

# RETRO

VIDEOGAME



0 774470 29348 4

10 >

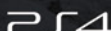
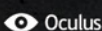
PLAY FOR FREE



NEW BRITISH TANK TREE  
NEW ROCKET LAUNCHER VEHICLES  
NEW HISTORICAL MAPS  
FULLY DESTRUCTIBLE BUILDINGS  
EVEN BETTER GRAPHICS WITH NEW GAME-ENGINE



© 2009–2015 by Gaijin Entertainment. All rights reserved.



# ★ W A R ★ THUNDER

WARHUNDER.COM



NEW UPDATE WITH  
BRITISH TANKS!

## press start: february 2016

### Taking Aim at Shooters and *Star Wars*

Issue 10 marks a major milestone for *RETRO*. As the new editor-in-chief, I made it my first order of business to evaluate the magazine's recurring and unique content. My goal is to transform *RETRO* into an evergreen periodical. You'll find a smattering of previews and reviews scattered across our pages, but the bulk of our content going forward will consist of features, retrospectives, and interviews — the sort of content you can revisit weeks, months, and even years after an issue's on-sale date.

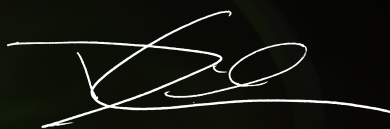
Our feature blowout begins in a galaxy far, far away. In 1983, the first *Star Wars* game took flight in arcades. The games that followed were hit or miss, much like the sequels and prequels to George Lucas' 1977 space opera, but the best of the bunch rank among the best games ever made. This issue looks back on the cream of the crop of *Star Wars* games across virtually every gaming platform.

You also hold in your hands some of the most comprehensive retrospectives on first-person shooters ever assembled.

The origins of *Halo*, and an eight-page look back at the evolution of the FPS genre complete with exclusive comments from legends like John Romero and Scott Miller, are just some of the feature articles at your fingertips.

But wait, there's more! Issue 10 is bursting at the seams with columns from some of your favorite *RETRO* writers, reflections on the original *Wasteland* and its crowd-funded sequel, and a deep dive into the making and remaking of *Resident Evil*, plus some excellent interviews.

If you're a new subscriber, welcome aboard! If you've stuck with us since the beginning, we thank you. In either case, the best is yet to come.



DAVID L. CRADDOCK,  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

In addition to serving as editor-in-chief of *RETRO*, **DAVID L. CRADDOCK** writes fiction and books chronicling videogame design and culture. His publication credits include *Stay Awhile* and *Listen and Dungeon Hacks*. Follow him online at [@davidlcraddock](https://twitter.com/davidlcraddock).

#### RETRO Media Network

Ph: (949) 713-7204  
[www.ShopReadRETRO.com](http://www.ShopReadRETRO.com)  
[www.ReadRETRO.com](http://www.ReadRETRO.com)

#### MAGAZINE TEAM

Publishers | Mike & Tricia Kennedy  
 Editor-in-Chief | David L. Craddock  
 Creative Director | David L. Craddock  
 Creative Assistant | Daniel Kayser  
 Copy Editor | Alexandra Hall  
 Senior Art Director | Monique Convertito  
 Managing Editor | David Giltinan  
 Associate Editor | Robert Workman  
 Illustrator | Thor Thorvaldson  
 Illustrator | Anthony Di Masi  
 Co-Founder & Emeritus Creative Director | Mark Kaminski

#### CONTRIBUTORS

Matt Barton  
 Preston Burt  
 Aaron Dennis-Jackson  
 Andy Eddy  
 Brady Fiechter  
 Tomek Grodecki  
 Alexandra Hall  
 Kieren Hawken  
 Daniel Kayser  
 Graeme Mason  
 Jeremy Parish  
 Patrick Scott Patterson  
 Chris Smith  
 John Szczepaniak  
 Kevin Tambornino  
 Michael Thomasson

#### COVER IMAGE

Caleb Havertape created this issue's beautiful FPS-themed cover. Check out more of his work online at [caleb-havertape.deviantart.com](http://caleb-havertape.deviantart.com). Credit for our incredible *Star Wars*-themed cover goes to Rob Duenas, whose portfolio you can find at [robduenas.deviantart.com](http://robduenas.deviantart.com).

#### ADVERTISING

Advertising Director | Mike Kennedy  
 T: (949) 842-6671  
 E: [sales@readretro.com](mailto:sales@readretro.com)

#### COVERAGE INQUIRIES

Want to see your product or story in the pages of *RETRO Videogame Magazine*? Email us: [contact@readretro.com](mailto:contact@readretro.com)

#### PRINTING & DISTRIBUTION

*RETRO Videogame Magazine* is published bimonthly in print and digital form.

#### RETRO MEDIA NETWORK

[ReadRETRO.com](http://ReadRETRO.com) / *RETRO Videogame Magazine*  
[ShopReadRETRO.com](http://ShopReadRETRO.com)  
[RETROMediaNetwork.com](http://RETROMediaNetwork.com)  
[GameGavel.com](http://GameGavel.com)  
[RETROArcadeRadio.com](http://RETROArcadeRadio.com)

#### DISCLAIMER

*RETRO Videogame Magazine* is part of the RETRO Media Network. Reproduction in whole or in part in any form or medium without the express written permission of GameGavel, LLC is prohibited.

#### COPYRIGHT

RETRO © Issue #10 ©2015, 2016 RETRO Media Network. All rights reserved.

GET YOUR RETRO PRINT & DIGITAL MAGS, MERCH, AND MORE!

[www.ShopReadRETRO.com](http://www.ShopReadRETRO.com)



## QUICK READS

- 06 Global Gamer U.K.**  
Our correspondent brings news of expos and soccer games.
- 07 Global Gamer Japan**  
Rock-paper-scissors creeps into games more than you might think.
- 08 “Use the Flippers, Luke!”**  
Read about famous tables in under 12 parsecs.
- 11 Preview: Devil’s Bluff**  
We tour KBJ Games’ house of horrors.
- 12 Star Wars Arcade Games**  
Soar, shoot, and race your way through George Lucas’ suite of coin gobblers.
- 26 Battlefield to Back**  
Lock and load. RETRO wages war across all three *Battlefront* titles.
- 28 Proving Grounds**  
Don your hazmat suit and return to Interplay’s *Wasteland*.
- 31 Review: Wasteland 2**  
How does inXile’s Kickstarter darling stack up to the beloved original?
- 35 Remembering Rogue Leader**  
Revisit one of GameCube’s best games.
- 37 Rarities Report**  
Unearthing a rare (and pricey) Bungie title.
- 47 How Quake Changed Everything**  
id’s gritty opus set the stage for much of 3D game design.
- 48 Classic Mods: Yesterday’s Fun, Tomorrow’s History?**  
Modding is timeless, but the mods themselves? Not so much.
- 51 Preview: Doom**  
id Software mixes classic and contemporary elements to concoct a bloody cocktail.
- 59 Origin Stories**  
Why did *Halo*’s combat evolve from third- to first-person?

## RETROSPECTIVES

- 14 Jedi Generations**  
Join us for a tour of the best (and worst) *Star Wars* videogames.
- 22 Tales from the Light Side**  
How BioWare’s *KotOR* prequels out-prenequed George Lucas’s prequels.
- 38 The Dawn of First-Person Shooters**  
*Maze Wars*, *Wolfenstein 3D*, and the birth of the first-person shooter.
- 52 Halo: Combat Evolving**  
How Bungie’s seminal series became a cornerstone of Microsoft’s business.
- 67 House of Horrors**  
The making and “REmaking” of Capcom’s survival-horror classic.

## INTERVIEWS

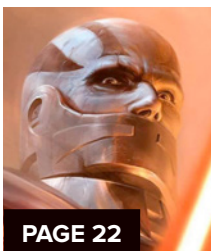
- 32 Tale of Tales**  
Our friends at IndieGaming.com chat with two devs preparing to leave the industry.
- 61 Lindsey Stirling**  
Videogame music catapulted Lindsey Stirling to YouTube’s highest heights.
- 66 Dev-olution: Tim Schafer**  
Point and click your way to the beginnings of Schafer’s career.

- 63 Multiplayer Madness**  
Sharing a dorm room with *Halo*, *GoldenEye 007*, and other console classics.
- 64 Review: Enyo Arcade**  
Sweet, sweet shmup torture.
- 73 Running and Gunning in Console Shooters**  
FPS games circle-strafe their way from desktops to living rooms.
- 75 Hell on Earth (and PlayStation)**  
One man’s journey through *Doom* on PS1.
- 76 From the Desk of the Commissioner**  
Just what is a “real gamer,” anyway?
- 77 Homebrew Heaven**  
Check out what’s happening on the homebrew scene.

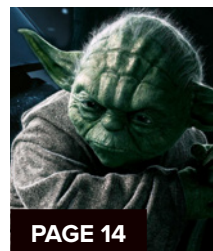
## SPECIAL FEATURES

- 09 Book Excerpt: Untold History of Japanese Games, Vol. II**  
What do Mario, Pac-Man, and *Star Wars* share in common? Namco. Also, Japan.
- 18 Unearthing the Atari Mega Drive**  
Remember when Atari and Sega almost teamed up to make a console?
- 49 Maze Invaders**  
Famed designer Ed Logg discusses one of his long-lost games.
- 62 Bouncer**  
The lost arcade game from developer Entertainment Sciences.

Illustration by Thor Thorvaldson



PAGE 22



PAGE 14



PAGE 38



PAGE 52



GLOBAL GAMER U.K. REPORT

# EXPOS AND FOOTIES



BY GRAEME MASON

## THREE RECENT EXPOS, PLUS TWO CLASSIC FOOTIE GAMES VIE FOR SUPERIORITY.

**T**he U.K. has seen three major retro events since my last report, each one with unique qualities. The 9th and 10th of October saw the return of PLAY Expo, which is fast becoming the cornerstone of retro events. Once more held at the vast Event City, Manchester, PLAY Expo encompasses a huge range of popular consoles and computers, generally under a theme such as the timely *Star Wars* and James Bond sections. Sony showed off the latest *Dark Souls* game; also on display were a number of indie titles, with Fully Illustrated's *Wulverblade* and construction game *Terra Tech* looking particularly impressive.



As usual, cosplay was a key part of the expo, with some of the best cosplayers taking part in a masquerade showcasing their characters. With the return of several guest speakers including *Q\*bert* creator Warren Davis, a dazzling array of stalls selling retro and geek-culture items, and an ever-popular arcade and pinball section, PLAY Expo proved to be another outstanding success.

The London Gaming Market debuted on the 15th of November. Taking place at the Royal National Hotel in Russell Square, the Market offered video and board games as

well as miscellaneous items of geek culture. With no tickets available prior to the day, its organizers (Replay Events, also behind PLAY Expo) were somewhat taken aback by its popularity. Although the queue to get into the hotel moved swiftly, even at the early opening time of 11:00 a.m., the rooms were jam-packed, often with stalls three to four people deep as gamers browsed for rare or desirable items. Given this was a highly-publicized event in the center of London, it was little surprise that there were few bargains to be had; however, with most sellers willing to haggle, there were definitely deals for those who were prepared to buy bundles.

While the organizers would no doubt brand the LGM an outstanding success, the videogame hall in particular was far too small for the assembled crowds, and actually getting to view each seller's wares proved difficult throughout the day. But in principal the idea is sound, and the market looks set to continue, with the next one planned for March 2016.

Finally, the REVIVAL Winter Warmer took place at Wolverhampton over the weekend of 28th and 29th November. This dedicated retro show, organized by Craig Turner, offered a more intimate and retro gaming experience than the PLAY Expo.

There have been two proposed reboots of popular U.K. soccer games over the last month or so. Firstly, on October 14th, Dino Dini, creator of the *Kick Off* series, announced he was working with a Finnish developer to create an updated version called *Kick Off Revival*. The original series was famous (or as some would say, infamous) for introducing a new control system where the player had to learn how to control the ball, rather than it simply sticking to feet, as with many soccer simulations. *Kick Off*, and particularly its sequel, are held in high regard by its dedicated following — there has been an annual World Cup of the game since 2000.

Meanwhile, one of *Kick Off's* rivals in the '90s was *Sensible Soccer*. Offering a more arcade-style experience, *Sensible Soccer* has a similarly dedicated fanbase, although due to the license being held by publisher Codemasters, creator Jon Hare is unable to use the original name. *Sociable Soccer* aims to combine the pure, fast-paced action of the original with an updated graphical sheen and modern multiplayer aspects. Despite a recent Kickstarter canceled for the latter, fans of both series are waiting anxiously to see what these famous developers can do with new technology.

Until next time, play well, retro fans! 🎮

**GRAEME MASON**, hailing from Chelmsford, has written about retro games since 2010. His interest dates back to the late '70s, when he stood wide-eyed in front of a *Space Invaders* cab.

GLOBAL GAMER JAPAN

# ROCK. PAPER. GAME MECHANIC.

BY KEVIN TAMBORNINO

## ONE CLASSIC DIVERSION TURNS UP IN VIDEOGAMES MORE OFTEN THAN YOU MIGHT THINK.

Remember playing rock-paper-scissors? Rock beats scissors, scissors beats paper, and paper beats rock. I used to play it with my friends to determine the winner of an argument or claim the last piece of pizza. As I grew older and started resolving disputes with words, I kind of forgot about the game. That is, until I came to Japan.

Rock-paper-scissors, or “janken” as the locals call it, is huge in Japan. I see it played everywhere I go. Kids at the park play it to choose who is “it.” Celebrities play it on wacky variety shows. Businessmen in suits play it to decide who buys the beer after work. I wouldn’t be surprised if the prime minister of Japan was elected through a week-long janken tournament.

Janken extends beyond killing time or finishing arguments. It is so ingrained in the culture that its use bleeds into videogames. Janken has been used as a game mechanic in many titles across a variety of genres. In fact, for many games, the battle system is just round after round of rock-paper-scissors.

The NES title *Princess Tomato in the Salad Kingdom* is a strange game to begin with, an adventure that takes place in a world inhabited by anthropomorphic veg-

etables. Things get even odder when the battles take place as janken tournaments with evil, rival vegetables. It often feels like luck, rather than skill, determines the winner of these battles.

Many anime adventure games in the 16-bit era also used janken battles or had their franchise characters play janken within minigames. How does Sailor Moon settle her grievances in *Sailor Moon Collection* for the PC Engine? With a few friendly rounds of janken.

I previously wrote about *Yo-kai Watch* arcade machines (*RETRO #7*). There are many machines like these in arcades and shopping centers. They use collectable cards or medals to bring characters into the game. Once the characters are summoned, kids play out the battles with simple three-button minigames. Many of these are based on janken since it’s a system that kids already know.

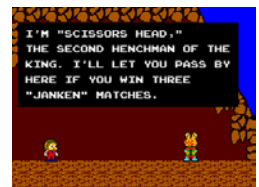
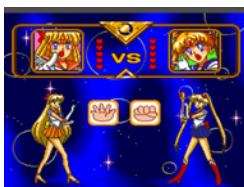
*Ranma ½: Ougi Jaanken*, based on the popular anime/manga series *Ranma ½*, uses the janken mechanic in a clever way. It’s a standard falling-block puzzle game, but the blocks contain icons for rock, paper, and scissors. If you stack, for example, paper on rock, you clear all the rocks below it. It’s a bit difficult to figure out at first but a fun game overall.

The 3DO and Sega Saturn also had versions of a “strip rock-paper-scissors” game called *The Yakuken Special*, but really, the less said about that, the better.

There are other, less obvious uses of janken. Many games use a janken-style system to determine how weapons or magic spells take effect. In the *Fire Emblem* series, this is presented as the “Weapon Triangle.” It shows which weapons will be most effective against others in battle. Swords beat axes, axes beat lances, and lances beat swords. Knowing which weapons to use against different enemies is vital for victory. *Pokémon* uses a version of janken as well.

The fighting series *Dead or Alive* also has a janken dynamic hidden behind the flashy fighting moves. In this case the system is based on the three basic types of moves. Striking (punching/kicking) beats throwing, throwing beats holding, holds beat striking. You don’t need to know this system to enjoy the series, but understanding it can make you a better player.

These are just a few of the many examples of janken found in games. There are dozens, maybe even hundreds more. Some of them are lame, but at least a third of them rock. [You’re fired. Consider this your walking paper. —Ed.] 🍷



KEVIN TAMBORNINO explores the culture and mechanics of Japanese games for RETRO Magazine. His favorite retro game is rock-paper-scissors.

# “USE THE FLIPPERS, LUKE!”

BY PRESTON BURT

## A LOOK AT STAR WARS PINBALL

**T**he *Force Awakens* recently captured the world’s attention with 24/7 blanket marketing, courtesy of the same product-hawking machine that first put Luke, Leia, Han, and Chewie on everything from bedsheets to cereal boxes over 30 years ago. It’s no wonder we ended up with a few pinball games along the way. Today we’ll spotlight the various different iterations on silverball from a galaxy not so far away.

### THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK (HANKIN, 1980)

Released shortly after the theatrical debut of the second film in the original *Star Wars* trilogy, *The Empire Strikes Back* is hands-down the rarest of any of the *Star Wars*-themed pinball machines. Due to the rise in the popularity of videogames, Australian manufacturer Hankin produced only an estimated 350 units before closing its doors. The most striking feature of this table is undoubtedly the imposing image of Darth Vader displayed on the “infinity” back glass. Fans of other early solid-state tables may recognize the infinity effect from Bally’s popular *Space Invaders* pinball machine. The lower playfield layout also seems to borrow inspiration from the aforementioned *Space Invaders*, while the top portion bears a striking similarity to Williams’ *Firepower*.

### STAR WARS (DATA EAST, 1992)

With the popularity of *Star Wars*, it’s hard to believe that the first North American table would not come until 12 years after

Hankin’s *ESB*, when Data East’s pinball division (which would evolve into part of Sega before eventually becoming today’s Stern Pinball) made what most pinball fans consider to be the definitive version. Complete with interactive R2-D2, iconic artwork, and original sound effects, this game sold the most of any physical *Star Wars* table at over 10,000 units. This debut design from modern-day master John Borg is extremely fun, and includes almost everything you would expect from a *Star Wars* pinball machine, with few exceptions. Availability, along with modern aftermarket upgrades, make this machine the perfect addition for any fan of the Force.

### STAR WARS TRILOGY (SEGA, 1997)

Not nearly as well-loved as the previously mentioned Data East version, Sega’s *Star Wars Trilogy* does incorporate most of the iconic aspects of the three films. Beyond the standard drop targets, plastic ramp, and pop bumpers, cool features on this machine include a ball-launching X-Wing fighter, a mechanized ION cannon ball diverter, and a carbonite-frozen Han Solo upkicker shot. Although the artwork designed to coincide with the *Special Edition* release of the films is nothing special, the dot-matrix animation showing Leia strangling Jabba and the ability to answer *Star Wars* trivia add some unique features to an otherwise B-list pinball game.

### Star Wars Episode I (Williams, 1999)

Okay, opinions about the quality of the film aside, this *Phantom Menace*-themed

pinball table is quite an ingenious creation. One of only two “Pinball 2000” tables to make it off the Williams production line, its inventive integration of video projected onto the playfield glass was the company’s last-ditch effort to save the silverball before shutting down the factory for good. A neon-charged lightsaber, fantastic video modes, and smooth flow make this game enjoyable despite the ever-present Jar-Jar.

### STAR WARS PINBALL (ZEN STUDIOS, 2013–PRESENT)

If you’re looking to play a new *Star Wars* pinball table these days, you’ll have to do so digitally. Zen Studios’ *Star Wars Pinball* tables offer a variety of fun and affordable pinball action. Originally released in 2013, *Star Wars Pinball* now includes numerous tables and is available on multiple platforms including PlayStation 3, Wii U, Nintendo 3DS, Android, and iOS. The virtual nature of the game means features which would have been nearly impossible in a physical game such as flying ships, firing lasers, and lightsaber duels add excitement to the *Star Wars* pinball canon. 🌌

**PRESTON BURT** lives in Atlanta where he writes about games, cohosts the Gameroom Junkies podcast, and organizes the Southern-Fried Gameroom Expo. Follow him on Twitter: @nocashvalue80.







# THE UNTOLD HISTORY OF JAPANESE GAME DEVELOPERS: VOLUME 2

BY JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

## EXPLORING ONE OF THE EARLIEST *STAR WARS* GAMES.

**T**he following excerpt comes from *The Untold History of Japanese Game Developers: Volume 2*, written by J. W. Szczepaniak. Mr. Szczepaniak conducted extensive interviews with developers of numerous Japanese games — some you’ve heard of, others you probably haven’t. This excerpt concentrates on Szczepaniak’s interview with Professor Yoshihiro Kishimoto, a long-time developer at Namco who, before turning to education, was responsible for hits such as *Pac-Land*, *R.B.I. Baseball*, and *Dynasty Warriors DS*. He teaches at Tokyo University, Hachioji Campus.

### J.W. Szczepaniak: How did you join Namco?

**Yoshihiro Kishimoto:** Namco wasn’t famous then at all, because it was way before Famicom (NES). When Namco started selling Famicom games, that’s when it became a name everyone recognized. Before that it was only making arcade games, so was only known by a few groups of young people. When I saw the name Namco in the job ads, I thought, “Oh, this is the company that makes *Galaxian*, which I used to play. Maybe I should give it a try?”

At that time Namco was becoming really big and wanted programmers. So there were four other college graduates who joined Namco in the same year that I did, as programmers. But actually I was the only one who had studied programming at university! They learned after they joined the company!

### JS: Did Namco provide programming courses for new employees?

**YK:** Yes, they did. Maybe for half a year? You can become somewhat functional after six months. Development at Namco was done on Hewlett-Packard machines. At that time, one unit of this computer was 2 million yen. There were five units of this console, all lined up. And there was a hard disk drive here. The hard disk was about the size of a curling stone, but the memory capacity was only 640 megabytes! So using this hard disk we would develop five games in parallel, or at the same time. For instance somebody would be working on *Pac-Land*, and next to him somebody else would be working on *Xevious*, and then next to him there’d be *Mappy*.

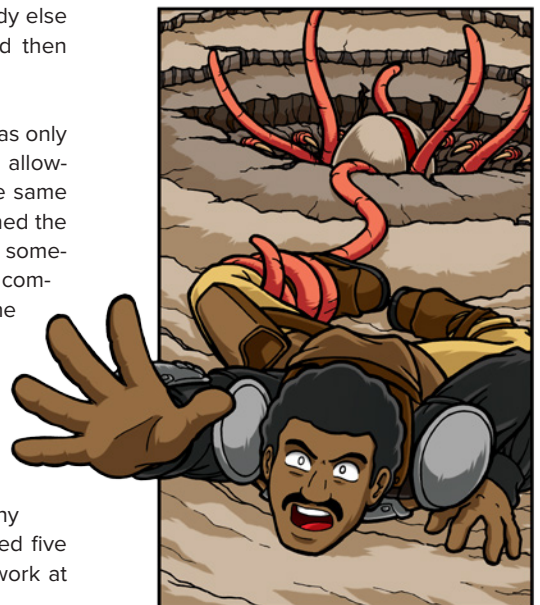
When I joined the company there was only one of these systems, with stations allowing up to five people to work at the same time. And then four new people joined the company. So if one of the *sempai*, someone who had been working at the company for longer, was using one of the five stations, we had to wait at the back of the room for them to finish. And then when a *sempai* would finish or maybe decide to take a break and leave the room, one of us would sit and work on the computer. Sometime later the company bought another system, which added five more stations, so everyone could work at the same time.

### JS: Please describe the development of *Pac-Land*.

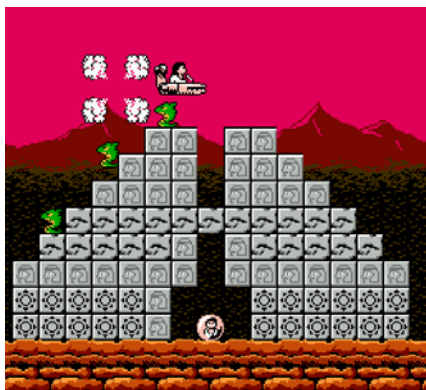
**YK:** The difficult thing about *Pac-Land* was that I was first shown the American cartoon or animation, and I was told to make a game based on that animation. *Pac-Man* is Namco’s creation, but the animation was a bit different — I was told I had to make the game based on this American cartoon version.

### JS: Do you feel *Super Mario Bros.* perhaps took influence from *Pac-Land*?

**YK:** This is something I heard from somebody else, but I heard that Miyamoto-san



**JOHN SZCZEPANIAK** has been a journalist for over 10 years and written for more than 20 publications, including *Retro Gamer*, *GamesTM*, and *Gamasutra*. The *Untold History of Japanese Game Developers: Volumes 1 and 2* are available through Amazon.



said that was the case. Iwatani-san was saying that; Iwatani-san the creator of *Pac-Man*. According to him, Miyamoto-san actually said that, but then again, you cannot tell if that was really the truth!

**JS: Describe the day you were told about Namco's *Star Wars* project.**

**YK:** I had no particular emotion. It was kind of a strange era, I must say. If someone were to come up to me today and ask me to be the programmer for a *Star Wars* game, I'd be thrilled. But at that time I just didn't feel anything in particular. I remember that everyone said it looked like a lot of work, so they weren't too keen to work on the project. Because it didn't give the freedom to make everything or anything you wanted.

**JS: What was it like working within the framework of another's creation? What were the increased risks or rewards in developing from a popular franchise like *Star Wars*?**

**YK:** It was just cumbersome — too much work! It's also strange to think about how little awareness there was for such a popular franchise. This was the good old days, when even if a game didn't have a popular license, it would still sell, so long as it was entertaining. Back in those days, just because you released a *Star Wars* game didn't mean that it would sell better than an *original* game.

To begin with it was just *impossible* to express *Star Wars* on the Famicom console. Like for instance at the very beginning of the game, there's the *Star Wars* opening text moving toward the back, saying "Long, long time ago..." At first, a destroyer or whatever it's called, a huge ship, flies over-

head. So those who watched *Star Wars* the movie were very much impressed with that scene, with the Star Destroyer flying over, and the title text moving upward. But you can't replicate that on the Famicom.

Another famous scene from *Star Wars* the movie is, toward the end of the movie the X-Wing will fly through the narrow passageway to destroy the Death Star, but you cannot express that, you cannot replicate that on Famicom, because it doesn't do proper 3D.

**JS: Did the planner come up with the bosses? The first boss is Darth Vader who turns into a scorpion.**

**YK:** When I was first told to work on *Star Wars* as programmer, my first reaction was, "What am I going to do? How can that be done?" Because it was just not possible to do it on Famicom. So I remember thinking that I was at a loss. So there was nothing else that could be done, so we came up with this idea of Darth Vader turning into a scorpion when you hit him. The planner was Shinichiro Okamoto, three years my senior. That was when Sega had their console game, *Alex Kidd*, which was the influence for Darth Vader turning into a scorpion. Looking back, it's a mystery why the licensor gave us the OK for that!

Just like with *Alex Kidd*, the screen would move or scroll to the right, and all kinds of enemies would appear, and at the very end the boss would appear. I discussed it with Okamoto, and we felt our only option was to make Luke the main character and do it that way as a side-scrolling action game.

**JS: Luke also swam underwater in a similar way to *Alex Kidd*...*Star Wars* also had blocks to break and a vehicle that jumped obstacles!**

**YK:** Right, right, right! But then, we couldn't think of any other way to make some kind of game out of it.

**JS: Do you know how Namco acquired the license to work on it?**

**YK:** I don't know anything about that. There was no checking mechanism at all. Nowadays the licensor always checks to see if the graphics look similar, and make sure the content is appropriate (in line with the IP). But at that time there were no checks at all. We weren't given any sort of materials or data to work off of, either.

**JS: Can you recall anything regarding Namco's dealings with Nintendo? It was one of the first third-party licensees.**

**YK:** There was someone by the name of Udagawa-kun. He was a very good programmer, he went out and bought a Famicom, and analyzed the inside on his own. He made the very first game that Namco released on Famicom, a conversion of *Galaxian*. He worked completely on his own. At that point he didn't receive any kind of technical information from Nintendo, whatsoever.

So at that time some top executive at Namco took the game and went to Nintendo, and said: "This is the game we created. Can we sell it?" And Namco didn't need *any* technical information from Nintendo, because Namco could already do it. From Nintendo's point of view Namco had lots of famous games, and the *Galaxian* game that Namco showed Nintendo was of a very high quality. So Namco signed an agreement with Nintendo under very different terms and conditions compared to other companies.

**JS: Is there anything else you wanted to say?**

**YK:** In Japan there are many things that I cannot say in public. This is one of the reasons for my agreeing to your interview. I want to document it for the record, for future generations. ☘





# Devil's Bluff

Indie dev Brandon Justice on *Devil's Bluff*, and its reality TV influences.

■ DEVELOPER: KBJ Games ■ PUBLISHER: KBJ Games ■ PLATFORMS: PC (consoles TBD) ■ RELEASE DATE: 10.29.15 ■ PLAYERS: 1–12 players ■ ESRB: NA

GAME INSPIRATION can strike when you least expect it. Even when you're traveling through Amsterdam, not quite in the sharpest frame of mind, images of haunted houses and the devil and throwing your animated friends under a bus may come rushing through your skull. "We were drunk off our faces and talking about what we'd make if we could make whatever we wanted, and we eventually got to the idea that was *Devil's Bluff*," recalls Brandon Justice, the game's creative director (and former editor-in-chief of *RETRO*).

Eventually they formed KBJ studios and Justice and team struck out to do exactly what they wanted to — rally a Kickstarter campaign and go to work on crafting *Devil's Bluff*. The game draws inspiration from the likes of *Clue*, *Scream*, and *Scooby Doo*, and when you start talking old-school videogames, even the darkly terrific *Legacy of Kain: Blood Omen* comes up. "I still remember when [that game] came out," says Justice. "It was distinct at the time, because it didn't just acknowledge or glorify the bad guy, it literally put you in his shoes, and asked you to do some fairly deplorable things. It's something people have flirted with since, but nothing has really captured that same essence."

*Devil's Bluff* is in no way a brutal and gothic affair, but the reference to the bloodthirsty *Kain* is applicable in a more lighthearted manner. The goal here is to survive a night in a haunted mansion, where up to 12 gamers

can work together — or against each other — to survive a killer and get out alive.

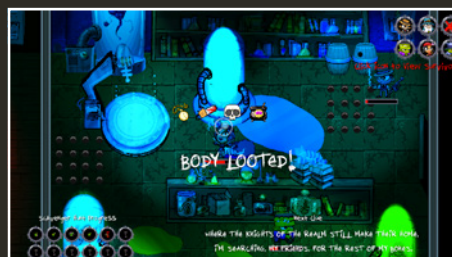
"As silly as it sounds to say, we count reality TV among our influences," says Justice. "The desire to create a multiplayer experience that captures the backdoor conversations, betrayals, and lack of trust shows like *Survivor* manufacture in spades was something that drove us from day one. It's definitely a risk to build a game more focused on social dynamics than, say, shooting people in the face from across the map, but there's enough of that out there already, right?"

Everyone in *Devil's Bluff* maintains the same skillset, placing the focus on external situations and the goal of avoiding the devil in the house. You're basically playing as a survivor and must keep surviving, either deviously or through teamwork.

"Ultimately, it comes down to a few core things: variety, challenge, and a sense of purpose," Justice says. "These are things that artificial intelligence can attempt to

approximate, but nothing comes close to the unpredictable creativity of other human beings. In the same sense that there was no substitute for playing *Contra* or *Ikari Warriors* alongside a friend, the best multiplayer games give you that same sense of connectivity and comradery you used to get crammed on a couch with your friends."

While there are obvious references to classic games — "the game is an absolute homage to the games we grew up playing" — Justice places emphasis on a different direction. "We've got some hardcore pixel artists working on the project, including several folks who've helped WayForward on a number of titles in the past, and Jake "virt" Kaufman on our audio, but the gameplay itself is almost the opposite of that. We're trying to do something radically different there, and luckily, use of classic sensibilities has given us an opportunity to add a sense of charm to this little experiment of ours while making it something our small, self-funded team could get to market without selling too many valued organs." —Brady Fiechter





# TRAVELING THROUGH HYPERSPACE

## STAR WARS IN THE VIDEO ARCADES

BY PATRICK SCOTT PATTERSON

In the late '70s and early '80s, *Star Wars* might've been the only entertainment property bigger than *Space Invaders*, *Asteroids*, and *Pac-Man*. That being so, it was only a matter of time before the adventures of Luke, Leia, and Han made their way to video arcades.

It started in 1983, when Atari released the first-ever *Star Wars* arcade game. Featuring incredible music and colorful vector graphics, this rail-shooter masterpiece put you in the role of Luke Skywalker during the famous Death Star battle from *Episode IV*. You helped guide Luke in his X-Wing fighter through a battle with TIE Fighters and into the Death Star, aiming to "shoot the core" before *Gradius* ever made that a thing.

While this first *Star Wars* game was epic as an upright, it was utterly incredible in its sit-down, cockpit version. You can even spot *Star Wars* creator George Lucas in an Atari promotional photo enjoying the sit-down version of this now-classic coin op. A big success in arcades, the game drew in players with the name and kept them coming back with challenging gameplay.

"Aside from the fact that the title was *Star Wars* and it boasted a digital version of the classic movie theme, there was an immediate appeal to being able to engage in a semi-3D battle against TIE Fighters," says Robert T. Mruzek, who's held the game's world-record high score since 1984. "The trench, for me, was always the *must-play*

aspect of the game. Nothing quite like it existed at the time. Coupled with the imposing and new yoke controller, gamers from back in the day just had to learn this one to be respected among [their] peers."

The following year, Atari followed up with a raster-graphics game based on *Return of the Jedi*. Using a three-quarters isometric perspective similar to Sega's *Zaxxon*, *Jedi* focused on the film's famous speeder-bike chase. In 1985, Atari completed the original arcade trilogy with *The Empire Strikes Back*, a vector-graphics game sold as a retrofit kit for the original 1983 *Star Wars*.

In 1993 Sega obtained the rights to make *Star Wars* games. First up was *Star Wars Arcade*, a rare coin-op in which Admiral Ackbar serves as your commanding officer during the second Death Star battle from *Return of the Jedi*. This unique cabinet allowed one player to serve as the pilot while the second operated as the gunner. Allegedly, only a handful of these cabinets made their way to the United States, where they are highly sought after by collectors today.

"That game was amazing," says John Randy, a former arcade operator who once had a *Star Wars Arcade* on location. "It was so involving and dynamic. Kids loved it."





Before Atari brought *Star Wars* into arcades, several companies tried to piggyback on the popularity of the film by using *Star Wars*-like images in their games and promotional graphics. The most blatant may have been Exidy's *Star Fire*, which not only used similar ships in-game but even drew the title screen in the same fashion as the famous *Star Wars* logo. Even prototypes of Williams classic *Defender* used cabinet artwork with *Star Wars*-inspired images before the company decided to dodge potential lawsuits.

In 1999 the prequel films entered the world of *Star Wars* arcade games with Williams Electronics' release of the *Star Wars: Episode 1* pinball machine. This piece is not only noteworthy for its unique use of mirrors and video screens to create a 3D effect, but it was the final pinball machine released under the Williams name. The company went out with a bang, reportedly selling more than 5,100 units total. The game remained a staple in North American arcades for years, despite the presence of Jar Jar Binks on the playfield.

Sega also continued to produce arcade games in the franchise, looking to both the new prequels and the classic trilogy. In 1999 it introduced *Star Wars Trilogy Arcade*, a multistage, first-person experience that contained scenes from all three original films. The next year saw *Star Wars Racer Arcade*,



based on the speeder race in *Episode I*. This unique take on the license marked only the second *Star Wars* video arcade game to stray from the realm of space battles, after Atari's *Return of the Jedi*. In an arcade market practically saturated with racing games, *Star Wars Racer Arcade* managed to stand out and find a great deal of success that extended far beyond the theatrical run of the prequel trilogy.

Fast forward to 2015 and many of the classic *Star Wars* arcade games can still be found in arcades, barcades, and amusement centers across the country. And the legacy continues, since a new coin-op debuted in the months leading up to the recent *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. From the ever-present Bandai Namco comes *Star Wars Battle Pod*, an arcade cabinet that puts you into the *Star Wars* universe unlike any videogame before it.

Described as an "experimental arcade game," *Battle Pod* sees you literally enter the game cabinet and close the door. Inside, a screen surrounds you on all sides, delivering a first-person experience that simply cannot be duplicated by a current home

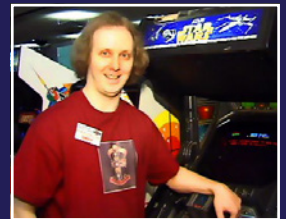
videogame. As of this writing these limited-edition cabinets are mostly found at Dave & Buster's locations. A flat-panel version was announced at New York Comic-Con, but the original pod unit is the true must-play version of this game.

"Sure, virtual reality might get me closer, but it won't be everything that makes *Star Wars Battle Pod* a delight," said Kotaku's Patrick Klepek in an online review. "It made me feel like I was in the middle of a *Star Wars* battle, and that wasn't just the graphics — it was the construction of the cabinet, too. If the same game were displayed on a regular television monitor, it wouldn't have been the same. What makes *Star Wars Battle Pod* click is a sense of scale achieved by preventing the player from comprehending everything."

Disney, the new owner of the *Star Wars* franchise, announced plans to produce some sort of new *Star Wars* film each year for as long as the public goes to see them. That, combined with the fact that it's merchandising the current film so heavily it makes KISS seem humble, all but ensures that the *Star Wars* franchise will continue to thrill arcade goers of the future as well. 🎮

Arcade champion Robert Mruzek has held the *Star Wars* world record of 300,007,894 points since January 22, 1984. When asked about this longstanding record, the champ is humble, giving props instead to another coin-op competitor.

"I was never the best player, I was merely the player who played the game the longest," he says. "That small claim to fame was supplanted in 2005 when Brandon Erickson nearly toppled my score. He played for four additional hours than me before succumbing to a combination of technical malfunction and fatigue. I have the higher score while Brandon played it the longest. I can't see myself being mentioned without citing what Brandon had achieved as he came so very close. His machine failed him with respect to the controller whereas mine did not. Otherwise, there would have been a new champion."



**PATRICK SCOTT PATTERSON** has been around long enough to remember *Star Wars* toys and video games when they were both new. That makes him pretty cool.

# JEDI GENERATIONS

## VIDEOGAMES FROM THAT GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY

BY GRAEME MASON

**FROM 8-BIT TO LEGO BITS, RETRO LOOKS BACK ON THE BEST (AND WORST) STAR WARS GAMES.**

Considering the instant, immense popularity of *Star Wars* upon its cinematic release in 1977, it's surprising to note there were no official home videogame adaptations until the early '80s. The film's slick setpieces were ideally suited to pixelated adaptations, so why no notable games until 1982? Maybe it was licensing, with George Lucas wanting to hold on to the rights until his grand plan for the LucasArts games division came to fruition. Or perhaps developers felt limited by the power of the computers and consoles of the time.

More likely a confluence of factors — such as the fact that licensing movies and TV shows wasn't as popular as it is today, with most publishers concentrating on original material or rip-offs of existing games — led to the “Darth” of *Star Wars* videogames in the years following the blockbuster first film.

### 1980s

Aside from one unofficial version of *Star Wars* on the Apple II in 1978, the licence remained dormant until 1982 when the Atari 2600 and Mattel Intellivision hosted interactive adaptations of *The Empire Strikes Back*. It was a simplistic game, even by the standards of 1982. Based entirely on Hoth, you piloted a snowspeeder in a *Defender*-style scrolling landscape. Spread throughout were constantly respawning streams of AT-ATs, which when shot enough times would flash briefly and disappear. That was it — no tow cables, no other levels. While the game was playable, the lack of variation counted against it.

The Atari 2600 also got *Jedi Arena* a year later, a game that capitalized on the popu-



larity of the lightsaber battles of *Return of the Jedi*. *Jedi Arena* made for an interesting but strange game. Placing two Jedi within the same room, each armed with a deadly lightsaber, sounded like a good idea, but positioning them so they can't attack each other and then throwing in the annoying remote training droid from *Star Wars* sucked the fun from the premise.

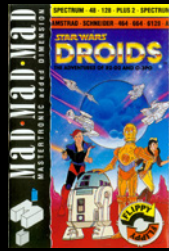
Also released in 1983 on assorted consoles was *Return of the Jedi: Death Star Battle*. As the name suggests, this game focused on the movie's climactic attack on the second Death Star. Controlling a miniaturized Millennium Falcon, you had to fend off enemy spacecraft in a cramped subsection of the screen, while waiting for a gap in the Death Star's shield. The second screen contained the space station itself, and at the center was its vulnerable soft spot. But rather than making for the core, you had to chip away at the exterior, one block at a time, while avoiding deadly laser beams. Like *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Death Star Battle* was a repetitive game and a little too easy to complete.

In 1988, the Sinclair ZX Spectrum and Amstrad CPC got a lamentable effort called *Star Wars Droids*, based on the cartoon



Lead Art by Daniel Kayser

of the same name. No other original *Star Wars* games were forthcoming, save a cutesy Japanese-only Famicom platformer based loosely on *A New Hope* and infamous for its scorpion-like Darth Vader. The potential of the series was to stay relatively untapped until the following decade.



### 1990s

In the early '90s, Lucasfilm finally began to take a firm interest in the incredible property it owned. JVC and U.S. Gold published *Star Wars*, a side-scrolling platformer with Luke Skywalker, on the NES in 1991. Early levels, set within the dunes and caves of Tatooine, were frustrating thanks to platforms that required pixel-perfect jumping and tedious non-canon enemies such as slugs and giant bugs. While the NES version improved in later levels, the Master System version boasted slightly easier gameplay and brighter graphics, while the Game Gear port excised some of the original's trickier sections in a sort of best-of compilation of the better levels.

Upgrading its console development via fresh talent, LucasArts helped create the SNES' *Super Star Wars*, which took the template laid down by its NES predecessor and enhanced virtually every aspect. From the opening scene on Tatooine to a magnificent Mode-7 landspeeder level, *Super Star Wars* was a graphical tour-de-force, although tougher than a rancor's hide. The concluding Death Star assault and trench run remain a wonder to behold, and it's incredible what Kalani St-

reicher and the rest of his team extracted from the Super Nintendo.

Despite *Super Star Wars*' success, LucasArts did not forget its PC roots. As the home of flight simulations, the PC was an obvious choice for a space-based *Star Wars* game. In 1993 *X-Wing* took off. Allowing you to jump into the cockpit of the eponymous spaceship as well as Y-Wings and A-Wings, this first in this series of space combat simulations contained an unprecedented level of depth. After a handful of training runs, there were three whole campaigns to explore, each one holding a variety of different objectives. Unlike *Star Wars* and *Super Star Wars*, *X-Wing* did not follow the plot of any of the movies. It did, however, culminate in the famous attack on the Death Star.

Given the outstanding triumph of *Star Wars* games in the early '90s, sequels were inevitable. *Super Empire Strikes Back* and *Super Return of the Jedi* both appeared on the SNES, while the NES also got a version of the former that proved even more brutal than its forebear. Fortunately, the SNES iteration of Episode V included a password system.

Slowly, cartridge- and floppy-disk platforms were being phased out as the almighty CD-ROM began to take over. LucasArts took advantage of the CD media's extra space and included full-motion video in *Rebel Assault*, a maligned combination of digitized graphics and on-rails shooting, accentuated by the presence of John Williams' amazing *Star Wars* score — a first for games based on Lucas' famous galaxy. *Rebel Assault* was undoubtedly flawed; its first level, which saw you pilot a skyhopper around the narrow canyons of Tatooine, was interminable. However, levels such as Star Destroyer Assault, which saw Rookie One jump into an X-Wing and attack an Imperial Star Destroyer head-on, provid-

ed a jaw-dropping experience thanks to semi-realistic graphics and iconic music, which dragged the gameplay a step closer to the movies themselves.

In 1994, *X-Wing* received a sequel, *TIE Fighter*, which gave fans the chance to play as the notorious Empire for the first time. *TIE Fighter* was a huge improvement upon *X-Wing*, updating the graphics engine and offering a more solid set of missions. Plus, it was pretty cool to finally dress in black and take out those Rebel scum.



Now we get to a rather popular game on PC and PlayStation.

In 1993, the first-person-shooter *Doom* took the world by storm. Although not the first in this now-ubiquitous genre, *Doom* was the biggest and best at the time. Naturally, a *Star Wars* FPS followed. LucasArts developed its own engine, implementing new features such as vertical aiming and 3D models. Unlike many of its peers, *Dark Forces* contained a coherent plot that drove its gameplay. As a result it was strictly single-player, but lacked nothing for it.

Yet while *Dark Forces* was a genuine hit, the series took off with 1997's *Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II*. Playing the roguish Kyle Katarn once more, you could now finally wield a lightsaber and Force powers. Those additions, as well as the original score, made *Jedi Knight* a huge improvement on *Dark Forces*.

In 1997 the original trilogy special editions hit theaters, keeping the flow of related videogames steady. Whereas the *Dark Forces* series focused on single-player, LucasArts' space simulation games began to shift toward multiplayer,



**GIVEN THE OUTSTANDING TRIUMPH OF STAR WARS GAMES IN THE EARLY '90S, SEQUELS WERE INEVITABLE.**



most notably with the third installment, *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter*. Now playable over LAN and dial-up, the game allowed teams of Rebels and Imperials to take each other on in deep space. *Balance of Power*, an add-on pack, introduced single-player missions, but the follow-up *X-Wing Alliance* was disappointing in that you could only play as the Rebels, and was released with several annoying bugs. However, it did contain an extensive single-player campaign, thus an-

swering much of the criticism of *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter*.

Nintendo kept its close association with the franchise thanks to the Nintendo 64 and two further important games. First, 1996 saw the N64 launch title *Shadows of the Empire*, a multilevel extravaganza. Set sometime between *Episode IV* and *V*, *Shadows* was not a bad game, but the gameplay failed to match its engaging plot. Far more impressive was the first in-

stallment in the *Rogue Squadron* series. Once more set after *A New Hope* and created by developer Factor 5, *Rogue Squadron* pitted Luke Skywalker as a member of the titular team, carrying out various missions against the Empire. *Rogue Squadron* didn't offer any massive leap forward in terms of gameplay, but was so fun that no one cared, and it became a big seller for the Nintendo console.

Sometimes games start off as bad ideas, but end up working out. Sometimes they are great ideas, and don't work out; other times they are bad ideas that just get worse. *Masters of Teräs Käsi*, released for PlayStation in 1998, was an example of the latter. A one-on-one fighter set in the blaster-orientated world of *Star Wars* was never likely to entice many fans, and its gameplay was repetitive and the range of moves (so critical to this genre) limited.

Before we depart the '90s, there's the small matter of the prequels. *Episode I: The Phantom Menace*, was released in 1999 to mixed reviews and ringing box office tills. If the aim of George Lucas was to introduce a new, younger audience to the franchise while disillusioning the vast majority of existing fans, then he certainly





succeeded. Given that one of the movie's standout scenes was the energetic pod race, a game based solely around that also appeared. Though *Episode I: Racer* was hardly a classic, its multiplayer was particularly entertaining, although only the PC version could support more than two players — disappointing considering the N64 and Dreamcast's four controller ports.

### 2000s

The prequel love continued into the 2000s with *Jedi Power Battles* (PlayStation, Dreamcast, and Game Boy Advance), which managed to at least improve upon *The Phantom Menace* film. Taking control of one of four Jedi from the movie, players enjoyed rousing lightsaber action, although the graphics weren't the best and level design was repetitive. On PC, *Star Wars Force Commander* tantalized fans of the real-time strategy genre, but ended up disappointing all but the hardcore. Three years in the making, the game was technically impressive, but remained a frustrating experience for many due to cumbersome controls and spotty gameplay

For the next movie, *Attack of the Clones*, only the Game Boy Advance received an official game version: the GameCube, Xbox, and PlayStation games were all dubbed *The Clone Wars*. Nomenclature aside, *Clone Wars/Attack of the Clones* proved to be one of the better adaptations of the prequel movies. Set after the second movie concludes, it's nothing other than good blasting fun set over a series of clone campaigns.

The early part of the decade had already seen *The Battle for Naboo* on Nintendo 64 based around conflicts from *The Phantom Menace*, and the vehicular combat title *Star Wars Demolition* on PlayStation and Dreamcast gave players the chance to jump into the cockpits of many famous vehicles. In a similar if vastly superior vein was *Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader*, which debuted on Nintendo GameCube. Once more from LucasArts and Factor 5, this and follow-up *Rebel Strike* really showed what the console was capable of, looking like a totally authentic recreation of many of the original trilogy's iconic scenes. Both

were also a joy to play, and rank among the finest *Star Wars* console efforts.

With LucasArts almost giving up on games based around the prequel trilogy (*Episode III* got a rather half-hearted run-around-and-slash game of the same name that was pretty, but boring), the milking of the original trilogy and new stories from the franchise began to dominate its release schedules. PC gamers receive *Galactic Battlegrounds*, an *Age of Empires* clone which, as the name suggested, recreated many of the series' famous battlefields. A logical step from this was *Battlefront*, a first-person shooter that placed you on the field of battle as a foot soldier in either the Rebel or Imperial army. Encompassing all five films that had been released by 2004, *Battlefront* was essentially an online shooter, one that gathered a large fanbase and modding community. Its gameplay was simplistic, and drew criticism at the time, but it was splendid fun to play despite the absence of space-based scenarios.

*Battlefront II* was even better, including scenes from *Episode III* and the chance to play as the famous heroes and villains

from the films. Meanwhile, 2002 had already seen arguably the best of the *Jedi Knight* games in *Jedi Outcast*. Featuring massively improved Force powers and the continuing story of Kyle Katarn, *Jedi Outcast* was an exceptional game that spawned a follow-up in *Jedi Academy* (2003), which starred Padawan Jaden Korr and focused even more on Jedi powers and lightsaber skills. The same year also gave us new material in *Knights of the Old Republic*, an RPG set thousands of years prior to the original *Star Wars* movies. Developed by BioWare, *KotOR* and its sequel may seem clunky today, but the depth of play and atmosphere generated by the evocative story make these games classics well worth tracking down.

Today, the steady stream of *Star Wars*-related gaming continues with *Star Wars: Battlefront* recently receiving its third update and the *LEGO Star Wars* games ranking among the best-selling videogames of all time. Despite the odd clunker, *Star Wars* games, in the right hands, will always hold the potential to create thrilling experiences across a wide range of genres, all to the tune of ringing cash registers. 🎮

## SOMETIMES GAMES START OFF AS BAD IDEAS, BUT END UP WORKING OUT.



# UNEARTHING THE ATARI GENESIS BURIED TREASURE

BY KIREN HAWKEN



Illustration by Anthony Di Masi

One of the great what-ifs from Tramiel-era Atari revolves around the bestselling Sega Genesis (Mega Drive outside the U.S.), the machine that dominated console sales across much of the world in the early '90s and knocked the seemingly invincible NES off its perch in the U.S. Though long forgotten, I recently got in touch with one of the main people involved in this fascinating confluence of events.

## PARTNERS

Back in 1988, Sega approached Atari about releasing its new Mega Drive console in the U.S. The Sega Master System had bombed there, selling less than two million units. At the time Atari was still the number-two player in the market, with the 7800, XE range, 2600 VCS, and the 16-bit Atari ST all vying for shelf space. So it's only natural that Sega wanted to use Atari's name, reputation, history, and market presence to launch its new machine in Atari's home territory.

Negotiations eventually fell through because Atari CEO Jack Tramiel wanted worldwide rights to the machine, while



Sega was keen to hang on to Europe, having been very successful there previously. Sega had a great relationship with Virgin Mastertronic in the U.K. and France (at the time its two biggest markets) and didn't want to jeopardize that.

The man heading up Atari's console division at that time was Michael Katz. He was heavily involved in the negotiations, and

was so impressed with the Sega hardware that he actually ended up leaving Atari to join Sega as president of U.S. operations, where he would eventually launch the Genesis with the shockingly aggressive (for the era) slogan "Sega does what Nintendo'n't."



A company called Mega Drive Systems already existed in the U.S., so Sega planned to market its new 16-bitter as the Tomahawk. But Atari hated the name for several reasons. Not only did key Atari staffers consider it to border on being racist, they also felt it had no relevance to gaming, and parents might consider the name to be violent and unfriendly.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Around this time, Atari opened a new Chicago office. According to ex-Atari employee D. Scott Williamson, who programmed *S.T.U.N. Runner*, *Toki*, and *RoadBlasters* for the Atari Lynx handheld, "We were originally hired to write games for the Tomahawk." The "we" Williamson refers to is actually he and Ed Schneider, coder of *Turbo Sub* and *Hydra* on the Lynx.



But as Williamson explains, the Tomahawk name wasn't flying. "From what I know, Atari vice president Larry Siegel had been brokering a deal where I believe Atari would be the North American, possibly worldwide, distributor for the system and

its games. Sega was looking for an 'aggressive American' name for the console, and that's what led to Tomahawk, but we didn't like it very much. We had an office contest to see who could come up with a better name, I think the prize was something like a steak dinner! Steve Ryno (developer of *A.P.B.* on the Lynx) came up with the name Genesis, either as 'the console that would redefine gaming,' or after the effect in the *Star Trek II* movie. Either way it stuck. The deal later fell through and I don't know if Steve ever got his prize, but that is seriously how the Sega Genesis got its name."



## SPECULATION

There is no doubting the negotiations had been in an advanced stage if Atari had even hired staff to write games for the console. Given what a huge success the Mega Drive and Genesis went on to become it would have been interesting to see what Atari would have done differently. Would we still have had *Sonic the Hedgehog*? Would the 7800 have been dropped altogether? Would Atari Genesis have revived Atari's fortunes and propelled it back to the big leagues? Or would the Genesis have been crippled with bad marketing and lack of funding, like other Atari machines of the age?

All we can do is speculate on what might have been, a scenario with more what-ifs than you can shake a three-button controller at.

*Special thanks to D. Scott Williamson*

# FIVE OTHER SYSTEMS NEARLY RELEASED BY RIVAL COMPANIES

1



## SONY PLAYSTATION

Probably the most well-known story of them all, the Sony PlayStation was originally going to be a CD add-on for the Super Nintendo, to compete with the Sega CD. The deal originally came about during the time that Sony was designing the sound chip for Nintendo's 16-bit machine; development on the SNES CD actually started back in 1988. The system was at an advanced stage, with mock-ups being shown to the press, technical specifications thrown around, and potential games hinted at. A reported 200 prototypes had been produced and delivered to developers when the project was canceled due to disputes between the two parties.

Sony wanted to retain some control over the format and be responsible for the licensing of its technology. But Nintendo wanted complete control over the add-on, given that it would become part of its console range. This saw another well-known electronics company step in, Philips. But this deal fell through quite quickly when Nintendo saw the failure of Sega's own CD add-on and decided the CD format was not the way to go.

The cancelation of the Philips contract is actually what led to Nintendo games appearing on that company's CD-i console; they were offered up as compensation. Ironically, Sony would actually produce its own portable versions of Philips' CD-based multimedia machine. A much-improved version of the SNES CD hardware reappeared in 1994 as the Sony PlayStation, and Sony's 32-bit console and the PlayStation brand battered its rivals (including Nintendo) into submission, causing well-known names such as Sega and Atari to leave the market completely.

2

## APPLE II

While Apple founders Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak were working for Atari developing *Breakout*, they "borrowed" parts from Atari's inventory to produce their first computer, the Apple I. This machine was mostly sold as a kit in very small numbers and allowed the well-known visionaries to work on a follow up, the much better-equipped Apple II. The two Steves then went back to their former employees with their machine, seeing it as an ideal fit for the innovative company, which was riding high on the success of the 2600 VCS console.

Atari turned down the machine to focus on the 2600 while its own labs were working on a successor. This follow-up system became one of the Apple II's biggest rivals — the Atari 400 computer. Codenamed Colleen, the 400 was originally designed to be a game console and was soon joined by its better-specced sister, the Atari 800. Ultimately both machines would go on to very successful and long lives, so it could be argued that Atari didn't lose out in this story. But consider today's state of affairs, with Apple dominating almost every sector it enters and Atari nothing more than a name knocking out rubbish mobile games and tacky merchandise.

3

## NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

Given how successful the NES was in North America, it's hard to believe that Nintendo originally approached Atari to release and market the machine in the west. Atari received a very early version of the Famicom (as it then was) in 1983 to assess. At the time Atari was working on the 7800 ProSystem. Atari had to choose which



machine was best. It proposed that the console would carry Atari branding but be named the Nintendo Advanced Video Gaming System, to show its roots.

Nintendo insisted that it would manufacture all the hardware, including the game cartridges, and set the price per unit of both. This left Atari with little room for negotiation and was eventually one of the key reasons that it pulled out of the deal. Atari also felt the 7800 ProSystem represented a better option given its superior technical specifications and backward compatibility with the 2600 VCS.

Negotiations between the parties were also strained when Atari discovered at the 1983 Summer Consumer Electronics Show that its competitor Coleco was illegally demonstrating its Coleco Adam computer with a fully licensed version of Nintendo's *Donkey Kong* game. This was a direct violation of Atari's exclusive license with Nintendo to publish the game for its own computer systems. You have to wonder how big a name Nintendo would be today had this deal taken place.

4

## ATARI LYNX

Most people are aware that the Lynx was originally designed by the team behind the Commodore Amiga for American software publishers Epyx, and dubbed the Handy. But many are unaware that before Atari secured the rights to the powerful hardware, it was shopped around several other companies. Epyx was resigned to the fact that it just did not have the financial clout to release the Handy itself, and was looking for an international partner with a big name. Epyx offered the machine to Nintendo first, in the form of a grand presentation at NoJ's offices in Japan. The story goes that Nintendo was incredibly im-



## FIVE OTHER SYSTEMS NEARLY RELEASED BY RIVAL COMPANIES (CONT.)

pressed with the Handy and its full-color 16-bit technology, but then wheeled out the Game Boy and showed it to Dave Needle's Handy team. As soon as they saw the pocket-sized machine with its superior battery life, they knew that negotiations would go no further. Nintendo has never been a company known for cutting-edge technology, instead preferring to use tried-and-tested hardware solutions.

The Handy was then offered up to Sega, which quickly dismissed the console after taking a good look. According to Dave Needle, Sega then tried to copy the hardware on the sly. When its engineers had problems getting it work, they made the audacious decision to contact Needle for help. In the end, Sega decided a handheld version of its Master System console, Game Gear, would be the best move.

### 5 COMMODORE AMIGA

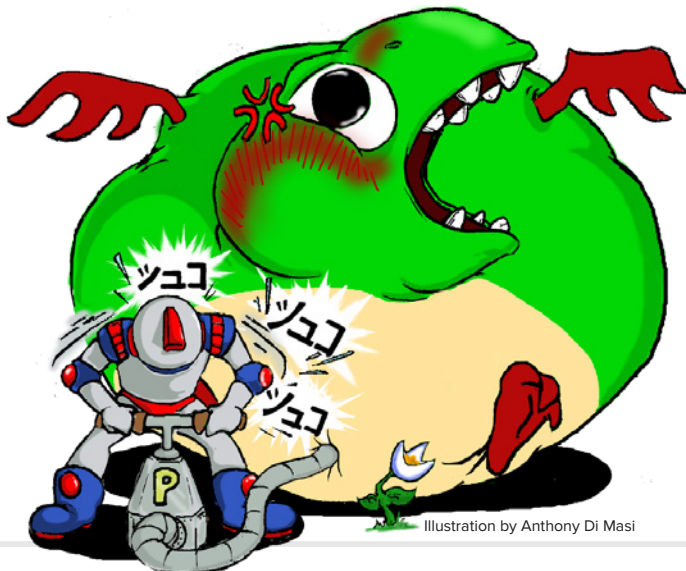
The computer we now know as the Commodore Amiga was designed by Jay Miner and the team of engineers behind the Atari 400/800 computers. They left Atari to form their own company, then known as Amiga Technologies, to develop a powerful 16-bit home system. Codenamed Lorraine, it was originally intended to be a game console that could be upgraded



to a full-blown home computer. The company originally intended to make games for the Atari home systems while developing their new hardware so they could keep funding the project.

But the famous North American video-game crash soon nixed that plan and caused the company to seek outside funding. This first came in the form of Atari, whose parent company Warner Bros. offered Amiga a substantial loan to keep on developing the system, in exchange for exclusive rights to license the technology. But then the board split Atari up, and the consumer division was sold to ex-Commodore CEO Jack Tramiel.

Ironically it would be Jack's former company, Commodore, that would come to the rescue and make the Amiga its own, while a team of ex-Commodore engineers would produce its arch-rival, the Atari ST. The ST was the spiritual successor to the Commodore 64, while the Amiga was really an evolution of the Atari 8-bit range, meaning things had completely swapped around. Brand loyalty was seldom so confusing.



## 10 FACTS: SEGA GENESIS



- With sales of over 40 million units, it's one of the most successful consoles of all time.
- The system's bestselling game was *Sonic the Hedgehog*, which moved over 15 million cartridges. In second place is *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*, with sales of over 6 million.
- The "Genesis does what Nintendon't" campaign showed the big differences between Sega's machine and the aging NES hardware, leading early adopters to switch over to the new 16-bit platform.
- The silly "blast processing" marketing buzzword referred to the system's powerful 16-bit Motorola 68000 CPU. Running at 7.6 MHz, it was over twice as fast as the CPU of rival SNES, though numbers alone didn't tell the whole performance story.





- The console is still being produced and sold by Tectoy in Brazil, and American company AtGames also produces a series of emulated Genesis-on-a-chip handhelds and plug-and-play consoles with built-in games.
- New officially licensed Sega Mega Drive games were being released in Brazil well into the 2000s in the form of titles like *Duke Nukem 3D*, *Guitar Hero*, and *FIFA 2008*.
- In 1991, Sega released the Mega-CD (Sega CD in North America), allowing for much larger games. The unit was also capable of outputting full motion video, albeit grainy and restricted to 16 colors, as well as streaming music direct from disc.
- Another add-on, the 32X, was released in 1994 and turned the system into a 32-bit powerhouse capable of playing games like *Virtua Fighter* and *Star Wars Arcade*. At least, that was the idea.
- There are over 1,000 different games for the Mega Drive and Genesis, meaning it has one of the biggest libraries of any gaming system.
- To this very day, the Genesis is recognized as one of the best retro machines to collect for. It also has a vibrant homebrew community with groups like Watermelon, Future Driver, Super Fighter Team, and Air Walk Studios releasing new, commercial-quality games for the machine.



## PLAN B

So what did Mr. Williamson of the Atari Chicago office get up to when the Atari Genesis deal fell through? He continued developing his prototype game, *Whitewater Madness*.

“I was getting ready to write games on the [Genesis CPU] 68000 when the deal fell through. The STe computer was in development at the time and so we were asked to make our game for that instead. I had done a lot of ST programming but had not written any complete games yet. I started with the technology and tools, making the tiled character graphics, sprite blitting, sound, input, etc. Ed [Schneider] guided me, told me what he needed, and wrote the AI code for all the enemies and their projectiles.”



Later on, Williamson said, he “wrote the ship control, river currents, shooting, and collision code. The STe had more advanced blitter and sound capabilities than the standard ST, I recall. I also got the Spectrum 512 kernel working for the 512-color title screen — not that it looked like it really was full color or anything. We were a new team and we were getting used to working with each other and the new tools. We kind of made it up as we went, I don’t remember any concept art or even a design document existing.”

Williamson said he remembers “plans to port the game to the Lynx, 2600, 7800, and XE, but I don’t think that ever happened.” And indeed he is right: The ST version was the only one that ever made it out the door, although the 7800 got its own CX number and appeared on several release lists, so it’s likely that version was started.

So what exactly was *Whitewater Madness*? “It was a vertical scrolling shooter where you drove your boat around/on a river and shot at things that were on the shore while avoiding hazards in the river and things being thrown or shot at you from land,” says Williamson. “There were also river currents and power-ups, but pretty basic stuff. I drew the first ship frames, which looked like an egg painted to look like a Porsche 928.”

Williamson was also responsible for creating the HUD art, “which looks terrible,” he admits, “although isn’t so bad for ‘programmer art.’ I got the digitized sound drivers working early but we didn’t have anyone to do the sound for a long time so the game was totally full of samples of all of us in the office saying words like ‘pow,’ ‘zoom,’ ‘pew,’ ‘bang,’ etc. I loved it that way, it cracked me up.” The finished game actually ended up being quite reminiscent of another Atari game, but one from the arcade division — *Toobin’*. 🎮



TALES FROM THE LIGHT SIDE:

# STAR WARS KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

# RETROSPECTIVE

BY AARON DENNIS-JACKSON

## HOW BOWARE AND OBSDIAN'S PREQUELS OUT-PREQUELED THE OFFICIAL PREQUELS

Lead Art by Daniel Kayser

If you've never heard of Wookieepedia, don't know what a Star Destroyer is, and can't imagine why an adult would make a "whiiiiishzzz" noise under their breath whenever they hold a mailing tube, then you've chosen exactly the wrong reading material, because I'm here today to tell you about one of the greatest marriages between the *Star Wars* universe and videogames: BioWare's *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* series of RPGs.

The original *KotOR* wasn't even close to being the first game set in the *Star Wars* universe, but it *was* among the first to give us a real taste of all the stuff that makes *Star Wars* so enduring — the variety of worlds, the different alien species, interstellar jaunting — without our options being limited to "shoot it or slice it." We'd been doing that all through the '80s and '90s, but it really wasn't until *KotOR*'s 2003 release that we were able to properly live out the Jedi fantasy. We were no longer restricted to killing everything in sight; we actually had options. How did this all come to be?

### A LONG, LONG TIME AGO...

Back in 1999, LucasArts and BioWare began discussing plans for a new game set in the *Star Wars* universe. LucasArts gave BioWare the choice between doing a game based on the then-upcoming *Episode II* film, or one set 4,000 years before. BioWare chose the latter, more creatively freeing option, and went to work. LucasArts did, of course, retain preapproval rights for most everything, but BioWare knew what it was doing. Apart from a little tightening here and there in regard to designs, LucasArts let the RPG specialist do what it did best, and gamers have been reaping the benefits ever since.

The end result received uniformly high scores from reviewers, but this particular game *endured*, and continues to do so to this day. Why? Is it a case of *Star Wars* fans being starved for this particular kind of content, or did BioWare not only refine its RPG formula, but do so while bringing some freshness to a license that didn't seem to benefit from its own creator attempting to do the same thing?



### WORLDS APART

Probably the best — and most readily apparent — thing about the first *KotOR* is how it's obviously *not* a tone-deaf cash grab; genuine *Star Wars* love leaks from every pore. After you've generated a character, you're treated to that scrolling text that's greeted *Star Wars* fans since May 25th, 1977; after that, the amazing story freshens things up.

The Mandalorians invaded the Republic, and the Jedi Council were a little slow in deciding the time was right to dish out some whoop-ass, so Revan and Malak — at this point Jedi — go against the Council, having decided that they need to get involved regardless. This decision ends poorly, and the dark side gets its hooks

into them. They put down the Mandalorian threat but become Sith, and war with the Republic using a seemingly endless amount of ordnance, from droids to capital ships. Your character's ship soon comes under attack — to say too much more would spoil it — but you try and track the two Sith. Whether to beat them or become them is up to you.

See, one of the cool things *KotOR* lets you do is be a selfish jerk from the outset, letting you angle toward becoming a Sith yourself later on, when the Force comes into play. This is the kind of freedom rarely seen in a *Star Wars* game up to this point; usually you begin as good or evil, and stay that way. This, however, is just the beginning of the departures *KotOR* takes





from previous *Star Wars* games. You also have to consider the alignment of your companions, from the goodie-two-shoes Carth Onasi to the hilariously murder-obsessed assassin droid (and fan favorite) HK-47. Though they would never leave you, they often offered sharp remarks concerning your latest actions. Strong

writing and character development lifted the game to new heights.

The technology of the time enabled *KotOR*'s developers to create fully realized worlds that were more than just combat zones; as one would expect from a BioWare joint, there's plenty of RPGing to

be done for friendly locals (or jerk locals, if you prefer). It's all recognizably *Star Wars* despite being set 4,000 years prior to the era most of us are familiar with, and actually getting to choose whether to be the blaster-packing space rogue armed and armored to the nines, or the noble Jedi making up for the poor protection offered by her robes with a dual-ended lightsaber, was something new and very, very cool.

**“HE’S HOLDING A THERMAL DETONATOR!”**

Speaking of combat, BioWare managed to pull off an impressive feat in making *KotOR*'s turn-based combat feel like real time. While all combat actions are determined by d20 dice rolls tempered by stats (using Wizards of the Coast's rules from the pen-and-paper *Star Wars Roleplaying Game*), onscreen it all looks smooth, with pauses while a turn plays out thankfully obscured. That's not to say it's all gravy, however: While attack and defense look awesomely choreographed, it's very hard to watch your player-character whip a lightsaber through an opponent's body yet still have the dice rolls deem it a miss. Worse still is the ranged combat; in this iteration of the *SW* universe, everyone has aim that makes a Stormtrooper look like Annie Oakley. It's incredibly jarring to see someone *attempt* to blast a door open, somehow completely missing it from inches away.

There's just so much here — Jeremy Soule's brassy soundtrack, getting to interact with species only previously seen in the Mos Eisley Cantina, combat that, despite its faults, still looks super sweet — that even if you're only familiar with the *Star Wars* franchise from the original trilogy, you'll find enough intrigue to make you truly feel a part of that galaxy far, far away.

**“THERE IS ANOTHER...”**

*KotOR* was a hit, so a sequel was inevitable. Work had already begun on the story, but BioWare handed the reins over to Obsidian Entertainment. Obsidian reworked the story, and that was the smoothest patch in development; from then on out, the going got rough.





For starters, Obsidian was only given about 14 months' development time, as the game was slated for a Christmas 2004 release. This placed the team under massive pressure, having to create a sequel to 2003's game of the year in such a short period. As a result, *KotOR2* required a bunch of patches after its release, as well as fans creating huge amounts of homebrew bug fixes (which, sadly, would not benefit Xbox owners). Obsidian was forced to leave a ton of cool ideas on the cutting-room floor. Basically, *KotOR2* was buggy, made no great changes to the original...and was still awesome.

Why? Partly because it had BioWare's fleshed-out universe to build on, but also because its story is slower and more meditative — it's definitely the *Empire to KotOR's New Hope*. Where the first game was rollicking adventure and fun, *KotOR2* is more reflective. Set five years after the first, you play as a former Jedi exiled from the order for leaving the still-deliberating Jedi and taking the fight to the Mandalorians, which left you responsible for atrocities. You awake onboard a ship, and soon find that the Sith are still a force in the galaxy, the Jedi are pretty much wiped out, and there's a rather large bounty on your head.

Of course, how the story progresses from there depends on how you play, but you end up searching for the hiding Jedi — the same Jedi responsible for your exile — and either try to assemble them to face the new Sith threat, or hunt down and end them.

One thing Obsidian actually improved on was the companions, and your interactions with them. Performing tasks that they agree with gains you influence, allowing you to probe deeper into their pasts, and even learn new skills from them.

Obsidian also tried to shake things up by introducing a crafting system, polishing combat animations, and tweaking the d20 system (along with the usual graphical and sound upgrades), but the biggest problem with the game was that



there just wasn't enough change. Sure, the story and dialogue choices were an improvement on the original, but the rest felt same-y, with only a couple of new worlds and a small handful of new enemies. If it wasn't for the incredible story, it would have been crucified in the press. *KotOR2* managed good reviews despite its shortcomings, and remains a fantastic example of how writing can make or break a game.

**“YOU WILL NEVER FIND A MORE WRETCHED HIVE OF SCUM AND VILLAINY.”**

Despite its failings, the *KotOR* series remained popular enough to make an MMORPG feasible, so BioWare Austin went to work on *Star Wars: The Old Republic*. It went live on December 20th, 2011, and remains popular to this day. *TOR* follows the usual MMO formula with you choosing to join the Galactic Republic or the Sith Empire, along with your character's race and class. It's set 300 years after the first two games, with the two main factions engaged in a cold war after the Sith retake the world of Korriban.

It's all standard MMO fare — get quests, level up, gain skills, complete harder quests — though the fact that it's a *Star*

*Wars* title adds a lot, especially for folks tired of orcs and elves.

By way of its format, *TOR* allows for a lot more exploring of the (thankfully) large number of available worlds, but again, because it's an MMO, the elements that defined the first two *KotOR* games aren't as present here; tightly written games don't allow for the kind of freedom an MMO needs, and vice-versa. It's worth checking out (and is free-to-play), but lacks in the elements that made the first two games so beloved.

The great writing, freedom to explore, and easy moddability have made *KotOR* beloved, but more importantly, still a wonderful way to spend your time. 🍷





# FROM BATTLEFRONT TO BACK

JOIN *RETRO* ON THE FRONTLINES AS WE WAGE WAR AMONG THE STARS.

BY DAVID GILTINAN

If you were a fan of both first-person shooters and *Star Wars* in 2004, a *Star Wars: Battlefront* game probably graced your console. The immersion of a first-person shooter coupled with the expansive *Star Wars* universe made for a match made in Cloud City. This combo proved to be a huge hit with fans as well as a big profit maker for Pandemic Studios and LucasArts, and more recently for EA DICE and Electronic Arts. But what started the beloved *Battlefront* franchise? What influenced it? And what does the future hold for first-person-shooter *Star Wars* games?



it be in the cockpit blasting TIE Fighters in *Star Wars: The Arcade Game* or taking down AT-ATs during the Hoth battle in *Shadows of the Empire*, *Star Wars* and videogames enjoyed a synergistic relationship.

One of the aspects of *Star Wars* that made it so easy to translate into videogames is that you had clear-cut heroes against clear-cut villains. Light side versus dark side, Rebel Alliance versus Galactic Empire, Jedi versus Sith — this basic formula made the first *Battlefront* successful, much like the game it took inspiration from, *Battlefield 1942*. Based on World War II conflicts, *Battlefield 1942* pitted the Allies and Axis



Powers against each other. Throw a coat of *Star Wars* paint on the formula and you got blasters firing in every direction courtesy of the Galactic Republic and the Confederacy of Independent Systems.

That's right, the infamous prequel trilogy was well represented here (along with the original trilogy, of course) thanks in large part to the release of the newer films in the late '90s and early- to mid-2000s. It only made sense to release the first two *Battlefront* titles around the same time; this trend repeated itself in 2015, when we saw the third main *Battlefront* entry come out right on the brink of the theatrical debut of *Episode VII: The Force Awakens*. The marketing is strong in this one.

Released in 2004, the original *Star Wars: Battlefront* came out alongside the release of the original trilogy box set on DVD (digitally altered, to my disgust). Several maps depicted popular locales from the movies including Tatooine, Endor, and



the Wookiee planet of Kashyyyk, which saw the big furballs jump into the fray on behalf of the Rebels / CIS.

The game also featured over 25 vehicles which could be used on appropriate maps. Stomp around as the enormous AT-AT, or zip away from enemies on a speeder bike. You can even take to the skies in the iconic TIE Fighter or X-Wing. Space battles weren't available yet, but we'd get to that in the sequel.

Speaking of which, *Battlefront II* brought back the original's acclaimed gameplay, coupled with the space battles and the ability to play as Jedi characters. There was even a story campaign which put you in control of a veteran Stormtrooper reliving his past battles as part of the Galactic Republic / Empire.

Not only that, a new mode called Hero Assault let you play as favorite characters for the first time in the franchise. Legendary characters throughout the *Star Wars* movies ranging from Darth Vader and Darth Maul to Anakin Skywalker and his son Luke were available. Teams were split up into heroes and villains, and battles continued until one team reached a set number of kills. It made for a thrilling experience, thanks especially to the added powers and abilities of each hero character.

*Battlefront II* added and improved upon so many things that it became the definitive *Star Wars* experience for a lot of fans — a good thing, too, since we wouldn't get another major release for 10 years.

Its high quality left fans clamoring for a sequel, and we came close to *Battlefront III* seeing the light of day. A rumor sprung up in 2006 that *TimeSplitters* developer Free Radical Design was in the process of making *Battlefront III*. One month later, the

studio announced it had lost the rights to the franchise after having worked on the third title for two years. A couple of years later, Free Radical cofounder Steve Ellis announced that the project was “pretty much done,” but that LucasArts pulled the plug when it realized it didn't have the funds for marketing a sequel.

Since *Battlefront II*, the only games that bore the *Battlefront* name were a couple of PSP titles and a mobile outing. This left the die-hard fans wondering if a new, full-fledged *Battlefront* game would grace home consoles once again. During E3 2013 fans got their wish. Developer EA DICE announced that it was working on a reboot of the series, and boy did it look gorgeous.

There was no denying the graphical fidelity of DICE's *Battlefront* offering. Stormtroopers soar over canyons, AT-STs lay waste to Rebel Alliance soldiers in the forests of Endor, and heavy hitters like Luke, Han, Leia, Darth Vader, and even Emperor Palpatine jump into battle. It seemed like everything *Star Wars* fans could ever want. Too bad the reboot was missing so much from *Battlefront II*.

For a game that seems to nail the look and feel of the movies so well, 2015's *Battlefront* certainly took a few steps back in regards to the shooter franchise itself. Compared to 2005's offering, DICE's *Battlefront* lacks space battles and a story campaign and allows fewer players to play against each other on fewer maps. While the criticism may seem unfair to some, it's important to note what kind of legacy DICE is living up to. The original *Battlefront* threw everything at us, and was impressive at the time. 10 years later, half of the content feels like it's been cut quicker than Luke Skywalker's hand.

Still, there's no denying that this new *Battlefront* is one of the most technically impressive games ever, and visually represents the *Star Wars* universe better than any before. It would just be nice to see more meat on its bone. At least it smells better than a hollowed-out taunt. Now I'd just like to see a well-written story campaign amid the backdrop of this beautiful new engine. With a wildly popular new trilogy having just launched, *Battlefront* is once again looking strong with the Force. 🌌



# PROVING GROUNDS WASTELAND

BY MATT BARTON

DISCOVER INTERPLAY'S  
SEMINAL TALE OF NUCLEAR  
WAR, BLOOD SAUSAGES,  
AND STRAY DOGS.

**W**elcome back to Proving Grounds! It's time to don your radiation suit, check the battery in your Geiger counter, and unjam your assault rifle. This issue we tackle the granddaddy of post-apocalyptic RPGs, *Wasteland*, an Interplay title that hit shelves in 1988 to glowing reviews. Its engine is a mashup of Interplay's earlier *The Bard's Tale*, and a tile-based, top-down view similar to the early *Ultima* games. Instead of the usual gaggle of goblins, orcs, and dragons, you'll be sending your badass team of Desert Rangers against chain-swinging biker scum, switchblade-wielding leather punks, feral dogs, and, er, bunnies and

opossums. One thing is for sure — you never know what you're going to find roaming about in the Wasteland!

As told in the manual, the apocalypse occurred in 1998. Apparently the Berlin Wall was still quite intact, and the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union still in full swing. The U.S. decided it'd be a good idea to build a space station called the Citadel, which the Russians believed to be a weapons platform. Just before the Citadel went online it sent out a distress signal, and soon after, all satellites went dark. Naturally, a panic ensued, and the result was global thermonuclear war.

Fortunately, the entire human race was not annihilated. Indeed, your characters are members of a company of U.S. Army engineers who'd been building bridges over dried-out riverbeds. They were far enough away from the blasts to survive, and managed to take over a nearby prison to serve as their base of operations (the prisoners were exiled to the wastes to fend for themselves). Eventually they learned of other survivors, including

campes of doomsday prepper types, and slowly began rebuilding civilization. Now they are receiving reports of strange happenings in the desert, and it's your team's job to go out into the wasteland to find out what the hell is going on.

You might expect a dark and somber game, but you'd be mistaken. While there are some disturbing visuals, the bright, cartoony tilesets and abundant wacky humor suggest a less serious tone.

First things first: You'll need a copy of the game. You can pick it up on Steam or GOG for a good price. Be sure to download the well-written manual — you'll be referred to its numbered passages frequently, which contain all the dialogue and other narrative elements they weren't able to cram into the game due to memory constraints. If you're trying to get your hands on a boxed copy but can't afford collector prices, get *Interplay's 10 Year Anthology* instead, which has *Wasteland* and nine other classics on a single CD-ROM.

Once you get the game up and running, it's time to create four separate char-



acters. You can play with the premade party if you want — if so, you'll get to play as the famous Hell Razor, Angela Deth, Thrasher, and Snake Vargas. However, you might get better results creating a party for your own. If you thought creating a party for *Pool of Radiance* or *The Bard's Tale* was tricky, get ready for this: Each character has *eight* stats. What's the difference between dexterity, agility, and speed, you ask? Well, it's all there in the manual. I will say that a key stat is IQ, which determines how many points you'll get to allocate for skills (more on that later). I wouldn't settle for less than 18.

Another key stat is the aforementioned dexterity, which not only determines how well you pick locks but also your chances of hitting what you shoot at. Luck is also a crucial stat with all sorts of implications, including the damage you do with guns. You'll need at least one character with a high strength score — he or she will be useful in melee combat and can break down doors and such. Agility and charisma are less important than speed, which determines the order of attack. A speedy character can take down enemies before they strike, saving the party a world of pain.

After you've managed to roll some decent stats, you need to choose a name, gender, and nationality. As far as I can tell, none of these have any effect on the gameplay, but are still a fun touch to consider. How well would Rangers from the U.S. and Russia work together after the bomb? Next it's time to allocate some points into skills. These range from brawling and assault rifles to piloting helicopters and repairing toasters, but not all of them are available at the start. Some are useless (except for role-playing purposes), others are useless for more than one character to have, and a handful are useful for all.

As with many later games, the cost of raising a skill increases with each point you put into it, and here it's not always beneficial to raise a skill above one. Dis-

covering which skills fit into each category could be a fun challenge and add to the replay value, so I won't list them here. However, if you must know, consult Per Jorner's excellent website *The Nearly Ultimate Wasteland Guide*.

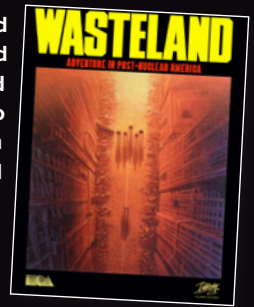
Once your party is ready you'll jump right into the wasteland, and boy, is there is a lot to see and do. Your first stop will likely be Highpool, a youth campground turned survival settlement just to the west of Ranger Center. Unlike modern games, there's no journal system, quest log, or waypoint system. Instead, you'll have to search all over for clues and (gasp!) take notes. For instance, your first tip is a baffling message tacked on the wall of the gaming hall in Highpool, which reads: "Cave. Adults: raid outlaws. Jackie. Bobby's dog? Fix water purifier."

Exploration involves more than just walking on every tile and talking to every person you meet. You'll also need to apply your skills at certain points. If there's a locked door, you can use your lock-picking skill; rocks can be climbed over; applying perception may help you determine the function of a machine. Conversations work on a keyword system. Thus, when you find a crying kid in the bushes, you can type in the words from the

note mentioned above (DOG and CAVE) to find the entrance to the cave. From there, you'll need to use a rope to descend into it.

As you can see, this is no simple hack-n-slash game; there are many puzzles and other elements that wouldn't be out of place in an adventure game. In addition to loot, you'll also come across characters you can hire to join your squad. You won't have complete control over them, but who'd pass up the chance to team up with Metal Maniac or Mad Dog Fargo?

You probably won't play for long before getting into your first battle. When that happens the game switches to the familiar *Bard's Tale* layout, with an animated portrait of the enemy in the top-left corner, your party's stats along the bottom, and a scrolling menu and report screen at the top right. After issuing your orders (attack, evade, etc.), sit back (with fingers crossed) as you read the results of the round. Needless to say, it leaves much to the imagination, but a judicious use of verbs and adverbs spices up the



**DR. MATT BARTON** is a professor of English at St. Cloud State University. He cofounded award-winning website Armchair Arcade and produces weekly YouTube series Matt Chat, which focuses on vintage games and hardware.



play-by-play (“Vic pounds the leather jerk into blood sausage!”). Sometimes the enemies will be too far away to hit with melee weapons, so you’ll have to use a turn to move forward as the enemies take potshots.

The game is infamous for its frequent weapon jams. When this happens, you’ll not only lose a turn trying to unjam it, but you’ll also sacrifice whatever ammo was left in the gun. Even with this inconvenience, however, you wouldn’t want to be the schmuck swinging a crowbar at the guy with the Uzi!

Healing up after battles isn’t as tedious as in many games of this era. Simply rest a few turns and you’ll begin recovering constitution (or regaining consciousness if you were knocked out in combat). Occasionally you’ll get injured or sick enough to require medical attention. The medic skill will stabilize a severely wounded comrade, but that’s assuming the character who has it wasn’t

the one who took the hit — that’s why you probably want to have at least two characters with this skill. The more advanced doctor skill is better than medic, but requires 21 intelligence. Sociopathic players can train these skills by keeping certain characters in critical condition, only healing them enough to practice the skill before letting them slip back into serious condition.

After you get a few battles under your belt, you might be eligible for promotion. Unlike *The Bard’s Tale*, you don’t have to visit the review board every time you want to level — you can simply use your radio to call HQ, and if you have enough experience, you’re promoted on the spot. In addition to added constitution, these promotions will earn you points to put into attributes. Put them into IQ if you want to raise your skills (most guides suggest building your IQ to 23). Keep in mind that you can also raise skills simply by using them, but not beyond what is allowed by your IQ.

If you intend to play the game all the way through, it’s worth learning how to use the built-in macro system. This will let you apply a series of commands with a single key. For instance, instead of hitting escape 20 times to rest up, you can simply press F1 (or whatever key you’ve assigned). To create a macro, just hit CTRL and a function key, release, hit escape 20 times, then hit CTRL and the function key again. Viola! You can also reorder the skills list so you don’t have to scroll to the next page to access a frequently used skill. Another neat trick is temporarily splitting up the party using the disband command. This technique is required in a few scenarios, but could also be used for strategic purposes throughout the game.

There’s a lot to do and see in the *Wasteland*, and it’s chock full of allusions to pop culture and inside jokes. You can confront the crime boss Faran Brygo (an anagram of Brian Fargo), contract wasteland herpes from prostitutes, visit Las Vegas (which lucked out and didn’t get destroyed in the war), and explore the Temple of the Servants of the Mushroom Cloud, a nod to the *Planet of the Apes* movies. While you can find plenty of walk-throughs to step you through the game, the designers insist there’s no “correct” way to win it, and even if you lose your party members, the game isn’t over — just create a new batch of rangers and send them out to replace them; the game remembers whatever you managed to accomplish with the first group.

It’s possible to beat the game in an hour or less without cheating, but I expect most adventurers will need a few weeks or even months to really savor the experience. After you’re done, you can read all the passages in the journal and chuckle at the many fake entries. If you enjoyed *Wasteland 2* and the *Fallout* series, why not play the game that got it all started? If you really want to prove that you have what it takes to flourish in a post-apocalyptic world, fire up *Wasteland*. Oh, and be sure to tell Vax who sent you. 🐱





# Wasteland 2

inXile's *Wasteland 2* makes good on the 20-plus-year wait.

DEVELOPER: inXile Entertainment ■ PUBLISHER: inXile Entertainment ■ PLATFORMS: PS4, Xbox One, PC, Mac, Linux ■ RELEASE DATE: 09.19.14 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: M

A FEW YEARS AGO, I would never have dared to dream that Interplay's classic *Wasteland* would get a sequel, much less one that stayed true to the spirit of the original game. If anything, we'd get another glorified FPS-RPG hybrid as happened with *Fallout 3*. Instead, Brian Fargo's inXile Entertainment turned out one of the best turn-based computer role-playing games in years.

The original *Wasteland* had a complex set of stats and redundant skills that could baffle newcomers. The new game cleans some of this up, or at least clarifies some ambiguities. For instance, instead of having dexterity, speed, and agility, we get coordination and speed. The skills now include shotguns and a variety of fun dialogue-based traits such as hard ass, smart ass, and kiss ass. There's also animal whisperer, and, of course, toaster repair. Even if you distribute these skills across your party, chances are you won't get to max them all out. In addition to nationality and gender, you can now choose each character's religion and preferred type of smoke. As far as I can tell, these are intended for role-playing purposes only, but it's still neat to know that at least some developers still believe gamers have their own imaginations.

An FMV segment sets up the story, which begins 15 years after the events in the original game. We learn that Snake Vargas is now General Vargas and Angela Deth is available as an NPC, but Ace is dead and Hell Razor

is missing. Ace's mission was to investigate a weird radio message about "man and machine becoming one," a job now given to your squad. As you pursue this mission, you'll get to meet the other denizens of the wasteland, forming new alliances and fighting all kinds of enemies, including the mighty Scorptiron 2.0.

The interface bears little resemblance to that of the original game, which had a tile-based, top-down view for exploration and a *Bard's Tale*-style combat screen. The new game looks and feels more like *Baldur's Gate* when you're moving through an area, but switches to a map view for traveling between towns and other sites. Combat is still turn-based, but now you get to see and move your characters around on the battlefield. An action-point system dictates how far you can move, how often you can attack and use items, and so on.

This straightforward and intuitive system allows for significant variation in tactics, including taking advantage of cover to reduce your likelihood of getting hit. Ranged weapons have a sweet spot range within which you're more likely to hit. This makes sense in terms of game balance, perhaps, but the fact that you're almost certain to miss at point-blank range seems questionable at best. In addition to guns and melee weapons, you can also lob explosives. A dot-matrix-style printer at the lower-right corner streams out a play-by-play of the round.

The original *Wasteland* was a classic CRPG beloved by many. The *Fallout* series was in some ways a successor to it, but fans have waited for a true sequel. InXile chose not to simply replicate the original game's interface with shiny new graphics, but added a much more sophisticated combat engine, updated dialogue system, and a logbook for tracking missions.

*Wasteland 2: Director's Cut* has even better graphics (it uses Unity 5's new bells and whistles), "perks and quirks," which let you customize your characters in all sorts of ways, precision strikes, and 8,000 new lines of voiceover dialogue. In a truly classy move, inXile gave this enhanced version away for free to anyone who'd already purchased *Wasteland 2*.

Don't go into *Wasteland 2* expecting the same AAA-level audiovisuals as Bethesda's *Fallout 4*. While I like pretty visuals as much as anyone, it's not my primary consideration when choosing a game. Instead, I like a well-tuned combat engine with lots of room for tactical variation and ways to customize my characters. *Wasteland 2* delivers that experience and then some. 🍷 —Matt Barton

OUR RATING: ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️





TALE OF TALES  
INTERVIEW:

# AURIEA HARVEY & MICHAËL SAMYN

BY VINNY PARISI

## TWO EX-DEVS DIVULGE WHY THEY LEFT THE INDUSTRY, AND WHAT LIES AHEAD.



### TALE OF TALES

I've gotta tell you a whale of a tale...of tales. It involves two ex-game developers who publicly decided to break away from making games and get back to creating, well, whatever they want to, really. Auriea Harvey and Michaël Samyn of Tale of Tales were known in the videogame space for creating projects that defied traditional mechanics and conventions. Some may have questioned if they were making games at all, but I think that's part of the conversation ToT was hoping to engage in. After their final game, *Sunset*, failed to find commercial success, the duo decided to move on to other artistic endeavors.

Now, both Harvey and Samyn have Patreon campaigns running, which they're hop-

ing will help fund their creative passions. Most recently, the studio launched a Kickstarter campaign for *Cathedral in the Clouds*, a real-time, 3D set of virtual dioramas "to contemplate religious themes." With their work on conventional videogames behind them, IGM got the chance to chat with Harvey and Samyn about what led to their final decision to move on, and their thoughts on what's next.

**INDIE GAME MAGAZINE:** Now that you're focusing on creating digital art, rather than specifically making videogames, does that change your design philosophy at all?

**Michaël Samyn:** Oh yeah. To some extent, I feel like we're going back to where we started. In 2006 we wrote the "Manifesto" before we had barely made any games, really. It feels like we're getting back to that, which I think we lost a little bit when becoming too comfortable in the game industry.

**Auriea Harvey:** Or when trying to take the game industry too seriously. But on the other hand, it's kind of like nothing changes. I mean, in that respect it's like going back, but in another respect it's like nothing changes at all because...the only thing that changes is our outlook, the things we're optimistic about versus the things we're not optimistic about. We're not optimistic about "oh, we're going to make this game and support ourselves financially" or something.

**MS:** Right, and by extension, more philosophically, I think we've given up hope that videogames will become the medium that we dreamed of when we started. We hung on to that hope for a very long time, but I think we've given up. We just want to make our work without having to depend on [the game] industry to accept it.

**IGM:** To build off of that a little bit, I know on one of your Patreon pages you say that as you're slowly moving away from video-

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The following interview excerpt comes from our friends at Indie Game Magazine ([indiegamemag.com](http://indiegamemag.com)), a webzine devoted to indie games and culture.





**games you realize how much they've held back your creativity. I wanted to ask if you could elaborate on that, and in what way?**

**MS:** Sure. It's weird. It's sort of taking us by surprise a little bit because we felt reasonably comfortable making videogames the way we were making them. Of course a lot of people, you know, didn't really think of them as videogames or thought they were too weird or whatever, so we were never bound by any sort of particular format. But now when you sort of open up to other things...

**AH:** Well, I think it's more that we were very concerned with who was going to be playing the game. And you know, you're always thinking about the audience with whatever you're making; but in this case, we had to think of a very particular audience of game players, and how they were going to react, and what they were going to think was weird, and what they were going to think was not weird. We had to always sort of second guess and try to figure out what player reaction was going to be to any particular thing that we do, because we would never be received as just "Oh yeah, they made a game. Let's ignore it." It was always "Yeah, they made a game. Let's either praise them or give them sh\*t for it."

We had to sort of negotiate that all the time, and that kind of makes you self-censor or change your mind about what you're going to do. I guess a lot of game makers consider this a good thing because, you know, you playtest and figure out how people are going to react and everything. But we had this other layer of public reaction to our work. And it's not that we don't want people to care, because obviously we do, but it's just that now we don't have to care so much ourselves, if that makes any sense. We're just going to make things that we think should exist, and we're not going to try to presuppose what the reaction is going to be to that thing that we make. We're just going to make it, and there's a difference in that; the difference being that before we had to predict reaction a little bit, so we could gauge "Will we be able to get this on Steam at all?", that kind of thing. "Will this be okay on the App Store? Will they feature it? Can we get it featured?"

**MS:** But also in the sense that, "Will gamers get this? Will they be able to play it in

a way that they enjoy it?" That was a difficult question to answer for us, because we explicitly wanted to make games that were different. But we also had to make sure they weren't *too* different, because then no one would be able to enjoy them. Which actually happened a few times for some people. I mean, we've always found an audience for our games, but like Auriea said there was often a very negative reaction, to some extent because of our failure to meet these people in a way that they could get it.

Our games, in essence, are not offensive or anything, and they're meant to be enjoyable and they're meant to be beautiful. So when they're not, there's a certain problem with the design. And I think now, since we don't feel limited to that kind of audience anymore, we feel that that's not a problem anymore. Now it's really just sort of more purely positive thinking; we just make things for people who can enjoy them, and don't worry about the people who have trouble with it.

**AH:** In general, the people who love our work are willing to put forth an effort. They

know we're going to make a certain kind of thing. Or they *don't* know what we're going to make, and that's part of the enjoyment of it. And I think that if we feel a little more free, we'll make better work. We'll do better design work anyway, and stop trying to fit our very square selves into the very round hole of the games industry. It may be healthy for us at this point.

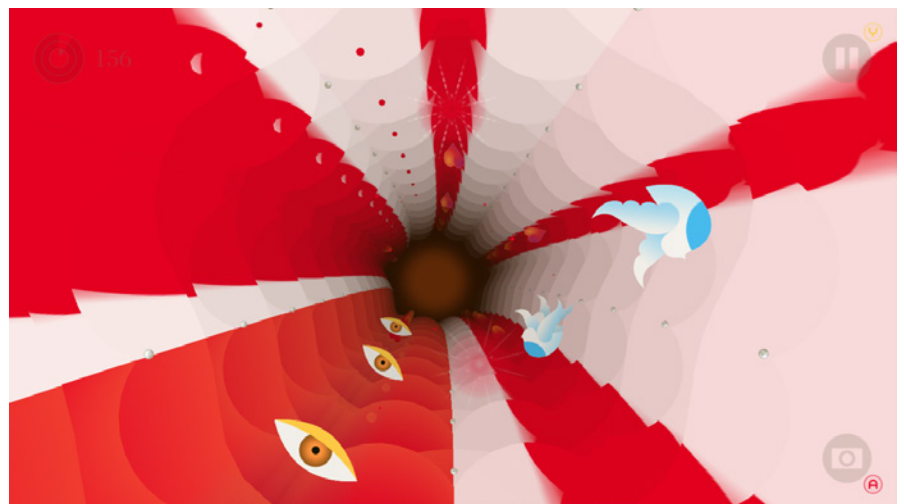
**IGM:** I know with *Sunset* you've previously stated that you wanted to be a little bit more accessible. The quote people use is "a game for gamers" when compared to your previous work. But I want to ask, accessibility aside, what would your ideal version of *Sunset* have looked like? Would it have been any different? You've mentioned that you abandoned some of your more extreme ambitions for it.

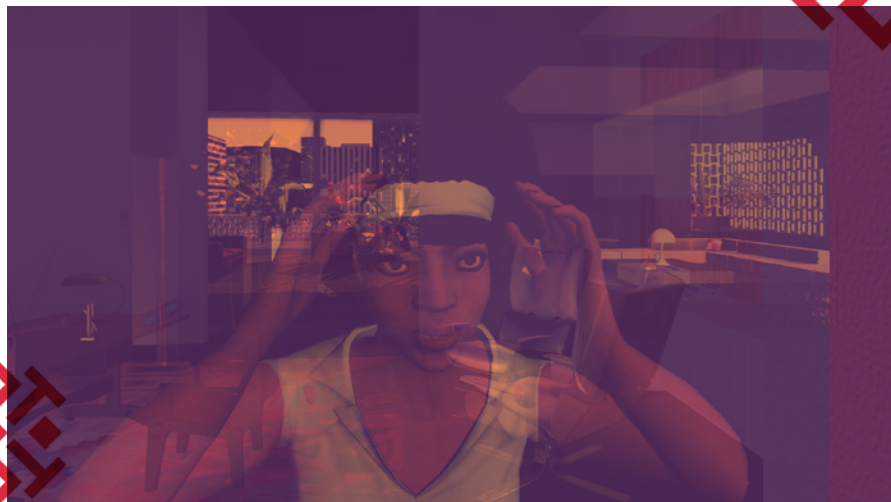
**AH:** That's true, but on the other hand we might not have made *Sunset*; we might've made something else.

**MS:** Yeah, I mean *Sunset* is what it is. We're very proud of it.

**"TO SOME EXTENT, I FEEL LIKE WE'RE GOING BACK TO WHERE WE STARTED."**

— MICHAËL SAMYN



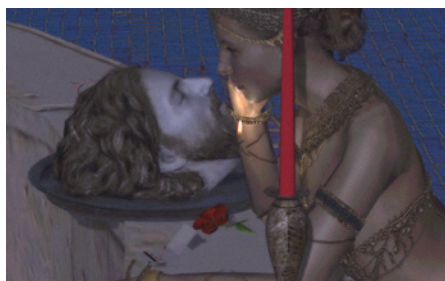


**AH:** *Sunset* is the most perfect *Sunset* it could possibly be, and I wouldn't want to redesign it. I mean, it was conceived to be the way that it is. We were just kind of naive, I think, to think that we were any good at making "a game for gamers," or a first-person experience whose content would be widely accessible. We suddenly wanted to make this game about revolution, and the '70s, and black power, with these very deep narrative threads going through it; and perhaps we were just naive to think that what we conceived of would be widely acceptable.

I think it's a talent, like anything else. Making something that is for the masses is not something everyone can do, and I think we're just not good at it. But I don't have an alternate design for *Sunset*—

**MS:** It would have been a completely different project with a completely different name...

**AH:** We didn't have one design and then tone it down or change it. It's more like, we started on *Sunset* and architected it to be a certain way. It is all that it can be, I think,



and we love it, but we understand it's not for everyone.

**MS:** We were not hoping that *Sunset* would be for everyone. That's kind of delusional. But we *were* hoping that we could reach more people with it, by making an effort. In a way it was a gamble too for us, because you never know. But then, it was a gamble we felt we needed to make. So we said, "Okay, what if we put in more effort to really look at the games people play, and really try to make something that fits within that. Would that work?" And we know the answer now...

**Both:** No.

**MS:** It's an interesting lesson to learn.

**IGM:** **Sure. I know that on your blog, on the *Sunset* page, you mention that you knew *Sunset* was going to be your last game. Was it during the development process you had that feeling? Or was it after the game came out?**

**MS:** Definitely before. During the development process.

**AH:** Or maybe even before we started... [laughs] but it's hard to say.

**MS:** From experience, we know that you can't predict how you'll respond emotionally when your game is released. It's always a surprise. At least, we never know how we'll respond. So it wasn't a definite thing. We were just saying "Oh yeah, this is our last game. Next year, we won't have

to attend GDC because we won't be making games," etc. It was also always kind of jokingly, because we knew we weren't sure about how people would respond. It was definitely an active process.

**AH:** And I mean if you really want to know why, there were a bunch of different reasons. But a lot of them had to do with us thinking, "Well, there are a lot of other things that we want to make"—

**MS:** I think we felt a bit trapped.

**AH:** Yeah, we were feeling a little bit trapped in games. It feels a little claustrophobic right now, indie games especially; and when you let go of this whole idea of indie games, you see that there are so many interesting things happening, just interactively. Either online or offline, in the realm of media art. Or in the realm of interactive media art, whatever you want to call it these days.

**IGM:** **That's actually something I wanted to ask you about, because I know a lot of creators outside of the gaming space are moving toward more hybrid forms of interactivity. They call it "gamifying" their products a lot of the time. So with you moving away from traditional games, what sort of alternative ways do you see to make your art interactive?**

**MS:** Well, it doesn't have to be interactive.

**AH:** But I know what you mean.

**MS:** We're really not sure yet. We have a bunch of good ideas, I think, that we just need to work on and see if they actually lead to good pieces.

**AH:** Yeah, we're going to have the workshop phase. Which is why we're doing the Patreon as well; to continue to interact with people, and have a sort of test space. The people on our Patreon will get to see what we're working on and try them early. They'll be our testers, if they want to be, that kind of stuff. But at the same time, we can explore things and figure out the new direction we want to go in. ❧

Read more from Indie Gaming Magazine at [indiegamemag.com](http://indiegamemag.com).



# STAR WARS ROGUE SQUADRON II: ROGUE LEADER

“ONE IN A MILLION.”

BY ROBERT WORKMAN

Unlike PlayStation 2, which launched with a notoriously uneven library of games, 2001's GameCube enjoyed a fairly strong launch lineup, featuring the likes of *Wave Race: Blue Storm*, *Luigi's Mansion*, and secret killer app *Super Monkey Ball*. But even amid this strong lineup, *Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader* stood out from the pack.

*Rogue Leader* arrived from Factor 5, the same team that had worked on N64 *Star Wars* games such as the original *Rogue Squadron* and *Battle for Naboo*. This time around, however, the developer flexed its muscles and harnessed the power of the GameCube to bring the *Star Wars* universe to life like never before.

You could pilot a number of new vehicles this time around, though many had to be unlocked. The sheer thrill of piloting an X-Wing during the initial assault on the Death Star, blowing up towers, and making the trench run was undeniable, and playing with the Millennium Falcon was awesome as well. The controls responded with pinpoint precision, and the ability to change between third-person view and the cockpit helped create unique perspectives on the gameplay.

*Rogue Leader's* missions stemmed from the *Star Wars* universe, harkening back to the original trilogy of films and even throwing in some bonus content. It also came with various difficulty settings, so you could prove that you were an ace of the stars if you really wanted to, even-

tually earning an Ace Mode that would really put your skills to the test — to see if you were, in fact, one with the Force. Factor 5 included a Naboo Starfighter for good measure, tying in with the additions to the universe made by the prequel films.

What really made *Rogue Leader* stand out, however, was its presentation. Factor 5 really brought out the best of the GameCube, running at nearly 60 frames per second and presenting an unprecedented level of detail for a Nintendo console, from the explosions on the Death Star to the sleek design of the ships. Factor 5 dialed into the nature of George Lucas' beloved series, right down to the intermission sequences that tied events from *Rogue Leader* in with the films themselves.

On top of that, the music is a true representation of *Star Wars* brilliance, using a number of samples from John Williams' epic soundtracks to fuel the in-game action, whether you're commanding your fellow fighters to take on waves of incoming TIE Fighters or bringing down mammoth ships. The sound effects are strong too, with a decent soundalike for Mark Hamill's Luke Skywalker issuing commands.

Factor 5 went on to produce one more *Rogue Squadron* game for the GameCube, *Rebel Strike*, which featured a variety of new flying missions as well as hidden goodies like two classic arcade games from Atari (*Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*). Sadly, that would be the last time the company would produce



a *Star Wars* game, as it signed on with Sony to develop *Lair* for the PlayStation 3 — and closed soon thereafter following the poor reception of that title.

Regardless, for a short period of time, Factor 5 captured lightning in a bottle, and *Rogue Leader* remains a *Star Wars* triumph even 15 years later. You owe it to yourself to hook up the GameCube, snag a copy, and take flight for a few hours, if only to experience truly essential *Star Wars* gaming circa the turn of the century. Indeed, the Force was with *Rogue Leader*. 🍌

CLASSIC  
**RETRO**  
ARCADE EQUIPMENT



**\$898**

32" Upright Pro  
Xtension Arcade Cabinet  
ONLY \$549 Without Controller

**\$299**

Xtension "Retro Edition" &  
"4 Player Edition" Controllers  
(Controllers Only)

MAME READY  
COCKTAIL

**\$499**

With Controls

\$299 Empty  
No Controls



Xtension "Emulator Edition" Controller

**\$349**

Available at:

**recroommasters.com**

800-727-0408

**XTENSION**  
Premium Arcade Gaming Equipment™

**REC ROOM  
MASTERS**  
ARCADE CABINETS & GAME ROOM FURNITURE

**GAMER  
OUTFITTERS**



**retrogametresure.com**

**A Monthly Subscription Box!  
Contains 3-5 Retro Games  
Every Chest is Different!**

1. Set Your Preferences
2. We Build YOUR Awesome Treasure Chest
3. Delivered right to your door  
**YOU KEEP THE GAMES!**



**Use Promo Code  
"RETROMAG15" & Save \$2!**

# Rarities report: Super Marathon

BY JEREMY PARISH

## BUNGIE MADE ITS CONSOLE DEBUT LONG BEFORE XBOX, BUT IS THAT FRESHMAN EFFORT WORTH THE DOUGH?



Box images from bungie.halo.org



**Developer/Publisher:** Bungie  
**Platform:** Bandai Pippin @WORLD  
**Date:** 1995  
**Avg. Price:** \$400–800

### WHAT IS IT?

With *Halo: Combat Evolved*, longtime Mac publisher Bungie became a major presence in console gaming practically overnight. But *Halo* wasn't the studio's first flirtation with life beyond personal computers — and I'm not talking about *Oni*. (We don't talk about *Oni*.) Back in 1995, Bungie took its first tentative steps into the console realm with *Super Marathon*, a hybrid port of its hit Mac first-person shooters, *Marathon* and *Marathon II: Durandal*.

### WHY SO EXPENSIVE?

Never heard of *Super Marathon*? Well, there are a few reasons for that. For starters, Bungie produced it for one of the biggest console flops of all time, the bizarre Bandai/Apple collaboration called Pippin. The Pippin made sense as a target for a *Marathon* console conversion in purely pragmatic terms: Its architecture was based largely on Macs of the era, with the

low-cost PowerPC 603e chip sitting at its heart. Converting one of Macintosh's premiere franchises to its kissing-cousin console sure would have been a lot less trouble than putting it on, say, Saturn.

The thing is, the Pippin fared disastrously on the market. Hardly anyone wanted it, and even fewer bothered to buy one. Pippin software tended to be produced in tiny runs, and the few releases that weren't painful to play tend to sell for a premium these days. Not only does *Super Marathon* boast a fairly interesting legacy given its place in a major developer's history, but its print run was miniscule. In fact, there's no proof that the game ever even made it to retail; the few copies known to exist have come directly from Bungie employees. Combine prestige with potential nonexistence and you have a videogame unicorn.

### IS IT WORTH THE HYPE?

Sort of! *Marathon* was a legitimately great shooter series; it served as the blueprint for *Halo*, after all, and diehard fans still love to tinker with and modify it. And for any serious Bungie fan, *Super Marathon* would be the ultimate collectible: a game that holds a symbolic place in videogame history, and one that few people have actually seen in person. Plus, *Marathon* would be fascinating to play on the Pippin controller.

Given the recent retro collecting bubble, the fanatical Bungie fanbase that's arisen around *Destiny*, and the astronomical prices attached to unicorns like *World Class Track Meet* and *Air Raid*, it's kind of surprising to learn that *Super Marathon* usually

sells for less than \$1000. Pippin fans intersect with Apple fans, one of the few groups who could give Atari and NES maniacs a run for their money when it comes to raging devotion. But that's how much of a dud the Pippin was: Not even frothy Apple zealots care about it.

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

Oh, come on. What are you planning to use that money for? A down payment on a house? Putting your kids through college? No, really, this is one best left to the truly obsessive. You can play the games compiled in *Super Marathon* quite easily, and for free! Bungie made the code to the *Marathon* trilogy open source, and fans have gotten it up and running on pretty much every modern operating system, with all sorts of mods, enhancements, and expansions. If you just have to have a true console experience, you can always grab the Xbox 360 port of *Marathon II* for cheap — and it has Achievements, too! 🎮



# POINT & SHOOT

MAZES, DEMONS, AND THE DAWN OF FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS

by David L. Craddock™



Lead Art by Daniel Kayser

## PATERNITY TEST

In a press release dated January 1, 1993, the founders of id Software declared that their next game would be the “number one cause of decreased productivity around the world.” They made good on their claim.

Hours after launching that December, *Doom* became the bane of professional institutions. Data packets blasting back and forth between staff playing death-match plugged up Intel’s network. Overseers at Texas A&M wiped the game from the master server to prevent students from spawning it on lab computers. Admins at Carnegie Mellon posted a notice warning (begging) students not to play the game online, and that failure to obey would result in their PCs being severed from the university network.

Not all corporations despised *Doom*. Microsoft’s Alex St. John, cocreator of the DirectX suite of game plugins, likened the game to a “religious phenomenon” when he and other developers at the House That Windows Built fell head over cloven feet for its addictive gameplay and technical pedigree.

Critics and gamers showered *Doom* with praise, proclaiming it the granddaddy of the nascent first-person shooter genre. However, it was not the progenitor of its kind. 20 years before the arrival of id’s productivity killer, three high-school kids got there first.

## RATS IN A MAZE WAR

Steve Colley, Howard Palmer, and Greg Thompson met by chance. Each was a senior in high school who had been accepted into a work-study program in the computer graphics lab at the NASA Ames research facility in Silicon Valley. They worked on Imlac PDS-1 workstations that consisted of an internal processor and memory, a rectangular CRT monitor able to render line-based graphics, and a keyboard and light pen.

Growing bored with the daily grind, Colley, Palmer, and Thompson conspired to push the boundaries of the PDS-1. They conjured up a three-dimensional labyrinth that could be navigated from a first-person view — giving you the sensation

that you were *inside* the maze, seeing it through your own eyes. Fittingly, they called their game *Maze*.

At its inception, *Maze* was simple yet technically stunning. The eponymous tangle of corridors was drawn with green lines assembled into cubes; the sides of each cube served as walls, with the space between cubes serving as hallways. They assembled those cubes into a 16-by-32 warren in which one player could meander around in search of the exit. Turns were limited to right angles, the simplest angles for the PDS-1 to calculate.



■ *Maze War* running on an Imlac PDS-1.

*Maze* coalesced swiftly, but the boys tired of drifting alone through a single maze whose location never changed. They had an epiphany: Why not let someone sitting at a second Imlac terminal join and compete to see who could escape the fastest? Inspired, they wrote the instructions necessary to let two Imlac machines communicate via serial cable. You could enter a name up to eight characters in length, which floated above your avatar — an eyeball that changed in appearance based on orientation. An eyeball staring right at your screen meant that player was facing you. If the eyeball was blank, the player was facing away.

What happened next seems almost preordained. One of the boys suggested they give players the ability to shoot one an-

other, turning *Maze* into a contest. Points were earned for shooting other eyeballs, and lost for being shot. Colley came up with the idea for a peek function: By holding down a key, you could ease around a wall to scope out the next corridor; as a trade-off, you couldn’t shoot while peeking. Other strategies, such as lying in ambush — a tactic that would become known as “camping” decades later — derived from there.

In the fall of ‘73, Colley, Palmer, and Thompson graduated high school and went their separate ways. Auspiciously, Thompson packed up the punch cards that contained the instructions for *Maze*. When Thompson arrived at MIT in February 1974 he entered the computer science department and met Dave Lebling, who would go on to cocreate *Zork*.

Thompson showed his new friend *Maze*, and Lebling saw untapped potential. “He had brought a prototype version of it from Ames and was working at our lab,” recalls Lebling. “He said, ‘I hear you’re into Imlacs.’ I said, ‘Why, yes,’ and he just dumped a bunch of paper cards which contained *Maze* and a bunch of other things. I said, ‘I can get that working.’”

Thompson mentioned that one thing he and his friends hadn’t been able to do was increase the player count; serial connections accommodated only two terminals. Lebling pitched a solution: The computer science lab was connected to a PDP-10 mainframe, which could function as a server capable of hosting players who dialed in from Imlac terminals. Lebling wrote the bulk of the code used by the PDP-10 while Thompson updated *Maze*’s code. They collaborated on enhancements to the game’s design, such as a miniature-sized map in one corner of the screen that showed an

### GET A HAIRCUT AND GET OFF MY NETWORK!

*Maze War* was a notorious productivity bandit in its day. According to its creators, frequent competitions between students at MIT and Stanford were responsible for clogging the flow of data over ARPANET, the forebear of the Internet.



■ The id Software gang early in the company's history. From left to right: John Carmack, Kevin Cloud, Adrian Carmack (back), John Romero, Tom Hall, and Jay Wilbur.

overhead view of the maze, an arrow depicting your position and bearings, and a level editor — perfect for when you tired of the default maze.

Thanks to shiny new client-server code rolled out in 1974, up to eight players from around the world could join a single session of the game, which the creators renamed *Maze War*. “You could run around in these mazes and kill each other,” Lebling says. “It was really awesome. You could also play it with these AI robots if there weren't enough people around, but they were more artificially stupid than artificially intelligent. They would adjust their play to be at about the same quality of yours, which was nice if you were having either too easy or too hard of a time.”

### PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

The story of id Software's influence on shooters began not with demonic invaders, rocket jumps, or Nazi dogs, but with a single, spinning cube.



“We finished making *Commander Keen* on December 4th of 1990, and we took Christmas vacations, and when we got back, we were still working at *Softdisk* [magazine] at that time,” says John Romero.

Romero worked with his friends Tom Hall, Adrian Carmack, and John Carmack (no relation) at the Shreveport, Louisiana-based magazine. Their job was to create PC games for subscribers of the bimonthly *Gamer's Edge* disk packaged with *Softdisk*. After returning from Christmas break, “John [Carmack] wrote some code to make a spinning cube appear on the screen,” Romero recalls. “That was his first 3D [program]. That was like, okay, he's excited about this 3D thing; maybe that will turn into something later.” They put the cube aside and went back to brainstorming game ideas for the magazine.

But Romero and the others had a secret. Flying under *Softdisk's* radar, they had published the *Super Mario*-inspired platformer *Commander Keen* through Scott Miller, the founder of Apogee Software and the innovator of shareware distribution: Give the first chunk away for free to whet players' appetites, then charge for the full product.

When *Keen* went gangbusters in January 1991, the fledgling team informed their boss at *Softdisk* that they were leaving to start their own company, called id Software. Their boss countered by reminding them that they still had contractual obligations to fulfill. Once they were square, they could split or stay.

John Carmack expanded on his spinning cube by writing a three-dimensional game called *Hovortank 3D*, but the two-

month deadline cramped his style. “That was his first real 3D code, and it was the only time he felt real stress while making a game because it was hard to do. It was just grinding constantly, trying to get 3D working, getting rid of problems like the fish-eye lens — it was his first really, really hard [project]. He wrote all that code,” Romero says.

*Hovortank* left an indelible mark on id's history, and on the legacy of FPS games. Piloting a hovering tank, you cruised around 3D levels shooting demonic-looking monsters. Each surface was painted in a single color, leaving levels as visually simplistic as 1987's Atari ST *MIDI Maze*. Nevertheless, *Hovortank's* smooth movement turned heads. Previous 3D games boasted larger and more detailed environments, but moved sluggishly. In contrast, Carmack's engine breezed along.

October rolled around, and the id guys needed another game idea to polish off their *Softdisk* contract. Romero and Carmack, who had formed a symbiotic relationship based on Romero's sharp eye for design and Carmack's blisteringly fast code, knew just what to make. A year earlier, Romero had struck up a rapport with Paul Neurath, cofounder of Blue Sky Productions (later renamed Looking Glass Studios). “I talked to Paul on the phone, and he said, ‘We're making a game. I can't tell you what it is, but it uses a technique called texture mapping that takes a graphic and maps it onto a polygon,’” says Romero. “I was like, oh, wow, that's interesting. John Carmack said he could do it, but it wasn't until a year later that we could make a game that could use that concept.”

Although Blue Sky had a head start, Carmack's prowess beat them to the punch. Shipping to *Gamer's Edge* subscribers in November 1991, four months ahead of *Ultima Underworld*, *Catacomb 3-D* was a dark fantasy action game that cast you as a wizard. id's team applied texture mapping to fashion environments like brick walls and terrain covered in slime — a huge leap forward from *Hovortank's* single-color surfaces. And while few FPS fans mention the game in the same breath as id's other shooters, *Catacomb*



3-D marked the first time you could see your virtual avatar's hand and weapon in a 3D environment, adding to the immersion of inhabiting a virtual world.

"It was in EGA [graphics mode], which was actually the painful part of it because EGA is a total pain to write for," Romero laments. Then he brightens. "We finished it in November of '91, and in January we started working on *Wolfenstein 3D*."

### NAZIS AND HELLSPAWN

Surprisingly, the id crew didn't immediately choose to develop another fast-paced shooter. Their initial idea was to remake *Castle Wolfenstein*, a stealth game written by Silas Warner for the Apple II. In id's reimagining, you would sneak around assassinating Nazis, hide bodies to avoid attracting attention, and steal keys to progress.

"We put [the stealth mechanics] in and then took them out because it wasn't true to the essence of the game: run and gun, basically," Romero says. They cranked up the speed and littered levels with ammo, bowls of gruel, and medical kits to restore life, and massive firearms like the chaingun, which burned through bullets but shredded all but the biggest baddies in seconds.



■ *Catacomb 3-D*'s floating hand.



■ *Wolfenstein 3D*'s level of gore was shocking at the time.



■ *Hovortank 3D* (left) move at a rapid clip, but featured single-colored surfaces. Conversely, *Ultima Underworld* (right) painted details on surfaces.



Early on, Carmack wrote the engine around EGA graphics, which could display 16 colors on the screen. Scott Miller, who had his finger on the pulse of industry trends and would be publishing the game under the Apogee banner, convinced them to switch over to VGA graphics, which supported 256 colors. Adrian Carmack embraced the advancement, drawing Nazi soldiers and guard dogs that patrolled dungeons and died in a shower of gore. The artists put their texture-mapping skills to good use, painting swastika banners on tiles, pens that held the corpses of P.O.W.s, walls hewn from rock, wood, and brick, and cell bars complete with skeletons peering out from the other side.

Romero continued to sharpen his level-design skills. *Wolfenstein 3D*'s engine allowed for straight corridors and right-angled turns, but the levels were much larger than those of *Hovortank* and *Catacomb 3-D*. Later, Romero and Tom Hall exhorted id's ace programmer to add secret chambers that you could find by pushing on false walls. Sound cards were hot-ticket items at the time, so the id guys laughed themselves silly recording gunshots, groans of pains, and German cries like "Achtung!" (Attention!) and "Mein leben!" (My life!).

*Wolfenstein 3D* blasted onto gamers' hard drives in May 1992. Gamers and critics embraced the game's pedal-to-the-metal action and hyper-realistic violence. The game netted id's designers their biggest windfall yet: a royalty check for \$200,000, exponentially larger than *Keen*'s inaugural check.

Confident in their bank account and design sensibilities, id Software parted amicably with Apogee and set out to publish its next game, *Doom*, as an independent studio. Once again, Carmack and Romero played the yin to the other's yang. Carmack stretched texture mapping even further by adding distance-based diminishing lighting. *Wolfenstein 3D*'s grisly dungeons had been flooded with light, but *Doom* maps could have variable degrees of lighting, including pitch-black corridors where lights flashed on and off, forcing you to inch your way forward.

However, some of the guys found early *Doom* levels lacking. "When we started *Doom*, we were just replicating [*Wolfenstein*'s] design aesthetic, and it was just boring and garbage for probably five months," Romero says. Determined to nip the problem in the bud, he harnessed the power of Carmack's new engine to create a devilish chamber: an elevator that dropped you into a room cloaked in dark-





■ After playing *Doom*, *Wolfenstein 3D* seemed tame.



■ *Rise of the Triad* focused on over-the-top action and zany weapons.

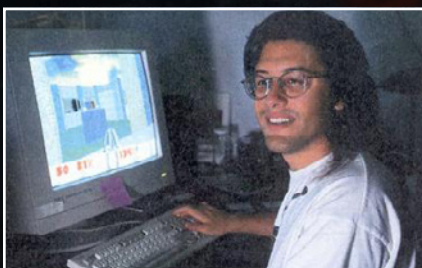


■ Deathmatch clogged networks for years

ness and holding a throng of monsters. Above, monsters patrolled ledges high up on either wall, sniping at you from afar.

“I brought the artists and Tom [Hall] into the room and said, ‘This is what we should be doing with our levels.’ And they said, ‘Holy sh\*t. That’s exactly it. Right there.’ Basically everything in shooters made during the ‘90s sprang from that day.”

In just a few minutes, Romero had demonstrated the most impressive aspects of *Doom*’s engine. Every corridor in *Wolfenstein 3D* ran at straight angles, and walls were all the same height. In *Doom*, floors could split into segmented pieces; bridges could rise and connect adjacent platforms at different heights; and stairs flowed between platforms — a far cry



■ John Romero, one of the chief architects of *Doom*.

from *Wolfenstein*’s flat, single-floor levels. Carmack also beefed up texture mapping. In older games, ceilings and doors had been limited to single colors, but *Doom*’s architecture was splattered with slime, blood, and twitching corpses.

Working with clay and latex, Adrian Carmack modeled terrifying monsters like the Spider Mastermind, a brain couched in a robotic shell and outfitted with a machine gun; and the Imp, a leathery-skinned demon that hocked fireballs and raked your flesh with its claws. New weapons like the rocket launcher and BFG9000 (short for Big...Freakin’ Gun) obliterated and melted enemies into bloody chunks.

*Doom*’s most vaunted feature was network multiplayer. One fateful afternoon, Carmack finished a segment of code and booted a *Doom* prototype on two computers in his office. On one PC, he pressed an arrow key to move his marine avatar forward, then looked over his shoulder to see his marine shuffle into view on the second screen, which showed the opponent’s point of view. Romero freaked out and immediately orchestrated the first of many interoffice deathmatch sessions.

id opened *Doom*’s portal to hell a few weeks before Christmas in 1993, and the gamers of the world shared in Romero’s exuberance — much to the dismay of teachers and lab admins. To this day, he savors every opportunity to eviscerate the world’s best *Doom* players one frag at a time. “I made *Doom*; *Doom* is me. It was made for me. It was all about friction, acceleration, and speed. I tweaked all those values until it felt perfect to me. So when I play the game, it’s exactly what I want to be playing. To me, it’s optimal.”

### GODS, DOGS, AND BUBBLEGUM

After id Software struck out on its own, Scott Miller staffed up Apogee to work on the company’s first internally developed game, *Rise of the Triad*. Tom Hall, who left id during *Doom*’s development, lead the effort.

“*Rise of the Triad* was originally intended to be a new sequel to *Wolfenstein 3D*, but never a true competitor to *Doom*. However, it did some things pretty well, such as deathmatch taunts, looking up and down with a mouse, and some really radical weapon designs,” Miller explains, speaking to weapons like drunk missiles; God Mode, a state of invulnerability that gives you the power to throw instant-kill fireballs; and Dog Mode, which turns you into a dog able to squeeze through crawlspaces.

In 1996, Apogee — rebranded as 3D Realms — broke off from the growing pack of *Doom* clones with *Duke Nukem 3D*. The Duke character was a muscular, irreverent action hero who had starred in two cartoonish platformers similar in design to *Commander Keen*. To bring Duke into the third dimension, 3D Realms fashioned a provocative world. Lead and rockets flew across pool halls, pornography shops, city streets, and strip clubs, where dancers flashed their breasts in exchange for Duke’s cash. Duke’s standout feature was his personality. Where id’s nameless protagonists elicited grunts and gasps of pain, Duke cracked one-liners and regularly compared the visages of alien foes to their posteriors.

“id was taking a serious approach to their games, so to differentiate ourselves we took a less serious approach,” Miller says. “That manifested as hu-



■ *Duke Nuke 3D*'s realistic environments and multifaceted weapons made the game stand out...

mor, the pop-culture references, and by making Duke a stronger personality by having him talk during the game.”

But *Duke Nukem 3D* was more than witty sound bites and strippers willing to bare all. Unlike in *Doom*, you could aim up and down, and jump and crouch. Inimitable weapons like the shrink ray, which shrunk enemies so Duke could stomp on them, and the pipe bomb became some of the genre's most iconic tools of destruction.

According to Miller, “It was our goal to be different than *Doom*, so we purposely designed weapons that weren't *Doom*-like. We didn't want to make any all-powerful weapons like the BFG. The pipe bomb is



■ ...as did Duke's irreverence and preening. “Damn, I'm lookin' good!”



■ Scott Miller (left) and Richard “Levelord” Gray (right).

a good example of a weapon with tactical implications, in that it's powerful but only goes a short distance. But, you can trigger it from far away, which leads to interesting ways to use it.”

A philosophy of semi-realistic level design meshed with destructible environments set the game apart even further. “Back then, destructible walls and such were not common,” explains Richard “Levelord” Gray, one of *Duke3D*'s chief level designers. “So often, adding these were the focus of an area, and that area was built around the player breaking the barrier. Other times, these breakable barriers were used for secrets or shortcuts.”

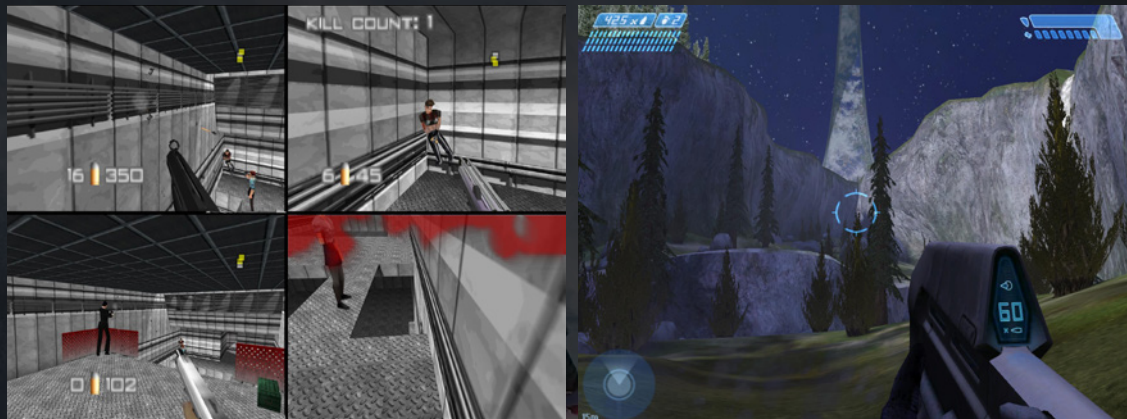
Further separating their game from *Doom*'s focus on labyrinthine interior levels, *Duke*'s designers constructed sprawling environments such as The Abyss, a Grand Canyon-like setting. “Even though some of the levels seemed big, they really weren't. The player had to follow the critical path eventually. We playtested *Duke* every night. One of the main focuses was to not make the player frustrated,” says Gray.

## BOTS, QUAKES, AND CONSOLES

id Software's manic gamers didn't sweat *Duke 3D* when it launched early in '96. They were hard at work on *Quake*, the spiritual successor to *Doom*. However, *Quake* went through several iterations before id decided to create a 3D carbon copy of its previous shooters. While id's founders were still at *Softdisk*, they aspired to create a top-down RPG called *Quake: The Fight for Justice*, but scrapped the design after two weeks, citing insufficient technology. After shipping *Doom*, the idea of a more exploration-heavy game light on combat resurfaced. *Quake* would be a

3D adventure in which players fought with a magical hammer and the assistance of a sentient companion cube.





■ *GoldenEye 007* (left) and *Halo: Combat Evolved* popularized FPS games on consoles.

“One thing we thought of for multiplayer was you were going to be standing on top of a cliff, and someone could come up behind you and hit you on the back of your head with a hammer, and you would tumble forward,” Romero says. “You’d be looking at the ground, then the sky, like you’re tumbling down a hill. I don’t think I’d seen that in a shooter, and it would have been a really different point of view.”

Ultimately the staff was exhausted after *Doom* and *Doom II*, and decided that *Quake* would follow in *Doom*’s footsteps. The protagonist of *Quake* was a hard-boiled (and characteristically mute) soldier assaulting a bleak world assembled from gothic castles and futuristic military compounds, and armed with shotguns, rocket launchers, and a few new armaments like the nail gun — a machine gun that spat spikes — and a lightning cannon.

*Quake*’s claim to fame was its 3D engine, another product of Carmack’s genius. *Doom*, *Duke Nukem 3D*, and other first-person shooters could be more aptly described as 2.5D — they projected 2D

images (sprites) to give the illusion of a third dimension, but unfolded on a 2D plane. *Quake* utilized polygonal instead of sprite-based characters, rendered out true 3D environments, and let you aim and move in any direction.

Arguably its biggest innovation was being able to type in an IP address and join online deathmatch bouts straight from the menu, pitting you against opponents from around the world and giving rise to large-scale LAN parties like id’s annual QuakeCon gathering. (Soon, the third-party QuakeSpy tool simplified this process by scanning for and listing in-progress multiplayer games. From there, you were just a few clicks away from dropping into an arena.)

In 1997, publisher Rare released *GoldenEye 007* for the Nintendo 64. *GoldenEye* focused on realistic movement and shooting, facilitated through *Sophie’s Choice*-type scenarios like choosing between running and gunning or holding still and aiming precisely. Most notably, the game offered four-player local multiplayer, a first for console shooters. In 2001, Bungie’s *Halo* finished what Rare started by providing a four-player campaign and LAN options that transformed college dormitories into staging grounds for week-long contests.

However, the vast majority of innovation in FPS design occurred on the PC. In 1998, Epic Games’ *Unreal* packaged a lengthy single-player campaign and a robust set of multiplayer modes. You could frag friends online, or enter arenas against computer-controlled bots, giving

you plenty of opportunity for practice before putting your modem to work. A year later, Epic followed with the multiplayer-focused *Unreal Tournament* on a disc bursting with weapons, maps, modes like Capture the Flag, and modifications like Instagib (one hit, one kill) and low gravity.

In between *Unreal* and *UT*, a startup called Valve Software rewrote *Doom*’s formula — kill enemies, find keycard, unlock door, rinse and repeat — with its debut game, *Half-Life*. Nonlinear level design, fiendishly clever AI, and a narrative told through real-time cutscenes that kept you in control of your character paved the way for story- and exploration-driven FPS games like 2007’s *BioShock*.

#### CUT FROM THE SAME CLOTH

Shooter trends evolved at a rapid clip in the late ‘90s and early 2000s. *Counter-Strike*, originally developed as a free mod for *Half-Life*, introduced realistic weapons and damage, offering a tactical alternative to the drove of twitchy, arena-based shooters molded after *Quake III* and *Unreal*. That same year, games like *Medal of Honor* and *Hidden & Dangerous* ushered in World War II-themed shooters. Drawing from historical settings and weapons, these games featured campaigns that set players on a linear path through tightly controlled missions and setpieces. The genre peaked in 2003 when Infinity Ward released *Call of Duty*, yet another WW2 shooter, but one that boasted high production values and found solid footing on the PS2 and Xbox.



The rise of realistic and war-themed shooters came with a price. As games like *Call of Duty* climbed the sales charts, they knocked the more fantastical *Doom* clones from their perch. Publishers followed the money, and production of sci-fi/fantasy and arena-style shooters slowed from a flood to drips and drabs. *Call of Duty 2* sold 200,000 copies on Xbox 360 during the console's first week of availability alone, making it the system's most popular launch game.

*Unreal Tournament*, once a standard bearer for the popularity of sci-fi arena shooters, inadvertently signaled the end of the genre's time on top. Released in November 2007, *UT3* received generally positive reviews, but saw very little on-line enthusiasm from players, with largely empty servers. That same month, Infinity Ward scrapped the tried-and-tired WW2 theme and introduced contemporary settings and themes in *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, highlighting incredibly visceral firefights and a multiplayer mode where you unlocked new guns by earning experience points across game sessions.

While critics lauded *CoD4*'s impressive production values and tight gameplay, its runaway success led to a string of annual sequels that offered little in terms of new ideas from year to year. And it drew a clear line in the sand: Developers either baked their shooters in *CoD4*'s lucrative mold, or failed. This aversion to risk, motivated by the potential for huge profits, frustrated classic FPS fans who yearned for the faster, more three-dimensional action and deep variety of settings, themes, and weapons seen in many shooters of the '90s and early 2000s.

Admittedly, *Doom* spawned just as many shameless clones, if not more. It was *Half-Life* that bucked the trend of corridor shooters — something John Romero believes we'll see again. "Experimentation is still going to happen, but in smaller-budget FPS games. I think with people making more of those, with different themes and ideas, something is going to click the way that *Half-Life* clicked."

Bold ideas need water and sunlight, which take the form of editing tools and ambitious gamers eager to create the



■ While *Half-Life* broke the *Doom* mold, *Unreal Tournament* (below) offered a death-match-centered experience.



next big thing. But *CoD4*'s dominance has turned blockbuster FPS games into walled gardens. Giving you level editors would work against the goals of publishers like Activision, which want you to pony up \$60 every year for another *CoD* rather than support older games that no longer earn it money.

Scott Miller prefers to look on the bright side, pointing to the advent of user-





■ *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* simultaneously innovated and stifled FPS games.

content-driven games like *LittleBigPlanet* and *Super Mario Maker* as indicative of where big-budget shooters might be headed. Indeed, Miller believes the term FPS should be retired to pave the way for new, intermingled categories of action games.

“*Halo*, *Gears of War*, *Borderlands*, *Warframe*, *Titanfall* — these all represent a maturing evolution of the 3D shooter category. Even *GTA*, *Dishonored*, and others belong in the category. The lines have been seriously smeared. Let’s just make good 3D games inside compelling, interactive worlds, and let the term FPS fade away.” 🐱



■ Without *Doom*’s free source code, we wouldn’t have inventive mods like *Brutal Doom*.

### TRENDSSETTERS

Many critics consider *Doom* the most important FPS ever, but as *Maze War* and the following titles illustrate, it didn’t invent the wheel.

- **MIDI Maze (Atari ST, 1987):** First network-enabled FPS. Supported up to 16 players.
- **System Shock (DOS, 1994):** True 3D engine that stressed exploration and puzzles.
- **Heretic (DOS, 1994):** Ability to aim up and down.
- **Marathon (Mac, 1994):** Alternate fire modes for weapons.
- **Dark Forces (DOS, 1995):** Ability to crouch.
- **Team Fortress (DOS, 1996):** Mod for *Quake* that introduced class-based play.
- **Tom Clancy’s Rainbow 6 (Win, 1998):** Squad-based, tactical shooting.
- **Counter-Strike (Win, 1999):** Mod for *Half-Life* that emphasized realistic combat and tactics.
- **Deus Ex (Win, 2000):** Copious helpings of RPG mechanics.
- **Metroid Prime (GameCube, 2002):** Blend of action, puzzle-solving, and adventure elements.
- **Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare (PC and Consoles, 2007):** XP-based progression system in multiplayer.



# HOW **QUAKE** CHANGED EVERYTHING

BY ALEXANDRA HALL

## QUAKE SET THE STAGE FOR THE NEXT DECADE OF 3D GAME DESIGN.

id Software's contributions to first-person gaming are inestimable, but 1996's *Quake* still stands as its single largest achievement. While a few earlier games, such as Bethesda's 1995 *Terminator: Future Shock*, pioneered isolated features, only *Quake* combined a dizzying array of cutting-edge ideas and technologies into a single package that irrevocably changed the first-person shooter landscape in ways still felt today.

### TECHNICAL MASTERCLASS

Though widely regarded as a programming genius, even id's John Carmack faced numerous challenges in creating a fully 3D FPS that could run acceptably on the day's 8MB 486. Clever design and extensive optimization would be key, so id brought on famous assembly programming guru Michael Abrash to hand-tune key parts of the development engine.

### A FEW LESS STELLAR TRENDS

While *Quake* is a very fast game, Quakeguy ran noticeably slower than the blazing-fast, literally 57 mph Doomguy. As realism increased, FPS games would decelerate further; witness *Unreal 2*'s geriatric shuffling.

And *Quake*'s increased complexity and fidelity made it harder for laypeople to create their own content, a trend which only worsened as technology advanced.

*Quake* also suffered a famously rocky development which saw creative lead John Romero depart soon after, resulting in a confused setting, plot, and single-player game. Perhaps the earliest indication of id's later reputation for prioritizing tech over gameplay.

id combined numerous techniques to render *Quake*'s world with as few calculations as possible. Newly made maps required a lengthy compiling process that stripped away all excess surfaces, leaving only those a player could see. During gameplay, aggressive sorting algorithms further reduced the renderer's workload by culling all non-visible surfaces. A separate, z-buffer-enhanced rendering path optimized display of items and enemies.

According to Abrash, one of Carmack's great innovations was decoupling light and surface rendering. Lightmaps, "baked in" during map compile, provided fast and realistic shadowing which could be augmented by fancy but expensive real-time lighting effects. Countless later games used the techniques pioneered in *Quake*.

### ARE YOU BEING SERVED?

*Quake* supplanted limited peer-to-peer networking schemes like IPX with a true client / server architecture based on TCP/IP, the protocol of the emerging Internet. Seeing that this paradigm shift resulted in a poor gameplay experience over modems, id created *Quakeworld*, which introduced client-side prediction to deliver smooth Internet play before broadband. Simple online play led to players forming clans, and clans led to eSports. Dominant players like Dennis "Thresh" Fong became the earliest eSports celebs.

### ROLL YOUR OWN

id wrote most of *Quake*'s gameplay rules in a special scripting language called QuakeC, and then made this code available to players, who spawned lots of creative "mods" like *Threewave Capture the Flag*, *Quake Rally*, *Team Fortress*, and

*Slide*. As with *Doom*, id later released *Quake*'s source code, enabling the source ports that allow us to enjoy greatly enhanced versions of the game today.

### SOFTWARE RENDERING IS SO 1995

3D accelerator cards finally became worthwhile in late 1996, and id was there with vQuake, written for Rendition's Vérité chipsets. Soon after, GLQuake brought pretty, 3D-accelerated shooting to any accelerator that could support the free OpenGL standard. 3dfx Voodoo cards became geek status symbols, leading to today's preoccupation with GeForce, Radeon, and framerate.

### GRAVIS GAMEPAD, BEGONE

A true 3D environment demanded a 3D control scheme: Enter mouselook. Now we take it for granted, but *Quake* is where many players learned how to control every future *Call of Duty* game. Meanwhile, a "console" let players enter commands to customize the game to their liking, even writing simple macros: a suitably complex interface for a complex game.

### TRUE GAME CHANGERS

id's still around today, but in name only. Here's to that original bunch of creative, goofy weirdos who revolutionized the way we all fragged back in the '90s. 🎮





# CLASSIC MODS: YESTERDAY'S FUN, TOMORROW'S HISTORY?

BY ALEXANDRA HALL

## MODDING MAKES GAMES TIMELESS, BUT MODS THEMSELVES ARE LESS RESILIENT.

I'm retreating, half-dead; a god-like Sonic's hounding me. Speeding by a doorway, I glimpse Lara Croft tangling with Sniper Wolf and EVA Unit 01. Robocop's iconic theme rings out nearby, heralding his demise. Just as I'm about to reach the big keg o' health, I explode into gibs, a victim of Lt. Commander Data's shock rifle. "I believe I've experienced my first emotion," quips Data via voice clip.

I burst out laughing. Welcome to my ridiculous *Unreal Tournament*.

### FOREVER INSTALLED (IN MY HEART)

I've loved PC game mods ever since finding *Wolfenstein 3D*'s map editor on a BBS. I love tailoring a game to exactly my taste. Don't like something? Change it. Enabling modders is one of id's greatest legacies.

But Steam patches can suddenly overwrite local files, potentially breaking mods. That's no recipe for longevity, so this past year I decided to create a static folder full of my favorite classic games, modded to the gills, forever ready to jump into for quick fun. Forever installs, if you would.

### A CRASS MENAGERIE

That's when my *UT99* started getting strange. It's funny, as my taste in mods is typically pretty low key. My *Dark Souls* is 100% nyan cat-free, and my *Fallout 3*'s pretty damn grim. But something about *UT* makes populating its halls with videogame, anime, and film characters oddly appealing.

Looking now, a few of the models are low quality. But for every dud, there are several nicely modeled pop-culture icons with, best case, hilariously glib voicepacks. I have more than enough familiar faces to fill large games, and it's surprisingly fun just playing bots.

May I confess? I also run four separate gore booster and three decal/corpse stay mutators, so when characters die, it's not dissimilar to a messy, crimson Fourth of July... which also makes me laugh. Don't judge?

### SERIOUSLY THOUGH

There are lots of serious mods too, of course, including the modern OpenGL renderer, OpenAL audio (excellent 3D headphone surround), stupid-big textures, XBots and XMaps for bot/map management, enhanced items, two grappling hooks, dozens of mutators, and custom gametypes like *Headhunters Classic* and *Monster Hunt*. I've barely played the gametypes, but in a forever install, you wanna plan for rainy days, right?

### LABORS LOST

Tracking down all this content today illustrates how ephemeral mod scenes can be. My google-fu is fierce, but many mods that once existed are simply gone. Sites go down, links rot, and mods effectively go extinct. It's terrible that these labors of love, so crucial to the scene in their heyday, can just disappear.

Between official preservation efforts, emulation, and piracy, I don't worry about com-

mercial games' continued existence, but the same can't be said for many mod scenes. Communities like *UT-Files.com* sometimes attempt to compile modern archives, but much has already been lost. I hope modern mod repositories like *ModDB.com*, *NexusMods.com*, and *Steam Workshop* last forever, but can they?

### YOU MUST BE THIS SKILLED TO ENTER

As a general rule, the newer the game, the fewer the mods. As fidelity increases, it becomes harder for people to create similarly detailed content. The graphically intense *UT3* has relatively few user maps and models compared to *UT99*, and not just because it flopped. Perhaps *UT 2004* strikes the best balance, able to display reasonably good-looking content that's not too difficult to create.

### A FUTURE FOR FPS MODS?

Going forward, will we see many FPS games that are both reasonably beautiful and blessed with a plethora of high-quality, user-made content? More importantly, will another FPS ever play host to half the cast of *Smash Bros.*? Despite my doubts I'll hold out hope, given the enjoyment I derive from my irreverent *UT* modding. At the very least, the scene can rest assured that Megatron, Ripley, Samus, and Sailor Moon will continue their eternal clash on at least one player's SSD. ☹





# FINDING MAZE INVADERS

BY MICHAEL THOMASSON

UNCOVERING ONE OF *ASTEROIDS* DESIGNER ED LOGG'S LONG-LOST GAMES.

**E**d Logg is a familiar name in certain circles, and even if you've never heard of him, you've definitely played his games. His design genius was responsible for such coin-op classics as *Asteroids*, *Super Breakout*, *Centipede*, *Gauntlet*, and other fan favorites. Following his work on *Millipede*, Logg also created one little game that most never knew existed: Atari's *Maze Invaders*.

Not every game idea plays well, and it's not uncommon for a videogame to stall during various stages of development. Even famous designers such as Ed Logg have their misses. Logg is actually quoted as stating, "Nearly half of my games did not make it into production." Such was the case with *Maze Invaders*.

Atari registered the copyright for *Maze Invaders* in 1981, but focus groups and field tests continued into the first half of 1982, when it didn't earn enough on field testing and was ultimately canned. "There were some parts that I found frustrating, such as when the maze would temporarily block me off," Logg recalls. "I could not resolve this frustrating aspect, which is probably why it failed."

Atari created only two playable prototypes of *Maze Invaders*. When it was canceled, an operator in Texas who truly loved the game actually convinced Atari to sell it to him. The other was relegated



to Ed Logg's garage so his son could play it. The latter was recently purchased by The Strong's International Games Center for the History of Electronic Games (ICHEG) and now resides in its basement archive, available only to a select few researchers and historians. So when I was recently offered a chance to check out *Maze Invaders*, I couldn't refuse.

*Maze Invaders*, described as "a cute puzzle-like game" by Logg, "was a maze-like game but the maze changed dynamically. The main character was very *Pac-Man*-like." At first glance it looks a lot like *Berzerk*, but once the maze starts shifting, you realize the game is nothing like Stern's multi-directional shooter.

The ICHEG at The Strong also granted me access to 98 pages of internal Atari documents concerning the game. Several of them were focus group summaries. While the description changed as the game evolved, here is the final version generated just prior to its cancellation.

## GAMEPLAY DESCRIPTION:

In a design document, Atari describes *Maze Wars* as "a maze-themed game in which the player maneuvers a comical, shooting figure throughout a series of mazes. The player travels through each maze, picks up various fruits, and exits through one of several doors.

"Each door represents an entrance to a different maze. The variety of mazes includes stationary patterned mazes, mazes with moving walls, and mazes with descending rocks. The player is threatened by attacking creatures which try to shoot or otherwise destroy the player.

"The ultimate goal is for the player to stay alive and seek out and consume a

## FUN FACT

The 1984 adventure movie *Cloak & Dagger* featured test screens from *Maze Invaders* intermixed with video footage of Atari's *Cloak & Dagger* coin-op game and the Atari 5200 cartridge version of *Cloak & Dagger*, which was relegated to the same fate as *Maze Invaders*.

	<i>Maze Invaders</i> Field Test	<i>Maze Invaders II</i> Field Test
	February 12 –19, 1982 Merlin's Castle in San Jose	April 2 –16, 1982 Central Park Game Center in Mt. View
Age	13 – 15 years of age	10 – 12 years of age
# of players	41 different players	35 different players
Game time range	0:31 seconds to 4:30 minutes	1:01 to 12:09 minutes
% of regular players	84% play video games at least once per week	82% play video games at least once per week
Average time	1:22 minutes	4:51 minutes
Score range	0 to 25,485 points	2,343 to 215,231 points
Average score	5,189 points	26,220 points
# of times played	106	107
Replay	30% of players returned to play again	54% of players returned to play again
Average # of games per player	2.36 games per player	2.82 games per player
Ranking with games onsite	Not ranked in top five (out of 73)	Not ranked in top ten (out of 60)
Deemed too difficult	22% of players	11% of players

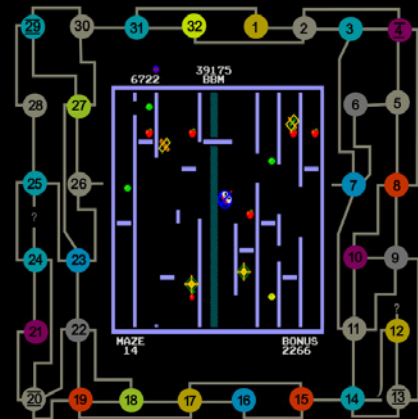
watermelon worth extra bonus points. The watermelon is randomly placed in one of the 34 different mazes at the beginning of the game. At the beginning of the game the player can choose one of four mazes from which to start. He must then use the maze map drawn on the bezel for guidance through the series of mazes to the watermelon.”

That last sentence is particularly endearing. Utilizing the artwork surrounding the monitor’s playfield was actually quite clever, and even more so, a functional way to help guide the player through the game’s 32 mazes.

Examining the default high-score table reveals that perhaps Ed Logg was in the running. The second- and fourth-place scores of 38,254 and 36,520 are credited to “ED” while the fifth ranking, a paltry 35,478 points, belongs to “LOG.” Will we ever learn the identities of “BBM” and “DUG,” or will they forever be a mystery?

Reading through the focus group and testing summaries reveals what went well, and ultimately, what went wrong with *Maze Invaders*. Generally, a new game would rank in the top three in any given location. During its premiere testing, *Maze Invaders* did not rank in the top five most-played games of the 65 games onsite. During its second run, despite many improvements such as replacing the troublesome rotating knob with a traditional joystick, it still didn’t crack the top 10, despite having less competition.

The reports state that *Maze Invaders* “rated significantly lower than *Space Duel*, *Tempest* and *Centipede*.” When players involved in the field test were surveyed, the report stated that “only 12% feel that *Maze Invaders* is better than *Tempest*,” “only 9% of the players noted that they prefer *Maze Invaders* over *Donkey Kong*,” and “two-thirds of the players, a significant number, say that *Centipede* is better than *Maze Invaders*.” The game was also beaten by *Pac-*



*Man*, *Ms. Pac-Man*, *Frogger*, *Kangaroo*, and others. To be fair, those titles have all stood the test of time and are still beloved over three decades later, so *Maze Invaders* had some mighty tough competition.

Ratings of the *Maze Invaders* prototypes on a 5-point scale, compared to other Atari games tested:

- Force Four*: 4.31
- Lunar Lander*: 4.21
- Centipede*: 4.07
- Dig Dug*: 4.17
- Kangaroo*: 3.94
- Maze Invaders II*: 3.89
- Maze Invaders*: 3.25

Note that *Force Four* ranked more favorable than *Maze Invaders* and still did not warrant a release. It virtually tied with *Runaway*, another unreleased Atari coin-op that had been doomed to the same fate of never reaching full production.

According to an Atari interoffice memo dated July 19, 1982, even if the game had not been abandoned, we still wouldn’t be playing it...at least not as *Maze Invaders*. The Atari legal department, after conducting a trademark search, recommended several alternate titles: *Maze Man*, *Wandering Wilbur*, *Wanderer*, and *Whiffet*. They ultimately recommended *Maze Invaders* be renamed *Pudgekin*. And that, fellow gamers, is why legal departments should not be in the business of naming games.

Although we didn’t get *Maze Invaders*, at least the gaming community dodged a bullet concerning that title. 🍌



# Doom

id's latest foray into hell combines old and new.

■ DEVELOPER: id Software ■ PUBLISHER: Bethesda Softworks ■ PLATFORMS: PS4, Xbox One, PC ■ RELEASE DATE: 2016 ■ PLAYERS: 1–4 players ■ ESRB: M

ANYONE WHOSE HANDS rest naturally on the WASD keys probably knows *Doom* by heart. id Software's epic first-person shooter, alongside *Wolfenstein 3D*, helped put the genre on the map, thrilling players for hours as they plowed through hordes of demons, or even each other in the game's revelatory multiplayer modes.

We've come a long way since then, although *Doom* hasn't seen much exposure since the impressive *Doom 3* for PC and Xbox in 2004 and 2005, respectively. That will change next year when Bethesda releases the new *Doom* for PlayStation 4, Xbox One, and PC.

Teased for some time, *Doom* was unveiled to the public at E3 2015, thrilling onlookers with an all-new sense of dangerously wild first-person action and excellent visuals that breathed new life into the series' hellish surroundings. Expect hellish moonbases, a number of classic weapons like the shotgun and rocket launcher, and (hopefully) shredding opponents and monsters like a pro.



Fans will feel right at home. The super shotgun makes its return, along with the BFG 9000, ideal for laying waste to anyone (or anything) who opposes you. The game will also include some effective melee weaponry, including the best chainsaw yet seen in a game. Decapitations are definitely on the agenda.

id managed to give *Doom* modern aesthetics while keeping the classic feel of the game intact. The run-n-gun action concentrates on delivering a fast pace, while new techniques, such as sprinting and double jumping, add more layers of complexity. Since this is *Doom*, there's no health regeneration system, so finding cover and trying to stay alive won't do any good. Just wade in and fight.

Based on the latest footage, *Doom's* visuals look impressive thus far...id Software continues to stay true to the moody design and tone of the original, with plenty of underground walkways, lava-filled caverns, and other locales straight out of hell. It looks fantastic, yet familiar in the best possible way.

What's more, there's a neat little perk in multiplayer, where you can actually control a beast for a limited amount of time. You can even the playing field and level a number of opponents with near invincibility, then come back down to Earth and fight in your regular human form. It's an adrenaline rush to behold.

Multiplayer will feature various modes, including the original deathmatch that many fans grew up with, along with Domination, Freeze Tag, and Clan Arena. id's engineers are crafting a single-player campaign as well, so you can blast demons while waiting for your friends to jump online.

For those who prefer multiplayer, *Doom's* SnapMap could easily be one of the best features. With this you can put your modding skills to good use, creating your own maps and modes for other players to try out, then testing their popularity within the online community. It's a great feature that will extend some of the traditional flexibility of PC shooters to console players.

Some may argue that the classic *Doom* design — running and gunning as opposed to *Doom 3's* more methodical, eerie, survival-horror-esque pacing — is the way to go, and, yes, it remains an absolute delight when it comes to seeing where the origins of first-person shooting came from. But the new *Doom* looks to provide a hauntingly beautiful experience that will make the hair stand up on the back of your neck as you shred through opponents. It's packed with ideas and features that will make it its own game, which is just what many fans will want in such a long-awaited update.

Welcome back, *Doom*. 🗡️ —Robert Workman



# HALO

**COMBAT EVOLVING**  
BY JEREMY PARISH

THE STORY OF HOW AN  
**XBOX**  
SHOOTER BECAME A  
CORNERSTONE  
OF MICROSOFT'S BUSINESS

Lead Art by Daniel Kayser



# COMBAT TRULY WAS EVOLVING, RIGHT BEFORE OUR EYES, AND HALO IN MANY WAYS SERVED AS THE CATALYST.

**W**hen the Xbox debuted in 2001, it launched alongside Nintendo's promising GameCube and PlayStation 2's one-two punch of *Metal Gear Solid 2* and *Grand Theft Auto III*. Yet the untested platform fared quite well for itself, launching strong right out of the gate. By and large, the credit for its success hangs on its day-one centerpiece, Bungie's *Halo: Combat Evolved*.

The Xbox business has changed considerably over the years — remember when Microsoft tried to sell the Xbox One by downplaying the fact that it plays videogames? — and so, too, has *Halo*. The close relationship between Xbox and *Halo: Combat Evolved* began in 2001, but as *Halo* slowly grows and advances over the years, it's clear that evolution is a long-term process.

## HERE COME THE FLOOD

In hindsight, playing the original *Halo: Combat Evolved* gives you that strange, alien sensation you find in the first entry of a long-running series. There's little question that this game belongs to the same

family as the recent *Halo 5: Guardians*; all the familiar elements show up here, from the "golden triangle" of combat to the Covenant to the wild and varied multiplayer. And yet, *Combat Evolved* approaches all of these things in a raw, primal fashion. It feels like a bridge between the shooters of the '90s and the FPS as it would take form in the new millennium. Combat truly was evolving, right before our eyes, and *Halo* in many ways served as the catalyst.

Compared to its sequels, *Combat Evolved* feels like more of a sandbox, especially in its campaign. While the series continues to offer plenty of latitude for goofing around in its multiplayer sections even today, the arenas and battlefields where the original game's story takes place can be quite jarring in their lack of structure. Once you land on the Halo structure itself, wide-open vistas present themselves — huge, open fields in which you can experiment with the rules and tools of the game.

The openness likely results from the game's original design; Bungie planned it as more of a strategic multiplayer action game, similar to *Tribes*. It reshaped the

game into the FPS we know and love today over the course of a couple of years, but many atypical shooter elements — big battlefields and a huge variety of vehicles — remained. The idea of seamlessly jumping into a jeep or hijacking an enemy tank hadn't appeared in too many games to that point (*Grand Theft Auto III* was only just beginning to shake the world to its core over on PlayStation 2), and the freedom that *Halo* offered felt truly marvelous. How many other single-player shooters allowed you to step outside a building of dangerous, narrow corridors, leap into a tiny airship, and go about blasting enemy ground forces from 100 meters in the air?



**JEREMY PARISH** is the editor-in-chief of USGamer.net and the author of several books dedicated to game design analysis, including *Game Boy World 1989* and *GameSpite Presents: The Anatomy of Super Mario Bros., Vol. 1*. Learn more about his work at [patreon.com/gamespite](https://patreon.com/gamespite).



## SOME CHANGES WENT OVER BETTER THAN OTHERS.

*Combat Evolved* wasn't without its frustrations. For as much as Bungie got right, the tight deadline under which it had to rework the game to fit Xbox showed. Some stages came across as repetitive, copy-and-paste busywork (see: "The Library"), and much of the second half saw you literally retracing your footsteps through the first half. And while she seemed unique at the time, the Chief's onboard artificial intelligence Cortana firmly established the now-tired concept of a constant voice in your ear urging you to complete the next task.

When the game worked, however, it sang. The canny enemy AI put the vaunted tac-

tics of *Half-Life*'s soldiers to shame, as Covenant squadrons would follow the lead of, rally around, and panic at the defeat of the devious Elite warriors. Design-wise, Elites were the star of the show: bigger, badder versions of your own Master Chief, all the way down to their recharging energy shields. Controls felt fluid and precise, firmly establishing the standard for console FPS controls that had been hinted at with games like *Perfect Dark*, and the trio of character skills — guns, grenades, and melee — were each mapped to dedicated buttons, allowing you instant access to all your abilities as the situation dictated.

This came with trade-offs, though. Master Chief could only carry two guns at a time, and dropping a weapon in favor of one you found lying around became a key strategy. Weapons became disposable in nature, especially enemy guns that ran on plasma batteries and couldn't be reloaded. Each weapon had value, be it a deadly sniper rifle, the limited but precise pistol, or even the esoteric Covenant pistols which worked so well for taking down Elite shields.

Somewhat ironically, many players never experienced these moments, as they were downplayed or completely absent from the game's popular multiplayer component. Despite launching well before the debut of Xbox Live and online play as an option for Microsoft fans, *Halo* sold in large part on the strength of its multiplayer. Like *GoldenEye 007* before it, splitscreen competitive play made *Halo* a monster on college campuses. It also gave birth to the console LAN party, as multiple Xboxes could link together to create an ad hoc network, allowing large groups to play together on their own screens.

While *Halo*'s multiplayer offered the same sandbox experience as the campaign — the same weapons, the same freedom to leap into vehicles on a whim — player-versus-player revolved entirely around Master Chief-like Spartans. The cunning Elites and zombie-like Flood were conspicuous in their absence. Not that players seemed to mind; *Combat Evolved*'s freeform competitive modes captured imaginations, inspiring viral videos of improbable physics and even the long-running *Red vs. Blue* machinima series in the pre-YouTube era.

And most importantly, *Halo* meant that Microsoft could point to a killer app when promoting the Xbox against the PlayStation 2 and GameCube. Sure, those other



## GEARBOX MAKES AMENDS

*Halo* began life as a Mac and PC shooter, so its sudden change to an Xbox-exclusive release left many fans feeling rather ill-served. PC shooter fans would have to wait nearly two years for the opportunity to experience *Halo* in its proper environment. A PC port by Gearbox — not Bungie, who turned out to have truly gone over to the dark side with the Microsoft acquisition — arrived at the end of Sept. 2003, with a Mac conversion bringing up the ca-boose a few months later.

Despite the wait, PC fanatics found themselves generally unimpressed with *Halo*. The console-centric design of the game resulted in a far more limited take on the FPS than they were accustomed to, and in any case the FPS genre had moved forward in the intervening years. Nevertheless, this sour reception didn't reflect the generally excellent quality of the conversion itself. Gearbox upgraded *Halo* while porting it, allowing it to run at a much higher resolution than on Xbox. It also traded out the Xbox version's slapdash cooperative campaign play in favor of online multiplayer. The Windows port became even better six months later with the release of the *Halo: Custom Edition* add-on, which allowed players to create their own mods and maps for the game.

guys had *GTA* and *Mario Kart*, but where else could you launch an ATV into orbit by detonating a pile of grenades under it? Only on Xbox.

### ARBITER MACHT FREI

Arriving three years after *Halo: Combat Evolved*, the inevitable sequel was simultaneously a high-water mark for the Xbox hardware, and also a tremendous disappointment.

Bungie's second console outing pushed Microsoft's machine to heretofore unimagined limits, producing visuals so advanced they practically fell apart (witness



the texture issues that dogged the real-time cutscenes). With high-definition consoles just around the corner, *Halo 2* would be about as detailed and intricate as standard-def game graphics ever got. It didn't just bring prettier graphics, though — it also introduced a host of new mechanics and features.

Some changes went over better than others. Fans seemed pretty positive on the revamped health system, which moved even further away from the old-school health pickup style. Not so much for dual-wielding, though; only a handful of guns could be held in tandem, and swapping to Master Chief's backup weapon (or tossing grenades, or using melee strikes) required casting your second pistol or rifle aside. It felt like a case of style over substance: the opportunity to go all John Woo on bad guys at the expense of *Halo*'s artfully crafted triad of combat techniques.

Even more controversial was the major change that took hold a couple of chapters into the story. *Halo 2* cross-cut its early story sequences between Master Chief's commendation ceremony for his performance at the Halo installation,

and an enemy Elite's shaming for allowing Master Chief's victory. The alien was branded and sent into battle as a sacrificial holy warrior called the Arbiter, a turn of events whose importance suddenly became clear when you found yourself in control of that alien avatar.

Much as with *Metal Gear Solid 2*'s Raiden switch, the Arbiter didn't go over well with fans, even though (unlike with Raiden) Master Chief wasn't cast aside altogether. Rather, the story alternated between the two rival heroes, bringing their tales together briefly before sending them in different directions.

For every creative choice that left players scratching their heads with the campaign mode, though, *Halo 2*'s multiplayer benefitted equally. In fact, many regard *Halo 2* as the pinnacle of the series' multiplayer, and not just because it made excellent use of Microsoft's new Live service for online play. The map design, weapon balancing, and game objectives struck a perfect balance for many fans; even the addition of Elites as usable multiplayer skins went over much better than the introduction of an Elite to the story mode. *Halo 2* contin-



ued to be one of the most-played games on Xbox Live until Microsoft turned off the servers in 2010: a six-year run that effectively made it *The Dark Side of the Moon* of videogames.

The excellent multiplayer mode went a long way toward ameliorating frustration with *Halo 2*, but not entirely. Fans complained that the story doesn't so much come to a conclusion as simply end, with a cliffhanger that leaves numerous plot threads dangling. The primary antagonist, Flood collective consciousness Gravemind, pops up at a critical plot juncture with no real explanation of its nature. Gravemind was the first sign of what would become one of Halo's long-term weaknesses, its reliance on "expanded universe" material to provide essential context to in-game events.

In hindsight, however, *Halo 2*'s flaws seem almost miraculously modest; the game could have turned out far worse.



Due to a deeply troubled development process, Bungie ended up throwing out most of its work on the game with just a year to go before the hard release deadline. The stunning E3 demo that featured Master Chief battling Covenant forces in the streets of a futuristic Earth city never materialized in the game, and many of the play features it showed off proved untenable outside of that carefully crafted E3 vertical slice. That it ended up shipping on time was remarkable; that it shipped with such a beloved multiplayer experience in tow downright miraculous.

### A NEW GENERATION

Finally: a *Halo* game that didn't have to be scrapped midway through and rushed to launch! *Halo 3* had its share of flaws, but in many senses it was both the most expansive and most polished entry in the series to date. Bungie made refinement a major priority in its first high-definition shooter.

*Halo 3* didn't altogether abandon its predecessor's rockier elements, but it certainly downplayed them. For example, dual-wielding still existed, but it wasn't nearly as effective a tactic as mastering the new weapons (including the versatile battle rifle) and support equipment like the Portable Cover. The latter changed the nature of play by adding a new element of tactical depth to combat. While many felt equipment undermined the purity of multiplayer, it greatly enhanced the campaign.

## ROADS NOT TAKEN

Mac fans often presented *Marathon* as the platform's answer to *Doom* — thanks to some weird porting shenanigans, the Mac port of *Doom* didn't show up until after *Doom II* did — but in many ways it was more accurate to say *Marathon* was the Apple fan's answer to *System Shock*. Like Looking Glass' cyberpunk shooter, *Marathon* involved rogue artificial intelligences in space and featured copious walls of narrative text to read through. And little wonder: Both games evolved from meaty first-person action role-playing games.

*System Shock*, of course, descended from *Origins' Ultima Underworld*, while *Marathon* derived from Bungie's own take on the first-person RPG, *Pathways into Darkness*. *Pathways* wasn't strictly an RPG; it also owed a great deal to classic adventure games like *Zork* and *Shadowgate*. With a strict real-time clock and plenty of surprises every bit as cruel as *Uninvited's* poisonous ruby, *Pathways* was a nasty piece of adventure game role-playing masquerading as a first-person shooter.

Given the almost collegial nature of *System Shock* and *Marathon's* origins, it's interesting to see the direction each series' descendants took. *Marathon* begat *Halo*, a linear, narrative shooter that sold largely on the strength of its twitchy multiplayer. *System Shock*, on the other hand, led to *BioShock*, a much slower, single-player-only shooter that retained a good many of the older games' RPG systems and mechanical freedom. Of course, Bungie eventually got back into the RPG spirit with *Destiny*, but its RPG elements are less the "chatty talky" kind and more the "grindy MMO" flavor.

Similarly, Bungie walked back the idea of the Arbiter as a playable character. *Halo 3* was the Master Chief's tale first and foremost, with the Arbiter serving strictly as a support character, playable in two- to four-player co-op; Master Chief always served as the avatar for player one.



*Halo 3* wrapped up the Flood saga that had spanned the series to that point, though the ending again felt jarringly abrupt, especially once you rescued Cortana from Gravemind's clutches. It also proved to be the most linear entry in the series by far. Bungie invested heavily in playtesting to smooth over the experience, which made for a snappy, thrilling shooter, but one that left little to the imagination. And despite this extensive testing, *Halo 3* nevertheless included "Cortana," easily the most hated level in the franchise outside the first game's "The Library."

On the other hand, multiplayer felt every bit as freeing as the campaign was restrictive. Bungie built up larger arenas to be traversed by "man cannons," and introduced a simple customization tool called Forge which allowed you to shape and share altered maps with friends.

"Refinement" would continue to be the driving theme for Bungie's final *Halo* titles. *Halo 3: ODST* began life as an expansion to *Halo 3*, but eventually grew enough to be released as a standalone game. The most experimental of the *Halo* games, *ODST* shifted the focus from Master Chief's story to that of a team of orbital dropship troopers: augmented humans with greater capabilities than those of typical grunts, but nowhere near as powerful as a Spartan II like Master Chief. The reduced strength and speed of the *ODST*s brought new tension to *Halo*'s well-worn gameplay, adding urgency to what had become rote and predictable encounters.



The boosted difficulty wasn't all that set *ODST* apart: A non-linear detective story bound together the entire game, allowing you to roam freely and investigate in the rain-soaked ruins of a demolished Earth city. Mechanically, *ODST* diverged the least from what had come before; its sandbox and tool-set transferred almost directly from *Halo 3*. The biggest change came in the advent of true cooperative play, as for the first time a *Halo* was designed from the ground up to allow multiple people to play together for a pleasantly transformative take on the series.

*Halo: Reach*, the final Bungie-developed *Halo*, took the opposite tack from *ODST*: It radically updated the sandbox while reverting to heroes with a more traditional strength level. In this case, *Reach* focused on a holding action by a team of Spartan III supersoldiers on the doomed human colony of Reach, the planet whose annihilation set into motion the events of the original *Halo: Combat Evolved*. With the ending a known quantity — everyone on the planet was doomed to die — *Reach* instead became about setting the stage for the main trilogy while introducing new and unexpected play elements.



Armor Abilities replaced *Halo 3*'s dynamic equipment. *Reach* hinted at *Halo*'s shift toward a *Call of Duty*-inspired approach, as Armor Abilities had to be set in advance (like a loadout) and allowed for some very *CoD*-like skills, such as sprinting. *Reach* also introduced space combat. While vehicles had been part and parcel of the franchise since the beginning, they were strictly terrestrial. Not so with *Reach*'s Sabre fighters, which transformed the game briefly into a good old-fashioned space sim — the one drawback being that the Sabres weren't a seamless element of the sandbox but rather played out in a standalone chapter. Small compromises aside, though, the cosmic shooting sequence added to the game's overall sense of grandeur, making *Reach* a stirring sendoff as Bungie departed for the greener pastures of *Destiny*.

#### PASSING THE TORCH

*Halo 4* saw the keys to the franchise handed to 343 Industries, an internal Microsoft studio created specifically to shepherd the *Halo* brand. The changeover, unfortunately, was not without issue. Tasked with the unenviable job of not only matching the quality of Bungie's work but also



ON THE OTHER HAND, MULTIPLAYER FELT EVERY BIT AS FREEING AS THE CAMPAIGN WAS RESTRICTIVE.



keeping the series' mechanics relevant while picking up where *Halo 3*'s story left off, 343i delivered in some areas and disappointed in others.

Perhaps the biggest frustration came in the form of multiplayer, which heavily resembled the overall design of *Call of Duty*. With loadouts, pop-up prompts, and a running experience system, the overhauled competitive play left many fans wondering what had happened to the series. Weapons felt slighter and less distinct, and the moment-to-moment gunplay became tedious with the arrival of a new race of foes.

With the Flood eradicated, the *Halo* series' only hope of moving the narrative forward was to explore new corners of the universe, and *Halo 4* looked into its backstory. The

## PERHAPS THE BIGGEST FRUSTRATION CAME IN THE FORM OF MULTIPLAYER.

Chief and Cortana began to uncover the origin of the Flood and the not-entirely-friendly races behind them. Unfortunately, in practice, the soldiers of these beings — corrupted humans called Prometheans — weren't nearly as interesting to fight as the Flood. Where the Flood's weak swarms of rotting creatures offered a welcome change of pace from the tactical Covenant forces, threatening to overwhelm you with numbers, Prometheans were quick-moving bullet sponges. They were difficult to kill, but not because they were particularly clever; they just moved in annoying patterns and soaked up gunfire.

Many fans also found the Spartan Ops mode to be something of a letdown. Intended as an episodic series that would expand the campaign, Spartan Ops ultimately became too repetitive for most players' tastes. Worse, it tied closely to the increasingly arcane plotline, which had long since ceased to be coherent, with fundamental terms and info spread across an increasing number of multimedia projects as a result of Microsoft's determination to make *Halo* into a central, long-running brand.

In fairness, many of the game's failings resulted from 343i following a little too closely in Bungie's footsteps: As with *Halo* and *Halo 2*, *Halo 4* underwent a significant reboot late in its production cycle, and the final product represented a hasty attempt to ship the retooled project. But for all its frustrations, the

game looked incredible — it easily stood as the most impressive example of Xbox 360's graphical capabilities until *Tomb Raider* came along.

343i clearly took the mixed reactions *Halo 4* inspired to heart; while *Halo 5*'s story left fans scratching their heads and complaining about its brevity, its moment-to-moment gameplay has won back many skeptics — no small feat, considering the bitter feelings 2014's technically troubled *Master Chief Collection* engendered. The biggest improvement by far: the replacement of Spartan Ops with the massive multiplayer mode Warzone, whose scale and three-sided combat plays almost like a cross between *ODST*'s Firefight mode and Bungie's *Destiny*. While it remains to be seen how *Halo 5* will be regarded in the long term, for now it's convinced fans to give 343i another chance.

While the precise future of the series may be somewhat nebulous outside the upcoming sequel to strategy spin-off *Halo Wars*, there's no question *Halo* does have a future. *Halo 5* was only the second chapter in the promised "Reclaimer Trilogy," and beyond the numbered games, we can also count on a steady flow of side projects and multimedia content. Microsoft accepted *Halo* as its consolation prize when Bungie went solo again, and you can be certain the company wants to wring every last drop of value from it. Who knows? Maybe someday we'll even see the long-gestating *Halo* movie come to fruition. 🎮

ORIGIN STORIES:

# HOW HALO LOST TWO PERSONS

INITIALLY A MAC-EXCLUSIVE THIRD-PERSON ACTION GAME, *HALO* ENDED UP REVOLUTIONIZING FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS INSTEAD. BY JEREMY PARISH



**T**he *Halo* series has changed a great deal through the years, though never quite so much as it did between its initial reveal and the launch of *Halo: Combat Evolved*.

Developer Bungie had made a name for itself on the Macintosh throughout the '90s, and its reputation rested on two pillars: the *Marathon* first-person shooter trilogy, and revolutionary real-time strategy series *Myth: The Fallen Lords*. Ever eager to explore new concepts, Bungie had sworn off the FPS following the release of 1996's *Marathon: Infinity* with a memorable metaphor about dead horses. *Myth* took the studio in a fresh, new direction: a god's-eye-view tactical game featuring deformable 3D battlefields. Soon after that, the company created a martial arts-driven action game called *Oni*. Its next game, however, would bring it all together, combining the large-scale strategy of *Myth* with the multiplayer sci-fi action of *Marathon* and *Oni*. Called *Halo*, it would be the company's magnum opus.

After some sly teasers directed at Bungie fansites, the company revealed *Halo* at MacWorld New York in 1999. By that point, the game had undergone multiple permutations, shifting from a pure strategy game in the *Myth* vein to a team-oriented third-person action game featuring online play, two warring factions (armored

JEREMY PARISH is the editor-in-chief of *USGamer.net* and the author of several books dedicated to game design analysis, including *Game Boy World 1989* and *GameSpite Presents: The Anatomy of Super Mario Bros., Vol. 1*. Learn more about his work at [patreon.com/gamespite](https://patreon.com/gamespite).



humans and energy-sword-wielding alien Covenant fighters), and a hop-on/hop-off approach to vehicles, some operated in tandem by multiple players.

The trailer left viewers champing at the bit to learn more about *Halo*. But nothing impressed quite so much as the game's sheer sense of scale: Two teams of multiple player characters squared off on a landscape that seemed to stretch for miles. It was all seamless and traversable both on foot and via vehicle. The camera panned and zoomed, revealing more of the environment as the human faction sped across muddy valleys and rocky plains. Meanwhile, the Covenant's unearthly combat aircraft left contrails as they looped through the sky high over the battlefield. Above it all loomed the Halo itself, a ring in the sky tapering to the horizon.

Today, the MacWorld *Halo* trailer seems almost surreal. It features numerous familiar elements — the soldiers, the aliens, their vehicles, the landscape textures, the distant mass of Halo, even the Control Room holographic computer panel — yet they're configured in a completely unfamiliar format. The Master Chief is one of several identical human soldiers who band together to hop into a Warthog, and the playstyle appears to be a squad-based competitive match between two factions.

*Halo* as we know it, of course, came into the world after morphing back into the first-person shooter Bungie had originally avoided. To a certain degree, you can blame the realities and limitations of the Xbox; where Apple bragged that the MacWorld demo was real-time footage running on standard hardware under OpenGL, *Halo* ultimately launched on the Xbox console, which was necessarily less capable than a Mac desktop and lacked OpenGL support.

Though Bungie had been a Mac mainstay through the lean, pre-iMac '90s, Microsoft acquired the studio and locked it down as an exclusive content provider for its new console. This raised Bungie's profile considerably, but it also meant the company needed to revise its development philosophy. The Xbox offered considerable power for a \$300 closed box, but Bungie had been targeting machines that cost 10 times that much and could be counted on to expand and undergo upgrades. *Halo* needed to be scaled back.

Since we never saw actual gameplay footage of Bungie's original vision for *Halo*, only scripted machinima videos without live AI, it's hard to say just how much the game truly changed. The MacWorld demo is often treated as a glimpse of the prototype campaign, but aside from the seemingly playable Covenant and third-person perspective, it could easily have been a multiplayer session. Then again, was there a difference? *Halo* was envisioned as a non-linear, mission-based, multiplayer game, a struggle between two factions for territory control across the Halo ring.

Another factor resentful fans often overlook is the small issue of Bungie not actually having the funds to complete the game on its own; Microsoft bought the developer because the studio needed an angel. The game's transformation into a first-person shooter raised hackles, but realistically, the extraordinary team shooter demoed at MacWorld would never have happened without help from a major publisher. In the end, publishers call the shots, and in this case the publisher was Microsoft. (Legend has it that Apple made a play for Bungie as well, but the offer came just a hair too late to stop the Microsoft deal.)

In any case, the change in design was as internally motivated as externally: According to a 2004 video commentary by the original *Halo* team, studio head Jason Jones opposed the idea of *Halo* playing in the first-person perspective until he realized the game didn't really work in third-person. "We tried playing this in third-person multiplayer and it was just impossible," recalled one staffer.

The change in perspective naturally resulted in a shifting design dynamic, as can be seen in various demo snapshots of the game between 1998–2000. Where early test footage of the RTS version of *Halo* transpires from a zoomed-out point of view set over wide-open spaces, the scenery becomes more complex the tighter the camera moves to the action. By the E3 2000 demo, which predates the Microsoft acquisition, *Halo* had become a first-person action game, and its environments began to take on a more familiar shape. The wide spaces still exist, and players can still freely jump into and out of vehicles, but the open arenas blend seamlessly into closed structures that resemble many of the alien facilities seen in the original *Halo*.

The final game would bring more changes. The expansive weapon set of the early builds would drop superfluous weapons like the flamethrower, the sword, and the harpoon launcher. Water-based vehicles would disappear, as would the bizarre live mounts. And — ironically, given the game's RTS roots — the story would involve a conflict between three decidedly *StarCraft*-like factions with the addition of the ravenous alien Flood to complement the human fighters and the advanced Covenant.

In other words, while it's tempting to think of *Halo* in terms of "before Microsoft" and "after Microsoft," in truth it underwent a series of evolutions and revisions as its creators struggled to find its ideal form. Fascinating as the old MacWorld demo was, Bungie ultimately went with the game we know and love in deference not only to the needs of its new master and platform, but because it simply worked as an FPS. The original vision of the game wasn't lost, precisely; rather, it helped shape *Halo* into an FPS like nothing before it. 🎮

# LINDSEY STIRLING

## HOW VIDEOGAME MUSIC TOOK HER FROM ZERO FANS TO 7 MILLION.

BY TOMEK "TOMMY GUN" GRODECKI

In Lindsey Stirling's music, you can find everything: From classical violin and fantasy, to cosplay and videogames. Lindsey's story even now is material for a great book. A youthful, talented, and cheerful violinist, she started her career at a young age. She tried her hand at the TV program *America's Got Talent*, but without any positive results. Despite this setback, Lindsey held her ground and released her music on the Internet. Now she has more than 7 million subscribers on YouTube.

**TG: You recorded two music albums, lots of compilations and some singles. Have you got any ideas for your next CD?**

**LS:** I've thought about doing an acoustic album, but haven't ever been completely happy with the recordings I've completed for that purpose, so that's still on the back burner. Also hoping to release a Christmas album in the near future. As far as electronic/dub/pop, that's also in the works.

**TG: You're also making videogame music arrangements (*Skyrim*, *Zelda*, *Dragon Age*, etc). Have you got any plans for your next projects connected to games?**

**LS:** I've been so crazy busy on tour I haven't taken time to consider my next game cover yet. I know I have a solid base of gamer fans, and so I'll do my best to deliver in a timely manner. I'm totally open to feedback on what I should cover next. I actually put together a gamer medley for my current tour that includes all the games I've ever covered in one song. I did this because every time I've performed gaming music in the past, some fans have been unhappy that I didn't perform this song or that, and now I perform them *all* so that *no one* can complain.

**TG: Which videogames are your favorites?**

**LS:** Oh, I loved the silly games like *Mario Party* and *Mario Kart*; *Zelda* was a favorite among my friends growing up so I have a lot of childhood memories connected to that one. *Just Dance* and

*Dance Revolution* have been some of my favorites because...yeah...I like to dance.

**TG: Last year you played in Liverpool for Andrea Bocelli. Did you find accompanying Bocelli challenging?**

**LS:** It was a unique challenge for me, yes. It was also a bit of a challenge connecting on a personal level with the other musicians and conductor, which is an important aspect of performance for me. Classical musicians are very perfectionistic at what they do and how they do it, and I feel like there are other classical musicians who are better suited for that avenue than I am, but it was a good learning experience.

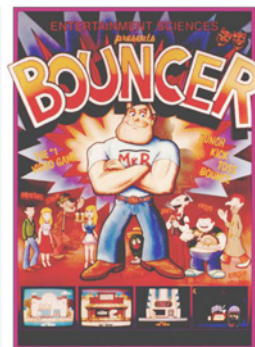
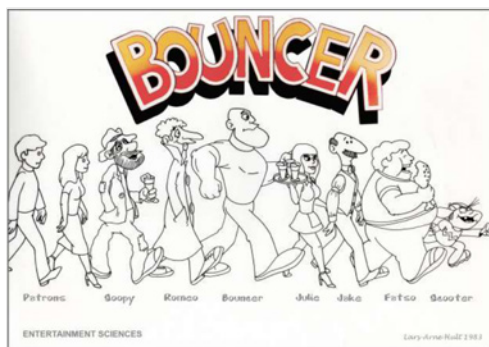
**TG: Do you have any future plans? Maybe some challenges? Life goals? I heard that you're going to publish a book...**

**LS:** I am publishing a book; should be out by January and I'm so excited! My sister Brooke is writing it with me and she's such a master with words. The memoir will make you laugh, cry, and everything in between. Post-tour I'll probably be doing a book tour, and I'm planning to stay in LA for awhile to start writing my next album. As far as future dreams, I'd love to win a Grammy. 🎵

Photography by Scott Jarvie  
Translated by Anna Paczkowska and Paweł Kusyk

**TOMEK GRODECKI** was born a long time ago in a galaxy far far away (read: Poland). He is an arts and culture journalist. Besides writing, he rocks out on stage with Warsaw Boys' and Men's Choir. Friends call him Tommy.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This interview is dedicated to the late Jason "Gavi" Gaviati — a musician, songwriter and producer, who spent several years touring with Lindsey Stirling.



# BOUNCER: THE LOST ARCADE GAME

## PART 1: MEET MR. B.

BY CHRIS J. SMITH

It is 1982, and everywhere you look, there are video arcade games. In every mall and strip center there is an arcade; at grocery stores, restaurants, department stores, and convenience stores, you find arcade games. Kids and adults alike line up quarters on the marquee for their turn to play. The videogame industry is booming and shows no sign of stopping.

If you're an entrepreneur, what do you do? If you are Ron Clark or Joel Heinrich, you start a videogame company.

In early 1982, Ron and Joel formed Entertainment Sciences in Huntington Beach, California. Joel brought experience in gaming through his company, MicroPin, while Ron was a pioneer in the development of computer-aided design (CAD). Looking to capitalize on the videogame craze, they brought in Ulrich Neumann, a talented hardware engineer from Gremlin/Sega. Ulrich was tasked with developing a powerful system that would give Entertainment Sciences an edge over established and up-and-coming videogame companies. Over the next several months, Ulrich designed RIP 2000, a hardware platform able to generate cartoon-quality graphics.

As the hardware neared completion, Entertainment Sciences needed a game to showcase Ulrich's technology. Rob Patton of Cinematronics was brought on board as

director of game design. As Ulrich demonstrated the RIP 2000 hardware, Rob pitched game ideas to take advantage of it. One feature of RIP 2000 that caught Rob's attention was its ability to scale graphics: Unlike with traditional sprites, RIP 2000 could create a playfield with realistic depth perception. Rob envisioned a game where a bouncer would eject undesirables bothering the paying patrons and wait staff. The game was called *Bouncer*.

While Ulrich put the finishing touches on the RIP 2000 system, Rob hired a local artist to build a mock-up of a bar and cardboard standups of the characters, which allowed Rob to design storyboards for the gameplay. *Bouncer* takes place at four different bars: Gulley's, a country-western bar; Hussang's Cantina, a coastal bar in Mexico; Studio 64, a disco; and finally, The Ritz, a high-class place, just because Rob thought it would be fun to have the bouncer wear a tuxedo. The object of the game is for players, who control "Mr. B" (short for bouncer), to keep the troublemakers out of the bar. If Mr. B is successful, he'll be promoted to a classier bar.

At the bar, players make sure the waitress, Julie, and Jake, the bartender, are able to serve their food and drinks, while ensuring the patrons are not bothered. If drinks are spilled, or patrons leave, Mr. B will not be promoted, and may be fired. Preventing

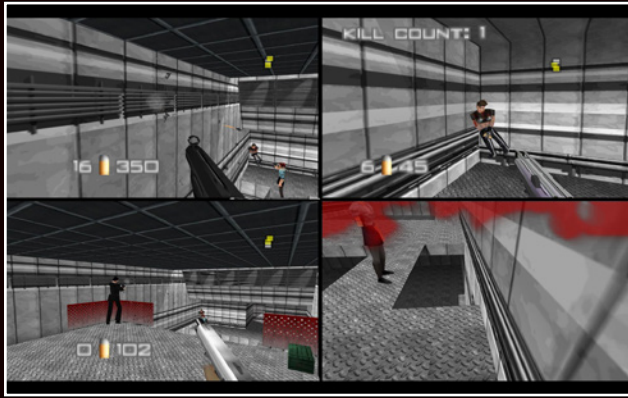
Mr. B. from having a smooth-running night are Sippy, the drink-stealing drunk; Romeo, the flasher with heart-bedecked underwear; Fatso, a large, food-stealing fellow; and Mikie, a misfit on a skateboard. Players move Mr. B using a trackball, and control the action using three buttons: toss/grab, kick/punch, and bounce.

To take advantage of high-resolution graphics, former Disney animator Lars Arne-Hult was brought in to bring the characters to life. Each movement was hand-drawn, inked, painted, and then digitized using a proprietary in-house system. The result was stunning, cartoon-quality animation, and unlike the LaserDisc games around the corner, the characters were completely controllable.

In less than a year, Entertainment Sciences built a custom hardware/software system from the ground up. The technical team worked tirelessly to build a few prototypes for test locations around the Southern California area. *Bouncer* tested well, with many players believing it a LaserDisc game. With no real manufacturing capability, the technicians scrambled to put together 20 units to premiere *Bouncer* at the 1983 Amusement & Music Operators Association (AMOA) show in New Orleans.

Stay tuned for part two, in which I'll cover the reception and fate of *Bouncer*. ❧

CHRIS J. SMITH runs [turbosub.com](http://turbosub.com), a space dedicated to the games of Entertainment Sciences.



## MULTIPLAYER MADNESS: THE RISE OF CONSOLE CO-OP

BY ROBERT WORKMAN

### CO-OP HELPED CONSOLE SHOOTERS BECOME A MAINSTAY OF COLLEGE DORM ROOMS.

**N**owadays, people love the idea of taking on their friends online in games like *Call of Duty: Black Ops III* and *Halo 5: Guardians*. But nearly two decades ago, the idea of playing a first-person shooter on a console barely existed, save for ports like *Doom* on SNES and other small titles that didn't make as big an impact as they did on PC.

That changed in 1997 with the introduction of Rare's *GoldenEye 007* for the Nintendo 64. Not only did console gamers finally get a taste of an original first-person shooting experience, but *GoldenEye* also came with a unique perk that resolved the matter of finding competition — four-player splitscreen action.

Some complain that the splitscreen experience makes it too easy to cheat, as you can scope out where your opponents are and track them down. But many consider *GoldenEye* one of the greatest multiplayer experiences out there — especially with its abundant options, like the inclusion of various villains and a paintball mode.

Still, up until this point, splitscreen had been reserved for other genres, like *Star Fox 64* (which had its own competitive edge) and *F-Zero GX*. When *GoldenEye* rolled around, developers saw the potential of bringing shooters to the platform. As a result, the N64 got a number of titles that supported it, including *Duke Nukem 64* and *Quake 64* — a real surprise considering their origins among a “hardcore” PC audience.

The arrival of another popular shooter just a few years later saw splitscreen gaming take an interesting turn. *Halo*, Bungie's much-beloved franchise starter, introduced the option when the game debuted for the Xbox in 2000, bringing with it a number of modes for two players. Neither player would have an advantage over the other, as they would *both* be Master Chief and take on the Covenant as a team.

At the time, splitscreen co-op wasn't a thing in games, even if competitive multiplayer was. *Halo* popularized the idea of working together with a fellow player and

splitscreen teamwork has since become commonplace. Granted, more of today's games feature online co-op, like *Black Ops III*, but some developers feel that local co-op can go a long way.

There are a couple of reasons local co-op remains significant. Number one, not everyone is comfortable connecting online for a match of their favorite shooter. The competition can be harsh in some games, like *Halo 5: Guardians*, and chat can certainly get rowdy. Number two, the option for local multiplayer — co-op or competitive — opens up ways for families to play together. Some parents are concerned with what their kids play, and the ability to set up a local match enables them to take part in the experience — not to mention have fun with it.

Other games have since built their own examples on how to make a local co-op experience worthwhile. One in particular is *Borderlands*, a game that brings along the concept of teamwork, as you and fellow Vault Hunters work your way across a troubled world, taking down enemies and cleaning up on loot.

Local multiplayer is a feature that many still appreciate today. A lot of indie offerings, like *#IDARB* and *Towerfall Ascension*, offer it with great results, and some developers still care about including the option in mainstream releases as well. *GoldenEye* and *Halo* paved the way for these great features, opening up a new world of co-op enjoyment to single-screen gamers. 🎮

**ROBERT WORKMAN** is a veteran in the videogame industry, spending several years establishing his trade with outlets like Segadojo and AOL GameDaily. He devotes a great deal of time to providing his gaming knowledge to RETRO.



# ENYO Arcade

Fun, frantic, yet flawed, this old-school shmup leaves room for improvement.

■ DEVELOPER: James Mearman ■ PUBLISHER: Dev-Zoo.net ■ PLATFORMS: PC ■ RELEASE DATE: 11.09.15 ■ PLAYERS: Single-player ■ ESRB: NA

**JAMES MEARMAN'S ENYO ARCADE** is a fast-paced, 2D shooter that blends agility with old-school visuals, music, and difficulty. Much like this intro, the game wastes no time getting into the action, and doesn't hold your hand at all. There are no tutorials, no hints, and only the briefest of opening narratives to explain why you're in some *Metroid*-esque hellhole. But the game isn't about narrative, it's about action. Frantic, only-ever-one-mis-step-away-from-dying action. Deaths come from a single hit, and can almost always be attributed to your actions.

The unnamed protagonist can run, jump, shoot, kick, wall-jump, and speed around in a ball, much like *Metroid's* Samus Aran, which *ENYO* is clearly inspired by. In fact, the pixel art and '90s action music will really take you back.

Just as welcome are the weapon stations placed generously throughout different levels, providing a number of attack options that can be chosen based on preference or necessity. For example, players who prefer to deal high damage will likely equip rocket launchers or rail guns, while the more spray-and-pray types may opt instead for the plasma rifles and nail guns.

I chose the nail gun, as my accuracy was nowhere near impressive enough to take out enemies in the few seconds before they narrowed the distance. Firing each weapon creates a slight blur effect around the edges of the screen, which I enjoyed. I didn't stick with

the nail gun, though, as certain areas called for alternative weaponry. One such example was the saw gun, which unsurprisingly shot saw blades, and allowed me to bounce shots around corners to remove potential threats before they saw me coming.

It was at this point that I realized my performance was improving. In a game that was challenging me from the get-go, I was beginning to predict the actions of enemies, planning for them, and leaping around platforms in a more confident — and dare I say, fluid — fashion. Amidst all of the dying and cursing, my efforts were being rewarded.

Of course, the feeling was always short-lived, as each new stage brought with it new deaths, and I was repeatedly faced with a stats screen reminding me of how many times I had re-tried, how awful my accuracy was, and how many enemies I had killed. While the difficulty curve of *ENYO* seems to be well-paced, there is still room for improvement, as expected for a game in Steam Early Access.

The first issue that struck me was the opening narrative, and how, despite its brevity, it was riddled with spelling mistakes, such as "finaly" instead of "finally" or "devistation" rather than "devastation." It might seem petty or nit-picky, but it is easy to fix, and something that would improve first impressions greatly.

I also felt that *ENYO* was *too* frantic to use a mouse and keyboard. Attempting to juggle

platforming with the keyboard and shooting with the mouse, while also trying to kick using another key, was just too much to handle for a console gamer like myself. I'm sure it is possible, and probably even easy for PC gamers, but I'd recommend using the controller support function.

Additionally, there really should be a map of some sort. Without it, I sometimes felt a bit lost. Occasionally I would accidentally loop back on myself and realize I had no idea where I'd gone wrong. Considering just how hard the game is, and that enemies respawn each time you return to an area, getting lost is demotivating. In a game like *ENYO*, back-tracking means dying...again.

Nevertheless, the reward of progression and improvement is likely to drive more dedicated gamers into the brutal action of *ENYO* until they have beaten every challenge thrown at them. Personally, I'm not suited to this kind of gaming torture, but I know others definitely are. For those gamers, it isn't torture, it's an opportunity. Despite my own lack of patience, I appreciate Mearman's use of style and sound to create an atmosphere reminiscent of the past, while fast-paced, fluid action brings the game into the modern day. It's a good combination, and while it may not be for everyone, I'm almost positive that it will be a celebrated blend of '90s memories and contemporary cursing in many homes. 🍷 —Ryan Noble

OUR RATING: ❤️❤️❤️❤️

RYAN NOBLE is an editor at Indie Gaming Mag, [indiegamemag.com](http://indiegamemag.com).



“Weiss’s deep familiarity with his chosen subject matter is an asset of the text, and as a writer he conveys information clearly and without pretension” —*GameCulture Journal*



**McFarland**

Orders 800-253-2187  
[www.mcfarlandpub.com](http://www.mcfarlandpub.com)

**COLECO VISIONS**



Your vision is our vision!  
The Colecovisions Podcast

Hosted By  
Willie,  
Gamester81 and  
SoCal Mike!

Find us on



@INTYPODCAST  
HELLO@INTELLVISIONARIES.COM  
[WWW.INTELLVISIONARIES.COM](http://WWW.INTELLVISIONARIES.COM)  
[FACEBOOK.COM/INTYPODCAST](https://FACEBOOK.COM/INTYPODCAST)

THIS PODCAST IS  
KEITH ROBINSON  
APPROVED!

FEATURING - EXCLUSIVE AND ORIGINAL GAME DEVELOPER  
INTERVIEWS, GAME-BY-GAME EPISODES, BLUE SKY RANGER  
INTERVIEWS, HOMEBREW UPDATES AND SO MUCH MORE!

**THE INTELLVISIONARIES  
PODCAST**

Hosted By -  
PAUL NURMINEN - RICK REYNOLDS - WILLIAM OLDS

BY ANDY EDDY

# DEV-OLUTION: TIM SCHAFER

## WANNA WORK IN GAMES? ACCIDENTALLY COP TO PIRACY. WAIT, WHAT?

In 1989, Tim Schafer harbored aspirations of becoming a writer, but having been a programmer for most of his life — much of it on his faithful Atari 800 home computer — he figured he'd take a job working with computers after he graduated from University of California at Berkeley with his computer science degree, which would hold him until he found a place to ply his writing trade.

He got turned down by Hewlett-Packard.

Then he got turned down by Atari (which would have been his “dream company,” he says).

When he saw a job listing at his college for an assistant designer/programmer at “Lucasfilm, Games Division,” which stated the company was interested in programmers who could write dialogue, he thought he'd be a perfect fit. He had even won a short-story contest in college for “engineers in the arts” — a “nerd writing contest,” as he calls it.

Confident he'd found a home in the games industry, Schafer called the number in the listing and spoke to the guy who'd posted it. With the call turning into an interview, the Lucasfilm guy asked him if he played any of the company's games. Excitedly, Schafer relayed his vast experience with *Ball Blaster*, a game he claims he “really loved” and played so much, he wore out an Atari 800 joystick on it.

While he probably expected an instant job offer from his admitted intimacy with Lucasfilm's game catalog, he recalls the Lucasfilm guy instead coming back with, “*Ball Blaster*, huh? Well, that's what it was called when it was pirated. It was really called *Ball Blazer*.”

Ouch. Despite the inadvertent piracy confession, the Lucasfilm guy asked Schafer to send his resume anyway, and a cover letter describing his ideal job. Schafer figured that Mr. Lucasfilm was probably just humoring him, so, assuming it was a lost cause, he “went for it,” making a cover letter that described his hunt for his ideal job in the form of a text adventure complete with illustrations. He printed it out on his dot-matrix printer, and sent it to Lucasfilm.

“It got their attention,” Schafer says. “I got the job.”

Once he got the position at LucasArts (which is what the Lucasfilm games group ended up being called), he worked on Ron Gilbert's *The Secret of Monkey Island*, which also led to the creation of a sequel. Then he started working on his own projects, first doing *Day of the Tentacle* (a sequel to Gilbert's *Maniac Mansion*) with Dave Grossman, which came out in 1993. He contributed to a number of other projects at LucasArts, and also helmed some productions solo, including *Full Throttle* and *Grim Fandango*.

LucasArts changed its direction away from adventure-style games, and Schafer left in 2000 to start his own San Francisco-based company, Double Fine Productions (which got its name from a sign on the Golden Gate Bridge, “Slow to 45 mph — Double Fine Zone”). Double Fine started with a game about a psychic kid named Raz called *Psychonauts*, which was originally going to be published by Microsoft for the original Xbox, but was delayed and ended up being published by Majesco in 2005. Other Double Fine titles — which show a vast diversity of concepts — include *Brütal Legend*, *Costume Quest*, *Sesame Street: Once Upon a Monster*, and *Middle Manager of Justice*, as well as *Grim Fandango Remastered* and a remaster of *Day of the Tentacle* slated for early 2016.

The latest excitement for Schafer and Double Fine is the recently announced crowdfunding campaign for *Psychonauts 2*, which is in early planning for a 2018 release. At press time, the campaign on the hybrid crowdfunding/investment site called Fig (Fig.co) — which has Schafer, among other veteran developers, on its advisory board — was well on its way to hitting the \$3.3 million goal. Schafer acknowledged that the crowdfunding money would be combined with cash from an external partner and Double Fine funding to complete the project.

One thing's for sure: Schafer's successfully spun his “nerd writing” into a very durable career. 🎮

ANDY EDDY has been a game journalist (some would say psycho, and not for “naut”) for over 27 years. For questions, comments, or recommendations for a future installment of *Dev-olution*, you can reach Andy at [andy@readretro.com](mailto:andy@readretro.com).



# THE MAKING AND REMAKING OF

# RESIDENT EVIL

BY DAVID L. CRADDOCK

RELIVE THE EVENTS THAT LED TO "THE MANSION INCIDENT"  
AS WE EXHUME THE DUSTY BONES OF RESIDENT EVIL



■ *Resident Evil* started as a remake of *Sweet Home* on the NES.



**“SILENCE LAY STEADILY AGAINST THE WOOD AND STONE OF HILL HOUSE...”**

The mansion wasn't dying. It was dead. It was death.

Tucked far back in the forest, it had been beautiful, but now it was fallen into ruin. Paint and plaster peeled like dead skin. Spider-web cracks marred the walls.

Inside, darkness hung thick and heavy. Grand, dilapidated rooms reeked of mold. Glass lay scattered across stained carpeting and marble tiles. Horrors roamed the halls — crawling, dragging, and pulling themselves along as they groaned into the stillness.

If you were to guess that the mansion was built by one Oswald E. Spencer, you would be mistaken — yet correct at the same time.

**“AND WHATEVER WALKED THERE...”**

Based on his appearance, few would've suspected that Tokuro Fujiwara was a masochist.

Diminutive, slender, and quiet, Fujiwara accepted a position at Capcom designing coin-op action games in 1983. Two years later, he took the reins as producer on *Ghosts 'n Goblins*, a punishingly difficult side-scrolling action game.

By 1988, Fujiwara had risen to the post of general manager of Capcom's Console Games Division. He further cemented his reputation for crafting pleasurable yet painful gameplay by creating *Mega Man*, a notoriously challenging platformer where you defeat bosses and use their weapons against other bosses, rock-paper-scissors style.

Following the smashing success of *Mega Man 2* in 1989, Fujiwara captained another NES game called *Sweet Home*. He envisioned it as a psychological-horror title: A team of five documentarians enter a haunted mansion to verify or debunk the myth that an eccentric artist had stashed his paintings there before disappearing.

Whether or not they walk out is up to you.

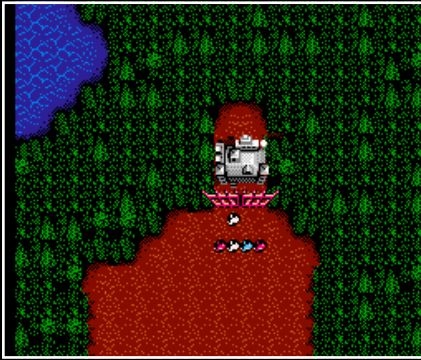
Although psychological horror suffused every square inch of its virtual real estate, *Sweet Home* did not originate the survival-horror genre. It was a role-playing game. Each of your five characters possessed a special item such as a skeleton key to open doors and a lighter that powered a generator, which restored power to previously inaccessible wings of the house.

As you wandered around, random battles against macabre denizens of the house broke out à la *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy*. If one of your party members died, their special item followed them to the grave. Fujiwara was merciless, but not cruel. Finite items lying around the manse performed the same functions as special items: If your nurse



■ Before designing *Sweet Home*, Fujiwara created the enduring *Mega Man* series.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The following sources were helpful in writing this article: “The Making of Resident Evil” (NowGamer.com), “Shinji Mikami: The Godfather of Horror Games” (TheGuardian.com), and “The History of Resident Evil” (PlayStation Universe).



bit the dust, you could scrounge up painkillers to heal.

Managing your party and inventory was essential to victory. Each character could only carry one weapon and two items in addition to his or her special item. When a character died, you lost those inventory slots. You could divide characters into smaller groups of two or three to cover more ground, and if one group got into a jam, the CALL option on the battle menu summoned the other party — provided they were close by. Thinking hard on which items to leave for later, which items to carry, and who should carry them added gravitas to every decision.

Fujiwara's team engineered visual and aural effects that enhanced *Sweet Home's* stressful gameplay. Black borders ringed your screen as you combed through wooded paths and basement passageways. Echoes and chants broke out around you, complementing the moody soundtrack. Zombies and other terrors were drawn as tortured, angry, or hopeless.

Japanese gamers were suitably excited and scared to comb the corridors of



*Sweet Home* when Capcom released it in December 1989. Lost diaries filled in the story, and solving puzzles — many of which could only be deciphered after you found a specific item or clue — set you on the path to a chilling final encounter that concluded with not one, not two, but *five* possible endings depending on how many of your party survived.

Despite garnering positive press, *Sweet Home* did not cross the ocean to the U.S. Fujiwara filed it away. Perhaps he would get the opportunity to revisit the game one day.

**“WALKED ALONE.”  
— SHIRLEY JACKSON,  
THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE**

Shinji Mikami loved a good scare. As a student in elementary school, he listened raptly as his teacher narrated *Yotsuya Kaidan*, a revenge story about a woman who's poisoned by her husband and returns as a ghost to drive him mad.

His love of scary stories didn't help him when, after joining Capcom in 1990, he was appointed the designer of a quiz game for the Game Boy. Development wrapped in just three months. Impressed, his manager, Tokuro Fujiwara, put him in charge of the Disney-licensed *Aladdin* and *Goof Troop* games for Super NES. When both games released to positive reviews, Fujiwara assigned Mikami to a special project: to reimagine *Sweet Home*.

In late 1994, Mikami sequestered himself away to lay the groundwork for his assignment. Early in his self-imposed exile, he mapped out a story that revolved around ghosts, which had petrified him since hearing *Yotsuya Kaidan* read aloud. Then he changed his mind. Ghosts were inarguably spooky, but were poor enemies for a videogame. You couldn't shoot a ghost. Monsters that resembled and acted like human beings, but bereft of morals or rational thought, held the potential to be truly terrifying.

Over the next several months, Mikami sketched characters, rooms, traps, and puzzles. When he emerged, the concept he brought to Fujiwara bore a resemblance to *Sweet Home*, but was also a



■ *Yotsuya Kaidan*, a ghost story popular in Japan, influenced much of Mikami's work.

unique beast. His story would revolve around a pharmaceuticals company that invented biological weapons that transformed humans into mindless, deformed abominations able to win wars in place of human soldiers.

Some trappings from *Sweet Home*, such as the mansion setting, save rooms, multiple endings, careful management of supplies, and journals to flesh out the story, would be transplanted into the new game. Other concepts came from a PC game called *Alone in the Dark*. Published by I-Motion, *Alone in the Dark* displayed polygonal characters against prerendered backgrounds — like photographs you could walk around and interact with. Backgrounds were displayed via a fixed camera, which meant you could only see your character from preset angles. But Mikami liked that. Choosing the viewing angle meant he could set up scares you would never see coming.

Fujiwara approved the design, which would be developed for Sony's new PlayStation console, and asked what the game would be called. Mikami answered swiftly: *Biohazard*.



■ Choosing Jill or Chris determined your difficulty level.



■ “I hope this is not Chris’ blood!”

### “THEY HAVE ESCAPED INTO THE MANSION...”

*Sweet Home*’s ill-fated filmmakers were defined by their special items. Mikami sought to intertwine characters and gameplay even more tightly in *Biohazard*. *Alone in the Dark* gave you two characters to choose from; Mikami followed suit, sketching out Chris Redfield and Jill Valentine, members of the elite S.T.A.R.S. unit.

Jill and Chris represented distinct play styles. Chris could take more damage and packed a lighter, but could only carry six additional items. Jill’s slimmer frame was more susceptible to punishment, but she carried a lockpick with which she



■ The lobby of the Spencer estate, a location you’ll revisit many times.

could open most doors, and could hold eight items at once. Both characters would also find different weapons over the course of the game.

Fundamentally, Jill and Chris represented difficulty levels. Jill’s larger inventory, the lockpick that made her the “master of unlocking,” and bazooka — found early on — suited new players. Chris, who had to lug around rusted keys to unlock doors Jill could pick, and who didn’t find the ultra-powerful Magnum handgun until late in the story, appealed to players looking for a challenge.

For inspiration to design his mansion, Mikami looked to the Overlook Hotel, the setting of Stanley Kubrick’s Hollywood adaptation of Stephen King’s *The Shining*. He appreciated the dichotomy between the Overlook’s opulence and the pervading sense that its beauty was only skin deep. That below the surface, something sinister lurked.

Like *Sweet Home*’s doomed abode, *Biohazard*’s Spencer estate was set back in a wooded area. It was enormous — three floors of bedrooms, parlors, and hallways that tied it all together. Areas were divided into segments, with each segment shown from a fixed perspective. Sometimes the camera was set low and at an angle, a method of purposefully disorienting your view. Other shots showed you from above, up close, or behind as you walked further away.

The camera didn’t follow. Pre-rendered backgrounds cannot scroll; you can only see precisely what the director chooses to show you. That inability to position the camera played right into Mikami’s hands.

### “WHERE THEY THOUGHT IT WAS SAFE.”

You could hear them — the zombies, snorting and groaning and lumbering. But you couldn’t see them. And that was the point.

*Biohazard*’s use of pre-rendered backgrounds came with a useful side effect. Because the camera couldn’t move, there was no way for you to peek around the corner and spot exactly where zombies stood, but hearing them triggered instinctual reactions. Your pulse quickened. Your heart raced. The zombies might be one screen away, or waiting in an alcove that Mikami deliberately hid from view.

Obscuring enemy positions was a way to build the zombies up in your imagination — turning them from regular people who had suffered terrible fates to larger-than-life monstrosities. As you solved puzzles and pushed deeper into the mansion and surrounding grounds, cutscenes played that had a soothing effect, albeit perhaps unintentionally. The dialogue was so hackneyed, the acting so cliché, that





■ **Fight or flight: Fight the zombie and grab the shotgun shells, or flee and conserve ammo?**

you could forget for a few moments the anxiety you felt as you inched through candlelit attics and waterlogged laboratories rotten with undead.

Mikami's combination of arranged cameras and monsters became the stuff of legend among gamers. Arguably the most famous instance is a long, quiet corridor flanked by windows — and as you strolled along a zombie dog exploded through the glass and hit the ground running just as loud and exhilarating music shattered the silence.

Due to the PlayStation's low memory, it had to load areas in chunks. Doors demarcated areas and served as loading screens, but Mikami folded that shortcoming into *Biohazard's* atmosphere. As you opened a door, the screen went black, the door appeared, the knob slowly turned, and the door creaked open as you waited nervously to see what the next room had in store. Perhaps you had sprung a trap guaranteed to smooch you into a Jill (or Chris) sandwich.



■ **The prerendered backgrounds and set camera angles dictated what you could and couldn't see in each scene.**



■ **Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto (left) and Capcom's Shinji Mikami strike a deal.**



Some players and critics found *Biohazard's* controls harder to wrangle than its decayed terrors. Mikami and his team knew that a traditional control scheme wouldn't work. Pressing left to move left might feel awkward in a room where, say, the camera slanted the view in a confusing way. Immutible controls seemed the perfect fit. Pressing up or down always moved you forward or backward, respectively, while pressing left or right rotated your character regardless of the camera's position. The "tank controls" proved divisive: You either got the hang of them, or you cursed Mikami as you steered your character drunkenly down halls and into the open arms of zombies.

#### "WE CONTINUED OUR SEARCH FOR THE OTHER MEMBERS..."

More than once, Shinji Mikami believed *Biohazard* might not shamble across the finish line. For many on his team, it was their first game, and only Mikami's third. Consequently, their tools were rudimentary and inefficient — the development equivalents of rubbing sticks to make fire. During the final six-month stretch, everyone pulled double shifts. As the hours grew long, developers cleared their heads by pushing one another through the empty halls in rolling chairs at breakneck speeds.

At one point, executives at Capcom issued a memo ordering the project be disbanded. Only the quiet but firm intervention of Tokuro Fujiwara saved *Biohazard*. He believed in Mikami, and his vote of confidence paid off.

*Biohazard* was not the first survival-horror game — a term coined specifically for the project — but it instantly became the most popular on its release in March 1996. The game premiered in the States as *Resident Evil* — a title Mikami despised,

stating that it makes zero sense. Players and critics around the globe drooled over the realistic graphics and trembled at the brooding, tense atmosphere.

A string of sequels followed in the wake of *Biohazard's* success, but none were helmed by Mikami. His game's high marks and lucrative revenues earned him a promotion to the role of producer, a position he didn't want. Producers got mired in bureaucracy and busywork. Directors got to make games.

When the opportunity to return to the director's chair arose in 2001, Mikami seized it. Then the general manager of Capcom Production Studio 4, he inked a deal with Nintendo to develop a string of titles exclusively for the upcoming GameCube console. One of those was *Resident Evil 4*. The other was a remake of the original *Resident Evil*, which Mikami would direct.

#### "AND IT TURNED INTO..."

Released in 2002, *Resident Evil's* reimagining — referred to as "REmake" by fans — started more as a proof of concept. Although the PlayStation version had looked impressive for its time, it aged quickly. Mikami wanted to build a new graphics engine to render visuals that would never go out of style.

Now more experienced, his team crafted photorealistic backgrounds with a twist. Each background was embedded with full-motion video and particle effects to give the illusion of movement: ripples of water in puddles, branches swinging in the wind, and flashes of lightning that lit up areas followed by rumbles and cracks of thunder.

They motion-captured professional actors to portray characters in real-time 3D,



■ Every room and corridor was remade for the *Biohazard* remake.

ditching the old live-action cutscenes. Capcom's tech wizards combined the mocap with 3D models for each character which boasted smooth skin and clothing, completely devoid of the jagged polygons from the PlayStation edition. Zombies looked more decayed than ever, featuring soggy-looking flesh, rotten teeth, and missing body parts.

Mikami harnessed *REmake*'s improved graphics technology to create juxtapositions of light and darkness. Looking back, environments in *Biohazard* had been almost laughably bright. Rooms that were previously flooded with light were now gloomy and dimly lit, such as a hallway where moonlight casts pale squares through windows — and clearly shows the silhouettes of undead straining against the glass, desperate to break in.

**“...A NIGHTMARE.”**

By the time they finished the graphics technology, Mikami and team had devised plenty of other ways to make your skin crawl. Every puzzle was remixed to

ensure that you wouldn't be able to skate through *REmake* just because you had memorized the original, and a few fresh ones were stirred into the bloody concoction for good measure.

Pulling out blueprints of the Spencer mansion, Mikami constructed new expanses of land that extended naturally from the environment fans already knew and loved, such as an old cabin set deep in the woods around the mansion, and a crypt where a furnace roared and threw shadows around the walls.

Defense items added another stratum to decision-making scenarios. Daggers, as well as tasers for Jill and grenades for Chris, could be used in place of bullets to stun or even kill zombies, but were in short supply. They came in handy against the Crimson Head, a new type of zombie. Every undead you encountered had the potential to evolve into a Crimson Head. Unless you decapitated a zombie with a lucky shot or one of Chris's grenades — or incinerated it using a lighter and kerosene from the jugs placed strategically around the mansion (another new addition) — the zombie would eventually rise as a Crimson Head, lobster-red and able to run and swipe with its claws. The sound of a Crimson Head's quick yet heavy steps, growing louder as it closed the distance, quickly made it one of the most fearsome monsters in all of survival horror.

you through the game, forcing you to wait for an opening and then run screaming before she could follow.

**“ENTER THE SURVIVAL HORROR.”**

Mikami departed Capcom after *Biohazard 4*, but survival horror lives on. In 2015, Capcom published a remaster of the *REmake* showcasing HD graphics and a more intuitive control scheme for new players. True to Mikami's vision, the graphics still hold up. Later that year, an executive from Capcom announced that work had begun on a total remake of *Biohazard 2*, a fan favorite since its release in 1998.

Unfortunately, other entries in the *Biohazard* series strayed from its roots. After *Biohazard 4*'s blend of action and survival raked in millions, *Biohazard 5* and *6* went all-in on action-heavy battles and grandiose cutscenes. Until “*REmake 2*” either lives up to over 15 years of expectations or fails spectacularly, Mikami's *REmake* remains arguably the deepest, scariest, most satisfying survival-horror game ever made. 🦹‍♂️



■ Lisa Trevor and the Crimson Head were new additions to the *REmake*.



Lisa Trevor, another new foe, could not be killed with conventional weapons. Preceded by plodding footsteps and the rattle of her rusted chains, she stalked



# RUN-N-GUN: HOW THE FPS BLAZED A PATH ONTO CONSOLES

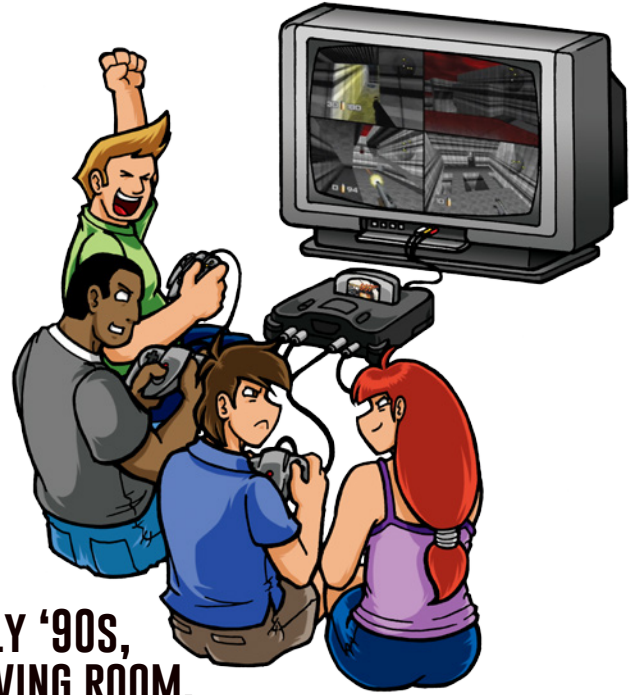


Illustration by Thor Thorvaldson

AFTER STORMING DESKTOPS IN THE EARLY '90s, FPS GAMES SET THEIR SIGHTS ON THE LIVING ROOM.

BY DAVID GILTINAN

It's tough to think of the western gaming world without first-person shooters, which have been a dominant force for over 20 years. And for good reason: They appeal to a wide variety of players with single- and multiplayer experiences, and the up-close perspective adds a high level of immersion. Franchises like *Doom*, *Halo*, and *Call of Duty* both defined and evolved the FPS genre.

While first-person shooters first thrived on PC, the console space also shares a rich history, albeit starting some years later with the N64 release of *GoldenEye 007*. But games released on even earlier platforms helped shape the path that would eventually lead us to the smooth action and established conventions of modern-day FPS games.

In 1980 we saw the first commercially successful first-person shooter, Atari's tank simulation game *Battlezone*. In 1983 Atari ported it to the Atari 2600, as well as to other consoles such as the Atari 5200, Game Boy, and even the Atari Lynx. The title boasted addictive, score-based gameplay and wire-frame vector graphics. The objective was to move around a battlefield and destroy other tanks you came across. *Battlezone* proved to be a major hit, and a heavily modified version even became a training exercise for the U.S. Army, dubbed *The Bradley Trainer*.

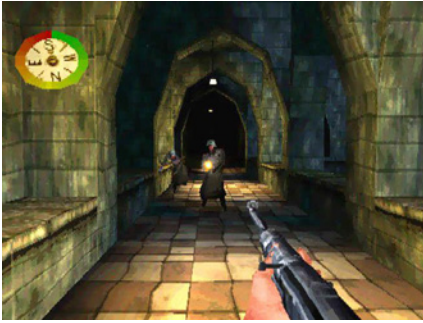
A couple more milestones in the genre were made with the release of *Faceball 2000* (originally *MIDI Maze* on Atari ST) for

the SNES and Game Boy. Although not a terribly good game, this early FPS introduced the now all-too-common regenerating-health trope. Furthermore, *Faceball 2000*, which first started the concept of LAN parties, involved smiley-faced avatars getting hit by slow-moving balls that took up your entire screen when shot. We've certainly come a long way.

The true rise of the genre came, however, from the release of id Software's *Wolfenstein 3D*. Although finding its start on computer platforms, its popularity led to ports on a range of systems such as the SNES, Atari Jaguar, 3DO, and even the Game Boy Advance. *Wolfenstein 3D* not only introduced



A long time ago in an apartment far, far away, **DAVID GILTINAN** found his love for gaming with the Commodore 64. He now shares this passion in RETRO, all while wondering if Darth Vader experiences asthma attacks 24/7.



While the idea that you are literally inside the head of a gun-toting hero is appealing, more often than not this involves playing as a rough and gruff white male with a five o'clock shadow. Sure, there are exceptions to the rule including Joanna Dark in *Perfect Dark* and Samus Aran in the *Metroid Prime* series, but for every Cate Archer you get about 20 Duke Nukems. As shooters (and games in general) have become more character driven and focused on narrative, it's become even more important to see different hands pulling the trigger.

console made it a marvel, made possible thanks to the power of the Super FX 2 chip. By the mid-'90s, the leap to true 3D gameplay in first-person shooters was so close that gamers could taste it. More powerful consoles that could support 3D graphics were hitting shelves, but console gamers didn't get a taste of the FPS genre's natural, 3D habitat until Rare's 1997 release of *GoldenEye 007* for the N64.

*GoldenEye* not only helped define Rare during its golden years, but also introduced the FPS genre to many gamers unfamiliar with PC gaming. Presenting multiple mission objectives depending on difficulty proved to be a successful formula in *GoldenEye*'s single-player experience, while the multiplayer modes introduced Nintendo faithful to memorable moments such as planting proximity mines in a bathroom vent and shooting over Oddjob's head only to have him pepper your kneecaps with bullet wounds. The game also broke what seemed like a curse of bad licensed video games. Rare went on to make *Perfect Dark* based on a more refined version of *GoldenEye*'s engine, which also introduced new additions such as bots in multiplayer.

The next big boom in console shooters came by way of Bungie with its Xbox launch title *Halo: Combat Evolved*. Originally planned as a real-time strategy game, *Halo* morphed into a more traditional FPS when Microsoft acquired Bungie in 2000. What made *Halo* special, however, was

that it introduced players to a fascinating world expanded upon through sequels, books, and even a short film by *District 9* director Neill Blomkamp.

Despite the fact that Microsoft's Xbox Live service wasn't ready in time for the console's launch in November 2001, forcing Bungie to drop online multiplayer from *Halo*, deathmatch still became hugely popular thanks to the growing trend of LAN parties, a first for consoles. Connecting four Xboxes allowed multiplayer matches to reach the game's 16-player limit. Its sequel *Halo 2* went on to be the most popular game on Xbox Live until *Gears of War* took that honor nearly two years later.

Aspects from the *Halo* franchise have since been borrowed by other titles, namely regenerating health and vehicular combat. The *Call of Duty* series is perhaps *Halo*'s most successful pupil, which eventually made it into one of the most popular franchises in gaming, period. The sci-fi story and setting also clearly influenced later games such as *Killzone*.

Whether you're looking for a story-driven single-player experience like *BioShock*, or something that allows you to hop online with a bunch of your friends like *Destiny*, the first-person shooter offers something for everyone. The future is bright for shooters, and if popularity is any indication, they're not going anywhere anytime soon. 🎮

the world to Nazi-killing soldier B.J. Blazkowicz, but also showed that smooth-panning, fast-moving, corridor-based first-person action could make for compelling gameplay.

Going back to the '90s, it's nearly impossible to overstate *Doom*'s contributions to mood and setting in a single-player campaign, and the fun of blasting away your buddies in multiplayer deathmatch. Like *Wolfenstein 3D* before it, *Doom* was originally released on computer platforms, but later graced consoles like the barren Sega 32X. A superior port also hit the Jaguar, which included more levels (22 of the PC original's 27) and ran the game in full screen rather than a smaller window. The fact that the cut-down SNES port even ran on the 16-bit





# FPS HELL. A JOURNEY THROUGH DOOM ON PLAYSTATION

BY BRADY FIECHTER

**DOOM WILL FOREVER BE A CLASSIC, AND THE PS1 PORT STANDS AT THE TOP.**

**Developer/Publisher:** Williams Entertainment  
**Platform:** PlayStation  
**Date:** 11.16.95  
**Players:** 1–2 players  
**ESRB:** M

WHEN I SIT DOWN TO EXPLORE the world of *Doom*, I first stumble across a shotgun. A growling face in the bottom of a low-resolution television screen expresses the satisfaction of the weapon's protective power. Foul pools of green acid surround me, and threatening red skies loom in the distance. The atmosphere is creepy and unsettling...and intoxicating. I recall the click-click of an ammunition grab, and a lightning-fast run down a sequence of corridors and a blast of that shotgun so loud it felt like I was standing in a bell tower at the stroke of midnight, a deafening ringing in my ears. It's raw, powerful, moody, and thrilling.

*Doom* was largely a triumph in atmosphere at a time when crude projections of architecture and landscape were both a hindrance and an art form. *Doom* was released for PS1 (we called it PSX back then) on November 16, 1995, less than a year after the Japanese introduction of Sony's console. The first-person shooter was more than a genre; it was a different way of living inside the game world. *Doom* built its fire and brimstone out of primitive blocks, but moving through these visual shapes and forms was a new experience. *Doom* restricted vertical movements, but the illusion of place and the mood that flowed through its walls were more than real enough.

**BRADY FIECHTER** enjoys the finer things in life: chainsaws, shotguns, and romps through his favorite retro games.

I recall the images of *Doom* with expansive scope and color, but isn't that the effect of our favorite games? The beauty of when they were at their best? Look at some footage, and some might see a threadbare, gaudy representation of a very long time ago, but the working parts are still representative of the best of its time, and still valuable to study today. The sharp red, blue, and green lighting baked in an irradiation effect, and the lower illumination inherent to the PlayStation port created a shadowy feeling absent on PC. The reference is a bit obscure, but perhaps you might recall a PlayStation game called *Loaded*, a shooter as fast and brutal as *Doom* but viewed from an isometric perspective. There was something special about how these games painted atmosphere with the PlayStation lighting engine. Certainly not subtle, but the impact was effective.

Plenty of gamers continue to seek out striking atmospheres in the virtual spaces of contemporary AAA games. 20 years ago, *Doom* was the bleeding edge. Imagine what it must have been like to be in a (pseudo-)3D space, in *Doom's* world, for the first time? Games like *Halo* and *Call of Duty* improved upon certain aspects, but recall how fresh the whole FPS enterprise felt in the beginning of the 3D era. *Doom's* DNA lives on in every first-person shooter.

In some fundamental ways, modern first-person shooters can miss the precise intensity that id captured in *Doom*. Its design is discreet and more like a side-scrolling space shooter. The action is contained

within confined structures, fostering a hypnotic sense of rhythm and pacing. Certainly some of *Doom's* tropes are antiquated, but these days, every game is about getting bigger and more sophisticated, forgetting the elegant truth that games can be at their best when they concentrate on powerful, singular beats. *Doom* felt so massive playing out in my senses, even though its game world was ultimately tiny compared to games of its kind today.

In the end, *Doom* is even a bit charming and melodramatic, tossing in an inverted cross entryway here and a chain with rusty pixel chunks there. Aubrey Hodges reworked the audio for the PS1 release, tossing in crying babies and breathing horses. In the wrong hands, *Doom* could have been a silly, fleeting amusement. It ended up being one of the great gaming experiences of my lifetime, and a trip down memory lane I will always relish with hellish delight. ☹️





# FROM THE DESK OF THE COMMISSIONER: ALWAYS THE SAME

BY PATRICK SCOTT PATTERSON

## ONE YEAR OLDER, *RETRO*'S COMMISH REFLECTS ON HOW THINGS NEVER CHANGE IN THE GAMING INDUSTRY.

Since the last issue of *RETRO*, your commissioner celebrated his 40th birthday. Our entrance into the year 2016 will also mark my 35th year as a gamer. Thanks to these milestones, I am now allowed to be even more vocal in my efforts to reform our potentially wonderful videogame industry into something that better resembles the industry of yesteryear.

That said, your Commissioner is sick and tired of hearing the younger generations talk about what they feel makes up a “real gamer.”

In my day, we didn’t define such things. We weren’t expected to live some sort of loosely defined gamer lifestyle. Nobody came up to us and said, “Hey, you aren’t a real gamer unless you play *Pooyan*.” If someone preferred to spend their quarters on *Frogger* over *Defender*, that was perfectly fine. If a player chose to enjoy the Intellivision over the Atari, we were all about that, too. It didn’t matter to us, as long as we were enjoying videogames.

We were allowed to like other things, too. Recently, one of my Twitter followers got upset with me for posting about an NFL football game one afternoon. They even took the time to write me a note, stating that they follow me on Twitter to hear my opinions on videogame

topics, therefore I was expected to talk only about videogame topics from now on.

When did that happen? Back in my day, it was okay if we wanted to talk about something else. One moment we would talk about our latest *Choplifter* scores and the next moment we would talk about the newest Transformers. It was perfectly okay to tell our friends how awesome *Die Hard* was while we worked on beating *Contra*.

Therefore, it is the official duty of the Commissioner’s Office to present the following amendments for younger gamers who engage in the heinous activity of trying to determine and define the legitimacy of other gamers. Failure to adhere by these rules will result in strict punishment, including forcing you to compete in your next fighting-game tournament with an Atari 5200 controller.

### AMENDMENT 1

You shall not, at any time, attempt to determine who is a “real gamer” based on what a person chooses to play, especially if your idea of retro gaming is based on the PlayStation 2 launch library. An exemption to this rule may be allowed if you can successfully beat me at *Computer Space*, *Joust*, *San Francisco Rush*, and *Call of Duty*.

### AMENDMENT 2

You shall not, at any time, attempt to determine who is a “real gamer” based on a person’s vocabulary. A person is not required to say “pwn” or “n00b,” and quite frankly, you don’t sound intelligent using those words, either. If you don’t understand what it means if I ask you to play doubles with me on a multiplayer game, you don’t know as much as you claim you do. I’m not going to use your gaming language until you learn and understand mine.



■ Care to step up?

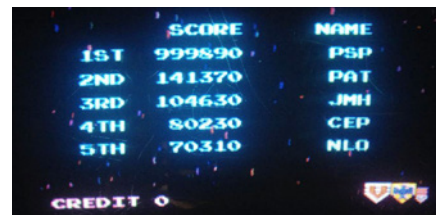
### AMENDMENT 3

You shall not, at any time, attempt to determine who is a “real gamer” based on their Xbox Gamerscore or PlayStation trophies. Some of us have kids and other responsibilities that simply don’t allow us to complete every 100-hour, cinematic, \$60 blockbuster that comes out. Maybe you’ve unlocked all the achievements in *Fallout 4*, but come talk to me when you’ve played *Galaga* for five hours on a single quarter.

Frame this page and post it next to your fancy gaming PC or modern-day videogame console. Embrace it and remember it, as we are all gamers, regardless of what we play or what outside interests we have. 🐉



■ Try dragon punching with this.



■ The Commish clocks in.

*PATRICK SCOTT PATTERSON* is a videogame advocate who’s been seen throwing controllers from every console generation to date.

# HOMEBREW HEAVEN

BY MICHAEL THOMASSON

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

Technology keeps moving forward, yet our beloved equipment of yesteryear still stands the test of time. Homebrew developers have been able to squeeze every ounce of performance out of our classic consoles and home computers — even going as far as creating new hardware to enhance them. When old and new collide, the marriage is something of wonder and bliss.

Case in point, *Dragon's Lair* was just adapted to the Sinclair ZX81. The video encoding and port is by Jim Bagley, an ex-Ocean Software coder responsible for *Midnight Resistance*, *Cabal*, and others. It isn't fullscreen, but amazing nonetheless. New aftermarket hardware called the ZXpand allows all 22 minutes of Don Bluth's exquisite animation to play back on the 1KB machine utilizing a modern-day SD card.



### IN OTHER HOMEBREW NEWS...

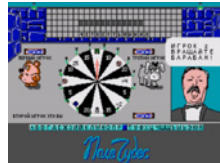
*Super Mario World*, originally loved and adored on the Super Nintendo, is heading to the MSX2 computer. Since the MSX2 was released in 1985, five years before the release of *Super Mario World* in Japan, it is amazing how closely this demake resembles the SNES version.



The NES version of *Double Dragon* has been hacked! Why bother with a wannabe like Billy when you can now rescue Marian with an American legend like Chuck Norris? That's right, the man so bad that he counted to infinity twice has returned to the videogame world to try and help us all forget the 1983 travesty that was Xonox's *Chuck Norris Superkicks*.



The long-running Channel One television game-show *Поле Чудес: Капитал Шоу*, aka *Pole Chudes: Capital Show*, which translates to *The Field of Wonders*, is coming to Sega Genesis. The show resembles *Wheel of Fortune*, complete with spinning wheel but minus Vanna White. Guess letters wisely, and you just might be the proud recipient of household goods such as a box of detergent, a new vehicle, or even cold, hard cash. Unlucky players will win a booby prize, taking home a bushel of vegetables...or worse.



Hideo Kojima's *Snatcher*, originally an MSX2 game — although more commonly played on the Sega CD — is headed to Nintendo's Virtual Boy. Due to its size and the techni-



cal limitations of the Virtual Boy hardware, this cyberpunk-themed graphic adventure will become the first and only multicartridge Virtual Boy release.

Get your pickaxe, as Stern's once-popular arcade platformer, *Bagman*, just hit the ColecoVision. Previously only available on Amstrad CPC, Commodore 64, and ZX Spectrum home computers, this is the first console conversion. Maneuver through mine shafts collecting money bags and placing them in wheelbarrows while trying not to get shafted. If you can't get enough of exploring mines and caves in *Bagman*, then you'll be delighted to learn that *Spelunker*, a title originally published for Atari's 8-bit computers in '83 before heading to the arcades two years later, is in tow.



Also coming to the ColecoVision are *The Stone of Wisdom*, a *Zelda*-like action-adventure RPG; *Nightmare*, a Greek mythology-based vertical shoot-em-up; a standard controller version of *Front Line*; and *Boxxle*, featuring over 200 levels and the ability to create and store over 30 puzzle creations using the puzzle editor. Prepare to be boxed in for a while.



The retro-style scrolling 2D shooter *Ghost Blade* for Sega's Dreamcast will feature an elaborate scoring system and more bullets than you can count. Look for *Heroes of Might and Magic*, the turn-based strategy PC game and Game Boy Color title, to drop on the Sega Genesis. Last but not least, *Sydney Hunter* will be published on Sega Genesis, Sega CD, NES, SNES, and modern-day platforms such as the Wii U.



So much to cover, so little column space! 📖

**MICHAEL THOMASSON** teaches college-level videogame history, design, and graphics. His columns appear worldwide in newspapers and magazines. Michael's contributed to or published dozens of games, and worked on MTV's Video MODS.

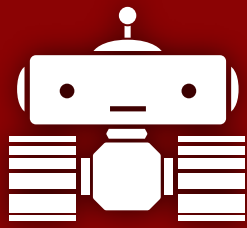
**Remember When.**

**Play Again.**

**COLECO  
CHAMELEON**

**Get your Chameleon on Kickstarter  
in February 2016.**

**KICKSTARTER**  
**RetroVGS.com**



# GEEKFUEL

MONTHLY MYSTERY BOX

A Monthly Mystery Box  
Of Geeky Goodness

As Low As

**\$13.90**

Per Month + S/H

EXCLUSIVE T-SHIRT IN EVERY BOX



GET YOUR GEEK FUEL TODAY!

[GEEKFUEL.COM/RETRO16](http://GEEKFUEL.COM/RETRO16)

# RETRO

