck" without accidentally killing any of the hostages he used as human shields. Otherwise, sneaking was the order of the day.

To that end, *Metal Gear* featured quite complex A.I. design for its era. Enemies possessed directional and situational awareness, meaning they could patrol within arm's reach of Snake without realizing his presence so long as he stayed out of their direct line of sight. This allowed you to slip silently through the base, avoiding roaming guards while dealing with traps like pitfalls, gassed rooms, and electrified floors. But careless play — being spotted by a guard or camera or firing a weapon within ear-

shot of an enemy without use of a silencer — would send Outer Heaven's personnel into alert mode, triggering wave after wave of soldiers to take down Snake. While alert guards appeared in fewer numbers than you'd have seen in other top-down shooters of the era, they moved faster than Snake, and their gunfire was deadly accurate. Survival in a combat situation demanded cunning and resources, creating ample incentive to avoid triggering alerts whenever possible.

All of this made for a decidedly complex console action game experience for 1987, so Kojima built in a handy help system through Snake's radio transceiver. Snake's mission commander, Big Boss, would call to offer tips at key points in the game, as would other contacts Snake met along the

way. You could also call your contacts for advice, though this proved something of a crapshoot; some allies would fail to respond and even disappeared altogether as the story progressed.

That, too, was a novel trick up *Metal Gear's* sleeve: The game actually told a story. Granted, it wasn't exactly the most involved plot; your mission to rescue a captured comrade from an enemy fortress revealed a secret weapon and the fact that Big Boss was behind it all. But the way it unfolded within the events of the game itself, through dialogue and radio transmissions, put *Metal Gear* well ahead of competing action games. The series has evolved considerably since 1987, but many of the basics that defined the original game — everything from radio chatter to the inevitable sequence in which the protagonist is captured and stripped of his gear — has its origins in Kojima's stealthy attempt to make a smarter action game.

[Note: For the lowdown on *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* check out Jeremy's Retro Rarities column on page 72.]

### OF RAILGUNS AND RANTINGS: METAL GEAR SOLID (1998, PLAYSTATION)

The advent of 3D gaming — that is, gameplay in a polygonal third dimension, not games on 3D screens — sparked a renaissance for old game franchises. In hopes of striking gold once again, publishers dusted off once-landmark series that had long been absent after fizzling out in the 16-bit era. Everyone from *Pac-Man* to *Pitfall Harry* to *Bubsy the Bobcat* enjoyed a new day in the sun, rendered in chunky high-fidelity triangles and struggling to produce a compelling hook for their revamped old-school action.

#### MSX TO NES

While most Americans became familiar with the original *Metal Gear* through its NES incarnation, the series actually began life on the MSX platform, less a system than a standard for console-computer hybrids. The MSX made very little headway in the U.S., and the original rendition of *Metal Gear* never made its way to the west. Instead it was ported to the NES...though unfortunately the quality of that adaptation proved to be rather lacking. Entire portions of the game were scrambled and rearranged, though radio conversations weren't properly adapted to the new layout of Outer Heaven, making for confusing and even broken hints. Most egregiously, the final boss which lent the game its title — the nuclear-capable mecha Metal Gear — was replaced by a defenseless supercomputer. While the NES version holds considerable nostalgia for many American gamers, Kojima reputedly detests it.





### THE TWIN SNAKES: SNAKE'S REVENGE VS. MG2 (1990, NES | 1990, MSX2)

Following the international success of *Metal Gear* on NES, Konami decided to follow it up with a NES-exclusive sequel: *Snake's Revenge*. Series designer Kojima, however, wasn't included on the team. That probably explains why it feels so odd, with a highly linear design and stealth portions broken up by bizarre side-scrolling action sequences.

Meanwhile, once Kojima learned of the existence of *Snake's Revenge*, he set the wheels in motion to get a proper sequel produced. The result, *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*, was not only a fitting follow-up to *Metal Gear*, it represents the acme of 8-bit game design. It also propelled the franchise's story forward while further cementing its Hollywood roots (most glaringly in its character portraits, which cheerfully swiped the likenesses of popular actors like Richard Crenna and Sean Connery), setting the stage for another 25 years' worth of games.

Still, despite *Snake's Revenge* immediately being relegated to apocryphal status, it nevertheless pointed the way toward at least one key element of the franchise's future developments: It was the first game to resurrect Big Boss as an embittered cyborg.

But no protagonist's return came as big a surprise as Solid Snake's — and, arguably, none worked out nearly so well. After eight years in retirement, Snake returned to action on PlayStation, and his adventure set a new standard for both game design and presentation. *Metal Gear Solid* (so named to emphasize its 3D visuals — that's "solid" as both "Solid Snake" and "geometric solid") had such an impact on gamers that for many it marks the true beginning of the *Metal Gear* series, with the 8-bit chapters serving as mere warm-up.

Of course, ignoring *Metal Gear* and *Metal Gear 2* undermines many of the narrative and design themes of *MGS*. The game's story draws heavily on its predecessors, revolving around Snake's past with the now-evil FOX-HOUND special ops organization and his prickly relationship with former commander Big Boss and seemingly deceased comrade Gray Fox — not to mention the impact of the realization that the *Metal Gear* project is anything but dead. "It can't be! Snake grits upon learning of the arms delivery system's role in the hostage crisis playing out at Shadow Moses Island. For players who had followed his adventures from the start, news of this revived threat hit just as hard.

Still, in many ways, *MGS* does stand as a fresh starting point for the series' narrative. It rewrites history, revising the final showdown between Snake and Big Boss in Zanzibarland at the end of *Metal Gear 2* to include a Darth Vader-esque revelation that Snake was his foe's son. This in turn led to the importance of cloning and nanotechnology that continues to define the series, as well as giving Big Boss a far more integral role in the story. In fact, *MGS* helped define him as the true central character of the *Metal Gear* saga rather than Snake, with his former comrade Revolver Ocelot serving as the series' long-term antagonist and Snake's fellow

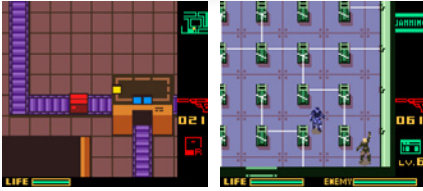
Big Boss clone Liquid Snake as the more fleeting threat.

*MGS* built its combat scenarios and play mechanics on the foundation of *Metal Gear 2*. Despite some limited opportunities to switch into a first-person view, *MGS* really played out like a 2D game with occasional nods to the vertical environments made possible by polygons. It wouldn't be until 2005's revised version of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence*, that the series would truly enter the third dimension — a fact made painfully evident in *The Twin Snakes*, the GameCube remake of *MGS*, where the first-person aim mode essentially broke the game.

Excellent as its well-trying play mechanics felt, *MGS* made ripples for its stunning presentation. Its virtuosic visual style truly broke new ground, creating the impression of seamless transitions between action and cutscenes, which were plentiful and stylishly directed. It also set the standard for modern visual design in games, with a subdued, almost monochromatic color palette that helped unify the graphics.

The game's unique blend of realism and abstraction hinted at an animator's intuition for knowing when to lean on style and allow the viewer's eye to fill in the details: Faces, mechanisms, and many animations all seem remarkably loose in hindsight. At the same time, the world burst with unprecedented atmospheric details: falling snow, warm breath fogging in the Alaskan air, an office complex swirling into chaos as monitors shattered and papers went flying amidst a duel between Snake and a cybernetic ninja. As a result, *MGS* still holds up pretty well today despite its blocky, simple character models. It put the series on the radar as a blockbuster and made Kojima a rockstar, and all but guaranteed the next *Metal Gear* would be a big deal.





### GHOST BABEL, IN COLOR: METAL GEAR SOLID (2000, GAME BOY COLOR)

Well, actually, the next *Metal Gear* barely made a blip on gaming's radar. The somewhat confusingly titled *Metal Gear Solid* for Game Boy Color was in fact a completely different game from the smash-PS1 title. In the west, Konami removed its Japanese subtitle (*Ghost Babel*, as in G.B., as in Game Boy — yeah, Kojima invented the gimmick of naming DS games with a "D.S." subtitle before the DS even existed), leaving many with the impression that this was simply a compromised port of the PlayStation hit.

In fact, it was anything but. Rather, this *Metal Gear Solid* played out like a parallel-universe version of *MGS*: Snake is called out of his arctic retirement by Colonel Campbell, meets Mei Ling for the first time, saves an awkward computer genius, falls in love with a no-nonsense lady soldier, and fights a team of supernatural commandos seeking to revive the concept of Outer Heaven with a hijacked Metal Gear. But despite the big-picture similarities, *Ghost Babel* differed radically in the fine details. His nemeses were former underlings of Campbell, the action takes place in Africa rather than Alaska, and there's no discussion of Snake's relationship to Big Boss, and no Liquid Snake at all.

Despite the downscaled format, *MGS* played faithfully to the PlayStation game — shockingly so, for those who had never experienced *Metal Gear 2*. Despite a few questionable design choices (such as an entire area that consisted of a color-based conveyor-belt puzzle to drive home the fact that, yes, this was a Game Boy Color title), the first portable *MGS* was a masterpiece of a game. And in the end, its apocryphal nature proved to be not so oblique after all. It's hinted heavily that *Ghost Babel* represented Raiden's VR indoctrination prior to his mission at the Big Shell. Speaking of which...



### BISHOUNEN BATTLE: METAL GEAR SOLID 2 (2001, PLAYSTATION 2)

"Who's Raiden?" you might wonder, if you've never played *Metal Gear Solid 2*. Those who have, of course, know him as the silver-haired protagonist who ended up replacing long-time *Metal Gear* mainstay Snake for most of the game's duration. Like *MGS2* itself, Raiden tends to be highly polarizing; some regard him as a brilliant character, while others consider him a waste of space.

One thing's for certain: *MGS2* is one of the most audacious sequels ever made. After the success of *Metal Gear Solid*, Hideo Kojima could have made any game he wanted. What he created was a high-concept commentary on the nature of video-games and the future of information control in the digital age. It was a profound, forward-thinking work on many levels; its thesis statements on mimetic mutation and government-level cultural gatekeeping through information flow feel far more ripped-from-the-headlines in 2015 than they did in 2001. Even the game's pre-release media campaign made a statement: Through careful editing, Kojima led players to believe Snake would be the star of the show, only to replace him early on with the aforementioned Raiden, a novice-level replacement for Snake with a whiny attitude and an overly solicitous girlfriend.

What makes *MGS2* especially startling is that it left players feeling like they hadn't really played the "true" game. Players never regained control over Snake after the initial Tanker chapter, seeing him only from an outsider's perspective; yet Snake had the more interesting adventure by far, as we glean through snippets of conversation. Raiden is left in the dark for most of the game, forced by mysterious powers to fight his way through a live attempt to rec-

### ENDLESS RECURSION

One of *Metal Gear's* recurring themes over the years has been its tendency to iterate on itself, sometimes to the point of self-parody...though admittedly the series' ability to flip instantly between somber melodrama and scenery-chewing slapstick makes it difficult to gauge exactly what's meant to be read as parodic.

*Metal Gear's* fondness for recycling first manifested in *Metal Gear Solid*, which at times felt like a note-for-note reprise of *Metal Gear 2*. Given the obscurity and age of the MSX2 sequel — not to mention the eight years that separated them — that could be more than forgiven. But things started to feel a little suspicious when *Metal Gear Solid 2* was revealed as a deliberate simulation of its own predecessor. A clever narrative and metatextual twist, yes, but it also meant that *MGS2* was the second sequel to pattern itself directly after *Metal Gear 2*. Was Kojima making a point, or was he just spinning his wheels? Had he become creatively tapped out?

Happily, *Metal Gear Solid 3* went in its own direction, as have most sequels since. Only *Metal Gear Solid 4* retraced familiar paths, with bosses that played out as mash-ups of foes from older games and an entire act dedicated to revisiting Shadow Moses Island. But you can never really take the self-referentialism out of *Metal Gear*, even the games that blaze their own path are crammed with nods to and riffs on the earlier entries in the series. Honestly, that's probably as much a part of *Metal Gear* as the eponymous mech itself.

reate Snake's mission at Shadow Moses Island. In other words, the nagging sensation of "been there, done that" pricking at the back of your mind throughout the entirety of *MGS2* was deliberate.

Bold as it was, *MGS2* wasn't without its failings. It demanded much of players, and could be hard to love. The outlandish creative control afforded to Kojima for this sequel allowed him to tackle it with

big themes and high concepts, but that same freedom meant that no one kept the director's worst tendencies in check. Aimless conversations about trivial plot points and the woes of minor characters rambled on tiresomely; the much-vaunted enemy A.I. and combat physics felt incidental in a game focused around stealth; and the climactic face-off that brought the entire cast together felt incoherent and contradictory. While brilliant, *MGS2*'s flaws made the entire package difficult for many to swallow, and even the most gorgeous graphics (and protagonist!) yet seen in a videogame couldn't turn things around.

### THE OTHER SNAKE: METAL GEAR SOLID 3 (2004, PLAYSTATION 2)

The sour aftertaste many fans took away from *MGS2* meant its follow-up went comparatively ignored a few years later — quite the tragedy, given that *Metal Gear Solid 3* arguably remains the finest game in the series to date.

*MGS3* also represented a significant departure from previous games in the series.

Rather than advancing the plotline laid down in its predecessors, it leapt back in time 50 years to the 1960s, detailing a pivotal moment in the life of a young Big Boss. The story of *MGS3* centers around a conflict with Big Boss' own mentor and mother figure, legendary WWII hero The Boss, a journey whose ultimate outcome tipped the first domino of his fall into villainy. Despite taking place 30 years before Solid Snake's original adventure, *MGS3* features many series mainstays and connections to other games: a cocky young Ocelot, primitive analogue renditions of Snake's tool set, and even a precursor to Metal Gear itself.

The move away from high-tech complexes and computerized systems liberated both the visual and game design of *MGS3*, which adopted a more "natural" feel. Despite looking and sounding like his cloned son Snake, Big Boss was a more emotive and fallible soldier. At the same time, he commanded a wider array of combat skills; close-quarters combat played a significant role in *MGS3*'s narrative while also greatly expanding the nature of the



game's combat. Big Boss fought his way through a wider variety of environments, conquering jungles, concrete bases, and harsh mountainsides, resulting in more interesting opportunities for stealth and action alike. All of these factors gelled perfectly, resulting in the series' most intense final conflict — not to mention its most heart-wrenching finale.

Equally important to *MGS3*'s success were its phenomenal bosses. Much like the rest of the game, The Boss' Cobra Unit felt not like warmed-over retreads of previous games' boss encounters but rather distinct and well-defined warriors who tested your command over the game's arsenal of tools. Sure, you could just shoot down The Fear,

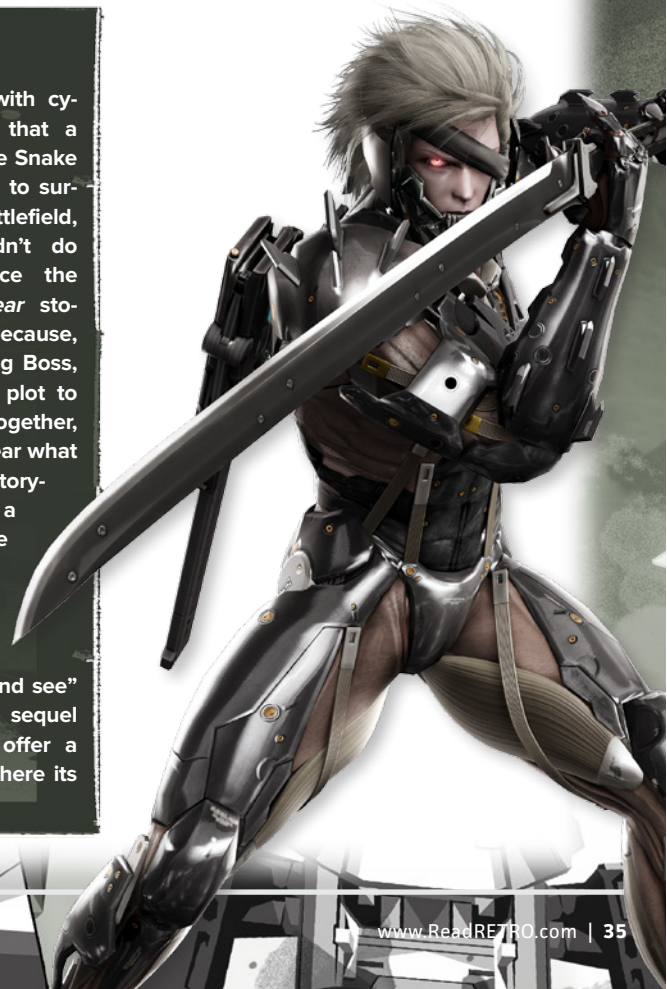
### SIDE EXCURSIONS: METAL GEAR ACID, PORTABLE OPS, AND METAL GEAR RISING: REVENGEANCE

While the line between canon and non-canon can be blurry in *Metal Gear*, drawing a line between essential and inessential stories is even trickier. Of all the potentially apocryphal *Metal Gear* tales to appear over the years, though, the most easily brushed aside is *Metal Gear Acid* and its sequel for PlayStation Portable. A fascinating tactical stealth card game of sorts, *Acid* definitely took the series in new directions. Even more unusual is its plotline, which features the usual baroque twists...and also the revelation that its protagonist, Solid Snake, isn't actually Solid Snake at all. Much to his surprise.

Straddling the line was the third PSP *Metal Gear*, *Portable Ops*. Though similar in many ways to the later *Peace Walker*, *Portable Ops* felt far rougher, with awkward controls and a storyline that basically amounted to treading water. Its only real acknowledgement in any other game is a brusque dismissal in *Peace Walker*, as Kaz Miller glibly mentions how glad he is to "put that nonsense in San Hieronymo" behind him.

Much less spurious, however, was Platinum's *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance*, which followed Raiden's adventures in the post-Snake, post-Patriots era. Positing a

future so lousy with cybernetic science that a normal human like Snake could never hope to survive on the battlefield, *Revengeance* didn't do much to advance the overall *Metal Gear* storyline...probably because, without Snake, Big Boss, and the Patriots' plot to hold everything together, it's not entirely clear what the *Metal Gear* storyline even is. While a brilliant action title in its own right — and definitely not a stealth game — *Revengeance* sits in the "wait and see" category until a sequel comes along to offer a better sense of where its story is headed.





but it was so much more satisfying to use spoiled food that had sat in your inventory too long to poison him. Yeah, you could theoretically take out The End by brute force, but it was way more rewarding to play out the battle as a tense, protracted sniper duel. For every thing *MGS3* did poorly (like the toilsome “survival viewer” that forced you to dress wounds in a separate menu), it did half a dozen things brilliantly. And perhaps most importantly, it created some retroactive context to allow the next game to pull the plot line out of the corner *MGS2*’s ending had painted it into.

### MARCH OF THE NANOMACHINES: METAL GEAR SOLID 4 (2008, PLAYSTATION 4)

“Who are the Patriots?” “The La-li-lu-le-lo!”

The most puzzling exchanges in *Metal Gear Solid 2* and *Metal Gear Solid 3* involved a shadowy organization called the Patriots, which certain characters even more strangely referred to through a babbling recitation of a line of the Japanese syllabary. This, along with many other *Metal Gear* mysteries and conundrums, was explained at last in *Metal Gear Solid 4*, the final chapter of Snake’s saga. And as with so many questions that found their resolution in this adventure, the answer ultimately amounted to “nanomachines.”

If *MGS3* was a freewheeling journey through the blank slate afforded by a trip into the past, *MGS4* was a forward march through narrow confines restricted by several games’ worth of convoluted continuity. It

wrapped up the *Metal Gear* story — Snake’s journey, Big Boss, the Patriots, and more — but the route it took to reach that conclusion offered players much less freedom to improvise than *MGS3* had. And it leaned heavily on two narrative contrivances to put a bow on the saga: nanomachines, whose all-encompassing capabilities eventually came across as “a wizard did it” for the HD generation, and retcons, which took a nuke-and-pave approach to continuity.

Despite playing fast and loose with key plot points that fans had earnestly grappled with for years, *MGS4* nevertheless wasn’t shy about folding the full span of *Metal Gear* history into itself. Key characters like Meryl and Rose returned; the Beauty and the Beast Corps combined elements of nearly every boss from the series’ history; and Snake dropped snarky little in-jokes left and right.

Unfortunately, much as with *MGS2*, *MGS4* often ran afoul of its own excesses. The insane *Metal Gear* vs. *Metal Gear* battle toward the end of the game was as fantastic as the submarine featuring the faces of Big Boss and his clones carved into its side (Mt. Rushmore style) was ludicrous. The involved post-battle exposition explaining each boss’ backstory was surely meant to evoke the solemn confessions of *MGS*’ dying bosses but merely felt contrived and overblown — especially when being relayed by a wacky omniscient narrator who made a pet of a diaper-clad monkey.

For all its frustrations, *MGS4* nevertheless did what it set out to do: Bring the *Metal*

### POINT REVISIONS

As if to prove the axiom that a game is never truly finished, only shipped, nearly every numbered entry of the *Metal Gear* series has been reissued in an improved version, beginning with *Metal Gear Solid*. The *MGS* team made significant tweaks to the game in localizing it for the west, and those were brought back to Japan in the form of *Metal Gear Solid: Integral*. But fans weren’t asked to double-dip with no real benefit, as *Integral* included hundreds of virtual-reality training missions, archival materials, and even a tiny teaser of *Metal Gear Solid 2*. The additions were meaty enough, in fact, that Konami managed to extract them to become a standalone release in the U.S.: *Metal Gear Solid: VR Missions*.

The sequel followed suit, *Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance* boasting a number of new features. Most enticing were the “Snake Tales,” small episodes that followed the progress of “Plisskin” through the Big Shell... though many fans were disappointed to learn that Snake Tales were meant as not-entirely-serious vignettes rather than an alternate story scenario. More fascinating was Konami’s attempt to cash in on the *Tony Hawk Pro Skater* fad of the era by allowing Snake to ollie his way across the Big Shell — not a canonical sequence of events, one assumes.

The most recent, and arguably most important, appended *Metal Gear* release came in the form of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence*. While notable for dredging up the past by including the original MSX *Metal Gear* and *Metal Gear 2* in English for the first time ever, *Subsistence* had much more impact on the franchise by bringing it into the future. After several years and urgent demands by the public, *Subsistence* retooled the in-game camera to break from the fixed, 2D-game-in-3D format of the prior *MGS* games in favor of a more dynamic modern camera that paved the way for the third-person over-the-shoulder camera seen in *Metal Gear Solid 4* and *Ground Zeroes*.

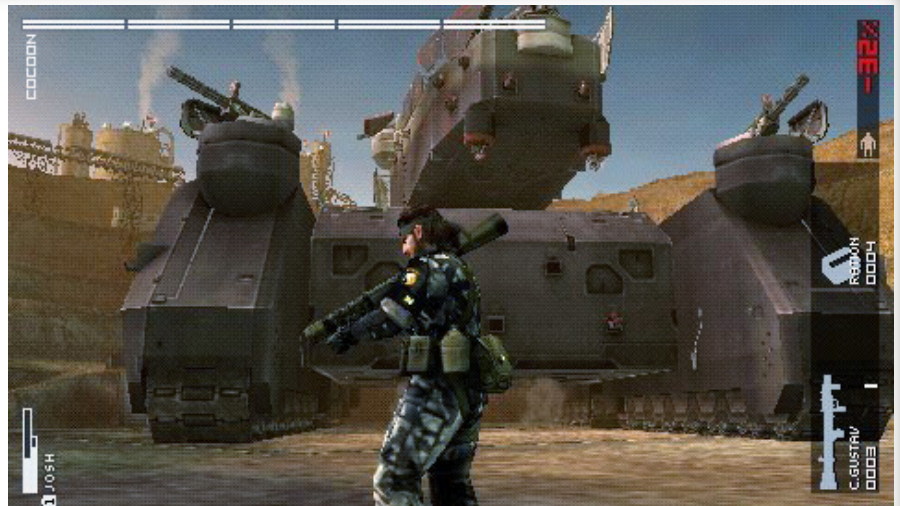
*Gear* series to a close. It used shortcuts and cheats to get there, but in the end, as a wounded and worn-out Snake confronted his dying “father” at The Boss’ grave before retiring to live out his last days in peace... it worked.

**AD-HOC HEROES:  
METAL GEAR SOLID:  
PEACE WALKER  
(2010, PSP)**

The end of Snake’s saga and the overarching *Metal Gear* continuity didn’t mean the end of the series, though. With 30 years in the timeline between *MGS3* and the original *Metal Gear*, there was plenty of room for further prequels and the exploration of Big Boss’ turn toward the dark side.

*Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker* may have been a portable game, but unlike its PSP predecessor *Portable Ops*, it felt in every way like a legitimate *Metal Gear* game. And it felt like something more, too. It built heavily on the new shooting mechanics pioneered by *MGS4* while looking outside the franchise for inspiration more overtly than any other *Metal Gear* game. Kojima landed on *Monster Hunter*, which at the time was the hottest game in Japan, almost singlehandedly making the PSP a smash success overseas.

Strange as the concept of a *Monster Hunter*/*Metal Gear* hybrid may sound, it works. At heart, *Peace Walker* played every bit like a *Metal Gear* game, with ample stealth and strong rewards for taking the stealthy, non-lethal approach to combat. But it also al-

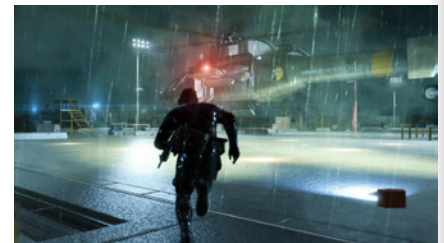


lowed for cooperative play, which proved to be nearly a necessity for the massive boss battles. *Peace Walker*’s story played out in bite-sized missions, with progress (and captured foes in particular) feeding into Big Boss’ Outer Heaven precursor, the offshore fortress Mother Base. More than a minigame, the base-building mechanic became an end in itself.

As usual for *Metal Gear*, *Peace Walker* included some bizarre design choices. The strangest? The story’s true ending could only be accessed by completing a number of unintuitive post-game tasks. Despite these quirks, *Peace Walker* made a welcome contrast to the highly linear and largely passive *MGS4*. In fact, *Peace Walker* barely had any story to speak of, presenting its tale through quick animated cutscenes and largely foregoing compulsory radio exposition in favor of optional cassette-based mission briefing recordings. Don’t be fooled by its small-screen format; *Peace Walker* is a key entry in the *Metal Gear* timeline, and more than any other game in the series helped set the tone of both narrative and play style for the upcoming *The Phantom Pain*.

**PAZ AMERICANA:  
METAL GEAR SOLID V:  
GROUND ZEROES  
(PS4/PS3/XBOX  
ONE/XBOX 360, 2014)**

Last year’s *Ground Zeroes* was presented as a prologue to *The Phantom Pain*, but it might be more accurate to say it’s the epilogue to *Peace Walker*. While it runs on a sleek new engine and hints at open-world play to come in the next *Metal Gear* chapter,



its story revolves entirely around characters and situations introduced in *Peace Walker*.

A brief sampling of the new play mechanics in store for *The Phantom Pain*, *Ground Zeroes* sends an aging Big Boss into a military base to rescue his *Peace Walker* allies, Paz and Chico. The ultimate outcome of this mission sets the stage for *The Phantom Pain*, going about its task somewhat controversially thanks to the story’s terrible treatment of Paz.

Touchy as some of *Ground Zeroes*’ narrative choices may be, there’s no doubt that it plays better than any previous *Metal Gear*; thanks to some smart refinements and interface tweaks, sneaking about feels more fluid and intuitive than ever. Despite the game’s move to an open-world design approach, the act of laying low and out of sight doesn’t feel compromised. Furthermore, the chaos that ensues if you allow Big Boss to be discovered feels more dynamic and interestingly unpredictable than ever before.

It’s a long way from that top-down MSX game all those years ago, but it still feels unquestionably like *Metal Gear* — and that’s a feeling that many a fan has come to know and love. 🍷



# Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain

What to expect from the fifth (and final) main installment of the *MGS* saga.

■ DEVELOPER: Kojima Productions ■ PUBLISHER: Konami ■ PLATFORMS: PS3, Xbox 360, PS4, Xbox One, PC ■ RELEASE DATE: 09.01.15 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: M

**AFTER THE APPETIZER** that was *Ground Zeroes*, fans have been eagerly awaiting the main course in the highly anticipated *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*. We don't have too much longer to wait with the title making a worldwide release on September 1st. Glory be to Kojima!

Continuing the story of Big Boss' downfall and transformation into "Venom Snake," *The Phantom Pain* sees our protagonist make his way into Afghanistan and Africa during the Soviet War in hopes of exacting revenge against those responsible for destroying his group, the Militaires Sans Frontières. After waking up from a nine-year coma, he forms a new group called the

Diamond Dogs. Snake also runs into his old rival Ocelot and a unit of warriors looking for a cause. This all leads him to uncovering a plot to develop a weapon that supposedly exceeds the destructive capability of Metal Gear.

When it comes to portraying Snake, the switch from David Hayter to renowned actor Keifer Sutherland had some fans skeptical, and still does to a certain degree. While no one can truly replace Hayter, leaning on Sutherland's experience and expertise as an actor lends itself well to creating a more believable character. Besides, *The Phantom Pain* supposedly has a lot less dialogue from Snake when compared to past entries in an effort to make the player feel more connected, so it's likely that the naysayers will have little to complain about anyway.

*The Phantom Pain* makes apparent just how gorgeous a *Metal Gear* game can look on current hardware. When seeing a mission for the first time, it's hard not to simply soak in the gorgeous environment. There's even a real-time day/night cycle (Snake can pass time quickly with his cigar) and differ-

ent weather patterns, such as sandstorms and rain, can affect visibility.

What's probably most impressive, however, are the character models. The newly developed Fox Engine really gets to flex its muscle here, with amazingly realistic textures and animations that truly breathe life into each person, especially Snake. Among videogames, only the *Uncharted* series has come close to attaining this level of detail in facial expressions and movements.

Then there's the open-world aspect. Hideo Kojima describes past *Metal Gear Solid* games as having "set [the player] on one rail to get from point A to point B, with a certain amount of freedom between." *The Phantom Pain* will stretch those limits further than ever, offering multiple ways to tackle your objectives.

Even the ways you dispatch enemies are varied. One example from a gameplay demo has Snake use an item called the Active Decoy, which creates a noisy balloon replica of the hero. The traditional use of this is to simply create a situation where



you can easily flank your enemy, but in this particular case, the presenter aimed to dispatch a soldier overlooking a cliff ledge. Throwing the decoy right at the enemy's feet caused the sudden, explosive inflation to knock him right off, making short work of that obstacle in hilarious fashion.

As we sampled in *Ground Zeroes*, a base can be infiltrated from any angle and with any tools you have at your disposal. While starting from a side that appears to offer the least resistance might seem obvious, the objective marker may indicate a way in that's riskier, but more rewarding. Collecting supplies and soldiers for your Mother Base is important to keep in mind when thinking of the big picture.

Likewise, it's also important to remember the way you complete missions, especially when making return trips to the same base. Enemy AI is considerably improved. If you, for example, were to dispatch soldiers with headshots for the most part the first time through, the next time you return their replacements may wear helmets, or just be more heavily armored all around. The world is always changing depending on how you interact with it. Even traveling between missions will see the day-and-night cycle taken into effect, determining conditions when you start.

Another interesting aspect is the fact that missions can be played in any order. This may sound strange for your typical *Metal Gear Solid* fan, especially since the series is known for having linear stories. Despite the looser, more open design, Kojima assures that players will still "understand the encompassing message by the end." How or even if that all comes together is likely to remain unclear until *The Phantom Pain* releases, but I'll have faith that it will for now.

Considering the fact that the open world of *The Phantom Pain* will be 200 times (!) larger than *Ground Zeroes*, an easy means of traversal is definitely called for. Luckily, cars, tanks, and even a horse are available to Snake. These, as well as several other items (including costumes) can be summoned or spirited away with just a quick signal to Mother Base.

Speaking of which, Mother Base acts as your base of operations between missions. Any vehicles and soldiers spirited away via the Fulton Recovery System (a rapid balloon airlift) go straight here for recruitment and staffing. There's a good amount of base-building involved with the ability to customize everything from weapons to cosmetic appearance. After a certain point in the game

you'll be able to join the online community and interact with other players' Mother Bases, either competitively or cooperatively.

An example of this was given in another gameplay demo where a player infiltrated an opponent's base. The base was outfitted with some advanced defenses, namely a drone, gun cameras, and infrared sensors. Anything that's not bolted down can be airlifted back to your base. The cooperative aspect is still unclear, but a good guess would be that players can team up to infiltrate and defend bases.

Combat is a major part of any *Metal Gear* game, and *The Phantom Pain* is no different. Close-quarter combat skills can now better defend against attacks from behind. Binoculars can scout enemy forces from afar and tag them for a strategic attack. Helicopter air support can be called in when situations get really intense. Also, Snake's artificial arm comes equipped with a tazer that leaves nearby soldiers dazed.

What's most intriguing, though, is the "Buddy System." Special units can be re-

cruited and used in unique ways to make life easier for Snake. So far we've seen DD the wolf and Quiet, a young woman unable to speak, but with surreal powers and exceptional sniping ability. She can be used for simple tasks, like scouting ahead to tag enemies, or providing support with her trusty sniper rifle. Quiet can even take down helicopters by shooting grenades Snake chucks into her line of sight.

Looking at the larger picture, this will be Kojima's last *Metal Gear* game, and will essentially close out the saga. While we've heard the likes of this from him before, this time it seems to be for real. If it is, it will be intriguing to see what else the legendary developer has in store, whether it be a totally new IP or perhaps the return of something old (another *Snatcher*, please). With the industry favoring smaller, lower-budget titles as of late, this isn't too much of a surprise. I just hope *The Phantom Pain* lives up to the hype so that the franchise can be put to rest, at least for the foreseeable future, with a memorable experience that *Metal Gear* fans old and new will appreciate. ♣  
—David Giltinan





# Metal Gear Online

Here's what you need to know before heading online with the new *Metal Gear*.

■ DEVELOPER: Kojima Productions Los Angeles ■ PUBLISHER: Konami ■ RELEASE DATE: 09.01.15 ■ PLAYERS: 1–16 players ■ ESRB: M

**WITH THE RELEASE** of *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*, players will also be getting what is now the third iteration of *Metal Gear Online*. Considering that this substantial addition might be unfamiliar to some, it's best to look back on the game's past to get an idea, as well as an appreciation, for what is to come in this exciting multiplayer mode.

Originally a part of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence*, the first *Metal Gear Online* consisted of five different game modes with up to eight players competing against each other. Everyone would assume the role of a soldier representing either the GRU or KGB in deathmatch, capture the flag, and other match types. Players that earned the highest score could then play as one of the main campaign's major characters, such as Major Raikov on the GRU side. This proved to be a very popular mechanic, even well after official servers were shut down in 2007, at which point a fan community took it upon themselves to recreate the experience through server emulation.

Despite its popularity with fans, *Metal Gear Online* wouldn't see major enhancements until the release of *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*. This version of *Metal Gear Online*, dubbed *MGO2*, allowed up to 16 players and provided the ability to create your own characters, specifying name, gender, race, and voice. There were also a lot more game modes to choose from that fit either solo or team combat. These included the usual deathmatch and capture the flag matches, along with the unique Bomb Mission, which saw an attacking team trying to destroy a designated area while the other team defends, and Race Mission, where teams were tasked with delivering a specific target to checkpoints.

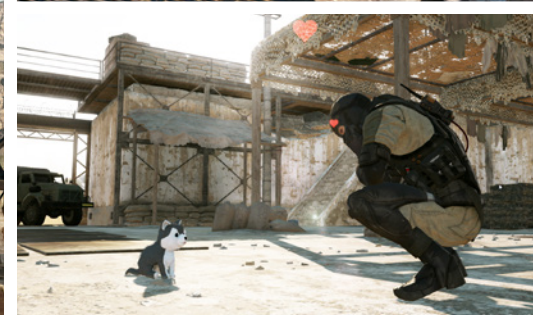
This enhanced version of *Metal Gear Online* was maintained for four years before Konami announced its closure in summer 2012. This left fans wondering if it would ever make a return, especially after the announcement of *Metal Gear Solid V* omitted any mention of the mode. A full year after

*MGO2* went down, though, Konami announced that the multiplayer mode would indeed make a comeback.

Thanks to the power of the recently developed Fox Engine, the new *Metal Gear Online (MGO3)* will have large maps with players using various forms of transportation to navigate the terrain. Riding around in the desert on horseback ought to make fans of *Red Dead Redemption's* multiplayer feel right at home, except for the fact that *RDR* didn't have jeeps and tanks thrown into the mix. Hideo Kojima himself described *MGO3* in one word: "vast." Yeah, it certainly sounds like it!

Matches can be had with 12 (6v6) or 16 (8v8) players to keep things balanced and fair. You'll choose equipment beforehand to gain a tactical advantage, such as desert camouflage in a desert landscape. More equipment and cosmetic items can be unlocked through extended play.





New weapons and items will be accessible this time round, including a plush puppy doll that distracts enemies in a similar fashion as the magazine in past entries. There's also a turret which uses Fulton balloons as ammo. These balloons will whisk players out of the match unless their teammates shoot them down first. Although not much has been revealed as of this writing, it's known that another item can be used to teleport a character out of danger. Aesthetically, this looks similar to what we've seen of Quiet's ability in the campaign's buddy system.

The tagging system that's used in the solo game will be used here also. This makes it important for players to assume certain roles and work well together in order to be victorious. A scout will be a valuable first point of attack to ensure everyone else has their targets, lining up snipers to flank, infiltrating with the CQC specialists, and keeping tabs on everyone's whereabouts. The latter will be especially important with weather changes also coming into play, not to mention the low visibility that accompanies matches during nighttime.

Tagging enemies can also be accomplished with a new tag grenade that allows your teammates to see enemies that it reaches through walls. This could potentially be a great tactic to use near the beginning of a

match as opposing players are more likely to be bunched up.

Combat, as always, is at the heart of *Metal Gear Online*, and CQC tactics are no different. You can sneak up on unaware enemies and grab them, followed by a chokeout, slam, or interrogation. Toss an unwilling hostage "selfie" in for extra embarrassment. Hand-to-hand combat can also knock out opponents.

For something a little deadlier and more imposing, mechs can also be utilized in *MGO3*. Equipped with a machine gun and a devastating big-boot melee that would make a wrestler jealous, these things can clear out an opposing squad easily if used properly. On the flip side, you're still exposed from behind when manning a mech, and an enemy could just as easily get the drop on you and steal the death-dealing machine for their own use if you're not careful.

Of course, in classic *Metal Gear* fashion, cardboard boxes can be used for stealth purposes. Those of you who love to turtle will get a kick out of using this to get the jump on unsuspecting opponents.

Many of the classic game modes look like they will be making a return. The latest trailer showing off *Metal Gear Online* has a team infiltrating a base to obtain an item while the defend-

ing team tries to stop them. Deathmatch is certain to come back also, but I wonder if the more unique modes will also be present, or perhaps replaced by something entirely new.

Main characters will also be making a return, with Snake and Ocelot revealed so far. These characters will bring a special set of unique skills, such as Ocelot's expert gunplay. It's unclear how you'll come to play as these characters though, so all I can do is guess that it will work in the same manner as *MGO2*, wherein the player with the highest score in the previous match won the privilege.

So far, it looks like *Metal Gear Online* is primed and ready to be the ultimate experience for folks seeking further action beyond *The Phantom Pain's* campaign. With the new console hardware to draw upon, the possibilities have never seemed so endless, and Kojima and company have certainly learned a lot from creating the previous iterations of *MGO*. Considering that this is reportedly Kojima's final *Metal Gear* game, you can trust it'll be jam-packed with all the badass weapons, silly items, and Kojima charm that fans demand.

*Metal Gear Online* will be available when *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* is released on September 1st. ♣  
—David Giltinan

# Hitman

Fans of the franchise are in for an all-new take on *Hitman*.

■ DEVELOPER: Io-interactive ■ PUBLISHER: Square Enix ■ PLATFORMS: PS4, Xbox One, PC ■ RELEASE DATE: 12.08.15 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: M

AFTER FIVE RELEASES, you would imagine a series like *Hitman* would have grown stale. Instead, each entry only builds on baldheaded badass Agent 47's already-significant capabilities, adding yet more ways to eliminate his targets. Now with a sixth game releasing later this year, one has to wonder if the franchise has run its course, or if Io-Interactive has something special up its sleeve. Based on its reveal at E3 2015, you can probably guess that it's looking like the latter.

First off, sticking with the simple title of *Hitman* is a good indication of what we should expect this time around. It's a new game for a new console generation, yet it also keeps the traditional spirit of the stealth genre alive. Promotional pieces speak of entering the "world of assassination," which in part refers to a heavy new emphasis on building an online community.

Io-Interactive is already breaking new ground by making *Hitman* a digital-first release. This is likely due to the developer's desire to build an online community inside the world of *Hitman* as players are tasked

with taking on contracts that are more dynamic than ever before. It's an intriguing break from the mold of traditional single-player experiences that present a story with a beginning, middle, and end, and nothing more. Here, we get a fresh take that should prove to be exciting, no matter if you're a longtime franchise fan or not.

There will even be short-term contracts available only briefly. Once the target's gone they're gone for good, so you'd best ensure their exit is by your hand. *Destiny* players will feel at home here, as this sounds similar enough to that game's weekly *House of Wolves* bounties. Except this is a *Hitman* game where each level is a playground with multiple ways to eliminate your marks.

*Hitman: Absolution* debuted the popular Contracts mode, which gets a revamp here. You'll still be able to create your own unique scenarios by choosing who's to be killed and how (so long as you can pull it off yourself) then share that challenge online for the Internet to take a crack at. The big difference this time out is that this new

entry returns the series to its more open and sprawling level designs, which should only prove to benefit the creativity facilitated by this mode. *Absolution's* levels were more linear, and while that's okay for your standard single-player campaign, it simply won't do in this new venture.

Now, this wouldn't be a *Hitman* game without the many ways to fulfill a contract. Each time you discover new methods of elimination, more of Agent 47's arsenal unlocks to provide even more options when out in the field. No matter if you're more comfortable setting up booby traps, getting up close and personal with fiber wire, or taking your target out from a distance with a well-timed sniper shot, each kill is a work of art with the given stage acting as the bloody canvas.

Luckily, we won't have to wait too long before diving into the new *Hitman*, as it drops first as a digital download this December for PS4, Xbox One, and PC. I hope to see you all there showing the world your own brand of assassination. Welcome back, agents. 🍷  
—David Giltinan





# SPLINTER CELL RETROSPECTIVE

BY DAVID GILTINAN

TAKE A LOOK BACK AT THE EXPLOITS, AND INFLUENCE OF, SAM FISHER.

It's difficult to avoid comparing *Splinter Cell* directly to the *Metal Gear Solid* series. Both are classified as being in the stealth-action genre, and feature protagonists who are gruff, cool secret agents. The similarities pretty much end there, however, as both properties sport vastly different gameplay styles and characters.

Whereas *Metal Gear* tends to be more "out there" with its plot, the *Splinter Cell* games have always been grounded in reality, with situations that could just as easily make the evening news on CNN. That's not to say *Splinter Cell* was better, just a different taste from the more "gamey" stories and characters typically found in other titles. It's a great mix of being a spy thriller, political drama, and action flick all rolled up into a videogame experience.

The original *Splinter Cell*, released in 2002, was the start of what would become one of Ubisoft's marquee franchises for years to come. Right off the bat, critics and gamers were impressed by the lighting engine's dynamic shadows. Darkness played a major role in gameplay, as sneaking around wasn't so much about getting behind a wall, but rather

being one with the shadows to either sneak past enemies or pounce on them without warning. A light meter helped determine how concealed you were from enemies' vision.

To help combat the lack of light himself, series hero Sam Fisher sported what would become his patented trifocal goggles. These allowed him to see in the dark using night vision, or to pick up heat signatures with thermal vision. Although such a device was initially argued against by author Tom Clancy due to it not really existing, the game's developers convinced him that it was easier to implement from a gameplay standpoint instead of having to switch back and forth between two different pairs of goggles. The triangular green dots they emitted also served as a great signature image for the franchise.

Even though brute force was certainly an option, the *Splinter Cell* series has always heavily emphasized the importance of using stealth instead. It can even help with obtaining information, especially with the ability to interrogate enemies that Fisher grabs from behind. Firearms are at your disposal, namely a silenced pistol and assault rifle, but their

use should be minimized if going the quiet route. Non-lethal takedowns with devices such as ring airfoil projectiles, gas grenades, and the ever-useful sticky shockers are almost always preferred.

Sam Fisher is not only skilled, he's also surprisingly agile. Climbing up and shimmying along ledges is no problem for him, as well as hanging off overhead pipes. One of his most impressive moves is the grossly underutilized split jump. If in a narrow hallway, Fisher can wall jump then use his legs as leverage to maintain a high vantage point. It's a cool way to pick someone off or get the drop on an unsuspecting soldier. It's just too bad the game (and the series as a whole) doesn't put you in nearly enough situations where this tactic is useful.

Some interesting changes made in the sequel *Pandora Tomorrow* remain completely unique to it. One of the more glaring differences is the voice of Third Echelon boss Irving Lambert being portrayed by Mr. Allstate Insurance himself, Dennis Haysbert. While the role was "in good hands" with Haysbert, there's no replacing original actor Don Jordan. This would be the only time Lambert was not voiced by him.



There was also the SWAT turn, which was a maneuver to get from one side of a doorway to another quickly and quietly. While it's a visually cool move, it served very little purpose (not unlike the split jump), and ended up being dropped in subsequent titles.

Another temporary change was the pistol having a laser attached to it for more accurate fire. There wasn't much use for it, especially when a reticle on the screen pretty much performs the same function. This was switched out in favor of the much more useful Optically Channeled Potentiator, a secondary fire that disrupted lights and electronic devices (cameras, security lasers) for a short time.

*Pandora Tomorrow* was the first in the series to introduce multiplayer in the form of the popular Spies vs. Mercenaries mode. In it, spies were tasked with obtaining the ND133 (aka "Pox Box") and bringing it back to a secure location. The mercenaries, who are heavily armored and outgun the spies, would protect the Pox Box. It was a critically acclaimed part of the game, but unfortunately didn't quite catch on as well as Ubisoft hoped. Luckily, improvements and additions were made from then on that made multiplayer feel as natural and complete as the single-player campaign.

This leads into what *Splinter Cell* fans (myself included) consider to be the strongest entry in the franchise, *Chaos Theory*. It was at this point that Ubisoft had a strong grasp on what did and didn't work in the past two entries, resulting in the third title being the zenith of the series' stealth-action gameplay, as well as (in my opinion) the genre as a whole. Graphics got a bump up in quality, including fine details such as Fisher getting wet when it rains. Multiplayer was also improved, and a new co-op mode became a fan favorite.

The option of taking enemies out lethally and non-lethally was also a considerable change, giving you the option to exercise your "Fifth Freedom" privilege more easily. The knife, which can help interrogate enemies, has multiple uses, namely piercing generator gas tanks and cutting fabric to easily sneak into a tent.

Next up was *Double Agent*, which is where the series started to make Sam Fisher feel more human. Sam comes to believe his daughter was killed in a drunk driving accident, which leads into him agreeing to perform his most dangerous mission yet: Infiltrate a terrorist organization as a double agent and take them down from the inside. This presented some intriguing changes, particularly the choice of objectives that will raise your standing with either the NSA or the terrorists. Get exposed and it's game over.

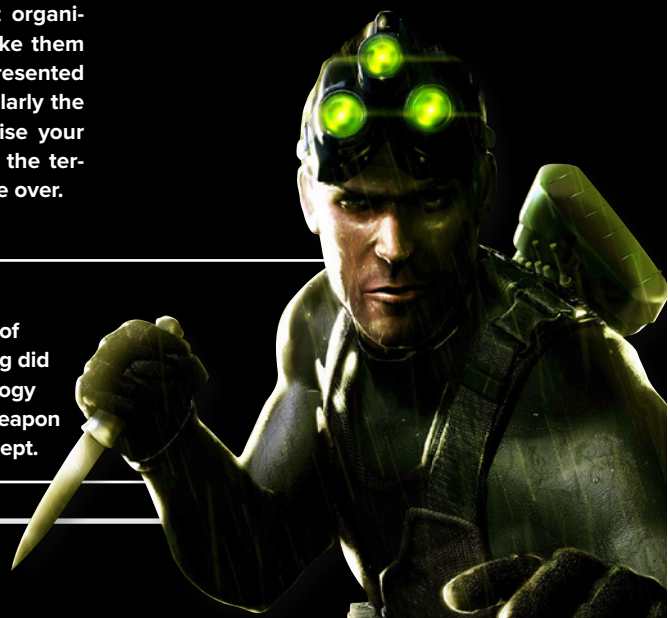
The shocking end to *Double Agent* led into the fifth entry, *Splinter Cell: Conviction*, in which Sam has now gone rogue. Free from the constraints of the NSA and Third Echelon, Fisher goes on a personal mission to find out the truth behind his daughter's death. Gameplay put more of an emphasis on action, with Sam becoming more violent and given the added ability to mark and execute multiple targets at once. While this was a fun new mechanic, hardcore *Splinter Cell* fans felt like the series was getting away from its original stealth roots.

*Splinter Cell: Blacklist* attempted to make both stealth and action fans happy by introducing different play styles: Assault, Ghost, and Panther. Fans were happy to see Spies vs. Mercenaries make a return, but the switch from Michael Ironside's iconic performance to the more youthful Eric Johnson (for purposes of motion capture) left some with a sour taste, especially because of the story's continuation from *Conviction*.

What's in store for Sam Fisher next? My hope is that if Ubisoft continues to ignore original performer Michael Ironside, it'll just reboot the series. A return to the more hardcore stealth roots would also be appreciated, although unlikely because of the wider mass appeal of faster-paced action titles. There's a strong parallel between how *Splinter Cell's* evolved and the way survival horror games have. Hopefully, if *Splinter Cell* does make it to current-gen consoles, it won't make the mistake of ignoring the true fans who made it so popular to begin with. 🦋

### SEEING THE FUTURE?

Going back to Tom Clancy's original complaint, just two years after the release of *Splinter Cell* goggles that could switch between thermal and intensified imaging did come into existence. Made by American global aerospace and defense technology company Northrop Grumman, the device was called the Fused Multispectral Weapon Sight. Who knows? Perhaps the fictional Third Echelon played a part in its concept.





# Metal Gear Solid

Solid Snake's return made for one of PlayStation's finest games.

■ DEVELOPER: KCEJ ■ PUBLISHER: Konami ■ PLATFORMS: PS1 ■ RELEASE DATE: 10.21.98 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: M

**KONAMI DID SOME SERIOUS WORK** on the original PlayStation, taking familiar franchises and giving them startling new life. You'd think that 1997's *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* was proof enough, but then the company came out of left field with Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid* — a game that took the original premise of the NES release and escalated it to new heights, turning Solid Snake into the gaming icon that we truly deserved.

Unless you've been living under a rock (or in this case, a box...), you should know *MGS'* story can go all over the place, but there's no doubt it's on the right path, especially when it comes to the epic encounters with its many boss characters. Each one represents something unique, giving you the chance to really stretch Snake's sneaking and combat skills to the maximum. If a tricky battle with Psycho Mantis doesn't get the job done (he reads your PS1 memory card and comments on other game saves, and his ultimate weakness is similarly outside-the-box), then the dramatic run-in with Sniper Wolf certainly will.

However, the experience as a whole is what makes *Metal Gear Solid* such a memorable affair. From the onset, the behavior of the patrolling guards sets the tone in itself, as they'll suspiciously follow footprints and act accordingly if Snake isn't quick enough to take them down. Fortunately, the game provides ample opportunity to test your

stealth skills. *MGS* redefined how "sneaking around" played out, and although it was a startling shakeup from the action games that dominated the era, there's no question it still works extremely well. Some may get frustrated at first, but after a little practice it quickly proves rewarding.

Likewise, the story sets the stage for the *Metal Gear* universe as we know it, and despite being quirky in some places (and a little over-the-top by the time the finale rolls around), Kojima proves that he's a very capable storyteller — and events would only get more motivating as the sequels came along (especially *MGS3: Snake Eater*, another true classic).

For a 1998 PlayStation release, *Metal Gear Solid* looks fantastic. The setting of Shadow Moses Island has plenty of character in itself, between fresh snow falling on the ground (thus the problem with footprints) and the interior of the base you're invading. The animations are superb (for '98 standards), and the character design quite elegant, especially the boss characters. The first time you face off against Cyborg Ninja is quite a sight indeed.

The game set a standard for voice acting as well. Each line is read with conviction, no matter how strange the written dialogue can be (again, a Kojima product), and your operator's anguished cry of "SNAAAAAKE!" upon your death never fails to prompt a re-

try. Kudos to the music, too, which for my money is the best in the series to date, even considering *Snake Eater*.

While there's very little to complain about in regard to *Metal Gear Solid* itself, the fact that this classic title hasn't been revisited in quite a few years is a shame. True, Silicon Knights gave it superb treatment with the GameCube rerelease *The Twin Snakes*, but outside of that we haven't seen any sign of a high-definition remaster, unlike other games in the *Metal Gear* series. And that's sad, because it prevents current players from really seeing where the series took off. Maybe we'll get it one day.

For now, if you really want to see where *Metal Gear Solid* came from, your best bet is to download it through the PlayStation Network. It's affordable and offers the full experience that you've come to expect out of a game starring Solid Snake. It's got a bit of a learning curve, and some parts are harder to swallow than others (speaking mainly of the torture sequence and Psycho Mantis), but overall it offers a memorable experience that also set the stage for the series of sequels that followed — including the forthcoming *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*. Quite simply, there's no sneaking around the fact that Kojima truly worked his magic here, and you shouldn't miss it. ♾️ —Robert Workman

OUR RATING: ♥♥♥♥♥



# Rambo: First Blood Part II

There's a fine line between "fun" and "frustrating."

DEVELOPER: Platinum Productions PUBLISHER: Ocean Software PLATFORMS: Commodore 64, Amstrad CPC, ZX Spectrum RELEASE DATE: 1985 PLAYERS: Single-player ESRB: NA

*RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD PART II* is the kind of game that makes me grateful we live in 2015 instead of 1985. Not because it's bad — far from it — but because incendiary, temper-baiting hooks of incredible difficulty are less prevalent these days. I definitely get a sense of accomplishment playing it, but not so much enjoyment.

As I accomplished minor objectives (like finding new weapons) as well as bigger, game-completing ones (like rescuing POWs and finding the helicopter) I was irked by endlessly respawning enemies and scenery that constantly snagged the hero. And I quickly found that simply completing a mission wasn't as compelling as perfecting it. Even if I got 90% of the way through on a particular go-round, I'd still grit my teeth and respawn again, because it was just bad luck that I died that one time, and dammit — this time I'd do it perfectly. So I try again, and my rage lessens as the awesome chiptunes pump through the speakers, but as I learn all the twists and

turns, I can disappointingly complete the entire adventure in well under five minutes. Despite the brevity and frustration, a sense of accomplishment supersedes my rage. It's like a little pixelated drug.

Gameplay-wise *Rambo* does a few things different from the other top-down shooters of the era, such as *Commando* and *Ikari Warriors*. For instance, you start out with a variety of weapons, all with unlimited ammo. But what really sets it apart are the elements that serve as early precursors to stealth titles. If you go in rocking your rocket launcher or 'nades, you attract the attention of every bad guy around. But if you use the knife, which is a little more difficult, you get less grief. It's an interesting little mechanic, but due to the game's brief playtime, there aren't many ways to enjoy it. Still, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* is rewarding and addictive, even if it's not especially fun. 🍷 —Aaron Dennis-Jackson

OUR RATING: ❤️❤️❤️❤️

# Metal Gear

Solid Snake's legend begins in an inventive stealth classic.

DEVELOPER: Konami PUBLISHER: Ultra PLATFORMS: NES RELEASE DATE: 07.07.87 PLAYERS: Single-player ESRB: NA

BACK WHEN EVERYONE ELSE was trying to make an action game along the lines of *Contra*, Hideo Kojima and Konami produced the stellar classic *Metal Gear*, a game that takes the stealth ball and really runs with it. While its production values may be questionable today (c'mon, it's almost 28 years old), there's no doubt that it remains as playable as it's ever been, thanks to superb controls and the sheer thought that you can take down an entire compound as a one-man army.

The gameplay is the thing, as you sneak around the jungle fortress of Outer Heaven while taking out guards and eventually coming face-to-face with the enemies in charge. You could take the action approach, but the game's built more to take advantage of Snake's sneaking capabilities, since he is the master of

stealth and all. The more you use these, the more you get out of the game — just like its sequels in the *Metal Gear Solid* franchise.

*Metal Gear's* visuals still have an innocuous charm about them, especially as you move across levels and take out guards who, for the lack of a better term, "feel asleep!" Sure, the dialogue could use some work, but it's delightful in its own way as well, with the "Kojima touch" perfectly intact. Besides, anyone can talk like a gun-toting lunatic — give me the slick style of Solid Snake any day.

With its innovative gameplay mechanics, memorable scenes, and distinct charm, this is easily one of the best games to add to your NES library, even if you aren't



necessarily used to how stealth titles play. Hey, you have to start somewhere — so why not with Snake? (And I don't mean *Snake's Revenge...*). 🍷 —Robert Workman

OUR RATING: ❤️❤️❤️❤️



# Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory

A decade later, *Chaos Theory* is still Sam Fisher's best outing.

■ DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal ■ PUBLISHER: Ubisoft ■ PLATFORMS: PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC  
 ■ RELEASE DATE: 03.28.05 ■ PLAYERS: 1-4 players ■ ESRB: M

IN A LOT OF WAYS, *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* and *Hitman: Blood Money* are very similar. Hardcore fans consider both games the best in their series, both introduce many gameplay elements that redefine their franchises, and both boast some seriously kickass soundtracks. While *Chaos Theory* takes you down a more linear path, it's still just as good as *Blood Money*.

You resume the role of Third Echelon special agent Sam Fisher, taking orders from boss Irving Lambert for the sake of keeping America safe. Fisher possesses "Fifth Freedom" privilege, meaning murder is acceptable as long as he accomplishes his missions. But as tensions rise and war seems imminent, tact is not only preferred but mandatory, with restrictions on fatalities and alarms raised.

The *Splinter Cell* series has always done a nice job putting you in scenarios that feel like they could easily happen in the real world. This is thanks in large part to the varied and interesting levels you'll navigate through, including a bank in Panama, an office building

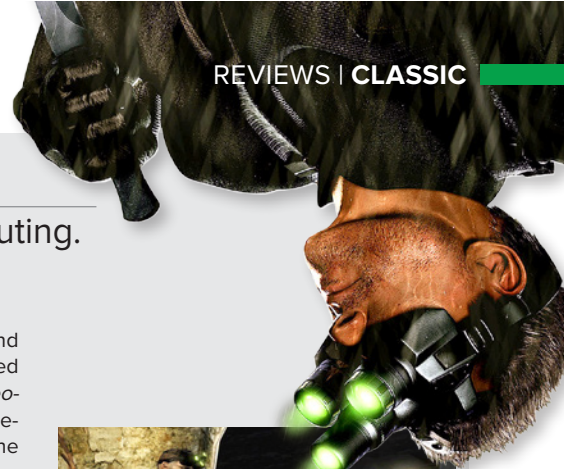
in New York (during a blackout, no less), and a bathhouse in Japan. All the politically-fueled plot turns that occur throughout *Chaos Theory* do a nice job of keeping you hooked, especially with Fisher acting as the man behind the curtain trying to prevent World War III.

AI is improved from previous entries, with enemies reacting to more anomalies such as broken lights and open doors. If in a firefight, they will even take cover and shoot at your last known position, forcing you to take a tactical approach to flanking them.

Multiplayer gets a punch, adding more tools in the popular competitive Spy vs. Mercenary mode, and a new co-op mode asks a couple of spies to work together to complete a unique storyline separate from the main campaign.

As far as pure, classic stealth gameplay goes, *Chaos Theory* is the best that the *Splinter Cell* series has to offer. Don't let this one slip into the shadows. 🍷 —David Giltinan

OUR RATING: ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️



## Syphon Filter

A balanced blend of action and stealth leads to pure fun.

■ DEVELOPER: Eidetic ■ PUBLISHER: SCEA ■ PLATFORMS: PS1 ■ RELEASE DATE: 01.31.99 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: T

NOT CONTENT on letting Konami and *Metal Gear Solid* hog the PlayStation stealth spotlight, Sony struck back just under a year later with Eidetic's *Syphon Filter*. Like *MGS*, *Syphon Filter* offers a fine balance between action and stealth, as you sneak up on enemies or take them out with a certain amount of gunplay. But there are some differences that make Sony's release stand out from Konami's dominant sneaker — and that's a good thing.

Playing as special agent Gabe Logan, you're given a certain number of missions to complete across each level, which you can tackle with both action and stealth approaches. It's that combination of genres that really make *Syphon Filter* feel a little more complete than most action games from that year, and there's something there to appreciate even today. Eidetic did a good job with the controls, so that the game never feels like a chore but still presents a challenge. The fact that you get access to weapons never hurts either — especially the effective

sniper rifle. It's perfect for picking off enemies from afar.

Where *Syphon Filter* falls behind *Metal Gear Solid* is with its visuals. Not that the graphics are disappointing, as the level design and animation hold their own, but it does have problems with low-res lighting. It makes you wonder just how an HD treatment of this game would fare — and since Sony's been fond of them over the years, maybe it's time to give *Syphon Filter* a sophisticated makeover.

Don't let the slightly subdued visuals throw you off, though. *Syphon Filter* remains a terrific stealth-action experience that's worth digging into again, even if you've mastered both it and its sequels. It's a good start to an underappreciated series, and well worth checking out again — especially via PSN on PS3 or PS Vita, where it's available for a bargain price. Now that's a sneaky way to add it to your collection! 🍷 —Robert Workman

OUR RATING: ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️

# Thief: The Dark Project

This pure stealth experience helped define the genre.

■ **DEVELOPER:** Looking Glass Studios ■ **PUBLISHER:** Eidos ■ **PLATFORMS:** PC  
 ■ **RELEASE DATE:** 11.30.98 ■ **PLAYERS:** Single-player ■ **ESRB:** M

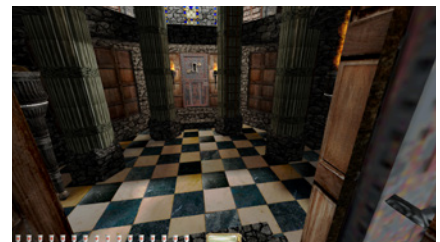
**IN THE BUSINESS OF REVIEWING** retro games, sometimes the job involves heaping yet more praise on a title that's already had its share. Other times, I laugh at how I thought something was awesome when, in retrospect, it's obviously terrible. And then there's the games that just kind of fade into memory. At their core, they're still exactly what they were upon release, but the little details that have since been outpaced by technology kind of stick in my craw a little more with each passing year. *Thief: The Dark Project* is one of those games.

The core is still there, and it remains rather great. You play as Garrett, and you steal things. In terms of story, there is of course a lot more, though in essence you grab whatever is worth some cash and isn't nailed down. There's also the City to save, a marvelous place combining magic, industrial revolution-era tech, and medieval Europe, but the real guts of *The Dark Project* lie in

outwitting guards, stealing into secure areas, and taking what isn't yours.

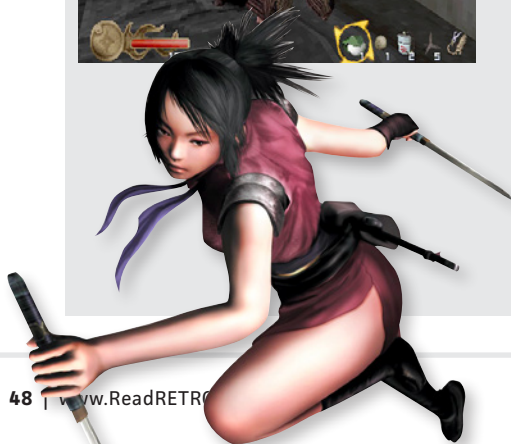
Pretty revolutionary for the time was the minimal heads-up display. With only small markers for health and an incredibly handy "light gem" that shows just how hidden in the shadows you are, weapons and items and such only appeared when selected. This helps subsume oneself into the game world, though I wouldn't go so far as to say it helps you appreciate the graphics, which haven't aged well. Surprisingly though, the sparse soundscape — mostly effects, and the occasional guard helpfully whistling or carousing drunkenly — have escaped time's ravages, which is great considering how important noise, and the lack of it, are to your success.

Avoiding detection is the name of the game, and you find that doing so not only smooths your mission, but also means you can avoid combat, which is an awfully (and intention-



ally) clunky affair. This is a true stealth experience, and once you dial your expectations down, *Thief: The Dark Project* still delivers on that. Just don't expect to be blown away. ❌  
 —Aaron Dennis-Jackson

**OUR RATING:** ♥♥♥♥♥



## Tenchu: Stealth Assassins

This slick and sophisticated stealth experience cut through the crowd.

■ **DEVELOPER:** Acquire ■ **PUBLISHER:** Activision ■ **PLATFORMS:** PS1  
 ■ **RELEASE DATE:** 08.31.98 ■ **PLAYERS:** Single-player ■ **ESRB:** M



**UNLIKE THE POPULAR** run-and-slash action offered by most ninja games, *Tenchu: Stealth Assassins* puts you in the silent shoes of a death-dealing master of stealth, be it the shabbily garbed Rikimaru or the sly kunoichi Ayame, as you complete a number of missions and take out your targets using a variety of tools such as grappling hooks, ninja stars, and your always-useful sword.

Developer Acquire does a splendid job of nailing the ninja experience. The game sets quite a tone when it comes to sneaking around guards and silently taking them out or, should the situation call for it, confronting them in pitched sword battles. The stealth route is the better way to go, often resulting in bloody disembowelments and decapitations. Chop, chop, indeed.

The missions themselves are pretty cut and dried, but the freedom they offer is very cool. You're always free to use a grappling hook to

strike from above or deploy a secondary item to gain a tactical advantage. It all comes together to deliver a worthwhile experience.

The difficulty may throw you at fist. The guards are fairly easy to beat, as you can pretty much wait out an alarmed enemy until it goes back to its route, and then finish it off with cinematic flair. On the other hand, bosses are a bit tougher than expected, requiring you to take a more cautious approach. This is all part of the learning process, though, and eventually you'll master these capable ninjas to your finest ability.

Some presentation issues aside (like the trash-talking guards), *Tenchu: Stealth Assassins* looks great, and plays even better. If it's a full-blown ninja simulation you want — blood spills and all — this is one sharp addition to your PlayStation collection. ❌  
 —Robert Workman

**OUR RATING:** ♥♥♥♥♥



# The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay

Starbreeze's influential sneaker still delivers the goods.

■ DEVELOPER: Starbreeze ■ PUBLISHER: Vivendi Games ■ PLATFORMS: Xbox, PC ■ RELEASE DATE: 06.01.04 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: M

THERE COMES A POINT in gaming when “retro” segues into what’s considered current, where a confluence of older ideas works with those still seen as the current standard. *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay* hits that spot exactly. Despite being released 11 years ago, it’s still more impressive than much of what we’re playing today, despite its inspirations — especially graphically and aurally — being more *Doom 3* than *Battlefield 4*.

I don’t have space to run down the whole Riddick mythos here, but all you really need to know is that he’s an uber-badass portrayed by Vin Diesel in film (and voiced by same in the game), he’s been taken to the infamous Butcher Bay prison facility, and he really doesn’t want to be there long. That means his eyes, ears, and fists in this first-person shooter are yours to control.

Speaking of control, this is one of the very few FPS titles I’ve played where melee combat feels satisfying, and your arms aren’t just a foot long; strike range feels good, as attack button presses combine with the direction controls to give a nice variety of strikes. Blocking also feels great, in that it’s not overly protective, but it’s not useless, either. This makes up for the ranged combat, with bullets taking their time to find their targets and accuracy over any range greater than, say, two inches being somewhat problematic. That’s fine, because there are far more awesome stealth elements to the game than run-and-gun ones, and this is what sets it apart. When hidden, the screen turns blue, and that’s when you know you’re either obscured from enemies or ready to pop out and snap a dude’s neck.

Despite the game’s linear progression, there’s a lot of freedom to be had sneaking



around the complex and interacting with fellow inmates and taking on sidequests. It’s a nice change from a pure “shoot-or-be-shot” experience. It’s also amazing how little this game has lost to time, especially the Windows version. If you’re a big stealth fan or simply wanting to experience an influential title, *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay* is a must-play. 🍷  
—Aaron Dennis-Jackson

OUR RATING: ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️

## Hitman: Blood Money

It’s a hit, man.

■ DEVELOPER: Io-Interactive ■ PUBLISHER: Eidos ■ PLATFORMS: PS2, Xbox, PS3, Xbox 360, PC  
■ RELEASE DATE: 05.30.06 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: M

**HITMAN’S AGENT 47** has never been a terribly interesting character. Outside of having a pretty cool voice and some badass skills, his backstory about being the perfect clone slash trained killer is downright trite. Good thing his games are just so damn fun to play!

In *Hitman: Blood Money*, you start off at an abandoned amusement park, which acts as a tutorial level. From there, you go on a string of contract kills that take you to some of the most fun and dynamic levels in the series’ history, including a suburban neighborhood, Mardi Gras, and even the White House. Each one is a fun experience, but the real selling point is the different ways you can execute your targets.

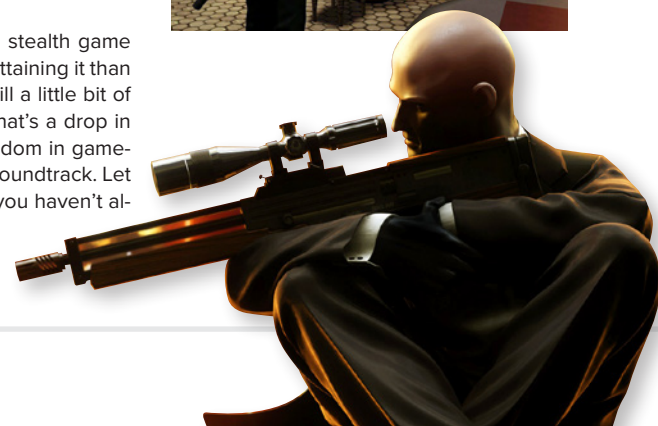
While you could go in guns blazing and eliminate your hits with brute force, it’s ultimately better to go the stealthier route (IMO the way all *Hitman* games should be played). Under the new Notoriety system, the more innocent people who end up hurt or catch you performing shady activity will act as witnesses. This raises your notoriety with a sketch of your ap-

pearance making it into newspapers, meaning Agent 47 will be more easily spotted in later missions. Remember, kids — If you’re going to murder people for money, do it discreetly!

There’s also improved hand-to-hand combat and the ability to toss melee weapons (silent knife kills for the win) that helps round out the experience if you choose to be more combative. Even though I iterate that *Hitman* games should be played with a “silent assassin” approach in mind, it’s pretty satisfying to disarm a guard and immediately blow them away with their own shotgun. And the ragdoll physics in *Blood Money* are entertainment gold.

If you’re looking for the ultimate stealth game experience, few come closer to attaining it than *Hitman: Blood Money*. There’s still a little bit of jankiness in its animations, but that’s a drop in the bucket compared to the freedom in gameplay, fun missions, and fantastic soundtrack. Let this title sneak into your heart if you haven’t already. 🍷 —David Giltinan

OUR RATING: ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️



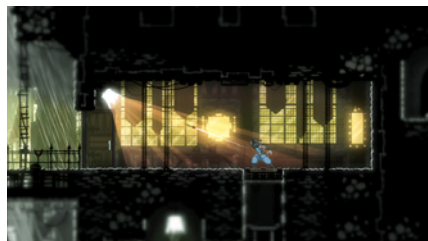
# Mark of the Ninja

Go ninja, go ninja, go!

■ DEVELOPER: Klei Entertainment ■ PUBLISHER: Microsoft Studios ■ PLATFORMS: Xbox 360, PC, Mac, Linux  
 ■ RELEASE DATE: 09.07.12 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: M

**SAVE FOR CLASSICS** like *Ninja Gaiden*, *Shinobi*, and *Tenchu*, videogame ninjas suffer from a bit of a generic rap. Luckily, the folks at Klei Entertainment know how to show off their inherent coolness, delivering a stylish, two-dimensional take on shinobi stealth with *Mark of the Ninja*. In the immortal words of Sterling Archer, this game is “totally ninja!”

*Mark of the Ninja* is great about showing you the ropes. The tutorial teaches everything from running and jumping to throwing bamboo darts and knocking out lights. There’s



also a handy grappling hook that allows you to move around quickly and easily.

The core gameplay is fine-tuned to the point where you feel like an absolute badass taking out soldiers from the shadows, dragging them into vents, snatching them from inside a dumpster, and slicing them while hanging from above. You will gain new abilities as skill points are earned, slowly turning your character into a brutal killing machine.

In order to sneak up on your enemies for the kill, you will obviously need to be light on your feet. Noise made is represented by sound ripples that show how far it travels. If you’re running and the noise circles you’ve made reach a soldier, you know they’re going to investigate the source. This simple mechanic works incredibly well.

Along with improving on your basic ninja skills, additional items can be unlocked, either to distract (firecrackers) or kill (spike mines). There are



even ravenous insects that will devour a foe in seconds. Thanks, *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull!*

Much like Klei’s more action-packed predecessor *Shank*, *Mark of the Ninja* features a slick, fluid style of animation. It looks great, especially while frantically trying to escape the fatal glow of a soldier’s flashlight. Cutscenes are also well-illustrated, bringing some dramatic emphasis to the otherwise weak “just another revenge tale” story.

*Mark of the Ninja* lays out an impressive formula for how 2D stealth should be done. The strengths absolutely outweigh its story-based shortcomings, making this a worthy warrior. 🏆  
 —David Giltinan

OUR RATING: ♥♥♥♥♥



platforming, and a heck of a start for Sucker Punch. One day I hope the studio will revisit the franchise that made it such a star and steal my heart once again. 🏆  
 —Robert Workman

OUR RATING: ♥♥♥♥♥



# Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus

Don’t miss this focused, fun, and unforgettable adventure.

■ DEVELOPER: Sucker Punch0 ■ PUBLISHER: SCEA ■ PLATFORMS: PS2  
 ■ RELEASE DATE: 09.23.02 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: E

**EVERY GREAT DEVELOPER** gets its start somewhere — and while Sucker Punch began with the memorable N64 platformer *Rocket: Robot on Wheels*, it really found its calling with the outstanding *Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus* — a character-based platformer/stealth adventure that still stands as one of the best PlayStation 2 games around.

The game follows a young thief and his partners in crime as they attempt to gather the pieces of a stolen family heirloom, dealing with a handful of dangerous criminals, ranging from a sadistic frog to a devastatingly evil owl. Throughout Sly’s adventure Sucker Punch demonstrates an extraordinary ability to ape the atmosphere of Saturday morning cartoons. The game resembles a well-made animated series, right down to Sly’s smoke-trailed getaways.

Sly’s striking gameplay never lets go, between sneaking around ledges, dodging sweeping

security beams, and overcoming enemies with his cane. Later games would expand on these themes with more playable characters, but *Thievius Raccoonus* shines for keeping it simple yet elegant. PS2 platformers were rarely so focused and fun.

The presentation shines too. The animations and level design couldn’t be better, and the voice acting is perfect, between Bentley’s smarmy genius talk and Murray the Hippo’s bungling dimness. It makes my wish these guys could get more work — even if it’s of the thieving variety.

The game does end all too soon, but makes up for it with plenty of replayability, as you track down vaults that you can break into for additional special moves.

Whether you play the original or the HD remaster in *The Sly Collection*, *Thievius Raccoonus* remains a fine work of stealth-

# CounterSpy

## A secret worth sharing

■ DEVELOPER: Dynamighty ■ PUBLISHER: SCEA ■ PLATFORMS: PS3, Xbox 360, PS4, PS Vita  
 ■ RELEASE DATE: 08.19.14 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: E

COUNTERSPY IS DELIGHTFULLY CHEESY, hearkening back to *James Bond* films and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* You play as a nameless spy working for the secret agency C.O.U.N.T.E.R. on a mission to stop two world powers from firing nuclear missiles at the moon. Just another day at the office!

Each mission starts with picking a side to infiltrate, with perks gained upon completion. These include plan pieces to complete the game, as well as money, weapon/formula pages, and officers who can lower your DEFCON level, which needs to be monitored at all times. Go higher than DEFCON 1 and that country will start a countdown, requiring a mad dash to the control console or else it's game over.

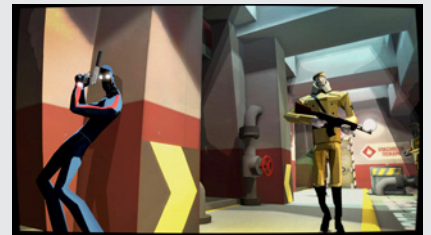
Good thing our shadowy spy has tools to help along the way. As mentioned, pages can be found for new weapons and formulas. Weapons include the reliable silenced pistol and assault rifle, as well as the more

specialized Sandman Sleeper (tranquilizer gun) and ever-so-handy Dart Persuader, which turns enemies against their own.

Formulas, however, offer a new level of strategy. These act as perks that can be universally useful (silent running) or situational (lowering DEFCON). Be sure to plan ahead though, as it costs money every time you use them on a mission.

The levels are procedurally generated, meaning there are differently placed vaults, camera locations, and enemies each time out. This makes being able to react to your environment especially important.

Although *CounterSpy* plays like a 2D side-scroller, going into cover switches it to a "gallery shooter." The camera shifts to a close angled view, allowing you to look ahead and take out cameras and enemies in sight. In some cases, though, enemies are in the background with no cover available, leaving you defense-



less. Also, enemy AI can be pretty inconsistent. In some cases, a silenced pistol alerted soldiers despite perfect, stealthy shooting. These moments can feel downright frustrating and unfair.

Despite some technical shortcomings, *CounterSpy* is really fun and challenging for stealth fans, as well as those who prefer some action and explosions. The visuals fit the cool spy thriller vibe perfectly, too. For a debut release, this is a good sign of things to come from Dynamighty. 🏆  
 —David Giltinan

OUR RATING: ♥♥♥♥♥



# Deus Ex

## Immerse yourself in this truly ex-celent outing.

■ DEVELOPER: Ion Storm ■ PUBLISHER: Eidos ■ PLATFORMS: PS2, PC, Mac  
 ■ RELEASE DATE: 06.26.00 ■ PLAYERS: 1–24 players ■ ESRB: M

**OPPOSITE-OF-A-NEWSFLASH:** *Deus Ex* is still perfection. Seriously, the amount of games from the beginning of the millennium — when 3D was kind of a new thing — that hold up, let alone still kick a ton of ass, can be counted on one hand. Fortunately, this effort from Ion Storm does, and it does it with style and depth to spare.

In *Deus Ex*, you take on the nanomachine-augmented persona of JC Denton, agent of the United Nations Anti-Terrorist Coalition. It's 2052, and there's strife everywhere: conspiracies, terrorists, massive societal inequality, and a pandemic wiping out global populations — and that's about as simple as the story gets. Things quickly grow complex and go down the rabbit hole in a hurry, but that's welcomed as it means more sweet, sweet gameplay.

And that's why the game is still so enjoyable — its gameplay. It's presented as an FPS, but the massive amount of RPG-esque options, due to the augmentations, as well as your active role in shaping the story, make this more than

just your average shooter. Hell, if you choose, you can go through the game killing practically no one; just use tranquilizer darts and the awesome ability to hack any computer, turret, or lock...provided you have the skills and the tools. All of it adds up to deliver something that remains incredibly fresh and rewarding while facilitating multiple playthroughs. Craft yourself into a god of hacking one time while barreling through with sheer force the next. Either way, you'll feel satisfied.

Of course, *Deus Ex* has aged since its 2000 release, but because the game is so beloved, an incredible community of modders has created sweet upgrades to get the game running in a way that's appealing to modern eyes. Sure, the combat mechanics could be improved and the sound/dialogue are not the greatest, but the sweet, tender meat of *Deus Ex* is still a fulfilling, enlightening experience for any fan of the genre. 🏆  
 —Aaron Dennis-Jackson

OUR RATING: ♥♥♥♥♥



# FROM CINEMA TO CINEMATICS

BY WARREN DAVIS

WITH METAL GEAR IN MIND, WE EXPLORE THE BIRTHS OF TWO INDUSTRIES.

One of the hallmarks of the *Metal Gear* franchise has been its reliance on rather long and sometime overly expository cutscenes. One might be forgiven for snarkily suggesting that the makers of these games see themselves as film directors rather than game designers. As *RETRO Videogame Magazine* is honoring all things *Metal Gear* this issue, it seems reasonable to take a look at the origins of both the film and videogame industries, which have quite a lot in common.

Some years ago, I saw a play that was about the early days of the movie industry. I had never thought about it before, as movies had been a part of my life from birth, but this play made me realize that there had to be a start to movies as both an art form and a business. Sure, I've seen some silent films (among them George Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon*). But I really had no understanding of the struggles and breakthroughs that occurred in creating this form of entertainment that is still popular today. And unless you're a historian, you probably have no awareness of those pioneers who developed the technology in those early days.

If you've seen the movie *Hugo*, you might remember the story about one of the first films to be shown to an audience. It was a train pulling into a station. As the train got close, people gasped and ducked — they'd never seen anything like it. It seemed so real.

Of course, that story seems so quaint nowadays. It's hard to believe people could be taken in that way. But I remember seeing *Superman: The Movie* in 1978 at the Chinese Theatre in Hollywood. During the opening credits, when the actors' names shoot out of the screen (in an early example of a 3D CGI effect) people gasped and ducked. Even though it wasn't actually in

3D, it seemed like it was. We'd never seen anything like it before. 80 years after the train pulled into the station, movies still had the ability to surprise us.

I was lucky enough to be involved with the start of a different entertainment technology — videogames. And though I never thought about it until I saw that play, I imagine that the start of the movie industry was not unlike the start of videogames. It began with the technology itself, which was years in the making. With movies, there first came the invention of photography, which began around 1800 and evolved over the next few decades. Independently, the concept of moving pictures was realized in devices such as the zoetrope, which was introduced in 1833. The flipbook was patented in 1868, combining photography and motion for the first time. The next 25 years saw many advancements in moving picture technology to the point where movies, crude but not unlike what we know as movies today, were first shown to an audience in 1895.

For videogames, technologies were also long in the making. The cathode ray tube, used in televisions as well as videogames, dates back to the 1890s. It, too, underwent much evolution. Then of course there's the microprocessor, which was the heart of almost every videogame system. The



■ This Zoetrope dates back to 1833 and was one of the first devices to create moving images.

microprocessor's history goes back to the invention of semiconductor devices which in turn led to the transistor in 1947. All of these technologies developed independently until someone thought of putting them together in a new and exciting way.

I experienced an example of that in high school during a field trip to Brooklyn College. We were shown an oscilloscope that had been programmed to play a game very similar to *Asteroids*, only the ship you were controlling looked just like the Enterprise from *Star Trek*. This was in a lab, not an arcade, years before *Asteroids* ever existed, and it needed a large closet-sized computer for processing power.

Just as movies brought together long-evolving technologies into a new form of entertainment, which had value to a paying audience and could be monetized, the exact same thing could be said about videogames.

So here you are in 1896 having paid admission to watch this newfangled thing called movies, or there you are in 1971 playing one of the earliest coin-op videogames. Not much different. Both technologies are still crude. The following years are largely comprised of innovation and change. Once the basic technologies are in place, they are explored as art forms. In film, the novelty of just seeing moving pictures gives way to a need to tell a story. The language of film emerges — close ups, dolly shots, over-the-shoulders, pans, zooms, etc. Framing is experimented with. People like George Méliès use tricks of the technology to create fantastical scenes unimaginable in real life. In videogames, a language of videogame playing evolves. Joysticks, trackballs, and buttons become standard. A structure of levels of increasing difficulty is widely adopted. Some attempts are made to integrate story into videogames.

And in both film and videogames, genres begin to appear...Films begin to fall into categories: love stories, comedies, action-adventure, fantasies, sci-fi. For videogames, there are driving games, flying

games, maze games, sports games, space games, shooting games. Films are made based on popular novels of the time. Videogames are made based on popular films or TV shows.

And the technologies improve...In the movies, pictures become clearer. Sound is added. Then color. Then 3D, a novelty when first introduced in the 1950s — it doesn't last, but comes back later. In games, blocky pixels give way to sprites. Color is added. Then photo-realistic colors. Pseudo-3D looking games. LaserDisc games display actual movies, also a novelty that doesn't last, but the idea of making games look like movies does come back later.

And of course the business models change. When movies become enough of a money-maker, the independent artists (and by "artists" I mean filmmakers) fall by the wayside. The studio system becomes established and predominant. The artists are no longer in charge; the money men are. The blockbuster is invented. Budgets become enormous. As videogames grow into a dominant force, big companies emerge and smaller studios are absorbed into those big companies. Innovation falls by the wayside as people try to make those AAA blockbuster titles. Budgets become enormous, and the artists (meaning videogame creators) are no longer in charge; the money men are.

Both movies and videogames also faced competition with technology that brought the same entertainment value directly into people's homes. For movies, the threat came from television. Movies had to step up their game to keep people coming into the theaters. For videogames, the rise of the arcades echoed the rise of the movie palace, and as home games became available, videogames had to keep ahead of home systems, both in graphics and gameplay, if they wanted to keep people dropping quarters into slots.

Of course there are differences as well. Movies, for example, enjoyed a few decades

before television became a threat, whereas home videogame systems emerged right on the tail of coin-op games. Throughout the 1980s, arcade games definitely had the advantage. Then PCs and home consoles began to catch up in the 1990s. But though their numbers are much smaller than in their heyday, arcades still exist and people still go to get the social experience of playing games in the proximity of other people. People also still go to the movies when for many, it's just as easy to watch something on a big flat-screen TV.

Videogames are still relatively new, but if we look at the movie industry for comparison, what might be next? Well, the collapse of the studio system in the 1970s along with the development of cheap digital technology which allows anyone to make a decent-quality film has given rise to a thriving independent film market. Films with relatively low budgets can break through (albeit with some difficulty) into the mainstream. I don't know if we're going to see a collapse of large game publishers, but the last decade has definitely seen the emergence of a viable independent game market. Tools are getting better and better at allowing small independent teams to create innovative games without large budgets and we are starting to see some of those games break through to a wider audience.

And if history is any indicator, I'm guessing that a hundred years from now many of the pioneers of videogames, myself included, will be known only to historians. Have you ever walked down the Hollywood Walk of Fame and looked at the names? Many are recognizable, but just as many are not. Those names represent people who were once famous, but for some reason their contributions just haven't withstood the test of time, while others have. The same will undoubtedly happen with videogames. Which will survive? Only time will tell. I just hope that 80 years from now, thanks to innovators and pioneers not yet born, videogames will still have the ability to surprise us. 🎮

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**WARREN DAVIS** began his interactive entertainment career at Gottlieb Amusement Games before moving on to Williams/Bally/Midway. His titles include *Q\*bert*, *Us. Vs. Them*, *Joust 3*, *Terminator 2*, and *Revolution X*. While at Williams, he pioneered the use of video digitization in games such as *Narc*, *NBA Jam*, and *Mortal Kombat*. Following a stint with Disney, he worked for ILM helping to develop *revisualization software for movies*.

# THE 100 GREATEST CONSOLE VIDEOGAMES: 1977–1987

BY BRETT WEISS

As you've probably surmised by now, this issue of *RETRO* is devoted to the *Metal Gear* series, created by industry icon Hideo Kojima. The first game in the stealth-heavy franchise, simply titled *Metal Gear*, hit the MSX2 in 1987.

What many people don't know is that Kojima got his start in the industry the previous year with a game that is about as far from *Metal Gear* as possible: *Penguin Adventure* for the MSX. Kojima was the assistant director for *Penguin Adventure*, which is the sequel to *Antarctic Adventure*, a character racing game.

*Penguin Adventure* expanded upon the already-fantastic *Antarctic Adventure* by adding such features as multiple endings, a slot machine minigame, a love story, more environments (including mountains, caves, and water), bosses (including a blue dragon), and RPG elements such as equipment upgrades.

While *Penguin Adventure* never arrived in the U.S. (an unfortunate oversight to be sure), *Antarctic Adventure* did, most recently as a bonus game in the Dollar General version of AtGames' ColecoVision Flashback console.

When *Antarctic Adventure* was released for the original ColecoVision back in 1984, I absolutely loved it, as you'll see in this sample chapter from my newest book, *The 100 Greatest Console Video Games: 1977–1987*.

Thanks for reading and enjoy!



**DEVELOPER:** Konami **PUBLISHER:** Coleco

**PLATFORM:** ColecoVision **PLAYERS:** Single-player **RELEASE DATE:** 1984

Hardcore gamers and macho joystick jockeys alike may wonder why I would include a cutesy penguin racing game in a book called *The 100 Greatest Console Video Games: 1977–1987*. The answer, my testosterone-fueled, troglodytic friends is simple: because it is one of the greatest games of the Golden Age.

You don't race penguins in *Antarctic Adventure*. Rather, you are a penguin (unnamed in this game, later called Penta),

sliding and gliding down twisting, turning, ice-covered pathways to the tune of Émile Waldteufel's "The Skaters' Waltz," which plays in an endless loop. I've heard some gamers complain that this music gets old after extended play, but it's never bothered me in the least. In fact, I like it quite a bit. It's an upbeat, catchy, circus-like song that fits the action very well.

The view in *Antarctic Adventure* evokes a slower *Pole Position*, with players watch-

ing the action from behind the penguin (as opposed to behind a formula-one racer). Pressing up on the joystick makes the penguin go faster while pressing down slows the flightless fowl. The penguin can also jump, which sets the game apart from most racers.

As the penguin skates his way to his destination, obstacles in the form of small ice puddles and wide crevasses appear on the track. Seals intermittently pop out of puddles, adding to the challenge. If the penguin hits a puddle or a seal, he'll skitter to the side, wasting precious seconds. If he falls in a crevasse, you must help him climb out.

As you approach the aforementioned holes in the ice, they appear to get larger, and part of the challenge is determining whether you should skate around or jump over them, and when it's necessary to slow down. If you slow down too often (by purposely skating slower or by hitting too many obstacles), time will run out and you won't reach your goal, bringing the game to an abrupt end (you only get one life).

The track in *Antarctic Adventure* circles the South Pole and is comprised of 10 sections (some much longer than others), each of which ends in a quick stay in front of an Antarctic ice station. When the penguin reaches a station, he turns around and waves his little flipper, and a flag will go up on the station building. After this brief but charming intermission, it's off to the races again. If you manage to circle the South Pole (i.e. make it to the last station), the cycle repeats itself, but at a more difficult pace.

As I alluded to earlier, keeping a fast pace is important for staying alive, especially deep into the game. Skating fast also racks up big points. Other ways to make your score soar include capturing green flags as they appear along the pathways and catching flying red fish as they leap up from holes in the ice. However, you should be careful not to let these goodies distract you from the primary goal: to reach the station before the timer runs out. Stations, in order, are as follows: Australia, Australia, France, New Zealand, South Pole, U.S.A., U.S.A., Argentina, United Kingdom, and Japan.

Konami released the original *Antarctic Adventure* in Japan in 1983 for the MSX com-

puter. I've never played *Kekkyoku Nankyoku Daibōken* (as it was called), but I can tell you that after watching a YouTube video of the MSX game in action, the ColecoVision cartridge is an excellent, extremely faithful port. The crisp, cute graphics — stark white and rich hues of blue, complemented by playful penguin animations — are fully intact, as is the memorable music. More importantly, gameplay appears to be the same.



In issue #27 (Sept./Oct. 1995) of the *Digital Press* fanzine, longtime gaming enthusiast Jeff Cooper said, "Everything about this game is good. The music is perfect. The graphics are smooth, detailed, and colorful. *Antarctic Adventure* helps cement the ColecoVision's reputation as the very best of the classic videogame systems."

In the seventh edition of the *Digital Press Collector's Guide* (2002), Joe Santulli said the game is "a top 10 for the ColecoVision" and that it has "the best graphics the system ever saw and a quality (albeit repetitive) soundtrack."

In 1985, Konami released *Antarctic Adventure* for the Famicom, which is the Japanese equivalent of the NES. The music's not as good in this version, but it does have an interesting addition in the form of flashing flags. If the penguin grabs a flashing flag, a beanie with a propeller will appear on his head, letting him fly for a limited time. In addition, the Famicom game has different flag colors — green, red, and blue (as well as flashing) — and two colors of fish: red and green.

In 1986 Konami released *Penguin Adventure*, a Japan-only sequel for the MSX. Designed by Ryouhei Shogaki and Hideo Kojima (*Metal Gear*, *Metal Gear Solid*), *Penguin Adventure* added numerous elements to the formula, including boss fights, minigames, purchasable items (including a gun), different environments

(forest, caves, outer space, water), multiple endings, and multiple pathways.

Ever since I got my ColecoVision console in the Christmas of 1982, I've had a ColecoVision hooked up to my television set (I've gone through four units). As such, I've logged many an hour on *Antarctic Adventure*. My kids have enjoyed it as well, especially when they were in elementary school and called it "The Penguin Game."



*Antarctic Adventure* starts off easy (unlike most ColecoVision titles, there is no difficulty level selection screen), but it does present a challenge later on as more seals and holes appear. It's especially tough to reach all 10 stations more than once, a goal I always shoot for when I play the game.

I'm a big fan of such hardcore classic racers as *Pole Position*, *Turbo*, and *Bump 'n' Jump*, and I've thoroughly enjoyed such slickly modern racing titles as *Gran Turismo*, *Rage Racer*, and *Burnout*. But *Antarctic Adventure*, an unlikely character game starring a perky little penguin, will always get some playtime in the Weiss household. 🐧

**FUN FACT:** *Antarctic Adventure* for ColecoVision came packaged with a map poster, which is very difficult to find today.

**WHY IT MADE THE LIST:** Challenging, fun, and irresistibly cute, *Antarctic Adventure* appeals to gamers of all stripes, from young kids to grizzled racing fans willing to give it a chance.

The 100 Greatest Console Video Games: 1977–1987 is available through [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), [Barnesandnoble.com](https://www.barnesandnoble.com), and at [Barnes & Noble](https://www.barnesandnoble.com) bookstores. For more information, check out my website: [brettweisswords.com](https://brettweisswords.com)

# MULTIPLAYER MADNESS: SUPER SPRINT

BY ROBERT WORKMAN

## ATARI'S THREE-PLAYER RACING EXTRAVAGANZA HELPED BRING A CLASSIC RACING BRAND INTO THE '80S.

**S**triding into a '90s arcade, what could be better than racing against friends in games like *Daytona USA* and *Super Off Road*? Back in the '80s these adrenaline rushes were a little harder to come by, mainly because networked cabinets weren't yet popular. That didn't stop Atari from crafting a legacy series into something contemporary for the '80s — something three players could enjoy.

Thus was born *Super Sprint*. The game debuted in arcades in 1986, allowing three players to control Formula One-like cars through a series of eight race tracks, all from an overhead perspective. Each track offered something diverse and new, such as opening and closing gates that provided an opportunity for a shortcut (assuming you didn't get smashed) or avoiding obstacles like oil puddles and small tornadoes, each of which could send your car careening into the wall, triggering a fiery explosion.

If the *Sprint* series sounds familiar, that's because it actually got its start back in 1976. Two players could drive their way

through that black-and-white racing game, using simple-looking checkerboard-patterned cars as they went through a series of tracks. Limited four- and eight-player models were available as well, in full-color raster versions. Their distribution wasn't nearly as wide as *Super Sprint*'s, however.

*Super Sprint* utilizes a steering wheel and gas pedal for simple control, though certain techniques help ensure a first-place victory. Along with taking advantage of shortcuts (and avoiding those tornadoes), you could learn how to handle tight turns with a quick flick of the steering wheel, or even perform small slide techniques while keeping on the straight-and-narrow. Most rookies just ended up in those fiery wrecks, though.

*Super Sprint* became an arcade favorite, based largely on its multiplayer appeal. Atari would also revisit the formula with other game releases. A two-player version, called *Championship Sprint*, came out around the same time, with a smaller cabinet that some arcade owners found more convenient. Even with one less player, the game delivered the same sort of racing action as *Super Sprint*.

In 1989 Atari released a variation of *Super Sprint* called *Badlands*, which took place in a futuristic, apocalyptic world. This version of the game worked the same in terms of control, but offered several track variations, as well as new obstacles to overcome. Although the game wasn't as well received as the *Sprint* titles, it became a favorite of many arcade-goers, and is still enjoyed by some today.

Although *Super Sprint* left its mark on the arcade scene, it would eventually find new life through home releases. A few years after its arrival in arcades, *Super Sprint* made its way to the NES courtesy of Tengen, the same company behind NES ports like Atari's controversial *Tetris* and Sega's *After Burner*. The port did moderately well, despite slightly condensed visuals and the loss of player three. A much later version came packaged with *Spy Hunter* in a two-game bundle for the Game Boy Advance, released by Destination Software. It wasn't as good, though, mainly due to the condensed size of the screen.

The original *Super Sprint* would live on through a number of arcade packages released by Midway, starting with the *Arcade Party Pak* for PlayStation, followed by *Midway Arcade Treasures* for Xbox, PlayStation 2, and GameCube, and later *Midway Arcade Origins* for Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. These versions were completely true to arcade code, right down to the three-player option.

Although arcade racing has changed quite a bit over the years, *Super Sprint* is often regarded as one of the key titles that defined it. A modern version would certainly be nice — even with the tornadoes. 🌀

**DID YOU KNOW?** *Super Sprint* left such a mark that it ended up being a minigame tie-in with several other popular releases, including *Jet Force Gemini* and *The Simpsons: Hit & Run*. It was also the influence behind another popular Tradewest/Midway arcade racing hit — *Super Off Road*.





# HITMAN ACTOR RUPERT FRIEND HAS LEGIT GAMING CRED.

BY JOHN GAUDIOSI

Actor Rupert Friend is best known for his role as Peter Quinn in Showtime's *Homeland*, but the English actor received critical acclaim for a string of period-piece films such as *The Young Victoria*, *Pride & Prejudice*, and *The Libertine*. Now, he takes on a slightly deadlier role in the upcoming *Hitman: Agent 47*, which sneaks into theaters this August. The actor shaved his head and immersed himself in the entire videogame franchise to breathe life into Agent 47 in this reboot of the film by 20th Century Fox. He didn't even watch the first film, in an effort to make this big-screen adaptation his own. One thing Friend has going for him is his old-school videogame credibility.

"I started out on a Commodore 64 in the late '80s and my best friends had an Atari. At that time as you'll probably remember you had to play videogames by loading a magnetic tape head cassette, which took the big games 10 minutes to load. So you'd start loading, go do something else, and then come back and usually find that it hadn't loaded and was corrupted. It was quite a frustrating experience. Friends had devices like an Amiga, an early Nintendo, and then Nintendo 64. I never had anything like that, but we did eventually get a very basic Macintosh and I was pretty good at *Theme Park* on that."

Friend was pretty good at *Street Fighter II* on the Commodore 64, although he calls it the "funkiest version of that game ever." He's always had a soft spot for *Bubble Bobble*. And he also got into *Myst*, which was "somewhere between *Lost* and something more horrific, but I remember being blown away by the look of it."

*Wolfenstein* was another game Friend got into, "where one of the big bosses you had to kill was Hitler." And his friend had the original *Doom*, which "was a treat because the weapons were so much better."

"I always preferred to play games that have an element of intelligence to them, rather than games that were just about instincts and trigger speed," says Friend. "When I played *Hitman: Absolution*, I loved that if I pull out my gun in the middle of a crowded street, I'm going to get arrested or jumped, or alert those security guards or whatever. If I wear the same uniform as someone who's from that world, they're probably going to know that I'm not from there, so it's very realistic. If you think about it in real life, if you dressed up and walked into a police station, they would probably know who the policemen were. So I found that level of sophistication a real pull. I think it's the reason why people play *Hitman*."

At the arcades, Friend gravitated toward the *Silent Scope* franchise, which required precision timing and aim with a real rifle and scope connected to the arcade cabinet. It's interesting that he's now playing the most famous videogame sniper of all time in Agent 47.

"I loved the challenge of those games, where it's all about biding your time and judging the wind and making that one perfect shot, rather than going guns blazing at enemies."

Friend took time off from gaming once he decided to become an actor. He immersed himself in reading and training and travel. He did buy a Sega Game Gear to play *Sonic the Hedgehog* games on though.

While he didn't play any of the *Hitman* games growing up, he was familiar with the franchise. In fact, there was someone at college who looked like Agent 47 and Friend used to tease him about it. Now Friend is Agent 47, potentially for multiple films if this one performs well at the box office. He took getting into character very seriously — and not just shaving his head.

"When I got this job one of the producers sent me every *Hitman* game, so I had a great time immersing myself in that world," says Friend. "I didn't play them in order. I played them backwards. I played *Absolution* first, and was like, 'Oh my god, games have changed so much.' You can see the neon light reflecting off a puddle onto skin. It's like fine art in many ways. The other thing I loved, as somebody who's interested in acting and movement and physicality, they clearly studied the way that this guy moves. And they clearly got the actor to do motion capture. The way the character moved through the world was very human and to me was very character forming. It wasn't just some guy. It was Agent 47."

With a brand-new game from io-Interactive launching in December, and a new comic book already out, *Hitman* is covering every aspect of popular entertainment. And Friend is now front and center in a rich universe that could support many more films. Friend is game to reprise this role on the big screen. And he's even open to going virtual in a future game, performing motion capture to bring this character to life and sync the game and movie universes. It's not often you find an actor who's willing to do that, but when you're Agent 47, you must be willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done. 🎮

# MICHAEL IRNSIDE

## REMINISCES ABOUT SAM FISHER.

BY JOHN GAUDIOSI



**H**ollywood actor Michael Ironside has appeared in seminal movies over the decades including *Top Gun* with Tom Cruise, *Total Recall* with Arnold Schwarzenegger, *No Way Out* with Kevin Costner and *Starship Troopers* with Casper Van Dien. But to gamers he's likely best known for his virtual portrayal of Sam Fisher in Ubisoft's bestselling stealth action franchise, *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell*. Ironside brought Fisher to life in games over a span of eight years from 2002 to 2010.

"*Splinter Cell* was the first game I'd ever done," says Ironside. "The Clancy series was special. It was done in Montreal. I've only done three or four games over my career, but they're all opportunities to act for me. I love acting. There's a little part of me in Sam Fisher. To be a good actor you've got to tap into that time during the ages of 9 and 17 when all things are possible, before reality sets in. There's a part of me that's still there, and allows me to play with the other kids (in games)." Ironside is referring to acting, not gaming. The 65-year-old actor is not a gamer, having grown up before even arcades were a thing.

"I've never been a game player," says Ironside. "I remember watching someone play *Pac-Man* and going, 'Why?' It just seemed so sad, the idea of gaming. That's why I think gaming is so much more interesting now because of mobile and the ability to play together with friends with teamwork. It brings in a whole new community aspect. When games first came out I called the world "isolatory." I didn't know if that's a real word or not, but that's what it did. It seemed to enforce the isolation of the game player. Now there are multiple platforms. You can play mobile games walking around. It's a form of communication. It's a chance to get together. If you're not communicating, it's not as much fun. Kids can interact with one another and be part of a community."

Having helped create the character of Sam Fisher, Ironside has mixed feelings about the new movie from Ubisoft and 20th Century Fox. Tom Hardy (*The Dark Knight Rises*) will be stepping into the Third Echelon gear of Sam Fisher in the film from Doug Liman (*Bourne Identity*).

"We'll have to wait and see, won't we?" replies Ironside, when asked what it'll be like to see someone else take on that role. "It's a great challenge for whomever does it because there's enough humanity behind that character with his relationship with his daughter and stuff and the possible relationship they want to flesh out, but it will be interesting. I just hope they don't make it all action, and we have something other than accountants and technicians doing the story."

Ironside is fond of Fisher, but no more so than characters like Jester, Richter, or Jean Raszak that he brought to life on the big screen.

"Movies and characters I've created are like old cars," says Ironside. "When you see them in pictures, they're wonderful, you have a soft memory of driving them, but it's always the new car or the new challenge that's probably got my interest. They're kind of like, 'Hey, look at that '57 Chevy, look at that '64 Ford, or the '97 Beamer I just got rid of.'"

Ironside also played Lieutenant General Jack Granger in Electronic Arts' *Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars*, but that was "under a wonderful situation where I got to step in and help somebody." Most recently, the actor went mobile in Game Insight's *Tank Commander* multiplayer battle game.

"I get offered about six or seven games a year and I'm working all the time so I'm very selective," says Ironside. "There has to be a team component for me and I knew the guy that did the sound on the game. I got to hang out with him and his wife. I'm getting older. There's got to be a humanistic aspect to it. I'm not a big fan of watching my movies, or watching the games I did. It's really about the organic process of making the project and the people involved that attracts me."

While you'll hear plenty of Ironside's voice as you play that mobile game, you won't happen upon him as a player. He admits he's a Luddite when it comes to anything electronic. "If I touch them, they break, so I play golf and shoot pool and that sort of thing."

Videogames do allow Ironside to step back and be any age, although the actor says he still feels like he's a teenager on the inside.

"It always shocks me when I cross in front of a mirror," says Ironside. "When I used to ask my father what it's like getting older, he'd always say, 'I don't feel any older. The equipment is breaking down, but I really feel kind of juvenile.' And now I understand that. I'm actually at a stage in my career where I'm starting to actually use stuff that I was trained to do and was unwilling or incapable of understanding how to use at an earlier age. I'm probably in better shape now as an actor than I've ever been in my whole life. It's kind of cool."

Even with the big-screen adaptation moving forward and the potential for movie sequels, gamers will always look at Ironside as the voice of Sam Fisher. Spending all of those hours game after game breathing life into that character helped Ubisoft create one of the most memorable heroes in gaming. 🎮

# WARREN SPECTOR

HOW LUCK LED TO AN ILLUSTRIOUS CAREER IN GAMING.

BY ANDY EDDY

**T**he earlier game-development pioneers didn't have the benefit of college-degree programs or specialized schools in which to learn their craft. Frankly, a lot of them got to where they are by knowing the right people — and often with a healthy dose of luck. Warren Spector isn't shy about that when it comes to the start of his now-legendary career.

"How did I get into games? Pure luck," Spector says. "I was an avid player while I was working on my master's degree and then my (never-completed) PhD. There came a point where the university didn't have a class for me to teach when, out of the blue, I got a call from Steve Jackson Games about an 'assistant editor and game developer' position. Next thing I knew I was a game-dev pro. That was my start in tabletop games."

He says he went from playing any tabletop game he could get his hands on — including being a fan of such Steve Jackson Games titles as *Ogre* and *Illuminati*, and "hardcore wargames" from Avalon Hill and SPI — to actually working on new products at SJG. It wasn't long before he felt "frankly, kind of

bored with the tabletop-game world and needed new challenges." And that's when good ol' serendipity struck again.

"A guy who I'd worked with at SJG called to tell me Origin was looking for an associate producer," Spector recalls. "Next thing I knew I was a computer-game developer. Like I said, all luck. Right place, right time."

That move to work with Lord British (Richard Garriott) and his development crew at Origin started him on a spectacular career in video-games that took him from Origin to Electronic Arts to Looking Glass Technologies to Ion Storm to Disney Interactive. It also included working on such iconic titles as *Wing Commander*, *Ultima VI*, *System Shock*, *Thief: The Dark Project*, *Deus Ex*, and *Disney's Epic Mickey*. His electronic-game career spans about 25 years.

Today, his career path has taken a slight departure from creating interactive products to helping instruct others how to make games.

"I'm working full time as director of the Denius-Sams Gaming Academy, part of the Moody College of Communication at The University of Texas at Austin," Spector tells

*RETRO*. "Early on, I thought I'd keep some small game-development effort going on the side, but this teaching stuff really is a full-time job!"

Looking back, when asked what games are his favorites from among the ones on which he's worked (and after complaining how much he hates answering that question), he cites *Deus Ex* ("It came so close to meeting the goals I hoped we'd achieve when I first imagined the game") and *Disney's Epic Mickey*.

"[Being] a part of Disney history is pretty amazing," Spector adds, "but it's also because I've received so much mail from people who were touched by the game, whose lives were genuinely changed by the game. Talk about inspiring!"

By the way, Spector also notes that he's "insanely proud" of *Epic Mickey*, "because the team and I got to reintroduce Oswald... to the world."

Do you remember what Oswald's full name is? It's Oswald the Lucky Rabbit. Yes, it seems there's a lot of that orbiting Spector's world. 🐇

**ANDY EDDY** has also had his share of luck, with a game-journalist career that's lasted over 26 years. If you have comments about this column or recommendations for who you'd like to see covered in a future installment, you can reach Andy at [andy@readretro.com](mailto:andy@readretro.com).

# TALKING STEALTH WITH RYAN PAYTON

BY DANIEL KAYSER

WE SEEK ONE INDUSTRY VETERAN'S INSIGHT INTO THE EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE.

Perhaps more than any other genre, stealth videogames are the least forgiving. Not only for those who play them, but for those who make them as well. With so many preconceived notions of what should and should not happen within a stealth experience, it can be truly difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the player's interest while simultaneously delivering something that can be considered enjoyable.

Of course, learning from the best is a great way to start. Fortunately for veteran videogame-journalist-turned-designer Ryan Payton, his roles at Kojima Productions working on the "westernization" of the *Metal*

*Gear Solid* franchise and his time at 343 Industries as a narrative designer on *Halo 4* have given him the chops necessary to understand a balanced gameplay experience that comes with big-time expectations.

Now the head of his own studio, Seattle-based Camouflaj, Payton has delivered multiple iterations of an innovative and crowd-funded stealth title called *République*. I had the chance to catch up with Payton to discuss the evolution of the stealth genre, the difference between working on blockbuster franchises and original IPs, his thoughts on the impact of virtual reality on stealth, and much, much more.

**RETRO:** Alright Ryan, let's dive right in! For better or for worse, how do you think stealth in gaming has evolved over the years?

**Ryan Payton:** I think that the stealth genre has become more forgiving in recent years, like a lot of game genres. Traditionally stealth games have been brutally difficult, where the punishment (swarms of tough enemies and game over screens) didn't really fit the crime (being seen). Now we're seeing games really emphasize the "action" part of stealth action, giving players more choices in how they avoid game over screens (mostly by allowing them to shoot their way out of conflicts). As much as I like to think of myself as a stealth purist, I'll be

the first to admit that the stealth genre can be frustrating and too difficult for mainstream audiences. It's not a coincidence that *Metal Gear*, *Splinter Cell*, and the rest have shifted more toward action gameplay in an effort to capture a wider audience.

**RETRO:** You've worked on a variety of games, so what's your take on the instances when non-stealth games feature stealth segments to mix up the experience?

**RP:** I have mixed reactions when games like *Legend of Zelda*, *Uncharted*, and *Grand Theft Auto* insert stealth sequences into their games. These are never the best parts of those action-driven games, but they do help freshen up the gameplay by throwing some stealth into the mix. Because stealth is inherently stressful and unforgiving, I think most players are just relieved to get past the stealth bits, which makes me think that stealth is rarely "fun" but it can serve a larger purpose.

**RETRO:** Considering the role you've played in bringing *Metal Gear Solid* to the masses and the fact that we're honoring the series in this issue of *RETRO*, what would you say is the key factor in that franchise's universal appeal?

**RP:** With such a multifaceted franchise like *Metal Gear Solid*, it's impossible





to point to a single key factor. In fact, I think *Metal Gear Solid* is the sum of its strange parts. Intriguing characters, robots, nukes, ninja, politics, genetics...To me, *Metal Gear* is more of an interactive fiction than it is a game, where the gameplay is clearly a vehicle to help tell the story. In fact, I think that stealth isn't necessarily a key component of *Metal Gear*, which is evident in the very action-driven *Peace Walker*.

**RETRO:** Was *Metal Gear* influential to you growing up? Which games or franchises would you say have been the most influential?

**RP:** I credit the original *Metal Gear Solid* as the most influential game of my up-

bringing — it's the game that made me want to make videogames. *MGS* was such an impressive piece of technology that really pushed games forward when it came to cinematic storytelling and voiceovers, but more so than anything, I was impacted by its hard-hitting, current-events-based story that tackled really serious issues like nuclear proliferation. *Metal Gear Solid* really opened my eyes to what was possible with videogame storytelling.

**RETRO:** Replicating the feeling of stealth in a virtual environment seems like a difficult task. What do you consider the most challenging part about creating a realistic yet enjoyable stealth experience?

**RP:** Creating pure stealth encounters is actually pretty easy and oftentimes come late into the development cycles. I think the big trick is to make them enjoyable, which requires lots of additional systems to mix up the formula. In short, I don't think many players enjoy pure stealth experiences, and the best stealth games are more about the ancillary gameplay and story than about sneaking around guards on predefined patrol routes.

**RETRO:** Considering that you've worked on both major franchises like *Metal Gear* and *Halo* and an original IP like *République*, to what degree do you feel the player's expectations going into the experience impact their overall impression of the final game?





**RP:** I think stealth players are fairly open minded, because there are such diverse approaches to the genre. On the one hand you have games like *Metal Gear* and *République* that use stealth as a vehicle for storytelling, whereas there are other games like *Invisible Inc.* and *Alien Isolation* that offer a more tactical, thoughtful approach to the genre.

**RETRO:** More so than most genres, it would seem that stealth games rely on immersion to enhance the experience. What innovative techniques have arisen due to advanced hardware capabilities or even cross-platform functionality that enhance the immersive nature of stealth in gaming?

**RP:** I think *Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes* offers a nice preview into the future of stealth, bringing the genre into the modern age with a more open field and allowing for more sandbox gameplay. The stealth genre has lived inside claustrophobic constraints for so long, I think that the new hardware is finally allowing the genre to spread its wings while allowing for more emergent gameplay.

**RETRO:** What's your stance on virtual reality? Do you see it altering or enhancing the way developers are able to approach stealth gaming?

**RP:** VR and streaming are the two next frontiers of games, in my opinion. VR, in particular, is going to power so many unique gameplay experiences, that it excites me to see what developers do with the stealth genre in VR. It was actually the first thing I thought of when I tried the Valve and HTC "Vive" demo — VR really opens up so many new possibilities for game design and interactive experiences.

**RETRO:** It's been a few years now, so how would you summarize the risk and reward of breaking away from major game studios to start your own?

**RP:** It's hard to believe that *Camouflaj* has been around for about four years now, and that we have a game on store shelves that players enjoy. We still have two *République* episodes left to release, but I'm already extremely proud of what we've built and can't wait to get the remaining episodes out to players. While I may not have as high of a salary as I used to have during my time on *Halo*, I'm infinitely happier at *Camouflaj* — I love building this team, and I love making *République* together with them. Running a studio has its own stresses, but it was absolutely worth the risk.

**RETRO:** When setting out to make *République*, where did you begin? With the story? The gameplay design? The platform and delivery method, or all of the above?

**RP:** The initial idea for *République* came out of wanting to create the first game to do a character- and facial-performance-focused game on mobile. When I played *Infinity Blade*, it really opened my eyes to what was possible on mobile. That team absolutely nailed sword gameplay on mobile, so I wanted *Camouflaj* to execute on a character-driven, episodic experience





for a wider mobile audience. Initially *République* was just going to be about warping from monitor to monitor, talking with characters via dialogue trees à la *Mass Effect*, but based on some feedback from a potential publisher, we added more action to the game and fell into the gameplay that we have today. The moment we moved the game's camera into a surveillance camera position, the game felt like the original *Resident Evil*, which had me really excited. From there we knew that Hope (the main character) wasn't going to kill her enemies, so we naturally evolved the game into a stealth-driven experience.

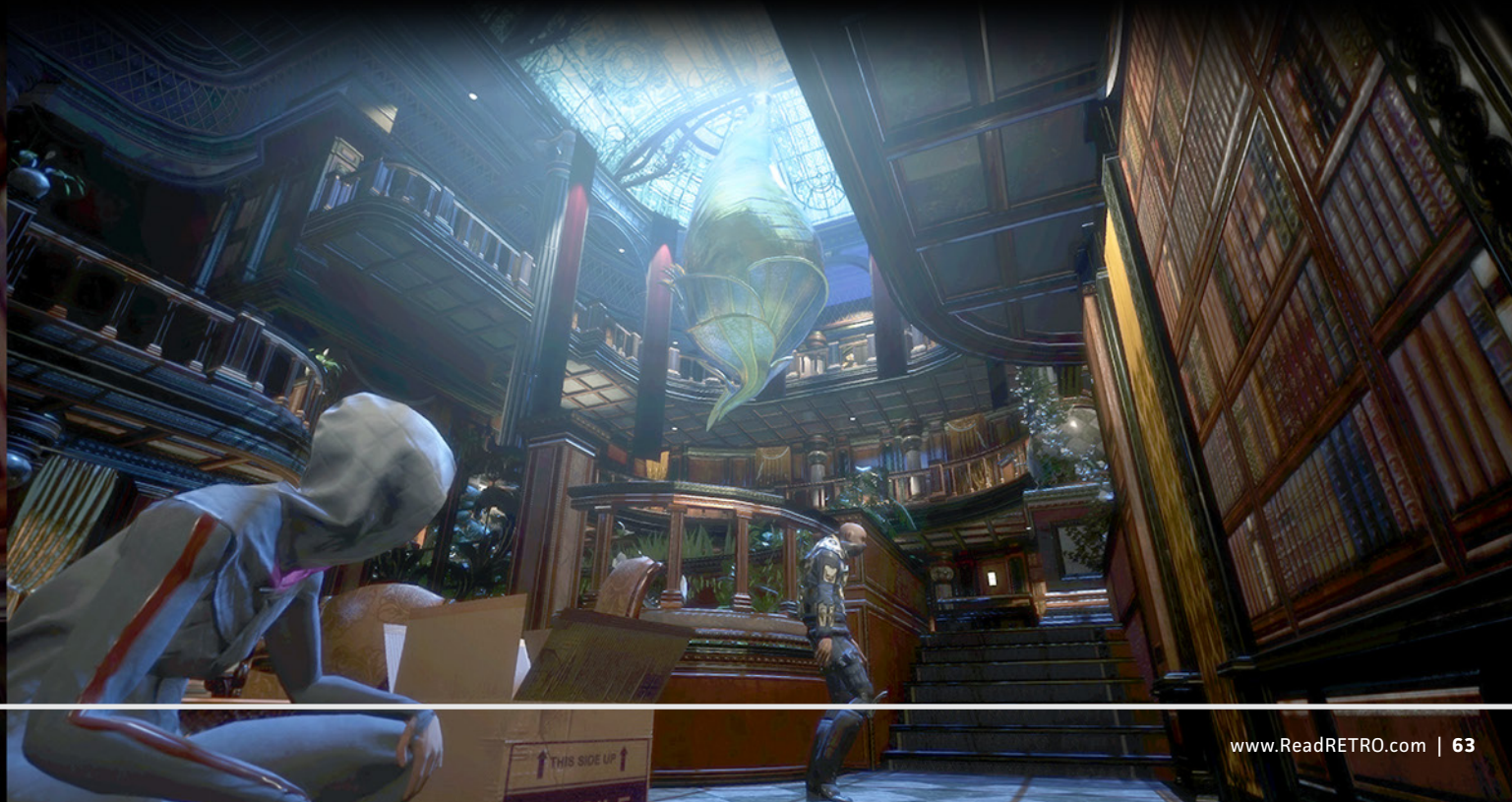
**RETRO:** Did you initially feel that removing direct control of Hope was a make-or-break design decision? How do you feel that it was received?

**RP:** Yes, making Hope her own character was one of the riskiest design choices we made, and it's a system I'm still very much proud of. I love how complex her AI is, and most of the time she does really smart things to aid the player — I like to think of her as a good tennis partner. Sure, there are times where she does unexpected things, which can be frustrating, but they also help her seem more alive. In fact, I was watching a Twitch stream of the game recently and noticed that the player was really frustrated that Hope wouldn't move to a position he was telling her to go. Then he moved the camera and noticed that there was a guard nearby — Hope saw him in plain view and opted not to follow the player's lead and get caught. The player was initially frustrated, but was then relieved to see that

Hope made the right choice. Striking that balance was really difficult and is impossible to perfect, though.

**RETRO:** What are your goals for the future of *République* as a franchise moving forward, and what other projects do you have in the works that you can talk about?

**RP:** The main team is focused on finishing the final two episodes of *République* while a smaller prototype team is working on what could be our next game. That prototype is actually the result of an official partnership we have with Shinra Technologies, so we're building an experience for their supercomputer cloud-streaming service. In short, we're really busy, which is a great problem to have. 🎮





# PIXEL PERFECT

PIXELS STAR **JOSH GAD** LOVES EVERYTHING ABOUT THE '80s, ESPECIALLY VIDEOGAMES.

BY JOHN GAUDIOSI

**J**osh Gad embraces the 1980s. He's literally immersed in that decade at his home, which includes a large classic video-game collection. So it worked out well when Sony Pictures cast him to play 1980s arcade whiz kid Ludlow Lamonsoff in the Chris Columbus-directed *Pixels*, which also stars Adam Sandler, Kevin James, and Peter Dinklage. By now, you know the concept of the flick, which features giant pixelated versions of Pac-Man, Donkey Kong, Centipede, Galagans, and the Space Invaders as the bad guys sent by real aliens to destroy the planet. It's all based on a misinterpreted time



capsule from 1982 that features those games, and was seen as a declaration of war. What you might not know is that all of those A-list actors spent a lot of time playing arcade games on the set — even when the cameras weren't rolling.

"We spent a significant amount of time playing those games," says Gad. "The funny thing is that there was one set in particular that had this insane arcade setup and we would waste so much time there. I guess it's not wasting time, really. It is 'training,' but we would just sit there and play. You're reminded of how addictive these games are, and just the sheer joy that you get from shooting a bunch of spaceships or frantically trying to eat ghosts. It's a crazy thing. And we would just line up, me, Sandler, Dinklage, Kevin, and just be transported back into

our 10-year-old selves playing these games in an arcade. That was a very cool experience to have that at our disposal."

What wasn't so cool was seeing the iconic Pac-Man, who's always been such a lovable character in every interactive and linear interpretation over the last 35 years. "It was one of the hardest days ever coming to terms with the fact that Pac-Man's an a\*\*hole," says Gad. "I really didn't want to face that truth. The first day on set was me driving in a car away from a giant Pac-Man trying to chomp at me. I pulled Chris Columbus to the side and I looked at him and said, 'Now are we really sure we want to make Pac-Man the villain?'"

Without a doubt, Gad's the biggest gamer in the film. He's been playing games



since as long as he can remember. “The first time we had a Nintendo was probably in our living room for what was about a week of just non-stop gameplay, and it was *Duck Hunt*, *Mike Tyson’s Punch-Out!!*, *Tecmo Bowl*, and the original *Super Mario Bros.*”

Gad has two older brothers, one who’s 10 years older and one who’s eight years older. His middle brother, Ronnie, would invite his friend over and the two of them would play *Zelda* nonstop.

“I would just sit there in awe every time they passed another level just cheering and being a great fan base in the background,” says Gad.

Gad and his brothers grew up in the other Hollywood, the one based in Florida. The ‘80s baby (born in 1981) grew up during the heyday of arcades.

“We had this awesome old-school arcade in South Florida, home of *The King of Kong* — the brilliant Seth Gordon documentary that came out years ago,” says Gad. “The name of the arcade that I used to play at all the time in Hollywood was Grand Prix Race-O-Rama. We used to go there and play *Pac-Man*, *Galaga*, and all those things, although I was younger than everybody else there because it was kind of the older kids who were playing a lot of those games. Again, I would just sit and watch and cheer them on, and that’s the extent of my relationship to gameplay growing up in the ‘80s.”

Having grown up in the ‘80s, Nintendo’s revival of the Nintendo World Championships at E3 2015 this year was another piece of Gad’s favorite decade making a comeback.

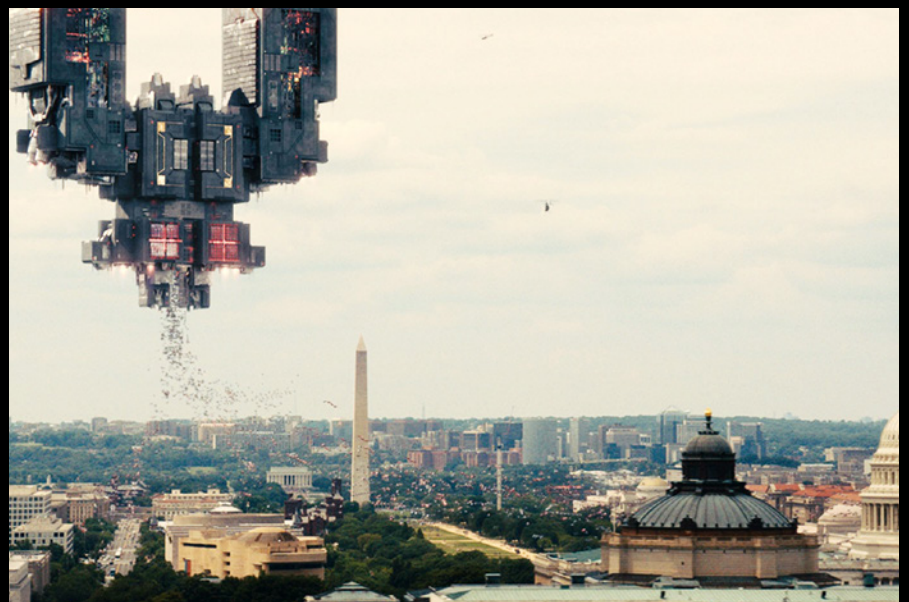
“*The Wizard*, the movie with Fred Savage, is such a significant memory for me,” says Gad. “That is when these games were at their height. And like all things ‘80s, it seems like everything is hot again, and I love that. I just love the fact that we’re digging back into it. I’m loving that it’s not just games that are becoming retroactively cool, but all of these things that I grew up with and that were a significant part of my life, and things that influenced me like *Goonies* and *Back to the Future*. So I’m thrilled

that the Nintendo World Championships is back.”

To this day, Gad prefers classic games to any of the action-packed, photorealistic games that lined the halls of E3 in June. “There’s a simplicity to them,” says Gad. “It’s funny because before my daughter was born I played some *Modern Warfare* and *Halo* and those games are amazing. The graphics are insane, but there’s a reason that games like *Candy Crush*, *Tetris*, and *Angry Birds* are still as hot as any of those other games that I mentioned. And it’s because of the sheer simplicity and the addictive nature of trying

to get that bird to crash into a group of pigs, or to get that line to fall into place inbetween three other lines. There’s something wonderfully simple and yet wonderfully addictive about just having a game that a 4-year-old can understand and a 9-year-old can understand.”

Gad’s own kids can go retro with Bandai Namco’s *Pixels: The Movie* free mobile game, which marks the first time classic arcade games like *Pac-Man*, *Q\*bert*, and *Frogger* have been featured together in one collection. It’s a game that Gad will also enjoy playing, since it’s another celebration of his favorite decade. 🎮



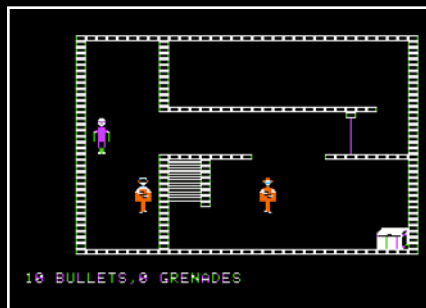
# PROVING GROUNDS CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN



BY MATT BARTON

EXPLORE A STEALTH CLASSIC THAT REMAINS BOTH CHALLENGING AND REWARDING.

**W**elcome back, brave adventurers. This month's Proving Grounds is set in a medieval castle, but it's no fantasy game! Instead we're headed to Germany smack in the middle of World War II, and the castle in question has been commandeered by the Nazis to hold dangerous Allied prisoners like you for brutal interrogation. They've already killed your cellmate, but not before he could steal a fully loaded Mauser M-98 pistol, which is your ticket out of this hellhole. The venue? Silas Warner's groundbreaking 1981 stealth game, *Castle Wolfenstein*.



■ Apple II screenshot

Forget about blasting your way out commando style. If you want to survive, you'll have to steal a Nazi uniform and sneak around guards and SS Stormtroopers, trying your best to stay out of sight. The task is formidable — *Castle Wolfenstein* has 60 rooms and five levels you'll have to get through to escape. However, your mission isn't just to save your own hide — you'll also need to find the Nazis' war plans hidden somewhere in the castle before making a break for it.

The game plays out in a top-down perspective, but you and the guards appear in side view, similar to the classic arcade game *Berzerk* (1980) by Alan McNeil, from which this game seems to draw some inspiration. As in that game, you'll want to avoid running into the walls, but here they'll only stun you rather than killing you outright. Unfortunately, with all the guards swarming the castle, a few seconds is all it'll take to blow your cover.

The locations of items and guards are shuffled at the start of each session, but the layout of the castle is always the same, so break out the graph paper. Mapping out the castle will go a long way to

ward completing the mission.

The plans are hidden in one of the many chests you'll encounter throughout the castle, but you don't know which one. Some chests have useful stuff, like ammo or grenades, but you might also find flavor items such as bratwurst, schnapps (which will get you drunk), or the diary of Hitler's girlfriend, Eva Braun. Naturally, the chests are locked, so you'll have to either pick the locks (which can take several minutes in real time) or shoot them open with your gun, alerting all guards in the vicinity — and possibly blowing you to smithereens if the chest in question is storing explosives. For whatever reason, you can only carry 10 bullets at a time — I guess Nazi uniforms have very small pockets. No wonder they lost the war.

The guards roaming the corridors come in two flavors, the simple-minded basic guards and stormtroopers, who are equipped with bulletproof vests. The basic guards won't chase you into other rooms, are fooled by uniforms, and some are cowardly enough to surrender if you draw on them, allowing you to take their equipment without having to shoot them.

The stormtroopers are much nastier — they'll see through your disguise and chase you all over the castle. The only way to take them out is with a grenade. You can also try to block them by killing another guard in their path. I'm not sure why this works; maybe they're afraid of getting blood on their jackboots.

The guards will also shout at you in German — "Halt!", "Kommon sie!" (come here, you!), or, my favorite, "Schweinhund!" (pig dog; it's a very naughty word in German). The digitized voices were incredible for the time. Critics were wowed by this tech, which was called "The Voice." If nothing else, they'll definitely give you a jolt the first time you hear a guard shout. Keep the manual handy for translating the German; you wouldn't want to mistake "I surrender!" for "Fire!"

What really makes the game a beast, though, are the controls, especially if you're a badass playing entirely with the keyboard. This setup has nine keys for moving and another for stopping (once you start moving, your character will keep going until you hit this key). This is tricky enough, but there are also nine other keys for aiming! It's a sure test of your ambidexterity, but also your ability to stay calm under pressure — get flustered, and you might go careening into a wall or firing your gun by accident. You also need to remember that T throws grenades, U uses the contents of a chest, Return lists your inventory, and the space bar lets you search guards and unlock doors and chests. I hope you're a touch typist — the guards won't stand idly by as you hunt and peck.

If this sounds too tough, don't worry — you can also play with a joystick or paddles. Paddles are an interesting option; they have dials for directing your movement and aim. It's probably not the most efficient way to play the game, but, hey, you'll earn a lot of respect from Apple II fans! If you do manage to escape the castle, you may be promoted by the Allied High Command, depending on whether you managed to retrieve the plans or not. You start

off as a lowly private, but if you're able and willing to get through the castle again (each time at a harder difficulty level), you can work your way up the ranks: Corporal, Sergeant, Lieutenant, Captain, Colonel, General, and the ultimate, Field Marshal. Needless to say, few have what it takes to earn such an impressive achievement, but that's why I call this column Proving Grounds. Indeed, the game was so tough that a company named Moxie sold a program called TGUE (The Great Escape Utility) that "fixed" *Castle Wolfenstein*, letting you add items, start anywhere, and open chests instantly. Needless to say, anyone who'd even consider using this program is not Proving Grounds material!

Warner did a sequel in 1984 called *Beyond Castle Wolfenstein*, which followed the same formula, but this time had you finding and detonating a bomb to assassinate Hitler. It updated the gameplay in several ways, but the most significant was letting you drag dead bodies around to hide them or block passages. You could also silently kill enemies with a knife.

While the game itself is memorable, so was its creator. If you think all programmers as shriveled weaklings, think again — *Wolfenstein's* creator was nearly seven feet tall and weighed over 300 pounds. He was a 32-year-old genius who programmed in his underwear. He was one of the first employees at MUSE Software, a Baltimore-based company, where he was well known for his eccentric personality and love of pranks. One of his favorite gags was leaving Tupperware containers filled with mystery foods on his filing cabinet for months at a time.



■ Commodore 64 screenshot

By all accounts he was a friendly and jovial giant, and his amazing skills inspired many other people to pursue careers in the games industry. Sadly, Warner passed away in 2004, a 54-year-old victim of kidney disease and diabetes. One of his closest fans was future id Software founder John Romero, who was obsessed with the game. Romero and John Carmack used *Castle Wolfenstein* as the basis for their groundbreaking first-person shooter *Wolfenstein 3D*. The two had originally intended to make a stealth game closer in spirit to the original, but eventually abandoned this idea in favor of a more straightforward action game.

Later, third-party games bearing the *Wolfenstein* name took more inspiration from Romero and Carmack's game than Warner's. Activision's *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* (2001) and last year's *Wolfenstein: The New Order* (2014), bear little resemblance to the Apple II classic. It's up to other franchises to take on Warner's stealthy legacy, most notably *Metal Gear* and *Thief*. I'm not sure if *Metal Gear's* Hideo Kojima ever played *Castle Wolfenstein*, but Ken Levine of *Thief* said it's one of his old-school favorites — I'd love to know whether he ever made Field Marshal!

If you want to try the game yourself, there are plenty of good options. For starters you can go to Virtual Apple II ([virtualapple.org](http://virtualapple.org)) and play it right in your browser (disk ROMs are available for download). You can also visit [archive.org](http://archive.org), which has the MS-DOS version set up for emulation in your browser. There are ports available for Commodore 64 and Atari 8-bit, too. It'll be trickier to find a way to play with paddles or vintage "hand controllers," especially if you don't have an old Apple II lying around (the other versions are limited to joystick or keyboards). Still, if you're willing to go for it, you can find everything you need on eBay for under \$300. 🛒



**MATT BARTON** is the producer of Matt Chat, a weekly YouTube show with classic game designers. By day, he's a professor at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota. Follow him on Twitter @mattbarton

# Kohler's Collect-a-Thon!

## YOUR GUIDE TO BUILDING THE ULTIMATE RETRO LIBRARY.

# LIVING THE DREAMCAST

BY CHRIS KOHLER

**THE MARKET FOR ORIGINAL CLASSIC GAMES** has never been hotter. Whether you're obsessed with collecting or just want to play your old favorites in their original format, you're paying more for old games than ever before. Each issue of Kohler's Collect-a-Thon! breaks down the current collecting scene for a particular platform. This time out, we're tackling Sega's beloved Dreamcast!

### THE PLATFORM

If the incredible success of Yu Suzuki's Kickstarter for his long-awaited *Shenmue III* proved one thing, it was that Sega Dreamcast has a posse. Sega's final game console had a brief life. It launched in November of 1998 in Japan and not quite one year later in the United States, but was discontinued in March 2001 when Sega bailed out of the hardware biz for good.

It didn't have a whole lot of support beyond Sega itself, but somehow Dreamcast managed to leave a remarkable legacy of well-remembered classics. Largely, these are fighting games and shoot-em-ups from Capcom, plus a genre-spanning variety of games that were the product of Sega's design teams at their creative zenith.

### COLLECTING IT

There were roughly 250 Dreamcast games released in the United States, a fairly manageable library if you're looking to collect 'em all. No single game has permanently broken the \$200 barrier yet, although a few are coming close. And you can still find Dreamcast games in the CD racks of your local thrift store. So you can see why some collectors might be tempted to knock out the complete Dreamcast set, which doesn't take up much shelf space, either.

### THE LIMITED EDITIONS

Two of the most expensive U.S. Dreamcast games to acquire are "limited editions" of its big games. *Sonic Adventure Limited Edition* was actually shipped out to Hollywood

Video rental stores in advance of the Dreamcast's U.S. launch, so that customers could try out the Dreamcast that summer. There are a few differences between *Limited Edition* and the final game, and the case, manual, and disc are all easily identifiable by the "Limited Edition" line. (Some sellers who don't know their stuff occasionally price this as a standard Sonic, so you might get a deal if you're eagle-eyed!) Many of these games have Hollywood Video stickers on the case, manual, or even the disc, so "clean" copies will fetch more money, up to \$200 in some cases.

There's also a *Shenmue* limited edition. In this case, you'll have to look for a small "Limited Edition" graphic in the upper corner of the case. Sega released 20,000 of these for the game's first run, and they included a soundtrack CD alongside the three game discs and the "Passport" Internet disc. Yeah, a case full of 5 discs. These are breaking \$100 more often these days, with the renewed interest in *Shenmue*. But that



could drop when things cool off. Regular *Shenmue* goes for about \$50 as of this writing, but again, that's a bit inflated due to recent events.

### THE HEAVY HITTERS

Capcom was cranking out fighting games like nobody's business during the Sega Saturn and then Dreamcast eras. Sega's platforms could handle arcade-perfect conversions of games that the original PlayStation struggled to run, and so these consoles were the perfect place for 2D fighting.

Some of the more obscure games can be quite pricey these days. *Project Justice*, the sequel to *Rival Schools*, can cost upward of \$150.



3D arena fighter *Power Stone 2* and *Street Fighter III: Third Strike* aren't as tough to get, but are still in the \$70–80 range. And hovering around \$40–50 are classics like *Marvel vs. Capcom 2*, *Capcom vs. SNK*, *Street Fighter Alpha 3*, *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*, etc.

In general, the later in Dreamcast's life it was released, the harder it is to find; print runs on earlier games like the first *Marvel vs. Capcom* and *Power Stone* seem to have been higher when publishers were more exuberant about Dreamcast's chances in the marketplace. By 2001, they were just serving a few remaining diehards.

Capcom's rival-turned-business-partner SNK also had some Dreamcast rarities of its own, mostly *Fatal Fury: Mark of the Wolves*, another game that can top \$100 these days.

### SHOOTING FOR THE TOP

Even more niche than fighting games were shmups, which Capcom also cranked out like crazy. *Cannon Spike*, *Mars Matrix*, and *Giga Wing 2* are the three shooters you'll pay anywhere from \$50–100 for. There's also *Bangai-O*, developed by action kings Treasure and published here by Crave Entertainment, in the same price range.

### THE HORROR!

Survival horror was quite the popular genre during the years 1999–2001, so it's no surprise that Dreamcast was full of horrific or otherwise highly grimdark adventures. Capcom, which really was just cranking out games left and right, of course had the now-classic Dreamcast exclusive *Resident Evil: Code Veronica*, followed up with ports of the second and third *Resident Evil* games. Those two are harder to track down, and you'll probably pay upward of \$50 for each but less for *Veronica*.



There's also *Carrier* by Jaleco (\$10–20), *Illbleed* (\$80–90), the memorably awful *The Ring: Terror's Realm* (\$20), and Sega's own *D2* (\$40–50) among others.

### FIRST PARTY

It was Sega that delivered many of the true Dreamcast classics. Since most of these were printed in fairly large runs, you shouldn't have a very hard time tracking down *Seaman*, *Jet Grind Radio*, *Space Channel 5*, *Samba de Amigo* (although its maraca controllers can cost up to \$100), etc. In fact, I've seen lots of sealed copies of some games like *Chu Chu Rocket* and *Fantasy Star Online* kicking around even today, so study up before you get suckered into buying a "rare" sealed Dreamcast game. They could be really cheap.



Sega's classic RPG *Skies of Arcadia* is pretty expensive, though, with most copies now way over the \$50 mark.



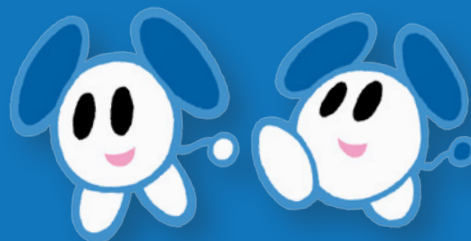
Speaking of RPGs, Dreamcast had a few of these, although they aren't quite as crazy as RPGs on other platform in terms of price. *Grandia II* might cost you \$50, but make sure it has the soundtrack CD that all copies included.

### BACK IN BLACK

You'll note that a lot of the expensive games, these four included, have black spines on the GD-ROM cases; these were released after Sega did some mild rebranding and changed the packages from white to black. In general, these latter games were released in lower print runs. So if you see a game in a black case, you might want to check to see if it's harder to find. Even some games that don't go for a lot of money, like *NBA Hoopz*, don't actually come up for sale that often.



Oh, and one last thing: If you do want to collect every Dreamcast disc that Sega sold, you may find that you want to track down all of the Web Browser discs. Versions 1.0 and 2.0 are dirt-cheap, but the limited-release 3.0 browser might cost you \$75 or more. 🐾



## ORIGIN STORIES:

# METAL GEAR DIDN'T INVENT STEALTH, IT MERELY DEFINED IT

BY JEREMY PARISH

WITHOUT SOLID SNAKE TO LEAD  
THE WAY, SNEAKY VIDEOGAMES  
WOULD BE FAR WORSE.

**M**etal Gear did not invent stealth games, or at least the idea of stealth in games, but it's hard to imagine that the art of slipping silently around a guard perimeter would be nearly so refined or artful if Solid Snake had never accepted that first mission to Outer Heaven.

It's difficult to pin down exactly where the inspiration for sneaking around to avoid enemy detection first entered the lexicon of videogame concepts, but the idea came naturally. Even as early as *Pac-Man*, the notion of enemy awareness factored into action games; the four ghosts who pursued *Pac-Man* behaved according to AI routines that reacted to the player's movements and position within the maze. Among the many games to attempt to ride *Pac-Man's* success to glory was Sega's maze game *005*, which debuted in 1981. *005* tasked you with a mission to steal secret documents without being spotted by a small army of guards. While primitive, the germ of inspiration had been planted.

While it took a while for stealth to come into its own, the concept of enemy line-of-sight began to appear in a number of action games. *Castle Wolfenstein* for the Apple II incorporated a similar concept to Sega's *005*, though it played out not as a white-knuckled arcade maze-chase, but rather as something slower and more methodical, like a more cerebral *Berzerk*. A couple of years later, Taito's *Elevator Action* translated the spy thriller escapades of *005* into a fast-paced side-scroller with a heavy vertical element. While by no means a proper stealth game, *Elevator Action* nevertheless involved enemy agents on the lookout for your character, Agent 17; when Agent 17 entered their line of sight by riding an elevator or escalator to the floor they patrolled, they would go on the offensive.

Within a few years, this became a common mechanic in other games, such as in *Kid Icarus* with its Grim Reaper, who patrolled platforms peacefully but would shriek to summon minions when he spotted hero Pit. And Geoff Crammond's *The Sentinel* turned sneaking into its core mechanic, challenging you to slink about a three-dimensional space while avoiding the gaze

of an omnipresent eye. Still, it wasn't until 1987's *Metal Gear* for the MSX computer that stealth found definition.

*Metal Gear* did its best to roll out its high concept slowly, though this effort was undermined in the NES port that most American fans are familiar with. There, you enter the fortress Outer Heaven by traveling on foot through jungle areas where not being spotted by enemies and their watch dogs is essentially impossible. In the original MSX version, however, Solid Snake enters the fortress by water and immediately sets about sneaking.

Even though the word "stealth" is never actually spoken in *Metal Gear*, its importance is unmistakable; patrols will swarm Snake seemingly without end if he allows his presence to be known. Even the clumsiest player will quickly realize the essential nature of hiding around corners, of silent takedowns, of avoiding security cameras, and of never firing an unsilenced weapon in the same room as an enemy guard. Many of Snake's moves seem to have been borrowed from *Wolfenstein's* bag of tricks, including the ability to disarm and take out foes with silent melee attacks, but his repertoire of actions and the situations in which they come into play are far more varied and interesting than anything that had come before.

*Metal Gear's* design came about as a solution to a technical problem — how do you produce a military-themed shooter on a system that lacks the power to move around dozens of enemies at a time? — but it also had the side benefit of grounding *Metal Gear* considerably in reality, or at least within a comfortable zone of suspension of disbelief. There's only so much you can do with a Rambo-like warrior who guns down foes by the hundred, but what about a fragile soldier who evades detection out of necessity? The nature of Snake's mission inherently lent itself to narrative possibilities, and his transceiver arguably proved to be a greater video-game innovation than his quiet approach to combat.

With the introduction of stealth, Snake broke the stereotype of the one-man army. He had to survive on his wits, and

with the aid of allies. Besides his mission commander, Big Boss, who treacherously fed you increasingly less useful advice and objectives over the course of the adventure, Snake also relied on the help of consultants who relayed intel on the enemy fortress and the whereabouts of key items and hostages. In today's games, we take those omnipresent voices in the hero's ear for granted, but back in 1987 that sort of live, in-field aid and advice was unheard of. Even in role-playing games, tips from NPCs required a journey back to the nearest town, but thanks to his radio, Snake could call for help on every single screen, and the game's designers could speak directly to the player and offer contextual hints by flashing the "call" alert indicator.

*Metal Gear* was among the first action games to attempt to integrate a substantial plot, and even after *Ninja Gaiden* and its flashy cutscenes became the trendy way for game makers to relay their narrative, *Metal Gear's* remained far more natural. Its in-game conversations and radio communications never took you out of the game engine, and story — especially in sequel *Metal Gear 2* — played a crucial role in developing the game rather than simply playing out as showy rewards for completing the next stage. With *Metal Gear Solid*, director Hideo Kojima took this concept to its natural extreme, folding cutscenes and conversations into the action. But again, these sequences used the basic game engine and visual assets to create a seamless flow between play and exposition; the team's plan to use *Final Fantasy VII*-style prerendered cutscenes was abandoned early on, resulting in a game that felt far more sophisticated and fluid than the clunky and quickly dated FMV approach.

*Metal Gear Solid* debuted in 1998, along with a number of other pivotal stealth-action games including *Thief* and *Tenchu*. But its refined stealth mechanics and intricate narrative set it apart from its peers, making it one of the most quickly and widely imitated games of the 32-bit generation. From *Syphon Filter* to *Splinter Cell* to a hundred games that shove a furtive stealth sequence into the middle of a mission, *Metal Gear* helped shape them all. 🐍





# Rarities report: Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake

BY JEREMY PARISH

## IS THE SEARCH FOR THIS RARE TITLE WORTH IGNITING?

MSX2 | 07.1990 |  
\$350 (cart only) / \$600 (complete)

### WHAT IS IT?

The second *Metal Gear* game, and the true sequel to the MSX classic that started it all. Sorry, *Snake's Revenge* for NES doesn't count — that game was produced for the U.S. market exclusively without producer Hideo Kojima's knowledge. Still, his discovery of the existence of *Snake's Revenge* helped inspire the creation of this game. While the original *Metal Gear* was a big deal and a huge influence, this sequel was the true springboard for the series that we know today...not to mention all those games that shoehorn in *Metal Gear*-style stealth sequences. *Metal Gear Solid*, its sequel, and the Game Boy Color *Metal Gear Solid* (aka *Ghost Babel*) all used *Metal Gear 2* as their template. It wasn't until *Metal Gear Solid 4* arrived nearly two decades later that the series finally broke free of this MSX2 exclusive's design template.

### WHY SO EXPENSIVE?

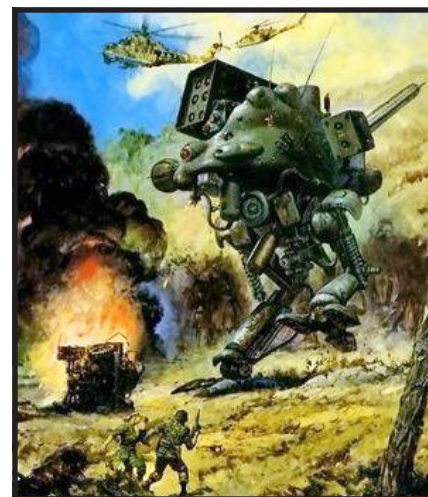
While *Metal Gear 2* codified the franchise, it did so in quiet obscurity, going largely unnoticed, especially by *Metal Gear*'s sizable American fanbase. Until *Metal Gear Solid* debuted in 1998, most Americans didn't even know this sequel existed. The same can probably be said for most Japanese gamers, too, even though they had access to *Metal Gear 2*; Kojima's grand farewell to the 8-bit era debuted on the MSX2 computer/console hybrid in 1990, well after the platform had begun its slow saunter into the sunset. Only the hard-

est of the hardcore took the time to play *Metal Gear 2*. The 16-bit era was already in full roar by the time *MG2* arrived, with the Super Famicom's debut coming only a few months later, so a belated follow-up to a game that had found far more traction overseas than at home in Japan made only a negligible blip on the gaming radar. Produced in small quantities exclusively for a dying platform and never released in the west in its original form, *Metal Gear 2* was destined for future rarity.

### IS IT WORTH THE HYPE?

As a pivotal moment in the evolution of one of gaming's longest-running franchises (and arguably its longest-running continuous narrative), *Metal Gear 2* was a pretty big deal. Not only did it represent a massive leap over its innovative but limited predecessor, it took such a massive leap that the next two *Metal Gear* games basically just iterated on this one. *Metal Gear Solid* seemed like a major leap in game design to most players, but that's because we'd never played *Metal Gear 2*, where most of the ideas and even specific scenarios in *MGS* came from. Verbatim, sometimes!

Practically everything that defines *Metal Gear*, from the long-winded conversations about Kojima's political perspective to the ability to distract and divert the attention of enemy guards, got its start here in this game. *Metal Gear 2* first gave Snake the ability to crawl into narrow openings and a radar tracking system. Ideas that appeared in a cursory fashion in the first *Metal Gear*, such as radio conversations and escaping



from a jail cell, took a more substantial and fleshed-out form here. Most importantly, many of *Metal Gear Solid*'s plot twists and boss encounters turned out to be mere echoes of events that transpired in *Metal Gear 2*: battling a helicopter, the fist fight against the cyborg ninja, and most of all the repeated backtracking across the enemy installation. Basically, everything except Big Boss' revelation that he was Solid Snake's father, which was retconned in later. In short, *Metal Gear 2* is a masterpiece of an 8-bit action game, so forward thinking and well designed that it served as the basis for one of the greatest works of the 32-bit era. It holds up remarkably well on its own, and for fans of the *Metal Gear* series, it's absolutely an essential play. In other words, yes: It's worth the hype.

### BUT I DON'T WANNA PAY \$600!

Thankfully, this is one of those happy instances where you don't have to go to the cleaners (or the organ donors clinic) in order to get a hold of one of these greats. Sure, you fussy completist collector types can expect to butt heads with one another to add a boxed cartridge to your shelves, but for everyone else Konami has been extremely generous about reissuing *MG2* over the past decade or so, giving the game a complete modern localization and updating its interface graphics to borrow less obviously from Hollywood. You can play the official English version of *Metal Gear 2* on PlayStation 2 (via *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence*) or on PlayStation 3, Vita, and Xbox 360 (through the *Metal Gear Solid HD Collection*) — any of which you can pick up for a double sawbuck if you know where to look. 🐍



# THE PENGUIN GAMES

PENTA THE PENGUIN USED TO BE QUITE THE MOVER AND SLIDER.

BY JAMIE LOVE



Even with Konami set to deliver one of its biggest releases to date with *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*, there's been lots of talk about the future of Konami's beloved game franchises as the publisher restructures around pachinko and Hideo Kojima takes his leave.

The Arcade Block office has been no exception to this conversation. After ensuring we all downloaded copies of *Silent Hill PT* before it vanished, we talked at length about our favorite Konami franchises, most of which we don't expect to see return to consoles anytime soon.

During the 8- and 16-bit eras, Konami developed and published plenty of titles that live on today in the nostalgic retro-gamer mindscape, some of which did continue into the previous generation of consoles — from Arc System Works' excellent *Contra* update *Hard Corps: Uprising* to a reboot of the *Rocket Knight* franchise by Climax.

Yet with all the Konami titles that came to mind from my gaming past, one tiny and largely obscure penguin claimed the top spot. Import gamers may well be familiar with Penta the penguin. But for the uninitiated, Konami gave this tiny, flightless bird plenty of space to flap his wings during the early years of gaming. While Penta's early work may prove too primitive by today's standards, there are still a few gems I'd recommend checking out with this overview of the more notable titles in his career.

## ANTARCTIC ADVENTURE (1983, MSX)

As with many early Konami titles, Penta's first game debuted on the MSX. Before the side-scrolling auto-runner dominated mobile devices, players guided Penta at sonic speeds between station points, catching fish while dodging hungry sea lions.



## PENGUIN ADVENTURE (1986, MSX)

While Penta's return revolved around saving a penguin princess, the gameplay saw significant enhancements with items, new abilities, and a variety of stages. The game has also become quite notable for being the first that Hideo Kojima worked on.



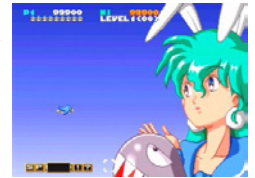
## WAI WAI WORLD (1988, FAMICOM)

Penta doesn't have the largest role in this release, but the platformer brings plenty of Konami characters together for a unique game that is well worth challenging the archaic difficulty to experience.

## PARODIUS (1988, MSX)

This parody of the *Gradius* series may have been better than the game that inspired it. The host of selectable characters Konami brought to this bizarre twist on its shooter formula features Penta's son, Pentarou, as a playable character. The nature

of shooters also makes this one of the most important titles on the list, and there are several great entries in the series to explore from the Famicom to the Sega Saturn. I recommend digging right into the incredibly vibrant 1996 PS1/Saturn release, *Jikkyō Osuhaberi Parodius*.



## YUME PENGUIN MONOGATARI (1991, FAMICOM)

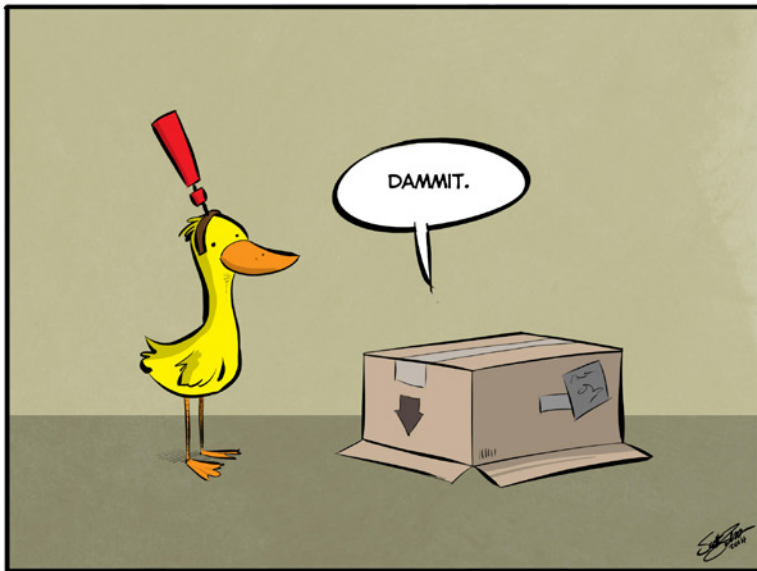
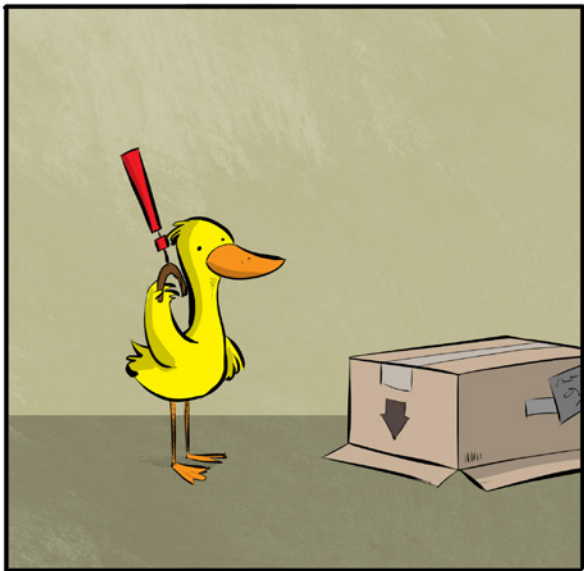
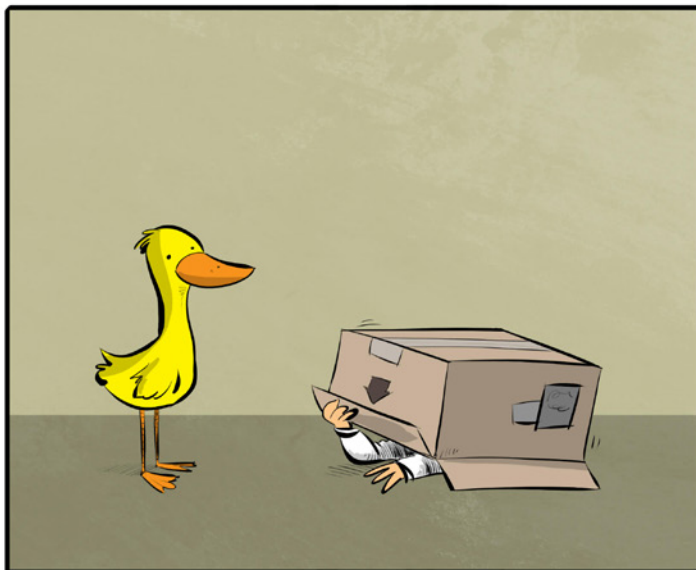
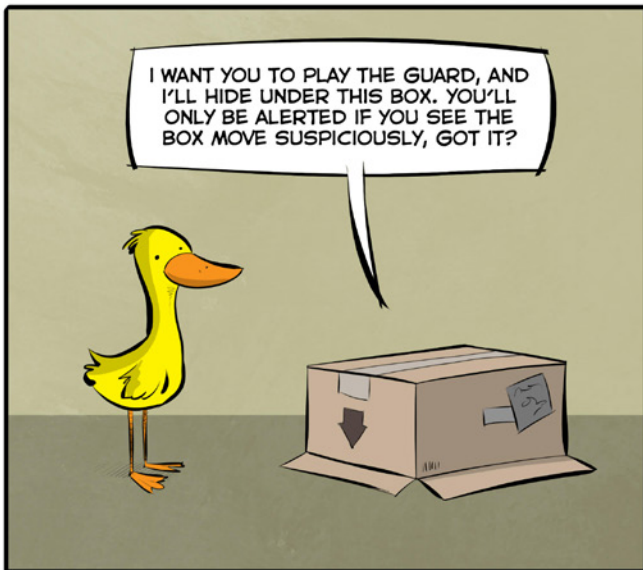
This classic both justifies this list and continues to provide excellent fodder for anyone looking to create a YouTube video about delightfully bizarre games from abroad. The story revolves around Penta's girlfriend leaving him because of his weight, and the efforts of her new suitor to keep Penta husky and single. The goal of each stage focuses on losing weight with energy power-ups that enable you to destroy enemies by shouting Japanese text, while avoiding the endless barrage of food enemies throw in Penta's direction. Whether traditional platforming stages or shooter levels, Penta must reach the end of each one in time and in shape to avoid a rather harsh breakup call from his girlfriend. One assumes the happy ending is the true one, given Pentarou's later existence. You really can't make this kind of game up, but thank heavens Konami did. 🐧



JAMIE LOVE is Nerd Block's brand manager. He loves penguins so much he drives around with a Prinky on his dashboard. Follow him on Twitter @chairmanlove.

# EXPERIENCE POINTS

BY SCOTT JOHNSON



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Illustration by Thor Thorvaldson

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