

RetroVIEW NEC/TTi



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What Happened to TT i

"Americans are tired of fighting games."

—Top Japanese NEC Executive

If that doesn't speak booming, ear-splitting volumes as to why NEC and the TurboGrafx-16/Duo never stood a chance, I don't know what would. This kind of thinking would haunt NEC as they morphed (with Hudson in tow) into Turbo Technologies Inc (a.k.a. TTi), the company 51% owned by NEC and 49% by Hudson in 1992, to pick up where NEC proper had completely fumbled the ball. But first, a little back story...

Only Room for Two

From the outset, it was pretty clear that NEC didn't really know what to do in the US market. Despite having a capable US-based staff, NEC did what many Japanese companies do to their US subsidiaries—micro-managed and second-guessed them to death.

In any event, NEC summarily ate it—even though they should have and could have technically been in it up to when Sonic the Hedgehog arrived in mid-91 (Sega hadn't managed to do much at all with Genesis to this point, either). Sadly, NEC didn't capitalize in any way on a staggeringly huge library of quality titles found on the Turbo's Japanese counterpart, the ubiquitous PC Engine. Foibles with the box art (which might have worked in the Museum of Modern Art) and rampant confusion with the CD-ROM add-on (a bit too

far ahead of its time for the US market) didn't help matters. The awesome Turbo Express (weighing in at \$300) certainly couldn't hope to crack the low rent district of the GameBoy even though it was (and still is) an amazing piece of hardware.

It was clear that as the launch of the Super Nintendo approached, Sega and NEC had to do something fast lest they get crushed by the big N, a company with massive amounts of momentum, tons of hype and more money than God behind them. Sega came up with Sonic, a game which clearly had what it took to fight the impending Nintendo juggernaut. NEC, however, went an entirely different route...



The Birth of TTI

When it was becoming increasingly clear that NEC didn't have the marketing savvy to combat an invigorated Sega and a gargantuan, entrenched Nintendo, they took what would prove to be (ultimately) a losing proposition: instead of focusing on the TG-16 and/or exiting market, they decided to bring the Turbo's big brother from Japan—the Duo—to US shores for combat in '92. The new company formed to market and sell the Duo in the US would come to be known as Turbo Technologies, Inc. and was a fresh start for a company that had, to this point, failed to make much noise.

With a new hardware piece (that very thinly acknowledged its ties to the TG-16), a new price point (\$299.99 for the hardware and a software bundle), and a new lease on life, TTI set out to make its name in the console arms race. Big games were announced, including the mighty Dracula X, but the biggest problem would continue to be Japanese execs.

For starters, NEC and Hudson duked it out for control of the fledgling entity. Though Hudson technically had the minority stake, they emerged with more day-to-day control. The fact that NEC was taking a bath in many of their other divisions (consumer electronics et al) didn't help their focus on TTI, and it probably worked out for the better that Hudson took the reins.

The problems didn't stop there, though. For example, the marketing budget for the Duo was very weak—they only had enough cash to effectively advertise the machine in five major markets, which is all fine and dandy if you're in Japan, where 2 cities comprise 90% of the market. The budget they allocated for five markets must have seemed like a fortune to the execs back home, clearly proving that they had about as keen a grasp of geography as the average American high schooler.

Compared to the marketing budgets behind the Sega CD, Sonic the Hedgehog 2 and the Super Nintendo, the meager amount of advertising possible couldn't even be measured as a drop in the bucket—more like a pin prick to a blue whale.

Show Me the Games!

Another problem was lack of funding on the software side. TTI simply wasn't given enough money to license and bring over the biggest titles from Japan that could have very much helped the Duo at least stay competitive. Two of the biggest titles by far—a fantastic port of Street Fighter 2 CE and the stunning Dracula X—simply required far too much of an initial upfront fee to license—money that TTI was not provided with by its Japanese parents.

Another major hole in their game plan was a failure to woo integral 3rd party support to the platform, despite that many of the publishers that produced Genesis and SNES games also produced PC Engine games in Japan. All of this, sadly, could be attributed to a lack of funding and/or interest by NEC and Hudson—can you imagine a hardware producer today not attempting to snag as much support as humanly possible?

Clueless

It was becoming increasingly clear that TTI was doomed to fighting two battles: one against their competitors in the marketplace and another against the home office in Japan. Sadly, nobody listened to the impassioned pleas from the crack staff at TTI, and the company slowly sank out of sight and completely closed its doors in the summer of '94.

The sad fact of the matter was that the corporate suits behind TTI simply had very little to any understanding of the US market and it showed in every mis-step and gross miscalculation. It's unfortunate, too—who knows where NEC would be today if the Duo had managed to penetrate even half the homes that Sega and Nintendo did with their respective 16-bit platforms. It's hurts to even contemplate...

—The 6th Man

Special thanks to Steve Garwood and Larry Aldrich for their help in putting this article together.

Turbo Tidbits

- The PC-FX was never considered for a US release despite what you may have read.
- Turbo Zone Direct (www.tzd.com) still sells brand new Turbo/Duo gear, including Duos and Turbo Express units.
- Up until 1997 there were still new games coming out for the Duo. The last title? Dead of the Brain on Super CD.
- The factory that produced HuCards (TurboChips) shut down in '93 with Legend of Hero Tonma and Bonk 3 as the final titles. This didn't help people that really needed a new System Card at the time.

The Lost Titles

Here's some handy cover scans of the games that were never meant to be (apparently). Now you can pay through the nose for just about all of them on eBay—lucky you.



RetroVIEW

32X: The Lost Titles

32X: The Lost Titles

Some came out in Japan, some came out in Europe, and a few didn't come out at all. The following games (two of which were completed) were never available for American consumption and, in the case of ROTK, it were available in severely limited numbers in Japan — same goes for Darxide was a similar story in Europe.

Not surprisingly, you can find the prototypes for Virtua Hamster and X-Men floating around on eBay from time to time, but Darxide is almost as difficult to score (I had to, at one point, track down the company that produced it and ask for a copy...which I have yet to collect—d'oh).

Anyway, take a gander at what 'could have been' and wonder if it was really worth it. After all, even the Sega CD had more than five good games to its credit—can you say that of the 32X?

Romance of the 3 Kingdoms IV

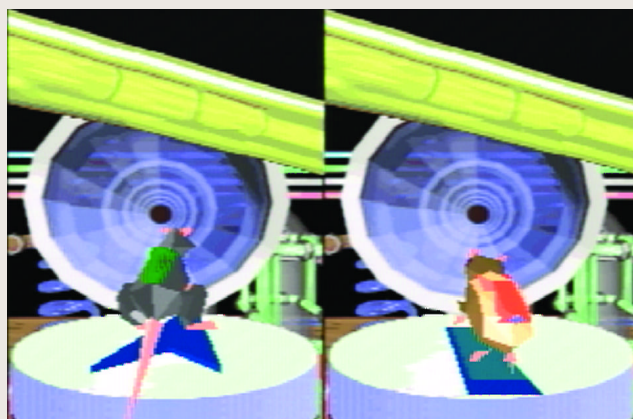


This 32X take on Koei's venerable, re-unification of China, sim (minus the bloodshed), is really nothing more than a port of the more colorful and better-sounding (than the Genesis rev) Super Famicom/SNES version.

You're still out to re-unify ancient China, albeit in Japanese. Needless to say, unless you have a keen grasp of the Japanese language or like playing trial and error with a billion souls (OK, so there weren't a billion Chinese back in the day—work with me) be our guest. Only for the completely psychotic completist 32X gamer...all two of you.



Virtua Hamster



The killer about Virtua Hamster is that it's so far from complete that you're left wondering exactly what it was going to turn out like. You play a hamster (ostensibly—if a gaudy collection of shaded triangles can really be called a hamster) racing through a Habitrail tube...and racing and racing, and racing and racing—think the Atari Games' classic S.T.U.N. Runner (looks-wise) with almost no gameplay. Collision isn't activated and there's nothing more than your 'hamster' jetting along at a brisk pace. You can also shoot, but, uh, there's nothing to really shoot at.

There's a 2-player mode, but that amounts to a split screen with two bundles of triangles racing through a Habitrail tube...racing and racing, and racing and racing, and, uh, that's about it. The game actually has a storyline in it that refers to your heroic exploits but unless those exploits center around turning off your Genesis/32X combo, I'm not interested. Another sad reminder of what could have been...

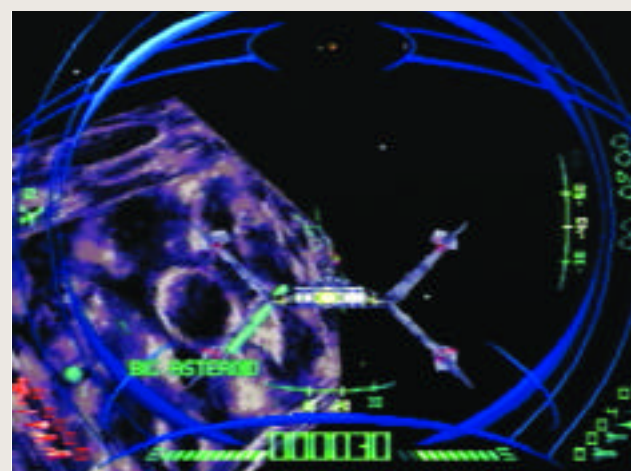
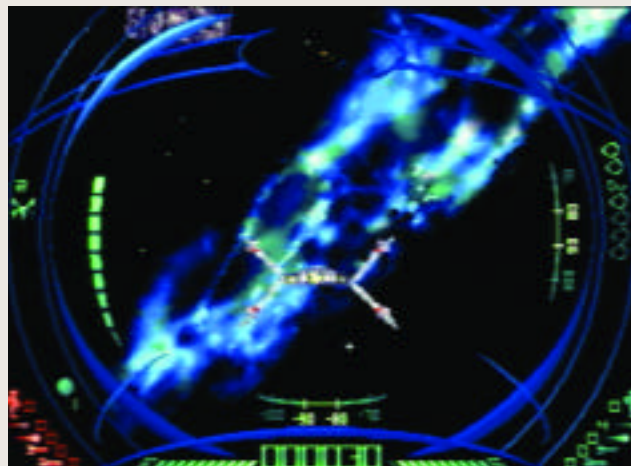


X-Men

It looks like they had planned to let you select from Bishop, Iceman, and Rogue, but Bishop is the only one you actually use. The first 3 levels are all in a dojo or temple filled with ninjas—I'm assuming you had to fight your way to Silver Samurai to enlist the aid of Clan Yoshida or some such nonsense. Rogue's level has characters and collision, but Iceman & Bishop's levels are both unfinished and both seemingly part of Arcade's Murderworld with a pinball motif (Arcade's level is listed but not on the cart, <sigh>).

The gameplay takes place in what appears to be a pseudo-Guardian Heroes perspective, with multiple lines to attack from. Unfortunately the game was so unfinished that (oddly) there was only collision on the first few levels of the 'game' and you only had access to Bishop's guns.

Had Sega finished and released this.... well... 32x would have died anyway. But it's a pity this went down incomplete—excellent control and visuals for what was there, and one of Scavenger's last high profile projects before they went down the drain.



Darxide

The question floating around Frontier Developments when Darxide went into development must have been "does the world need a 3D Asteroids?" The answer, for good or ill: "yes." And that's precisely what this 100% complete game is—a 3D Asteroids with a few tweaks here and there.

Darxide only saw a (very limited) release in Europe and is very hard to find...period. The game is set in large belts of Asteroids and you need to repel the alien invaders while dealing with massive, ship-smashing stones hurtling around the 3D world. The game looks very nice—superior, in fact, to many early (and even late) Saturn games. According to Frontier, they managed to get software texture mapping running on 32X in software that could slap around hardware textures on Saturn.

This game is the brainchild of one of the original developers of the immortal Elite (you get a gold star if you're not European and you remember it), but Darxide falls a bit short of that legendary title. Still, it's complete, it's pretty and no one has ever heard of it...just expect to dig and pay not a little for it.

Gone But Not Forgotten

It's really a shame some of the other announced 32X titles never even saw the light of day as prototypes (at the very least). It would have been nice to get home versions of Alien vs. Predator (the Capcom arcade game) and Konami's Dracula X (though I'd imagine that would have been a port of the not-so-good SNES rev). Not to mention an entire And while I'm at it, how about a copy of SuperGrafx Strider and Saturn Sonic Xtreme and...

—ECM

RetroFIT

Target Earth

The Road to Shangri-La

Long ago, before I trod the road to gaming enlightenment, back when imports were the type of car my Dad drove and the Japanese language was an unintelligible mass of scribbles in stereo manuals (come to think of it, that hasn't changed much), you could still walk into your local gaming store and find a virgin gaming experience—something unaccompanied by volumes of hype, three thousand separate reviews, and "L@K RARE" plastered all over the place.

This is how I experienced titles such as Herzog Zwei, M.U.S.H.A., Ghouls N' Ghosts and a spate of others—back before memorizing the hardware specs of countless game machines (how many sprites can a TG16 display? And what size?), back when the games mattered more than what made them tick or how much life could be wrung out of a fifteen minute demo. Some would say a kinder, gentler time.

It was the summer of '90, and I was a fresh-faced lad still in high school. On a rainy day trip to the mall, I hit my usual haunt: the Danbury Fair Mall Electronics Boutique (back when the carousel was still there, <sob>) looking to expand my new universe of 16-bit games while my friends' toiled away in the salt mines on planet NES. That's when it first caught my eye...Target Earth.

Target Genesis

Target Earth (known in Japan as Assault Suit Leynos) is the first title in the legendary NCS/Masaya series that spanned Genesis, Super Nintendo, Saturn and even a chapter on PlayStation. While there aren't direct ties between Target Earth and Cybernator (the SNES' spiritual brother of TE a.k.a. Assault Suit Valken), they are clearly cut from the same mold.

TE is a relatively straightforward action shooter, much like Contra, Metal Slug, etc. You play the role of an ace mech pilot and (will be) savior of the human race against a vicious alien armada inspired by the first Star Trek film—not the first time a Hollywood plotline has been borrowed, and it wouldn't be the last.

The story is displayed via small in-game cinemas that take place along the bottom of the screen replete with character pic and amazingly well translated text. There isn't a lot of it (it is a shooter) but it all makes sense and none of it features a shred of broken, off-kilter English.

These cinemas help make you feel like your part of a much larger force and thus the game doesn't suffer from one man against the world syndrome. At any given time, your allies and enemies are chattering away on your com-link and it adds some heavy-duty punch to the gameplay—it's doubtful that I'd have such strong memories of it without such a well-done sense of immersion in a greater cause.

Along with the cinemas come some thinly veiled mission-based gameplay. While most of it simply requires you to get from point 'a' to point 'b' while managing to stay alive, some missions require you to guard shuttle craft, load allies onto an escaping space craft, etc. It's a nice twist, and goes that one step further to differentiate the series from Contra and its ilk.

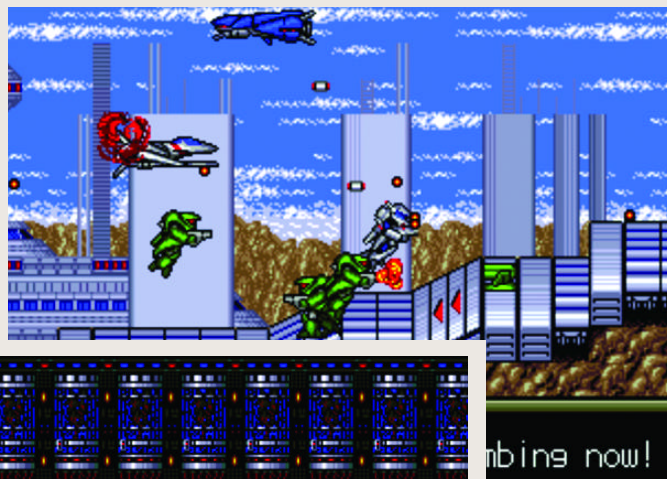
Amazingly the graphics still stand the test of time: everything is well animated (some of the animation is amazing for a 4 meg Genesis game circa '90) and the colors (as is the case with most classic Genesis title) really stretch the feeble limitations of the machine. The hues used on both enemy (emerald green) and allied (brown and white) units are all very vivid and bright, with almost no dithering anywhere. Less is more would be a good way to describe the visuals. Another way would be to quote Haohmaru: "wow, I forgot how good this game looks."

Packing Heat

The action is more deliberately paced than, say, Contra. Your mech does not move at a Gunstar Heroes-type pace and moves with the gait and speed you might expect from a large, hulking robotic mech.

You can jump, and aim your gun up and down at varying angles to catch just the right shot to reduce a nearby foe to molten, fiery ruin. Best



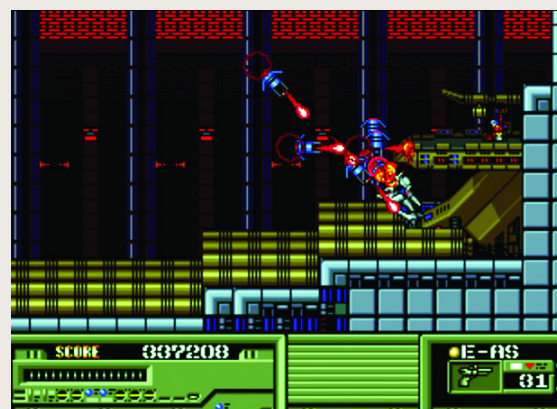


of all, depending how well you accomplish a given mission, you'll earn a veritable arsenal of enemy-eradicating ordinance. Not only is it a nice reward, but it adds significantly to the replay value—especially for this, one of the most difficult games ever (see box-out).

Enlightenment

Oddly enough, Target Earth isn't too hard to find, despite being of the same class as *Ghouls N' Ghosts* and *Herzog Zwei*: early Genesis titles that were created pre-1991 P.S. (pre-Sonic). It can be had for peanuts on eBay and most used game stores. Without question, any gamer that considers him (or her) self a big fan of Genesis games needs to check this title out. Meanwhile, I'll be seeking to channel a higher power so that I can earn the parasite weapon...without codes.

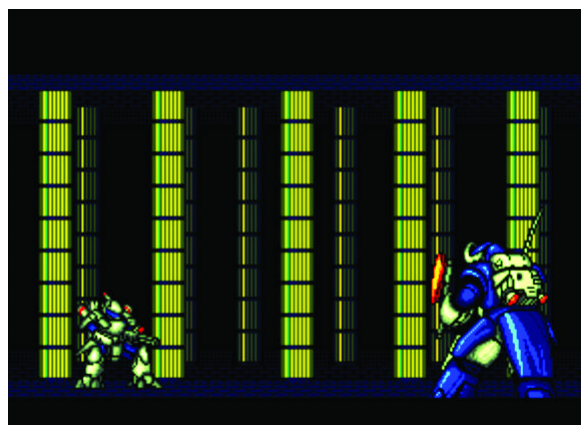
—ECM



The Best Ending Ever?

First off, if you can best this game legitimately you are a member of the gaming elite. This game is hard as nails and I don't think I know anybody that has beat this game 'legally' (i.e. sans codes) outside of myself—an admission which generally draws cries of "yeah, right" and "my ass." In any event, it's a very, very, very hard game. But, there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

While most developers put as much thought into their endings as Pokey puts into work, this ending is amazing. Sure, there's not a shred of CG nor is the soundtrack orchestrally scored, but this was top stuff in '90. Even now, the emotional impact (completely conveyed visually, sans any text) is a force to be reckoned with, accompanied by well-drawn cinematics and a rousing closing overture.



Feast your eyes, then go and cheat, err, beat the game on your own—it's a site to see...

RetroFIT

Phantasy Star



the princess, kill the evil king, the end. Sure, Phantasy Star was still about killing the giant evil in the end, but it wasn't that cut and dry. We talk about "epic" games these days, games that have a storyline and scenes that feel larger than life, like they were pulled from a timeless book or a great big-budget movie. It was this very game, however, that I feel started it all.

the tyranny of a once-great king now gone wrong, Alis finds she has no choice but to take up their cause and try to bring an end to Lassic's evil reign herself. So, not only did we have this great, epic game before us, but such a game also gave the starring role to a female? An amazing feat, and one that really wouldn't be repeated again until Final Fantasy IV.

Looking Good

It wasn't just Phantasy Star's storyline that stood apart from the rest of the pack:

technically, it was an astounding game. With Phantasy Star, the hardware superiority of the SMS was never more tangible, as the rich, bright color pallet of the game made everything on the NES look dark and drab by comparison. And where Dragon Warrior presented us with battles made up of a small, 1/4th sized box with a stationary background and lifeless creature, Phantasy Star's battles were full screen, with gorgeous (at times animated) backdrops and huge creatures with liquid smooth attacks. Every new enemy you met was something fresh, and who can forget the very first time they ran into one of the infamous sandworms on Motavia

and saw the beautiful animation of their attack? With a great storyline, cast of characters, and graphics to die for, that would have been enough - but it wasn't, for Sega.

Phantasy Star has what I think is still one of the best game soundtracks ever. I've always said that I typically don't notice the music in a video game, so if I do, it is something special. To this day, I can STILL clearly hear at least four or five of the musical tracks from the game in my head, as if I had just played the game yesterday.

The Beginning

It might be hard to believe, but I used to be a hardcore Nintendo fan. For me, the NES was the next best thing to God, and I even went so far as to convince one friend who was perfectly happy with his Sega Master System to sell it and get himself an NES. Somewhere along the line, however, my thoughts started to change. Maybe the SMS wasn't such a bad little system either. Sure, it was no NES, but it might be good to have one too. I talked my father into getting me one for Christmas, and I did have some fun with it. Then, however, a game would come along that changed my gaming life forever.



Phantasy Star set the stage for games that had that awe-inspiring feeling of becoming part of something far larger than you could have imagined. To someone that thought a game like Zelda was big, suddenly here was something with its own solar system, complete with 3 planets and

each with their own unique feel and landscape. And where typically we would set forth to save the fair maiden, this time it was the fair maiden who was doing the saving.

As she watches her brother mercilessly struck down before her eyes, we are introduced to the young Alis Landale. After losing both her father and her brother to

1988

Thirteen years ago. It seems so long ago, but that was when IT came out - the game that had a profound affect on me. It was in 1988 that a game called Phantasy Star was released, the game that single-handedly made me a "gamer."

Well, okay, that's a lie - Beserk was the game that made me a gamer. What Phantasy Star did was make me the type of gamer that I would be from that point on.

What was it about Phantasy Star that was so special? What was it that grabbed hold of me and refused to let go? Simple: storyline. What game before Phantasy Star really put a lot of care and work into a decent storyline? Save





Phantasy Forever

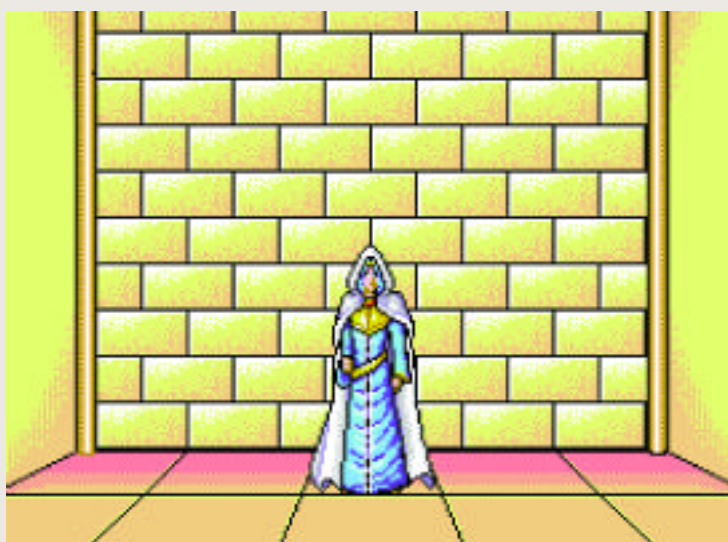
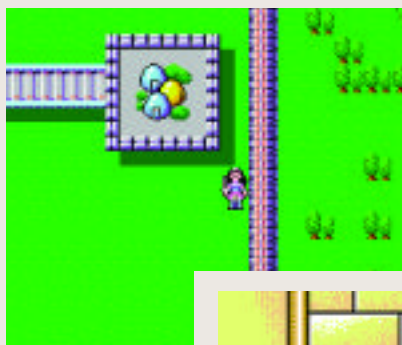
For being one of the first real video game console RPGs to come out in the US, we couldn't have asked for a better beginning than Phantasy Star. Not only that, but I maintain that Phantasy Star is still, to this day, one of the best RPGs ever released in the US. Sure, the graphics are a bit outdated, the music can't hold up to fully orchestrated redbook music tracks, and the storyline isn't "complex" next to Square's latest RPG.

Still, even today Phantasy Star is a great game to play, and I can think of a number of RPGs released in recent years that aren't up to the quality of this little title released thirteen years ago. It saddens me that so many gamers today don't have a history with the older consoles, so that they probably haven't played Phantasy Star. If you haven't, I really recommend that you do, because it will give you a whole new appreciation for the RPG genre.

As long as I love video games, I'll love Phantasy Star, and the adventures of my favorite video game heroine, Alis

Landale. In fact, Phantasy Star still sits comfortably at #2 on my personal list of my favorite games ever, only having been bumped from the #1 spot by Silent Hill. If Sega loved me, we'd get an update to this game on the DC with Skies of Arcadia-esque 3D, or even better, a gorgeous 2D update on the GBA. Come on Sega prove that you love me. Please?

—Shidoshi



RetroFIT Crystals



100 years have passed. Most of the earth has become dominated by mutated creatures. People worked together to rebuild their villages and their lives, but they still lived in fear. As they feared the rebirth of evil, they remembered the construction of the tower and of its consequences once activation had begun. Once evil emerged, would they still have a chance?

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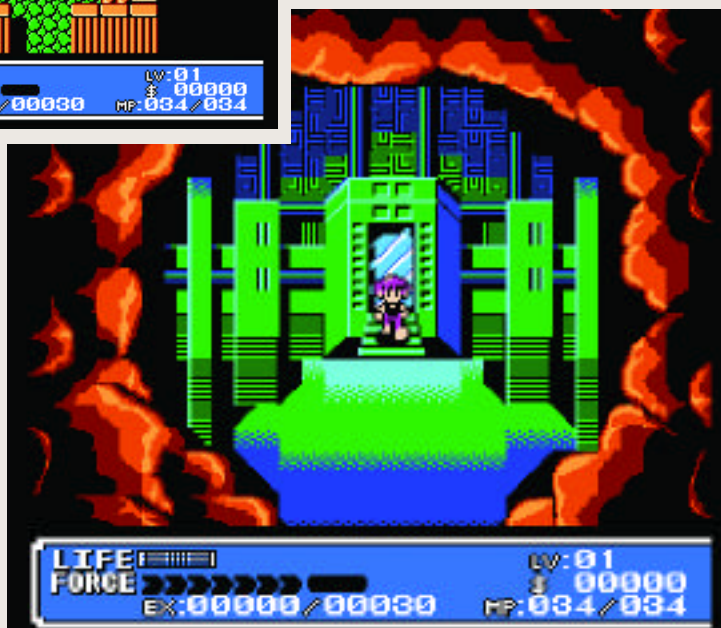
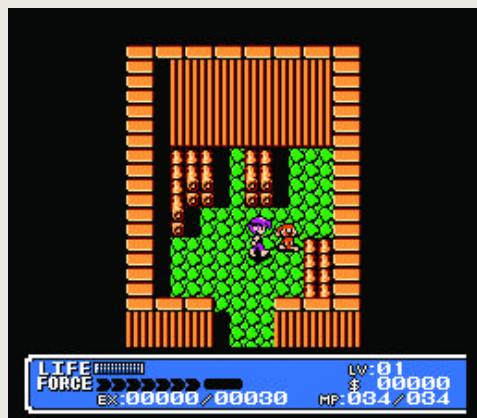
There was still one hope...

November 1990. Dragged along by my parents to yet another faceless wholesale warehouse store, I break away as soon as possible and head for home electronics. Target: Nintendo section. Not that I can afford anything, mind you, but it's still fun to window shop. "Golgo 13, have it. Contra, have it. Castlevania, <blech>. Crystalis... huh, what's this?" Picking it up, I investigate further: "Fight the evil, swords, magic," blah blah blah. The company sounded vaguely familiar... Didn't they make Ikari Warriors? (It wasn't for another 8 months that I would become acquainted with their \$599.99 console and \$189.99 cartridges). When I saw the price—\$11.89—it was hard to argue the expected quality any further. It was time to find the parents and beg and plead like there was no tomorrow. Hey, NES carts under \$30 were a rare commodity where I lived, even after the arrival of Genesis & TurboGrafx-16. When I got it home and fired it up, I was at a loss—I couldn't decide if I wanted to kick whoever decided to so badly undervalue this amazing game, or kiss them for having put it within my means.

Crystalis is the epitome of 8-bit action RPGs. Many have tried and failed to approximate the fun of Zelda, but Crystalis succeeds where others have failed, and maybe, to some (like me), actually surpassed the originator.

The story goes that on 10/1/1997 World War III broke out, ravaging the earth to the point of knocking the planet off-axis and creating widespread radiation-spawned mutations. In the aftermath the 'elders' banded together and erected a giant floating tower, with the assumption that somehow this would ward off future evil.

Ray Bradbury, this is not. You, a synthetic human, were created in case of evil returning to the world, eternally sleeping in the side of a



mountain in a stasis chamber. And to prevent the game from being a. boring and b. abruptly ending, you are awoken and charged with the holy mission of vanquishing the re-emerged evil.

What sets Crystalis apart from others, and in my opinion makes it vastly superior, is the massive areas you can wander in without pause. Zelda pauses every time you move to another 'room', be it in the overworld or in a dungeon (most likely stemming from its origins on the FamiCom Disk Drive) which is frustrating for a spaz like myself that craves action. Crystalis,

as a rule, has roughly an 8x8 screen area to wander without loads/transitions. Not to mention your man is no wuss like Link—he

doesn't need to be scratch-free and 100% healthy to shoot 'enchanted' blade projectiles like that princess-whipped whelp, all he needs is to stand still for a second to charge up and away he goes!

Your weaponry and armor are a bit bland, but they keep it focused. There are 4 swords, all element-based (wind, fire, ice, lightning), which can be enhanced by their respective crystal balls, and maximized by locating the corresponding bracelets. The 'balls' allow you to vanquish obstacles in some situations (i.e. destroy a weak wall, create an ice bridge, melt an ice wall...) while the bracelets launch an

elemental attack on the surrounding enemies, while bilking you for some magic points.

I cannot think of any other game EVER with a telepathy spell, where you can sacrifice magic points to teleconference with your choice of mentors you meet during the course of the adventure. Then again, I doubt you turn on the game and expect your spiritual guide to say 'I don't want to talk to you. Leave me alone!'

The locales your adventures take you thru are amazingly diverse as well: from villages, to massive city-states, small pygmy tribes tree fortresses. Even the deserts and the frozen mountains and tundra of the north (ironically to

the south as well as north in the game) are well laid out.

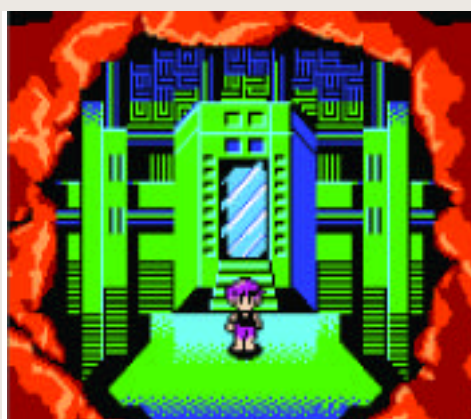
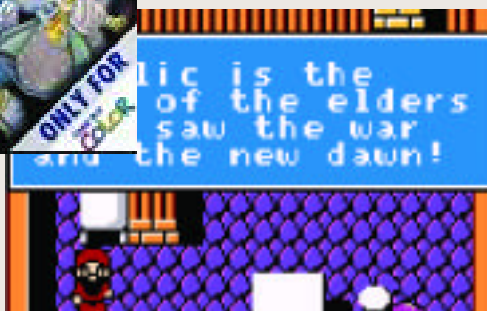
Sadly, the sequel SNK promised to be in the works for many many many MANY years never seemed to make any progress and quietly disappeared from release lists. Which is probably a good thing, as SNK would have more than likely opted to release it on one of their own consoles instead of NES or SNES, and there was no possible way I could come up with \$700 for a NeoGeo system and the game, short of selling my organs in Tijuana. I like Crystallis, but I like my spleen even more, if you follow me...



I'm guessing that I wasn't the only one that was overly impressed with Crystallis, because in 2000 Nintendo of America ported the NES classic to GameBoy Color so the current generation could enjoy it. Personally I liken it more to a remake, as they changed the story around to remove the apocalyptic demise of the current world and just skip straight to the semi-medieval time the game occurs in. If you had never played Crystallis before you would not even notice the reworking, but for a hardened fan like me it was a bit of a shock. Other little irritable details like the much lower resolution detract from the GBC version, but it's the only one you could really walk off the street at this point and purchase.

So how 'bout it SNK—going to give us a sequel this decade?

—Pokey



RetroFIT Herzog Zwei

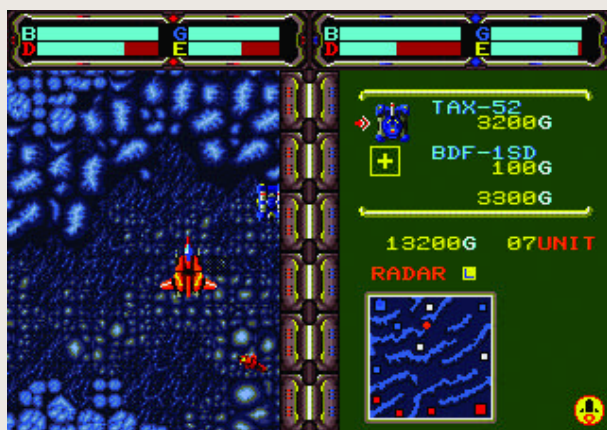
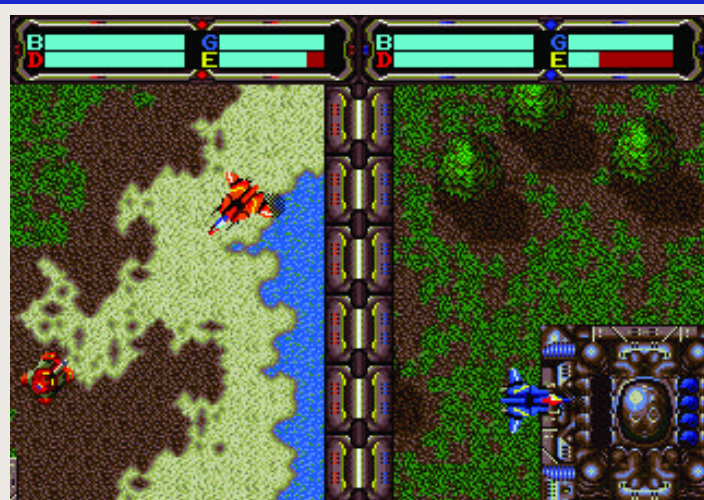


There was a game released a long time ago, for a console still in its infancy, by a company largely unknown in North America. The system was the Genesis, the company was TechnoSoft, and the game was Herzog Zwei. Herzog Zwei means "Dukes Two" in German, and it indicates not only that it's a two-player game, it's also the sequel to Herzog—an even lesser known game for the Japanese MSX computer. The original game was similar in concept — fight a computer or human opponent for dominance of the map by building and deploying various fighting units. Herzog Zwei one of the first—if not the very first—Real Time Strategy games, and those who played it know how amazing it

was. At the time, I described it to my friends as a high-speed chess game with no grid and no turns. You and the computer or a friend create and deploy units in a frenetic attempt to conquer the map.

Herzog Zwei was an exceptional game, a true classic on a system that arguably didn't have as many classics as it should have. Most people know it only from one single boring picture

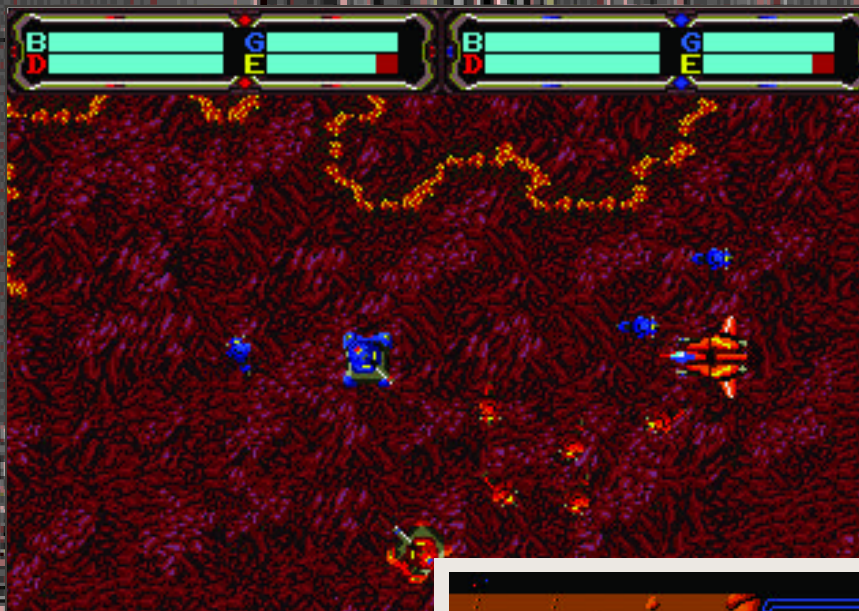
from an EGM magazine many years ago. Remember that this game was pre—Sonic, so it suffered a low production run since very few players had yet to buy the system. It also received



no advertising support and sadly, as the first of its genre, it was hard for gamers to wrap their head around the whole concept. It

wasn't at all like the Koei strategy games they knew and it was too cerebral to be called a shoot 'em up, so few people took the risk. Those who did were more than amply rewarded, however.

It's very simple compared to the modern real-time strategy game—the object was simply to shoot the other player's base enough that it exploded; simple, right? Well there was more to it of course, but it was no Starcraft, and it was no Red Alert. There were only eight kinds of unit to produce with no flying units at all, but there were different programs to assign the units, which made for a surprising amount of variety. The game not only defined the RTS genre, it introduced concepts never repeated. As a player you weren't simply pointing and clicking, you were actually on the battlefield. As a transformable flying and walking robot, you could pick up units and place them where they would do the most good or drop down and shoot a few baddies mano a mano. You couldn't attack the enemy's bases yourself however, which meant you had to get your units in close to fight for you. The game was phenomenally well balanced—you couldn't fly



if a little light on the effects. A flat scrolling background covered in sprites was as fancy as it got here, no parallax or pulsing backgrounds to distract you.

The game has aged quite well, far better than most games of its era. The flaws in the computer AI mean that you either play with a friend or you simply count the minutes until your victory — inevitably it would come if you knew the pattern. When first I imported this game, the learning curve was very steep. The manual was high incomprehensible in Japanese, and I spent the better part of a week working out exactly what the hell was going on. Once that was mastered I was digging into all eight maps and four difficulty levels, and loving every minute of it. I recommend spending some time to teach your friends though, as the computer won't keep you challenged for long.

To this day it's one of my top five games, and with only one exception, no one can beat me (ECM's note: oh we'll see Mr. Safely in Japan). This exception has just celebrated over eleven hundred StarCraft wins, so I don't feel too bad about losing. I'll take the rest of you on any time you're in the neighborhood though, so go find yourselves a copy and practice up some. This is Genesis gaming at its finest.

—NeoGman

all the way across the map while carrying something, and your units didn't have enough fuel to make it on their own. This forced you to take smaller steps, clearing and seizing the smaller bases en route to the enemy's HQ.

There were six programs available, and not all units could use all programs. Selecting one was as simple as picking the right icon; nothing complicated. The programs available were varied and useful: a program could have a tank simply sit still and fire at anything close enough, or have it approach the nearest enemy base, or attack the other player's home base. Different programs had different costs, and you had to balance the programming price against the cost of the unit and the money you had available. Making a stack of small tanks that didn't move was cheap, but the same stack programmed to attack the enemy's base would double their cost.

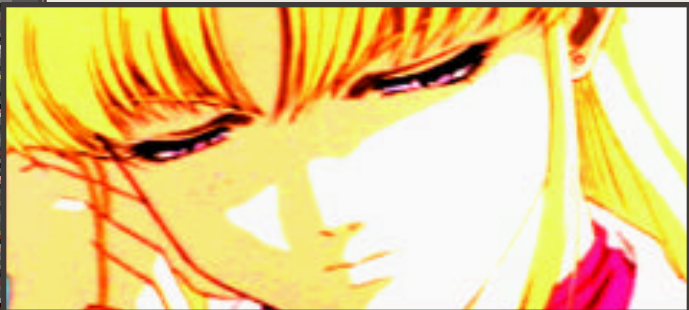
Each unit took time to produce — the bigger the unit, the more time it took. Making a large tank or turret could take more time than you could spare. You could create a unit from anywhere on the map, and pick it up from any of your bases simply by flying over it. Each player was allowed a maximum of fifty units, but the slow speed of the Genesis meant that in reality you'd be suffering slowdown and chop after a combined total of seventy to eighty units was reached.

Capturing bases was easy: if you created four infantry with an Infiltrate program and managed to sneak them inside an empty or enemy base, that base would become yours. Each smaller base you captured increased the amount of money you made, but spread your forces out a little thinner.

The music was phenomenal, as we came to expect from later TechnoSoft releases. Some of my all-time favorite game soundtracks were from this game, and they easily equal tracks in the Thunder Force series. The graphics were on par with most TechnoSoft titles,



RetroFIT Elemental Gearbolt



Say what you want, but we ain't Working Designs whores like some (who shall remain blissfully nameless). Which makes this tale all the more special. Gather around, ye that might have missed the treasure known as Elemental Gearbolt.

Yeah, I know what you're saying, "1998, in Retrofit? What's up with that?"

See, Retrofit is as much about things that are lost as it is about things that are old and marinated in nostalgia. At E3 in '98 there was a small booth in Atlanta displaying a few titles, some under the now defunct "Spaz" label (Thunderforce V, for the curious) and hidden among the wreckage of that E3, in that small booth, was a gun game for use with the relatively new Guncon—a game like no other...

It was a small title by a small publisher that was displayed in a crowded exhibition hall overrun by people and surrounded by deafening displays of "mine's bigger than yours." Elemental Gearbolt serves as a painful reminder of something that should have been, but wasn't. Sony passed on publishing their own game (released in '97 in Japan) and Working Designs picked up the slack for a title that they obviously felt warranted a look by US-based gamers.

If you take Gearbolt and insert it into your PSX or PS2, the score will instantly instill a sense of inspiration that's almost religious. You feel compelled to explore further.

"This is a gun game?" you inquire. Yes, but did you happen to catch the anime introduction and the bold characters that comfortably glide along to the haunting themes? No? Did you notice after you started the game that you felt like you were playing an RPG, except for the fact that you were holding a gun in your hand? Experience points? Levels? Cast of characters? Animated cinemas for events? Yep, you bet.

Funny thing about this unholy combination: it works. And more so than just a little; it works perfectly. As you travel through forests and towns laying waste to your enemies, the atmospheric and cinematic qualities serve to engulf your sense of doubt about this marriage and prod you to move ever further, ever deeper with a greater sense of purpose. The

score throughout the title is among—the best integration of music and gameplay to have ever come to light on console.

Elemental Gearbolt is a title that is well worth the hunt that you might need to undertake to get it. Keep an eye out for it used at your local game haunt to pick it up. It's an experience that no one should miss.

—Haohmaru



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NO DOUBT WE ARE TOO BRAVE TO
FALL DOWN...

LYRICS FROM "UNRA" DEBUT JAPANESE ALBUM

Page One: News & Goodies



CHO-YOUKOSO

Welcome, boys and girls, to AnimEtc. For those of you who were part of the GameFan days, I'm sure you're already familiar with who I am and what I do. For those who weren't, I'm Shidoshi, and this is GameGO's little anime section. The thing is, however, AnimEtc. isn't just anime - it is manga, Japanese music and entertainment, Asian live action movies, "otaku culture," and just about anything else that would go along with those things. You won't find just a few pages of slapped-together reviews here, however. AnimEtc. is about bringing you as much fun and interesting content as possible; hence the "Etc." part of the name. But... for AnimEtc. to live on, you've got to speak up. Some people have put doubt in the minds of those higher up when it comes to an anime section in the mag. So, if you like the idea of AnimEtc., and you want to see it continue, you MUST say so! E-mail ECM, or send mail to Posty, and let them know that AnimEtc. needs to - no, MUST - be in every issue of the mag.

- shidoshi@gamemagazine.com

THE J-POP INVASION

J-pop in America. It doesn't exist... or does it? You may not know it, but there have already been a handful of J-pop CDs released here on our shores, and even better, more are on the way. I've tried to pull together a list of the releases from some of the "bigger" names of J-pop and J-rock, but of course this list may not be totally complete. Dreams Come True - *Eternity* was on the *Swan Princess* soundtrack back around 1995, and they had another song on the Disney *Atlantis* soundtrack. Also, DCT will release the album *This Monster* here in the US come fall. L'Arc ~ en ~ Ciel contributed the end theme, *Spirits Dream Inside*, to the *Final Fantasy: the Spirits Within* soundtrack, and their album *Clicked Singles Best 13* was released in the US last May.

It isn't easy to track down, so you might have to check a music store which gets in or can order harder to find stuff, or try to find it online. Same deal with the US release of *Spike* from Puffy, or Puffy AmiYumi as they are called here, that came out in June. Back to movies, Utada Hikaru shows up on the *Rush Hour 2* soundtrack with a joint effort with Foxy Brown called *Blow My Whistle*. Being honest, what blows is the song - but still, it is noteworthy. Kuraki Mai (called Mai K in the US) seems to have had some sort of release before for the single *Baby I Like*. She'll also

have a full re-recorded in English album come out this fall, which will have all songs from her *Baby I Like* single as well as other songs. The company putting out this album will also release an English-language album from another Japanese singer, Aika Ono.

So, as you can see, the J-pop market in the US still isn't big, but it is certainly growing.

However, to keep it growing, we fans need to do our part. Releasing an album in the US from a Japanese group or singer is a big gamble, and typically, record execs have little interest in dealing with such acts. So, when such a release does happen, how the album sells is VERY important. One example of this is Coco Lee. Her US album seems to have had

very poor sells, and some are pointing the blame straight at Napster. Her music gets tossed up on Napster, and everyone just downloads instead of buying the CD. When a band like Metallica complains about Napster, it may fall on deaf ears - they are making millions, and their record deals are safe. For the smaller acts who desperately need sales to get a record company to care about them, things like Napster can be their death. So, if you care about J-pop and J-rock coming to the US at all, get out there, and support the artists with your money.



RECENT HEADLINES



Forever was a great ending for **Titles**: Loads of new titles were talked about at the recent Anime Expo '01. Here are a selection of them. Pioneer - *Adventures of Mini-Goddess*, *Ah! My Goddess Movie* (oh yeah baby), *NieA 7*, *Soul Taker*. Bandai - *Char's Counterattack: Mobile Suit Gundam*, *Giant Gorg*, *Kikaider*, *Kazemakase Tsukigage Ran*. ADV - *Aura Battler Dunbine*, *Eden's Bowry*, *Puni Puni Poemi*, *Sakura Wars TV*, *You're Under Arrest TV Specials*, *Zone of the Enders TV and OVA*. Media Blaster - *Beserk*, *Fortune Quest*, *Level C*, *Y's I & II*. Synch-Point - *FLCL*, *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*. Viz - *Inu Yasha*. **Newtype**: A US version of *Newtype* magazine?! Talk about such a project is beginning to crop up all over the place. Supposedly planned for a Spring 2002 launch, this US version of *Newtype* would be skewed more towards the Japanese anime scene, so that we can all see the great stuff we can't yet watch, but hopefully will be able to in the future. From what has been said about the plans, it sounds like the people in charge want to model the US version very much after the Japanese version. God bless *Animerica*, but the US REALLY needs another anime magazine for better balance. Wizard's new anime mag seems to be going in its own strange direction, and I question if anyone else has what it takes to give us a real alternative anytime soon. So, I hope that *Newtype* US is indeed coming.

Okay boys and girls, let's play a game of "cram in as much news into a small space as possible!" **Miyazaki**: According to the Internet Movie Database, the latest Miyazaki animated movie - *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi* - grossed \$15.8 million its opening weekend in Japan, which broke the record that *Mononoke Hime* held for highest opening by an animated film in Japan. **Cartoon Network**: Starting September 2nd, CN will premier "Adult Swim," a new block of animation targeted at an older audience. Showing Sunday through Thursday 10pm to 1am, Adult Swim will include, among other things, *Cowboy Bebop*. By the time you read this, CN will probably already be showing the original *DragonBall* series, and they are also planning on showing *Pilot Candidate / Candidate for Goddess*. **Tenchi Muyo**: More *Tenchi* is indeed coming. A third *Ryo-Ohki* OVA series should hit sometime in Spring 2002 in Japan, as well as a *Galaxy Police* OVA and TV series. Personally, I think *Tenchi Tenchi*, and it didn't need to go on from there. **New**



Huge "Sen" poster in Fukuoka



Outside the concert

AYU DOME TOUR 2001

Getting to spend a month in Japan was already good enough for me - when my host mother presented me with tickets to go to Hamasaki Ayumi's 2001 Dome Tour concert, I nearly had a heart attack. In a world... best day of my life. Fukuoka dome was HUGE, and there were around 30,000 people there. Ayu put on one hell of a show, and I walked away a happy man. And, look below at what I purchased: Ayu manga! Yes, Ayu and her life in hand-drawn form. Must... have... more... Ayu... goods!!!



JapanCHECK!

Shidoshi recently had the chance to spend a month studying in Osaka, Japan. So, for the first installment of CHECK!, we look at a few aspects of life in Japan.

CapsuleCHECK!



Put your money into a capsule machine in the US, and you'll get a Backstreet Boys sticker or a cheap fake ring. In Japan? Hardcore toys like *Tron Bonne* (above), *Golgo 13*, *Lupin*, *Namco gals*, and even... real girl's phone numbers?!

BemaniCHECK!



Japanese arcades know the score - typically each has an excellent "music game" selection. Those lucky Japanese now have *DDR 5th Mix*, as well as *Para Para Paradise 2nd*, *Guitar Mania*, *Shakka Tambourine*, and so on.

BeverageCHECK!



First, one of the cool Japanese *Coke* can/bottles. Anyhow, Japan has some great drinks. *C.C. Lemon* (my favorite), *Pocari Sweat* (for you active people), and *Calpis / Calpico* (a fermented milk drink... actually very tasty). Check your local Asian market - they may carry them all.

MangaCHECK!



Until you visit Japan, you CANNOT imagine how much manga some stores have. You could spend hours just checking out what all they have for sale. If you're a big fan of manga, Japan is absolutely your heaven.



REVIEW BY: SHIDOSHI • COMEDY • OVA [2] • THE RIGHT STUFF • 60 MIN • 12+ • ENGLISH DUB

I've got an addiction for "strange" comedy. Be it anime like *Elf Princess Rane*, movies like *Real Men*, or online comics like *Jerk City*, I often laugh at things most others just scratch their heads at. Now, we have *Assemble Insert*. AI has been around

idol singer. Yes, in the grand tradition of Minnie, the "idol singer savior" is back. Maron is a shy, quiet girl, who just happens to have superhuman strength. So, we basically have 60 minutes of a cute girl being a pop idol, beating up a bunch



Assemble Insert

for a few months, but I'm willing to bet that most of you never even heard of it due to it being a rather low-key release. The premise already begins to show that something isn't right with this show - the police are being beaten at every turn by a somewhat-sinister band of thieves called the Demon Seed. The small group of officers given the task of being a special anti-Demon Seed unit are out of options, and turn to a backup plan; find someone who will battle the thieves while becoming a popular

of half-wit thieves, a group of cops more interested in Maron's singing career than her crime fighting, and... live action commercials. While at times some of the jokes feel a bit forced, I can't help but like *Assemble Insert*. If you're the kind of person who likes your comedy bizarre and at times nonsensical, give dear Maron a shot. For the rest of you, you'll wonder what medication I was on when I found myself enjoying such a show.

In Depth: Anime • Live Action

A movie with a person in a rubber monster costume is a movie with a person in a rubber monster costume. That, in a nutshell, was what I always thought. Don't get me wrong, I love *Godzilla* and the rest. But when one of my classmates from Japanese

Remember the US *Godzilla* movie a few years ago? *Gamera 3* is what that movie SHOULD have been. I mean, absolutely, honestly - this movie is amazing. I never liked Gamera himself before, but after this movie, the idea of a giant



ACTION • THEATRICAL MOVIE • 2005 • 12+ • 108 MIN • JAPANESE • PREVIEW BY: SHIDOSHI

Gamera 3

The Revenge of Iris

class handed me *Gamera 3* and told me, "this one is different," I just kind of smiled and nodded. I took it home, and it sat there, and sat there, and sat there. Finally, I broke down, and I watched it. Boy... was I wrong. I was wrong to have waited, and I was wrong about big monster movies. As silly as other movies you've seen might have been, as cheezy as Japanese big monster movies may sometimes be, *Gamera 3* is different.

mutant turtle is suddenly cool. *Gamera 3* is a definite advancement in special effects, to a point where it isn't about people in rubber monster suits anymore - it is about giant monsters trashing the hell out of Japanese cities. If you've ever liked this kind of movie, or if you think you could like such a movie, you MUST see *Gamera 3*. ADV, thank the lord, is bringing it to the US. Full review then, I promise.





This is only Utada Hikaru's second album. I have to keep saying that to myself over and over, because to be honest, it is rather hard to believe. So long as I've been a fan of J-pop, she's been there. So, to me, I can't think of J-pop without Hikki. Also,

song, *Wait and See ~Risk~*, for example. After that, we are hit with what I think is by far the best track on the album, *Can You Keep a Secret?*. *Secret* is one of those songs that you just can't help but move to the music with. The rest of

REVIEW BY: SHIDOSHI • ALBUM • J-POP • TOSHIBA-EMI • 13 TRACKS • JAPANESE



Utada Hikaru

Distance / 宇多田ヒカル

her first album was released a little over two years ago - an amazingly long amount of time in the J-pop world. So, how does her sophomore effort, *Distance*, sound? Some have said that her newer work just doesn't have the same feeling. I, however, think *Distance* shows a more matured Hikki, music with a bit more richness of sound and personality behind it. Sometimes it still trips me up that J-pop songs hit as singles long before they are on an album - the opening

Distance is almost like Hikki trying to prove that she refuses to be locked into one music category; *Distance* has a lighter, more poppier sound to it, *Sunglass* is unquestionably R&B influenced, *Drama* breaks out into heavy rock chords, and *Eternally* is a soft, melodious ballad. If you don't expect all J-pop to be Morning Musume or MAX, then Utada Hikaru's *Distance* is a must for your collection. Great music for relaxing on a warm summer night.

In Depth: J-pop • Manga

You'll have to pardon me for a moment, because for some of you this will be totally old news. However, I never had the chance to talk about the "new" *Smile*, so gosh darnit, I'm going to. While I held a grudge against Mixx for what they did

mation. *Smile* is now a monthly manga anthology based around shoujo - or girl's - comics. Don't let the name fool you, though - these comics are for anyone who loves manga, not just those of the fairer sex. Included in the round up are

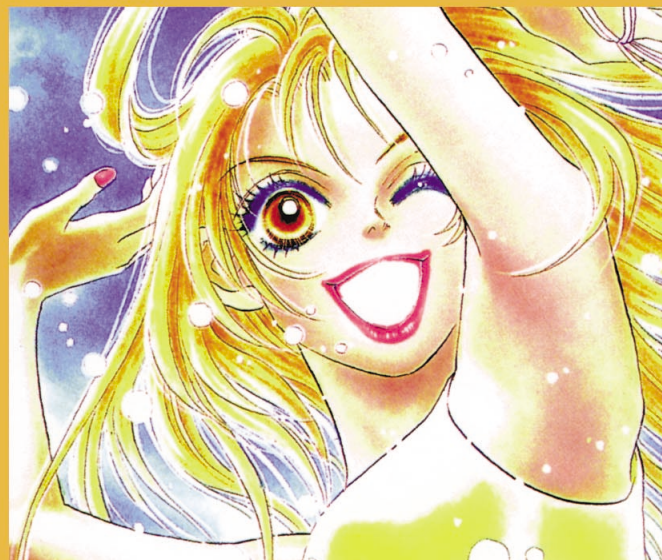


ANTHOLOGY • MONTHLY • \$4.99 • MIXX ENT. • 10+ • 128 PAGES • US FORMAT • REVIEW BY: SHIDOSHI

Smile Monthly Manga Anthology

to *MixxZine* for a long time, in a strange twist of fate, they made just as drastic of a change to another of their publications that couldn't have been better. *Smile*, from the start, was supposed to be a girl's magazine - it talked about "girlie" things like make-up, boys, fashion, and what-not, and it carried "girlie" manga like *Sailor Moon*. Being brutally honest, though, the mag was terrible. Then, however, it went through a transfor-

the continuing adventures of *Sailor Moon SS*, the somewhat darker action of *Juline*, and Shidoshi's beloved shoujo title, *Peach Girl*. Cute ganguro kogal = big love from me. Another title, *Clover*, was part of the line-up, but it was taken out to make room for some new upcoming titles. *Smile* is a fabulous anthology, and a must purchase each month. Kudos to Mixx for helping support shoujo manga in the US.



Holy Website Batman!

Now this is how you do a video game website. This Japanese site based on Street Fighter Zero 3, replete with character select screen and full SFZ3 tunes is amazing. Click on any character and you'll get relevant web page links and combo movies for each character. While it's clearly a work in progress, what's there is utterly amazing. Be warned, though, it's a large download and it has a nasty habit of crashing your browser.

GO!: <http://www.gfinder.com/albert/zero3/zero3.html>



Music For Our Ears

Not surprisingly, after we ran last month's Leftover on DJ Pretzel, we got inundated with requests to feature more game music websites. So here are two more for your delectation: Quinn Fox' Sega Re-mix page and KFSS Studios which features Final Fantasy remixes. Good stuff all around and certainly worth a few downloads—if you have any other sites we should know about, people, fire them our way.

GO!: <http://www.quinn.50g.com>

GO!: <http://www.kfssstudios.com/>

Furious

As we're official sponsors of CGE 2001 (the yearly classic gaming convention in sunny Las Vegas—coverage next issue), we figured we'd toss you some info on one of the new games featured there: Ms. Space Fury for Colecovision (released by Joe Santulli @ www.digitpress.com - a highly recommended read for classic game aficionados)! It's a follow-up to the classic Sega/Gremlin vector coin-op title Space Fury, circa '81. We hope this neat little collectible spurs GameGO! fan Cafeman to get to porting Intellivision Discs of Tron over to the Atari 5200 for the next CGE—looks like Coleco wins this round, Caf.



GameGO! Gets Together

Since our first issue was completed just prior to E3, we didn't have time to flash a pic of our pre-show get-together. We had a raucous good time that included a trip to Universal City Walk, (bad) arcade games, food and drink (plenty of the latter, in fact). For a magazine that didn't even exist yet, we're pretty happy with the small turn-out of people for a no-holds-barred, unsanctioned event. So feast your eyes on GameGO! editors and fans alike—can you spot ECM, Shou-sama, and Kodomo?

Tidbits

Ikaruga Watch: Not only is the game not going to Dreamcast (as our man on the inside insists), but now it's becoming exceedingly questionable that it will ever see the light of day in Japanese arcades. We're praying it's not so (it's always nice to see a non-fighting/non-racing game in arcades these days, <sigh>) and ECM is currently clutching his teddy bear and sobbing quietly.

Fresh Brewed

Starting next issue, we'll be dedicating hard space (rather than just this brief snippet) to the wonderful world of homebrew games across all platforms. Along with Ms. Space Fury (above), this is what a heavy duty homebrew project is about: Sonic Robo Blast 2. There is a positively huge Sonic fan community on the 'Net and they make scads of Sonic-inspired games from 2D (!) Sonic titles to one of the best found in this title. You can grab it at <http://www.srb2.org/main.htm> and spread the word that GameGO! wants homebrew titles! If you've got a homebrew game and you want it featured in these pages, let us know at freshbrewed@gamemagazine.com.



Don't Call Them Hardcore

Don't Call Them Hardcore

Well, you asked for it so you're getting it: an expanded and full-blown 'hardcore' section where you, the reader, can submit your over-the-top gaming stories each and every month. Any and all submissions (pics with you in them are best) should be sent along to hardcore@gamemagazine.com. So, without further ado, away we go!

Evicted

Darren Chase (a.k.a. PaCrappa) is a rare breed—someone that is so passionate about bringing better games to the masses that he started a game shop...at the expense of his apartment. That's right, he was recently evicted so that he'd have cash to start the game shop. All is not lost, however, as last we heard he's living in the store (now that's what we'd call going all the way).

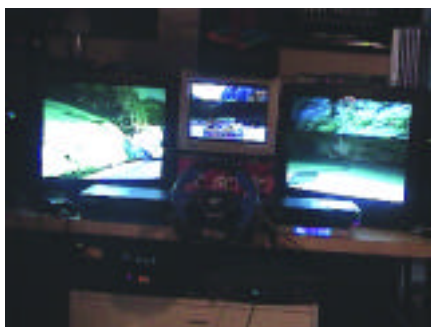
He's also a mad system modder and the included pic shows the battle scars he's earned in this quest to bring import gaming to the masses. Careful, though—ECM once dropped some molten hot solder on his leg and it stunted his growth (at least that's what he tells us)—soldering irons are hot, Darren. That's just a friendly tip from the boys at GameGO!



GT 3x3

Eddie Sun, resident of the Great White North (that's Canada for the illiterate), shows us that the only way to really play GT3 is to go all the way: 3 TVs, 3 PS2s, 1 wheel, and 1 gamer all linked for some Ferrari F355-style action.

Maybe ECM would have liked the game more if he could have pretended it was a Sega game...but probably not. We salute you, Eddie, it takes a special kind of head case to go through that much trouble to play GT2, err, 3.



Jaguar-itis

Some people collect rare PC Engine and Saturn games. Others have to have as much rare game hardware as they can get their sweaty little mitts on. Kevin Manne, however, suffers from a much more insidious malaise, however—he's a Jaguar fan. Yes, the Atari Jaguar.



Kevin's quest to own every rare piece of Jag-centric merchandise has led to some exorbitant expenditures: Brett Hull Hockey prototypes on CD and cart (\$550 for the cartridge on eBay; \$300 for the CD), cause ya know, it's not enough to just

have one or the other, <shrug>.

Next up was insane amount of Jag-related lunacy: a prototype Jaguar Voice Modem,

System Test Cartridge, Developers Flash ROM cartridge(s), and an early beta cart

of Rayman—what about the Jaguar boxer shorts and matching briefs?

To top it all off he even managed to track down a working Atari Jaguar kiosk for a mere \$200—lucky for him he'll be able to live in that when he gets removed from his apartment (talk to Darren—I'm sure he can rent you an awning or somesuch).

Normally someone with this sort of feline fixation would have been locked up, long, long ago, but since we appreciate anybody that spends this kind of money on a system that isn't even 64-bit (that's a joke, Jaguar Interactive regulars—don't hate me), we have nothing but respect. Viva la Jaguar! Or something...

Overheard

As a regular feature in the mag, we thought we'd start pulling choice quotes from wherever they might be found and adding our own unique take on things. We'll also be sure to skewer ourselves if we manage to screw up—all's fair and whatnot. So if you have a quote that you think should be featured in the mag, fire it along to quotables@gamemagazine.com.

"I'm so cheap--I'm the reason good development teams and game concepts go under."

-Vern911

ECM's Note: Not much more you can say to this—it's people like Vern that kill companies that take risks and try to innovate. You best be buying a copy of Stretch Panic if you want to remain on good terms with us, Vern—no excuses.

"Guilty Gear X is a 2D fighter with Street Fighter 3's pacing."

-Game Spot

ECM's Note: Really? Street Fighter 3's pacing you say? As if this comment in and of itself wasn't comedy relief enough, taken with our next quote it just goes to show you that a. nobody really plays these games and b. they don't have a clue.

"An opinion is not an opinion unless it is backed up with some kind of evidence. Its sad you haven't learned that yet."

-Anonymous Square Gamer Poster

ECM's Note: While I could go on for days about the absolute foolishness displayed in a statement like this, I won't. Do me a favor, though: go look up the dictionary definition of 'opinion' then come back and laugh at their expense.

RENDERZ

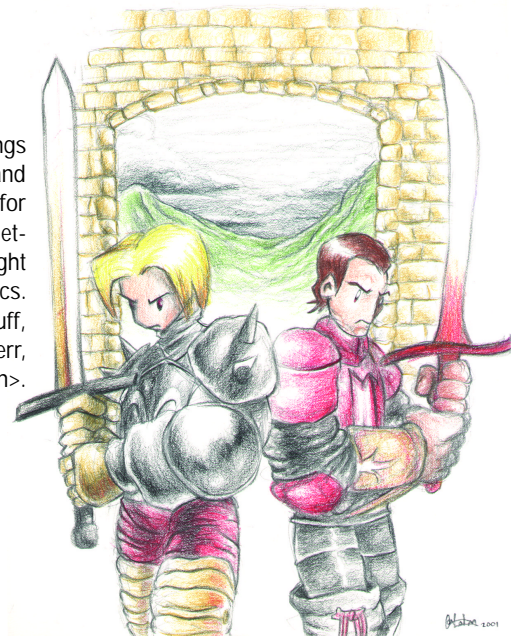


Dylan Benson (a.k.a. Someone) brings us the Metal Gear Solid ninja (a.k.a. Grey Fox) looking pretty sweet in pen and ink.



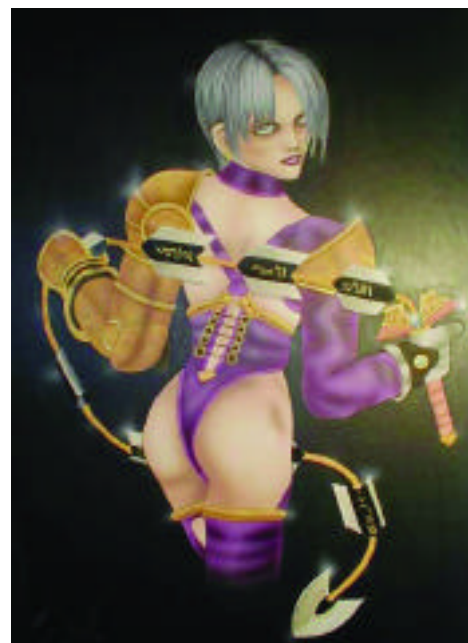
Straight from San Juan in lovely Puerto Rico (I'll get there someday, JJ) comes these two ace renderings by resident art expert JJ Esteban. Keep it coming, chief.

Julian brings us Ramza and Delita ready for some bloodletting straight from FF Tactics. Good stuff, Kaneda, err, Julian, <grin>.



Respect to J. Morgan for his depiction of DonDokoDon (sweet!) vs. Bubble Bobble. He also brings us a clever rendition of ECM's Alien vs. Predator board committing suicide a la its 'suicide' battery—shortly thereafter ECM shared the same fate.

There's just something about Ivy, and this rendition by Freddy Valazquez shows us a side of her we never thought we'd see—namely the battered and bruised, erm, side. Thanks Freddy—Kodomo has this pic handy for when he gets lonely...which happens, well, all the time.



RENDERZ



Kim Chase brings us this lovely rendering of Chun-Li, from one gaming addict's wife to another (Kasumi being the other). Thanks Kim—we'll take some more when you get a chance.



The "almighty Pimp Trot" (his words, not ours) come from our webmaster, Jacon Rens (a.k.a. Kenshin). We know a few FF fans that should be introduced to this bad motha—show him the way, Kodomo.



This sweet drawing of Shyna of Silhouette Mirage fame makes up for the tinkering done to the US version. Thanks Finch, keep it coming.



Nick Minor hooks us up with Kid from Chrono Cross—Haohmaru thanks you very much, Nick.



Shingo swings by from the GameGO! message board with a very swell take on Shingo Yabuki. Very sweet, Shingo—more please.

- AJ -



by kevin cameron
psd is co. Sega & Sonic Team

Hero (of The Next Level fame: www.the-nextlevel.com) brings us his take on, we'd imagine, his PSO character. Very, very cool, Hero—we'd have liked to fit more of your stuff in, but we're equal opportunity 'round these parts. Great job!

You can't ever go wrong submitting Darkstalkers art to GameGO! and Larry Thompson keenly appreciates this fact with this sweet shot of John Talbain. We love the cast and crew of Night Warriors, for future reference.



John Martel brings us his Post-It rendering of a "Shmup God"—sounds good to us, John. If this is what you can do on a Post-It, let's see what you can do on a full page.



Just wanted to shoot a letter over to let you know what I thought about the first issue of GameGO! Magazine. All in all...I thought your debut issue was OK. I could do without all your editors and writers being reduced to little manga caricatures...too cutesy. There were also some contradicting opinions offered about Gran Turismo: Two editors thought it was so-so, while the main review stated how nothing could possibly beat its racing experience (but this is okay...first issue jitters and all...look at the Official Dreamcast Magazine...I thought it was juvenile at first...but learned to appreciate it immensely...). I assume that you would appreciate the masses buying and playing games that you deem more worthy ("What you should be playing")...yet you cover games that I don't think the masses will ever come across...or like for that matter. Now, before you get all peeved, I will state that I kinda dug seeing all that cool Japanese stuff...but I'm what you'd call a medium-core gamer...I love videogames, but I don't go out and buy everything. Your magazine is geared towards hardcore gamers...I'd like to think they already know what to buy. I think your magazine will appeal to this crowd and this crowd only...not the masses. I also didn't appreciate the dig you made about EGM. Those guys are hardcore...but they also give the masses what they want...more info about U.S titles and titles the masses are more likely to pick up. They also cover the great titles out there as well (and, I might add, the occasional import!). I will, however, be objective and continue to pick up your mag to give it a proper chance. Great article on Stretch Panic...that title looks great! Love the paper you print on. Thanks for listening.

Don Cox

Though the power held within the pages of this tome of gaming wisdom you hold within your sweaty, controller-worm mitts is great indeed, there's just no way to agree with everyone...therefore, we don't even try. In fact, our editors aren't even required to agree with each other - imagine that! Contradicting opinions on Gran Turismo? Well, buckle up junior...because there's a lot more dissent where that came from! I understand how, phonetically, our magazine might remind you of a "safe, mainstream" gaming publication that tries to please everyone...but trust me, that ain't what you can expect from these ink-saturated pages, every issue.

Furthermore, your defilement of the term "hardcore" has stripped it of all its meaning and therefore, it must needs be stricken from the vernacular of gaming, completely. The phrase "give the masses what they want," was never meant to exist in the same sentence as the word "hardcore." Your blatant disregard for this time-honored adjective has defiled it, utterly...and for this, a plague of blisters upon your thumbs, and a thousand coffee spills upon our competition's pages for dulling your mind with their milquetoast brand of "editorial!" Devour these pages, feed your mind and be edified. Perhaps the words

contained herein can purify your blighted gaming soul...And let this be a lesson to those of you who would entertain such foolish notions: Garbage in, garbage out!

Posty,

This may be a dumb question but are you the same Post-Fu master of the now deceased GameFan magazine? I am really excited about GameGO! What happened to the rest of the GameFan team? I see ECM, Kodomo, You (if it is indeed the "real" Posty to which I address this letter), but I must know, where can I find The Judge, Eggo, Fury, and Rebus? Another thing I've been pondering is the 6th Man, I bet that is just an editorial name given to all the guest reviewers. Am I right? I understand that you must get a ton of mail but I beg you to please respond to and address all the questions I have. I thank you and I have faith that this magazine will get off the ground and rule above all others.

Nzo

Though many have tried to infiltrate the dank interiors of my cavernous abode, in the vain hope of bearing witness to the world's greatest living Post-Fu master practicing his craft, none have succeeded. Through hushed tones, acolytes of the Postal arts share tales of a most guarded technique, unknown to all but the Master...the chameleon-like ability to shift both his personality and his appearance, making any identification impossible. I assure you, however, that your letter has reached the nigh-legendary hands of the one whose Post-Fu fist is smooth to the bone.

However, as you know, not everyone from our old stomping grounds made the trip to GameGO! Magazine. Life has a funny way of helping people change tracks; sometimes, it gives you the nudge you needed to move in a different direction. Many of our compatriots found new challenges to pursue...new frontiers that demanded exploration. Some remained in the video game industry, many did not; either way, their legacy remains, etched in the memories of game players around the globe. For their contributions, I salute them all and respect their privacy by keeping their current whereabouts a closely guarded secret!



O' Postmeister of Ultimate Magnificence,

I hope this gets to you. I couldn't find your e-mail address on the GameGO!Magazine website. I regret that no Waffle Chips accompany this e-mail, but it simply is not possible via digital media. Know that the Waffle Chips are with you in spirit, o' great Posty.

Anyway, let me just express my sincere joy that the "old" GameFan is back! I think you know what I mean. I was a loyal reader of the GameFan magazine from day one! I bought every issue, and I personally loved the website as well. Like every loyal reader, the "Express" incident left me writing in agony upon the floor. Words cannot describe my hatred of the foul company and they'll never get so much as a dirty, cola-stained penny from my miserly grasp. GameGO!, on the other hand, already has my payment for a 6-month subscription! EXCELLENT magazine. I LOVE your review premise that includes no number system at all. Brilliant...just brilliant.

I'm pretty sure you won't publish this letter, thanks to the many legal hassles contained therein. I just wanted to say that it is nice to once again have a good game magazine to turn to. I rarely base my buying decisions on a magazine's reviews. I just like to READ them! Too many magazines just churn out the same mindless drivel every month. Heck, *I* can churn out mindless drivel with the best of them! I want the good stuff, and GameGO! delivers. Keep it up, and don't give in to The Man!

-Aelfraed

Never ones to let the proverbial Man keep us down, the Money staff of GameGO keep it real at every opportunity. Free from the clutches of a foe even more formidable than the infamous BlowMeister Games, we are free to wreak our signature brand of havoc on the industry, no holds barred! The details of our previous publication's demise were obviously well publicized, so there's no need for me to expound upon it here...you did that with all the skill and grace I could have mustered, as it is. Suffice it to say, your well wishes—and those of the multitudes who've e-mailed and posted on the website—have been heard and are greatly appreciated.

You have my oath as practitioner and purveyor of the penultimate Postal precepts that mindless drivel shall never spew forth from the pages of GameGO! Magazine. Now that you've planted the seed in my head, it's about time I tracked down some of those satisfying and eternally fresh Waffle Chips...the crisp morsels whose intense flavor and decadent scent induce seizures in lesser mortals. The mere mention of them has made my gob moist with anticipation. Salvation is mine!

LETTER HEAD

Posty!

I think you should've run for president! You know you could've beat Dubya! Long Live The Post Fu Master and GameGO!

Pitch113

Every news outlet around the nation made it clear during the tie which Florida eventually broke, that only 49% of the American public weighed in with a vote for George and Al. What they didn't tell you is that 51% of Americans wrote-in a vote for the one and only Posty! In a cover-up worthy of the X-Files, this fact was buried and will probably never be revealed to the public at large...but the truth is, we should now be living in the first Postal Presidency in America's history. There is no justice.

Mark my words: Four years from now, Dubya can look forward to a far greater challenge than stringing two coherent sentences together...

Dear Posty,

We've got a strange and disturbing scenario to recount for you...

We booted up our PlayStation 2 and we accelerated the graphics, increased the load speed and inserted The Interactive CD Sampler Disc Volume 4 (one of those demo disks that comes packaged with the PlayStation, or at least used to).

Once it booted up, we clicked on the Ace Combat 2 demo and began playing. It ran normally, the music and the standard messages accompanied by words, such as Altitude Low Pull Up etc...

But then, a very odd thing happened: after a short time (you only have a few minutes to play in the demo) you start to hear VERY STRANGE, deep alien-like gibberish sort of words, that in no way coincides with the gameplay...it sounded as if they may be subliminal messages. The voice is unlike any we have heard in the game before, and we've never heard them on the original PlayStation, only the PS2. Since we do not own the full version of the game, we are unable to see if this happens with it. What are these strange voices saying?

All-knowing one, we come to you with this letter because you have never steered us wrongly before. What are the origins of these subliminal-esque messages?

Rob & Chris

As one might expect when confronted with a letter like this, my first reaction was one of shock and confusion...that someone could possibly have so



much free time is a phenomenon that bears further investigation. However, we'll stick with your question about the potential for subliminal messages within Ace Combat 2.

Through a rigorous testing process, I have managed to replicate the conditions you've outlined above. Recording the garbled sounds and reversing them using traditional "back-masking" methodology, passing the resulting waveform through a series of amplitude and pitch filters, I was able to uncover the message that someone has taken great pains to hide. What was the message? Put simply, it's one of the eternal truths that all men should forever acknowledge, repeated over and over:

"Ozzy rules."

Now, do yourselves (and us) a favor, and go get a job. The world shudders in fear of what insanity your combined boredom might spawn, next...

Posty,

I just finished reading the premiere issue of GameGO! Magazine and all I can say is "Thank You!" Thank you for returning "The Magazine of Champions" back to the shelves (even though it has a new name) and thank you for curing me of what I called "GameFan withdrawal." I've been an avid reader of GF since '95 and I haven't missed an issue since.

I would faithfully buy an issue from the EB in the mall every month on my way to work. I finally decided to send in a subscription slip only to have it returned to me stating "No such address!" Then I went to the website and it wasn't up anymore! I thought I was going to have a heart attack! No GameFan was like Buffalo Wings without blue cheese! And no one tell what was going on! The employees at EB and Software etc. had no clue, I even went to the box stores and comic shops, yet they had no answer or me.

For six horrible months, I had to read EGM and GamePro, magazines in which I stopped reading when I first laid my eyes on a colorful front cover of GameFan! I was in EB just three hours ago about to buy an EGM when I saw the amazing artistry of "Spaz" Spaziente, I pick it up without a second thought! All I had to see was the phrase, "From the editors of GameFan" and I bought it!!!! After getting it home I have read it from cover to cover twice already! My subscription is in the mail! Thank you.

Jayson S. Brown

It seems the Emperor's new clothes are garnering rave reviews from the faithful...

WELCOME BACK, GUYS!

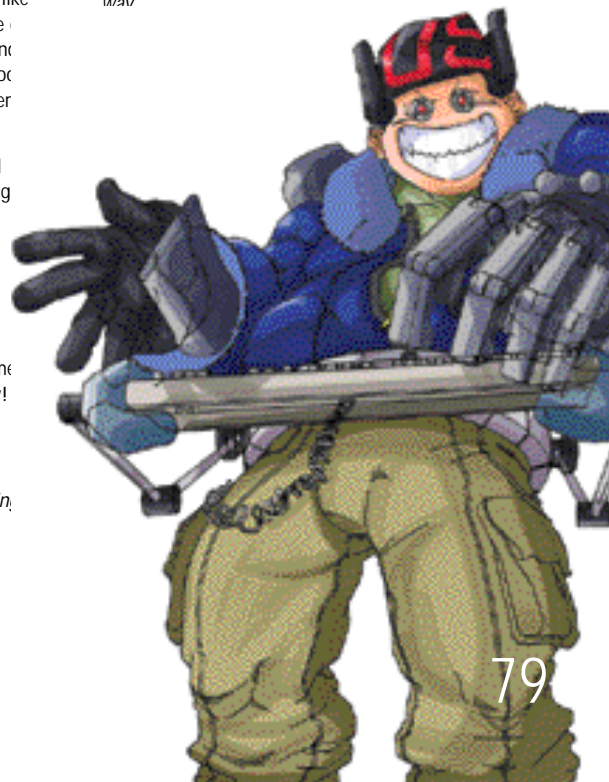
I really missed you! It was sad to see GameFan die (I tried to get a subscription to the magazine, but found out that it was canceled weeks after I mailed it), especially since there is no one else on the newsstands that stands up for the way gaming is supposed to be. I want to thank you for being the only magazine to warn me about Final Fantasy 8 and the PS2, as well as reacquainting me with shooters! While everyone else is too caught up on the bells and whistles of awesome graphics for the sake of awesome graphics, blood & gore and other 'mature' themes, you guys have kept the focus on good gameplay, and I thank you for it.

Much success to you guys on GAMEGO! Magazine.

Phillip Watts Jr.

This is what GameGO! Magazine is all about. Our reader is all about the pure thrill of playing video games. It's not a numbers game, where polygon counts or fill rates are king. It's not about sales figures or marketability. It's not about what's popular or what's accepted by the mainstream. This magazine is all about the games we feel you should be playing but might not be, since the competition won't give 'em the coverage they deserve. It is a magazine for the discerning game connoisseur. It is not a magazine for Johnny Q. Public, begging his parents for enough money to buy the latest safe, formulaic, cookie-cutter "electronic entertainment product," based on its television commercial. We aren't here to shift units, think outside the box, or maximize the sales potential of the latest "genre-busting franchise." We just want to point out the gems you might have missed, awash in a flood of utter mediocrity. It is our

WAZ



PARTING SHOT

Parting Shot is your chance to rant and rave about something that you want to get off your chest, so each and every month we turn this page over to one reader, industry pro, or bum off the street to give ease to his or her troubled soul. Without further ado, here's Faith vs. Science by GameGO! reader Craig A. Knauff.

Faith vs. Science

Whenever a game is announced, people start forming their own opinions almost immediately. These opinions are formed in response to questions such as "Who's the developer?" and "What genre is it?" or "What has that team done before?" These thoughts are perfectly natural, but the controversy over them is not if they are natural, but if they are "fair". One side shouts for the other to quit pre-judging games ("You haven't played the game, how would you know?"). The other touts past experiences they've had with the developers or a past incarnation with the game itself ("The last one was pitiful/awesome and this game will be too"). Those who try to be "fair" are the Science Gamers, and those who value past experiences are the Faith Gamers. The battle between them rages on message boards and chat rooms across the Internet. But what exactly is a "Science" or "Faith" gamer, how do they anticipate games, and what do they look for in a review?

Before I really delve into this, let me just say that if you want the best evidence of this battle of epic proportions, simply get ye to the GameGo! message boards (the people there may seem homicidal, but that's just because after months with no proper gaming guidance, they lost the ability to play well with others... just a little joke, folks).

To start, let's look up the definition of Science Gamer in our handy dictionary.

Science Gamer (Latin name: Trustis Nooneelsis): has the self-perception of being cool, levelheaded, and fair. They have a natural habitat that may include statues of Buddha and posters of Supreme Court judges (some locales may show only the shredded remains of said posters). Science gamers, when presented with information on an upcoming game, will take that info and put it in a special section of the brain. This section houses information and separates it from all other knowledge in every other section of the brain. This part of the mind is called the Denileia Oblongata. As a result, Science Gamers show neither enthusiasm nor agitation for any unreleased game—period.

A Science Gamer will trust only what he has seen, or what a seemingly "bias-free" publication has told him (there are plenty of those to choose from). An example is the recent 39 out of 40 Final Fantasy X was given by Famitsu. Science gamers, not having played the game or willing to pre-judge it based on VIII, assumed the game at least had the potential to be the best Final Fantasy ever if it was good enough to garner high marks from this magazine (especially since it was the highest rating Famitsu had ever given a Final Fantasy). Their personal feelings for VIII and the obvious similarities between the two games never

came into play. Science Gamers respect other's opinions, but only when that opinion is based on hard 'facts.' Trust is virtually non-existent. They refuse to draw their own inferences or trust the inferences of others. They wait until someone else has reviewed the final copy or they have rented/borrowed the game before deciding whether to buy a game or not. They sacrifice their own past experiences and feelings on the altar of fair play.

A 100% pure Science Gamer could see some potential that the next Army Men could be the pinnacle of computer entertainment. I can pretty much guess that everyone else would die laughing if they heard that. So let's say the day arrives and the Science Gamer buys Army Men: The Best Game Ever (followed shortly by "Hell Freezes Over" the movie). Everyone else would completely miss out. That would be an advantage, but it's more likely Army Men would be uhhh... less spectacular. Science gamers also want reviews that are 'bias-less' and aimed at everyone. They want a game to get a score (they love their scores) that is the "Final Judgment". The review will then be universally recognized by Science Gamers as fact. As a result, when a game gets a score lower than they think it deserves, they are the first to complain (<cough>Chrono Cross 9.5<cough>). In the end, though, is being a Science Gamer a good or bad thing?

Now, let's check our dictionary to see what is says about the Faith Gamer:

Faith Gamer (Latin name: Complectus Fanboyicus): has the self-perception of knowing exactly how good a game will be based on past experience with a prior game, reviewer, or development team. They tend to attach great value to the words and actions of those who have impressed them. Once impressed, they will actively crusade to defend the honor of that person or corporate entity. They may even go so far as to physically attack others for slandering their beloved idols. The exact biological cause for this is unknown, but sociologists explain it as the human need to be a part of a larger group.

A Faith Gamer trusts his past experiences and the reviews of those he usually agrees with. Let's use the Final Fantasy X Famitsu score as an example again. Faith Gamers would either 1. Look forward to FFX because they trust Famitsu 2. Look forward to FFX because of its similarities to VIII or 3. Be wary of FFX because of its similarities to VIII. If, in the mind of a Science Gamer, the sequel to a disappointing game is innocent until proven guilty, then that sequel would be guilty until proven innocent to a Faith Gamer. Unfortunately, Faith Gamers tend to be extremely faithful at times, and devolve into the dreaded fanboy.

When a magazine gives a game, one they already decided they like, a lower score, they are the first to complain. Why? Because Science Gamers have to play the game and decide what score it deserves, while fanboy Faith Gamers don't need two seconds with a game to decide it's "rightful score". Faith Gamers are also occasionally burnt by their beloved companies. But don't you worry, because 100% fanboys will still think that that company is the best

thing since sliced bread(everyone makes mistakes, right?). A Faith Gamer allows his natural biases to lead him. Contrary to what you may have heard, biases are not completely bad (and they're not completely good, either). Think for a minute how your biases are formed.

Go to a dairy store, and look at the ice cream selection. You may not know exactly what you want, but you sure as hell know what you don't. Don't like the looks of that new chocolate flavor? Why? Because you have had chocolate before, in one form or another, and it just didn't tickle your fancy. Faith Gamers think no more of judging games than of judging ice cream. The difference is that no one is yelling at them for pre-judging some ice cream. There is a chance; however, that you might have liked that chocolate ice cream. So what do you do? You ask for one of those small spoons of ice cream. Faith gamers can sometimes be up to 99% percent sure they will like/dislike something based on past experiences or the opinions of a trusted person, but there is always that 1%. That's why the best advice I can give both Science and Faith gamers is to try before you buy (Whenever possible of course).

Of course there are roughly two sides to each type of gamer. The anticipation side and the review side. You could have a person who refuses to pre-judge a game, but when it comes out, turns to a trusted reviewer. You could also have a person who draws their own inferences towards an unreleased game, only to turn to an "un-biased" publication for the "Ultimate Judgment". Truth is, there are very few 100% percent Science Gamers and very few 100% Faith Gamers (OK, so maybe there are quite a few fanboys running around). Pretty much everyone is a hodgepodge of these two groups, most of the time with a dominant side and a recessive side.

If you read this article hoping I would side with one group, I'm sorry to disappoint you. The more you think about it, the more you realize there is no right answer. You certainly shouldn't be a 100% Science Gamer or 100% Faith Gamer. In fact, a combination of beliefs that are exactly half Faith and half Science probably isn't the best either. Best yet, though, respect other's opinions as views you simply can't comprehend.

Best Regards,
Craig A. Knauff



Got something to say and nowhere else to say it? Send it to us at partingshot@gamemagazine.com, and if you're really lucky (and have been a good little boy or girl) we may actually print it.