

Sega Dreamcast

The Complete Manual



Classic games, hardware, developers



Sega Dreamcast The Complete Manual Contents



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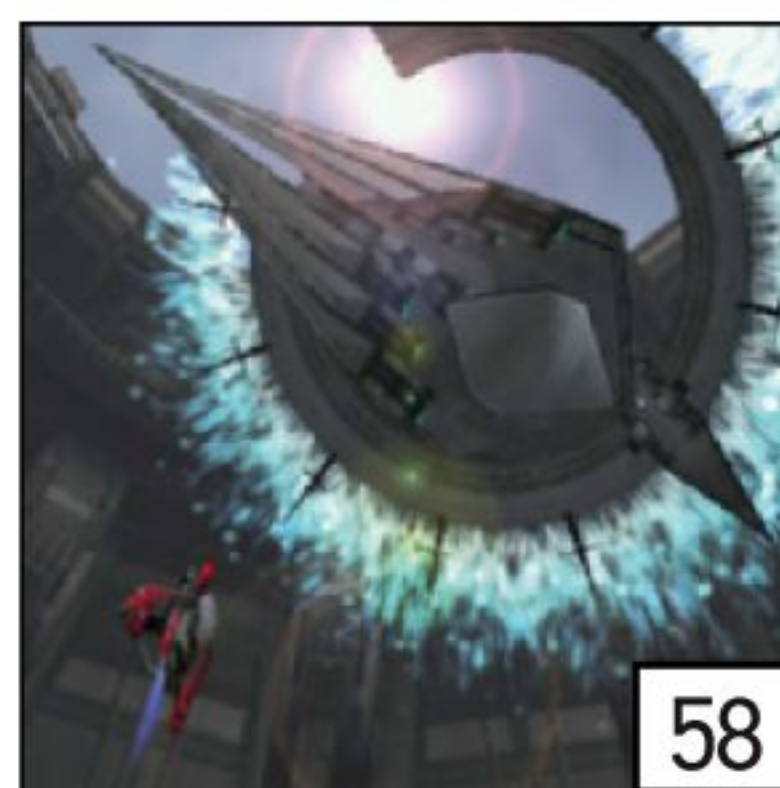
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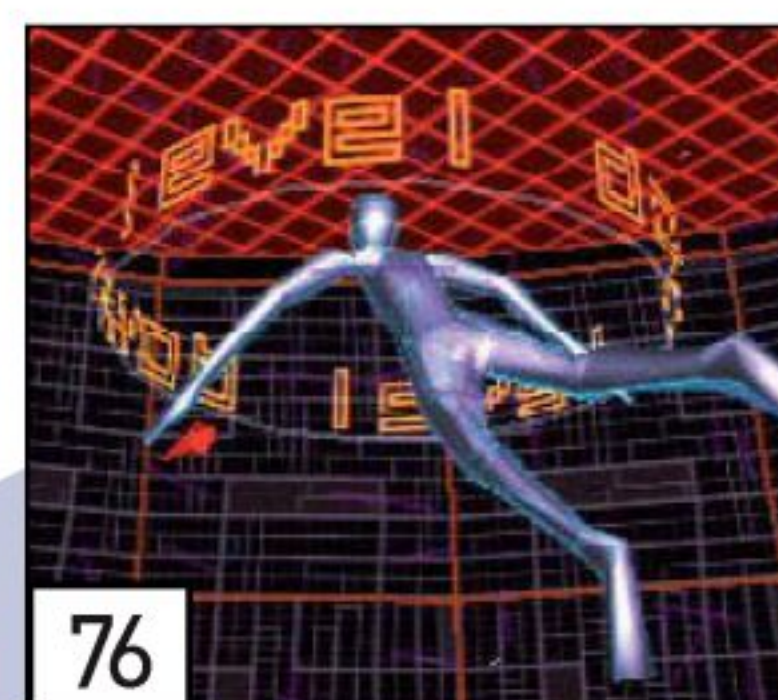
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RETROINSPECTION

DREAMCAST





A BRIDGE TOO FAR OR MISUNDERSTOOD MASTERPIECE? WHATEVER YOUR OPINION ON SEGA'S FINAL FORAY INTO THE VIDEOGAME HARDWARE SCENE, THERE'S NO DENYING THAT THE DREAMCAST IS WORTHY OF A SECOND LOOK. JOIN LIFELONG SEGA FANBOY DAMIEN MCFERRAN AS HE TEARFULLY REVISITS ONE OF THE INDUSTRY'S MOST UNDERRATED CONTENDERS

Year released: 1998 (Japan), 1999 (US/Europe)

Original price: £200 (UK)

Buy it now for: £105+

Associated magazines: DC-UK, Official Dreamcast Magazine

Why the Dreamcast was great... Sega's 128-bit console promised arcade-perfect gaming and the ability to go online for under £200. A flood of Sega classics followed and although Sony's PS2 was technically superior it took a while for it to catch up in terms of quality games.

Sega's Dreamcast holds a special place in the history of home videogame entertainment. It was an innovative beast, being the first 128-bit home console to offer online connectivity out of the box and setting the modern trend for sourcing internal components from PC manufacturers. It also proved to be Sega's last entry in the notoriously difficult hardware development race and brought an end to the days when arcade conversions sold consoles. Released in 1998 the ill-fated machine would be culled just three years later by a Sega undergoing seismic internal restructuring that would ultimately see the company emerge as one of the world's leading third-party software publishers.

The Dreamcast enjoyed a somewhat convoluted genesis. Back in the late-Nineties, Sega was still smarting from dismal hardware disasters such as the Mega-CD and 32X, and its Saturn console was losing the 32-bit war against Sony's PlayStation. As is usually the case when companies are against the wall, cracks began to appear inside Sega's corporate architecture. Newly appointed Sega of Japan president Shoichiro Irimajiri decided that the company's internal hardware development division was firing blanks and was determined to look elsewhere for the talent to create a new machine. This was not an entirely new stance; as early as 1995 there were rumours that the Japanese company would team up with aerospace firm Lockheed Martin to develop a new graphics processing unit (GPU), and while this proposed union came to nothing it set the wheels in motion for further excursions abroad in search of new hardware partners.

Around 1997 Irimajiri decided to enlist the services of Tatsuo Yamamoto from IBM Austin to work on a new hardware project. The idea was that the team would operate externally and therefore be unhampered by the internal politics that were pervading Sega's Japanese HQ at the time. Unsurprisingly, when Hideki Sato – head of hardware development at Sega Japan – caught wind of this he was less than happy and made it clear that any technical production should happen within the walls of Sega's Japanese HQ. This resulted in two different teams working in secrecy on two different prototypes in two different parts of the world.

'Black Belt' was the original codename given to the machine being constructed in the US, which was based around 3dfx Interactive's Voodoo 2 graphics technology. The Japanese counterpart was initially known as 'White Belt' (later 'Katana') and made use of NEC/VideoLogic's PowerVR2 chip. Both machines utilised 'off the shelf' central processors, with the American team picking the IBM/Motorola PowerPC 603e and their Japanese competitors favouring Hitachi's SH4. Ironically, despite Irimajiri's bold move of outsourcing development, it was Sato's team that ultimately won in the end with the 'Katana' prototype being selected as the basis



» Yukawa Hidekazu's tortured cameo in the *Shenmue* demo ended up being prophetic in ways Sega possibly didn't imagine.

INSTANT EXPERT

The PAL Dreamcast came with a lowly 33kps modem, but the US machine boasted a faster 56kps variant. Both were later superseded by a broadband adapter.

Sega never officially released the light gun peripheral in the US amid fears about the negative perception of gun crime at the time.

The rather limp UK advertising campaign didn't feature any videogame footage at all, instead relying on seemingly unconnected imagery and the vocal talents of Robbie Williams.

There is no reset button on the machine; instead users must press all the fascia buttons and the start button at the same time to return to the boot menu.

The Hong Kong/Asian edition of the machine did not ship with a modem; in its place was an empty, modem-shaped piece of plastic.

Sega had originally intended to place 8MB of RAM in the console, but it had to up this to 16MB when it found that graphical memory demands were higher than expected.

Shenmue is one of the few Dreamcast games to sell over a million units, yet its commercial performance was well short of expectations and the expensive project failed to actually generate a profit.

In Japan and the US the Dreamcast swirl is orange, but it had to be changed to blue in Europe due to a German company using the exact same logo.

In an attempt to battle the PS2, Sega Europe started bundling a DVD player with the Dreamcast for the same price as Sony's machine. The play wasn't a success.

Sega's final Dreamcast game was 2004's *Puyo Pop Fever*.

“SEGA'S DREAMCAST WAS AN INNOVATIVE BEAST THAT CONTINUES TO HOLD A SPECIAL PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF HOME VIDEOGAME ENTERTAINMENT”

DREAMCAST

ADVERTS

Now regarded as one of the most inventive and amusing advertising campaigns in videogame history, Sega of Japan's Dreamcast promotions were refreshingly self-deprecating. They featured real-life Sega managing director Yukawa Hidekazu getting in to all kinds of unpleasant situations as he dutifully attempted to make the fledgling console a success. The 30-second advertisements proved that not only did Sega have a sense of humour, but it was also willing to admit it had made mistakes with past hardware and that the Dreamcast represented a fresh start. The campaign was a tremendous success with Japanese audiences and Hidekazu became a star overnight; scenes from the adverts were plastered over the packaging of promotional consoles and the humble managing director even featured in the *What's Shenmue?* demo disc – sitting in a warehouse packed with unsold Dreamcast



» Sega MD Yukawa Hidekazu and president Shoichiro Irimajiri hawk Dreamcasts on launch day.

for the new machine (naturally, rumours abound that Irimajiri's move was merely a bluff in order to give the Japanese hardware division a much-needed kick up the backside). A disgruntled 3dfx promptly sued for breach of contract, claiming that documents had been signed that stated that Sega would use its technology in the proposed 'Black Belt' concept for the new console (the first version of Metropolis Street Racer started development for the 'Black Belt' and Bizarre Creations even had a prototype of this hardware). The two projects, which had been kept top secret up until this point, were made known to the world thanks to 3dfx's lawsuit against both Sega and PowerVR2 manufacturer NEC. The former was reportedly furious about having its dirty washing aired so publicly and the legal impasse would later have to be settled out of court for an undisclosed sum. Needless to say, it marked an inauspicious start for the life of the new super console.

With the technology decided upon, the next step was to give the new project a name. With Sega's stock pitifully low, the company was well aware that any new machine would have to represent a new beginning and distance itself from the tainted public perception created by the poorly performing Saturn. To the Sega management, this meant one thing – completely remove the Sega name from the console and establish a new gaming 'brand' in the same way Sony

“SEGA PROVED HOW SERIOUS IT WAS ABOUT THE DREAMCAST... AS AROUND \$500 MILLION WAS EARMARKED FOR THE DREAMCAST WORLDWIDE, WITH ROUGHLY HALF OF THAT FIGURE BEING SPENT ON CREATING THE HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE”

» Capcom provided sterling support for the Dreamcast. If you were a fighting game fan and owned the machine, then you were very happy indeed.



had done with the successful PlayStation. According to reports, over 5,000 different names were considered, with the positive-sounding 'Dreamcast' winning out. A combination of 'dream' and 'cast' – as in the way a magician would cast a spell – this pleasant moniker hinted at the expanded connectivity the system would eventually bring to the home via its online services. Thankfully for fanboys, Irimajiri's management team would later wisely relent and permit the Sega logo to be reinstated to the console's outer casing.

Internally the new system was a marvel of cost cutting, 'off the shelf' componentry – Sega had certainly learnt valuable lessons

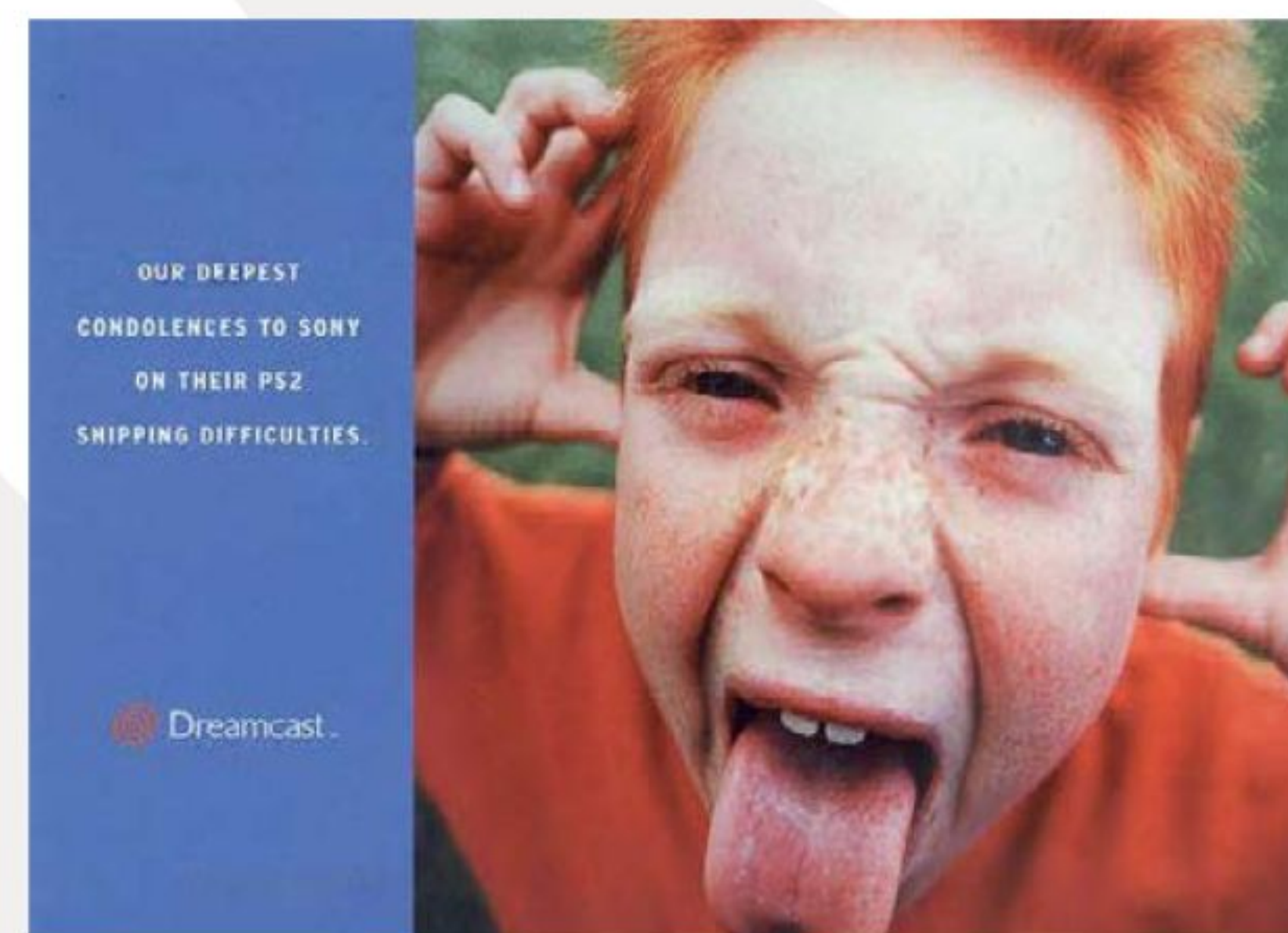
» Sega Japan's head of hardware development Hideki Sato.



from the failure of the Saturn. The Dreamcast's 32-bit predecessor was badly hampered by high production costs and the complex nature of the hardware made it difficult for programmers to get the most out of the system. With Dreamcast, Sega made sure the console was cheap to manufacture by using parts more commonly associated with PCs. The motherboard was a masterpiece of clean, uncluttered design and compatibility, with Microsoft's Windows CE operating system meaning that development would be a potentially pain-free exercise (although it should be noted that in the long term, programmers favoured Sega's own development tools over Microsoft's). In order to keep costs down, the decision was made not to include a DVD drive, as the technology was still quite expensive at the time. Instead, Sega used its own proprietary GD-ROM format, which could store a gigabyte of data. Not including DVD compatibility would later prove to be a costly mistake.

If proof is needed to ascertain how serious Sega was about the new machine, one only has to look at the amount of money involved in designing, creating and marketing the console. Around \$500 million was earmarked for the Dreamcast worldwide, with roughly half of that figure being spent on creating the hardware and software. The rest was splashed on promoting the machine all over the globe. Irimajiri, who found fame and fortune in the automotive industry with Honda, jokingly commented a few months before the Japanese release that the figures baffled him – car manufacturers would spend roughly the same amount on creating a new automobile, yet here was Sega throwing millions at the production of a diminutive box that sits under your TV. Nevertheless, Sega's Japanese president was well aware that this was the amount of capital it took to get a new machine on the shelves and into the consciousness of the consumer. The company knew that it would take something special to regain market share from the dominant Sony. "We have the strength of a beaten company," Sega's PR guru Yasushi Akimoto commented at the time. But for all this bravado, the new hardware launch was undoubtedly a huge gamble. The poor performance of the Saturn had pushed Sega into the red, and even before the Dreamcast hit store shelves in Japan the distressed firm had posted a shocking 75 per cent drop in half-year profits. With such a massive amount of money being devoted to doing battle in the console arena once more, the top brass at Sega knew that this could potentially be the last throw of the dice.

Nevertheless, as the console's Japanese launch grew ever closer there was a tangible sense of confidence in the Sega camp. Consumer interest was high and retailers reported that strong pre-orders were expected. However, this optimism was knocked slightly when NEC made the shock announcement that it was struggling with the manufacture of the PowerVR2 chipset. Issues were being encountered when the company mass produced the chip at the required 0.25 micron thickness (with one-in-three processors failing to meet production standards) and this invariably resulted in Sega



» Sega wasn't above taking cheap shots at its rivals, as this American advertisement proves.

COMMUNITY THE BEST DREAMCAST WEBSITES

PlanetDreamcast

www.planetdreamcast.com

Affiliated with the IGN network, this is a great resource for all things Dreamcast related. If you're digging around for some decent software reviews or just want to get yourself acquainted with the history of the console, this should be one of your first ports of call.



DC News

<http://dreamcast.dcemu.co.uk>

Predictably most modern Dreamcast sites are concerned with emulation, seeing as many high-spec PCs can now comfortably pretend to be Sega's 128-bit machine. This site is an intriguing snapshot of what is possible when amateur coders really put some effort in.



Dreamcast-Scene

www.dreamcast-scene.com

Another site with a heavy 'emu' bias (and we're not talking about that bird Rod Hull used to hang about with). However, there's lots of other interesting content on here too, as well as a nice community that is dedicated to keeping the memory of the machine alive.



Dreamcast Junkyard

<http://the-dreamcast-junkyard.blogspot.com>

A collection of (often-amusing) blog posts that deal with almost every aspect of the Dreamcast. Entertaining and passionate, it's also one of the few fan sites on the net that still gets regular updates and is well worth looking into.



KEEPING COOL

Due to the raw power contained within the console it was deemed necessary to fit a cooling fan to keep the internal components from overheating. Sega even employed unique heat sinks to keep the main CPU and GPU chips from getting too toasty. This bizarre setup was rumoured to use liquid to carry heat from the chips to the fan using metal pipes via the principle of 'convection circulation'. However, before you excitedly go opening up your PAL machines in order to gaze upon this remarkable feat of technical engineering, it's worth noting that it was sadly only utilised in Japanese launch consoles, and we've only just discovered from an ex-member of Sega's PR that the presence of liquid inside the pipes was actually true. Manufacturing improvements meant that main chips generated less heat and therefore the internal fan proved to be more than enough to keep things running smoothly.

having to halt Japanese pre-orders (which had reached around 80,000 by this stage) and reduce the projected number of units available at launch from 500,000 to 150,000. To make matters worse, several key titles such as *Sega Rally Championship 2* and *Sonic Adventure* were also hit by development delays.

The machine was finally launched in Japan on 27 November 1998 and the 150,000 available units promptly sold out before the day was over. In an eerie precedent to the Saturn launch four years earlier, the only title really worth bothering with on day one was *Virtua Fighter 3: Team Battle*. Unperturbed by the PowerVR2 production fiasco, Sega confidently predicted that it would sell half-a-million units by March 1999. When this target was missed and the news started to filter through that key software titles were failing to sell in the numbers expected (Capcom's stunning *Power Stone* was one high-profile commercial disaster, prompting a public apology from the developer, which wrongfully seemed to assume the end product wasn't up to scratch), those individuals inside the walls of Sega of Japan's boardroom started to worry. Prior to the Western launch the price of the Japanese console was reduced from ¥29,000 (£150) to ¥19,900 (£100), effectively removing all profit from hardware sales. The reduction had the desired effect and units started to sell in larger numbers, although this could have had something to do with the release of Namco's superlative *Soul Calibur*, which when confirmed as coming to Sega's 128-bit console caused a 17 per cent jump in the value of Sega's shares.

As the Dreamcast was struggling to maintain pace in its homeland, Sega's American and European divisions prepared to launch the console in their respective territories. The North American release occurred on 9 September 1999, with the



» *Shenmue* was arguably the most high-profile Dreamcast release and proved to many that the machine was a true next-generation proposition.

European debut taking place just over a month later. The US launch was an astonishing success with Sega struggling to meet the initial demand for the product. Half-a-million Dreamcast consoles found their way into US homes in the first two weeks alone – something the machine had failed to do in several months in Japan. The company proudly boasted that it made \$98 million on software and hardware sales thanks to the 9 September launch; by

anyone's standards it was an amazingly successful introduction and ranks as Sega's most successful hardware launch in the territory. In Europe the figures made for equally encouraging reading; by Christmas 1999 half-a-million units had been sold meaning that Sega Europe was six months ahead of the schedule it had set itself.

Given Sega's strong coin-op heritage, the Dreamcast unsurprisingly saw many arcade conversions during its life span. Shortly before the Japanese launch, Sega announced that it would be replacing its popular Model 3 arcade hardware with a new standard called NAOMI (New Arcade Operation Machine Idea). NAOMI and Dreamcast were essentially the same systems, with the former possessing twice as much RAM and four times as much sound memory. This meant that home conversions were more often than not exact replicas of what was seen in the arcade, and for the first time since the days of the Neo-Geo AES the term 'arcade perfect' actually meant what it said. A slew of Sega-produced arcade ports arrived including *Crazy Taxi*, *Outrigger*, *18 Wheeler*, *F355 Challenge*, *Dynamite Deka 2* and *Virtua Tennis*. Superb support also came from many leading Japanese arcade companies, most notably former Saturn ally Capcom, which not only released some excellent NAOMI titles (*Capcom Vs SNK*, *Marvel Vs Capcom 2* and *Project Justice* to name but three), but also



DREAMCAST

OTHER VERSIONS WHEN ONE MACHINE ISN'T ENOUGH

Divers 2000 CX-1

Shaped like Sonic's head, this all-in-one solution remains one of the most desirable pieces of Sega hardware. Bundled accessories included a keyboard, rumble pack and headset. It even had teleconference software and a remote for when you wanted to use it as a bog-standard TV.



Hello Kitty

Years before Nintendo cornered the female gamer market with the pink DS, Sega of Japan had been wooing young Japanese schoolgirls with this sickly sweet limited edition Dreamcast. Strictly limited to 2,000 units, many grown men hanker after this effeminate piece of hardware.



R7

The R7 was originally manufactured as a network console in pachinko parlours in Japan. Predictably many units have made it out 'into the wild' and into the hands of Sega collectors. The sleek black exterior reminds us of the Mega Drive, which is certainly no bad thing.



Treamcast

Not strictly an official hardware release, this Chinese modification was sold as a 'portable' solution for Dreamcast fans. Complete with a TFT screen and carry case, it offered incredible power on the move but unsurprisingly didn't trouble the established handhelds of the era.



seemed to release a new 2D fighter on an almost weekly basis, with titles like *Street Fighter III*, *Darkstalkers/Vampire Chronicle* and *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure* proving that Capcom was as serious about standing by the Dreamcast as it had been with the Saturn. Capcom offered another title for Sega's machine, a game that was arguably more important than any of its available fighters. *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* instantly caused a large amount of buzz for Sega's system, mainly down to the fact that the series, until that time had been entirely Sony exclusive. The game was eventually ported to the PlayStation2 and even Nintendo's GameCube as *Code: Veronica X*, but many fans feel the Dreamcast original was far superior.

Unfortunately, consolidating further third-party support wasn't going to be easy. Companies like EA had been burnt by the failure of the Saturn and ignored the Dreamcast throughout its life, choosing instead to stick with the far more profitable PlayStation (it was believed at the time that EA were offered favourable publishing

followed in the US and Europe but these failed to be a long-term solution to the problem.

Invariably, as sales began to diminish, more and more developers chose not to bring their products to the troubled console, and even those that had provided vital support began to lose interest. Namco – an essential partner and the company responsible for the system-defining *Soul Calibur* – dropped Dreamcast support almost as swiftly as it had taken it up. Therefore, throughout the life of the machine it fell to Sega to produce quality software, but while the company was undoubtedly adept at producing engaging coin-op experiences, it struggled to cater for a new audience of gamers that had been weaned on deeper, more feature-packed titles on the PlayStation. Sega's arcade ports were unquestionably arcade perfect, but in the eyes of many critics that was the problem – arcade machines are designed to entertain in short bursts and don't usually stand up to prolonged play within the home. Contemporary reviewers complained of lightweight coin-op ports and even the feature-rich world of *Shenmue* couldn't alter the often-erroneous perception that the Dreamcast was a machine packed with arcade titles that failed to keep your attention for more than a few hours.

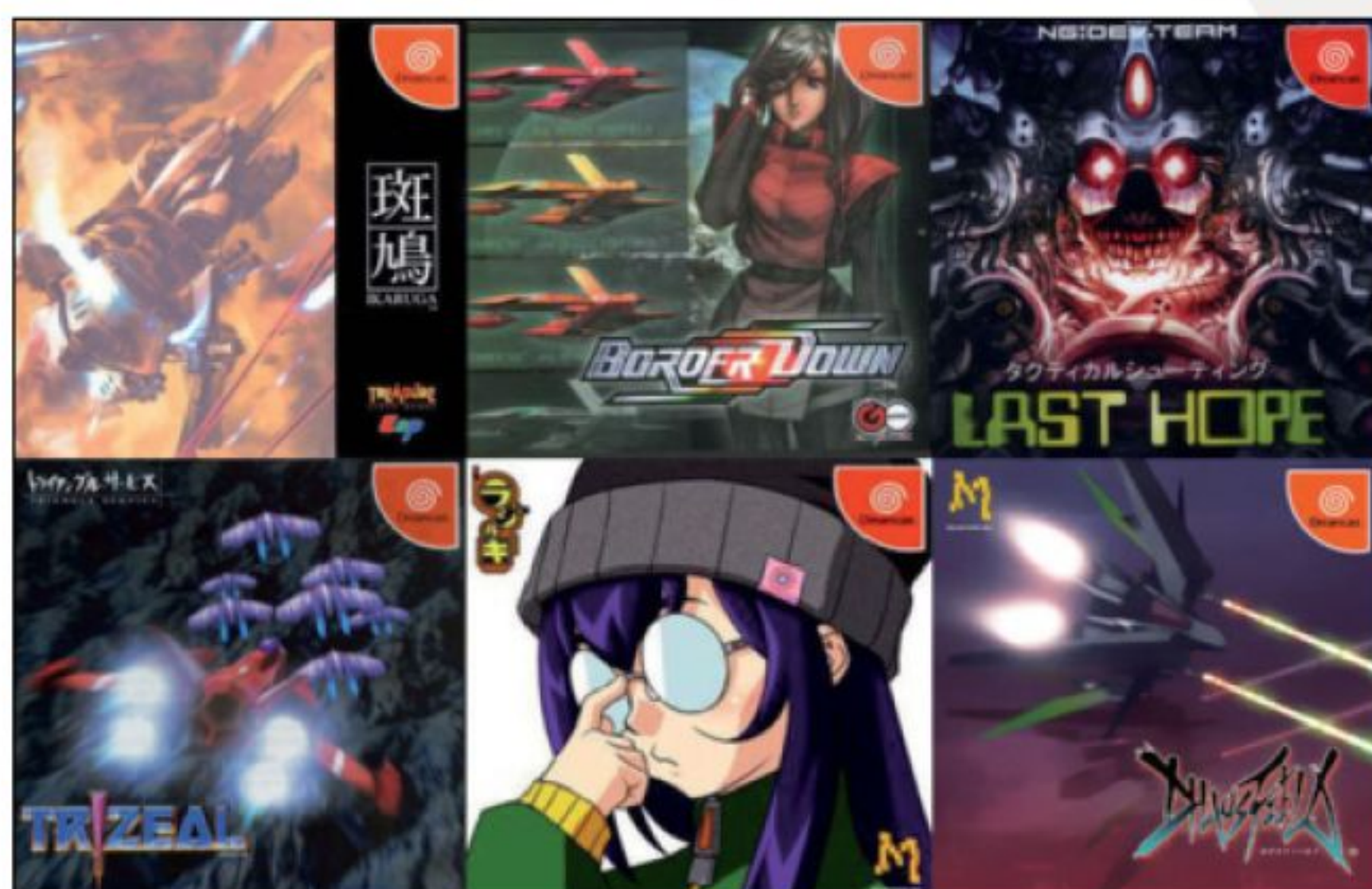
Dreamcast's ace in the hole – online connectivity – could have arrested such a sorry slide, but Sega never really managed to exploit this facet to its fullest potential. The company was unforgivably slow in getting it to the consumer and while the actual service was up and running from day one and boasted internet access and email connectivity it was let down by the software getting constantly delayed. When the promise of playing against 'six billion players' (a rather lofty boast made by Sega Europe, which seemingly assumed



» Small but perfectly formed – the Dreamcast VMU was a neat idea, but never really made the impact it should have done.

“THE THRILL OF PLAYING CRAZY TAXI IN THE ARCADE KNOWING FULL WELL THAT A PIXEL-PERFECT CONVERSION (AND NOT SOME CUT-DOWN PORT) WAS SET TO ARRIVE ON THE DREAMCAST IS AN EXPERIENCE GAMERS ARE UNLIKELY TO WITNESS AGAIN”

» These NAOMI-based shooters kept the console alive long after Sega had forgotten about it. Clockwise from top left: *Ikaruga*, *Border Down*, *Last Hope*, *Chaos Field*, *Radiggy*, *Trizeal*.



terms on the PlayStation2 if they didn't support the Dreamcast). Others adopted a cautious 'wait and see' policy towards the machine, commenting that they would review their stance when they saw some solid sales figures came through. Sadly, as positive as the Western launches had been, Sega ultimately struggled to keep the momentum for their console going. With Sony's PlayStation 2 looming menacingly on the horizon many gamers decided to stick with their current machine rather than upgrade early to the Dreamcast, and as a result the interest started to wane. Price cuts, like the one witnessed so early on in Japan, predictably



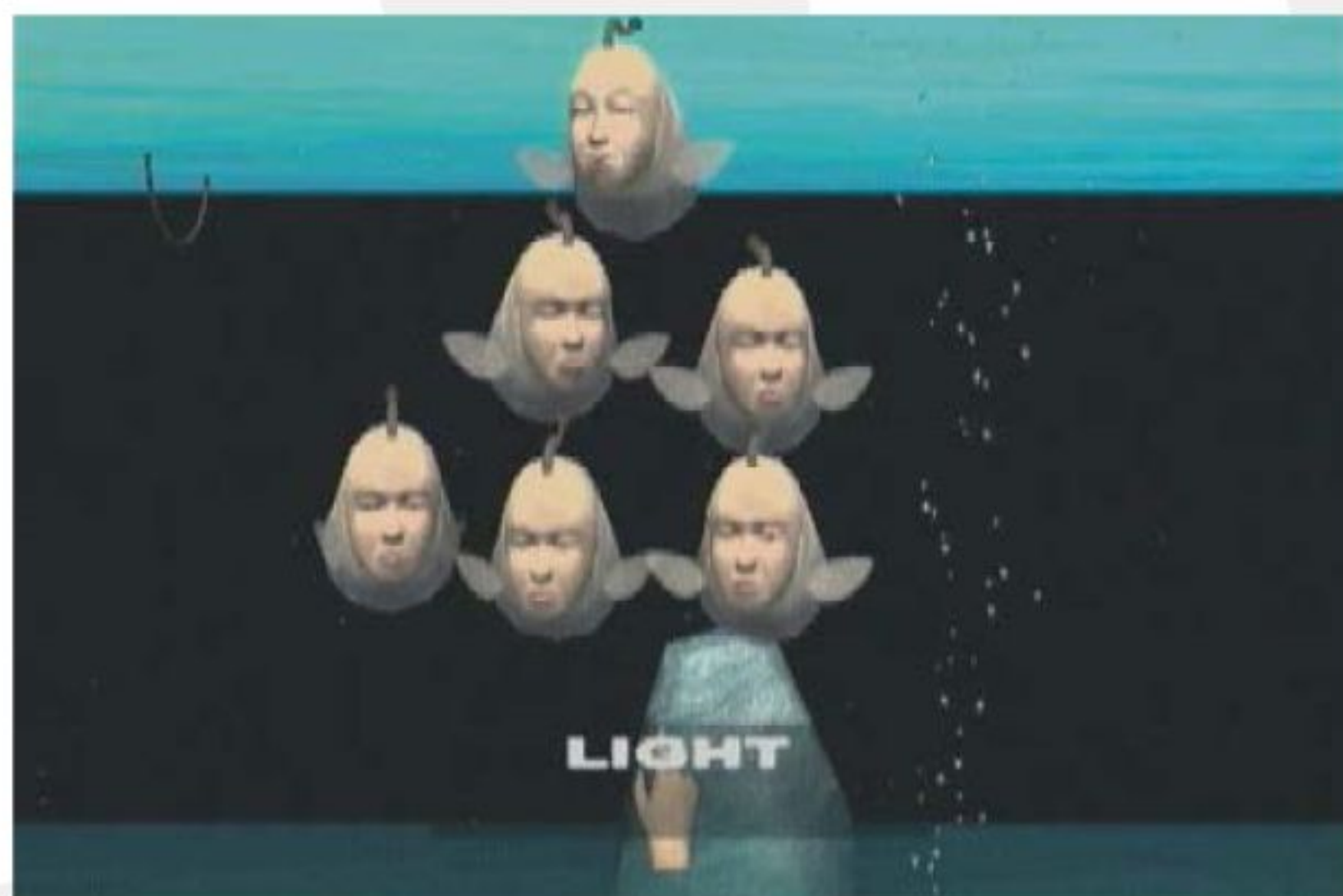
» Predating the Wii by a fair few years, the motion-sensitive maracas for *Samba De Amigo* brought joy to many a Sega fan – it's a shame the PAL release was so cripplingly limited.



» The proposed Dreamcast Zip drive – sadly it never made it onto the shelves.

that everyone on the face of the planet would buy a machine) finally came to fruition, it was found to be quite underwhelming due to the slow speed of the bundled modem.

When the PlayStation 2 launched in March 2000 after a series of troublesome delays, it became obvious that the writing was on the wall for Sega's 128-bit challenger. Ironically, the PS2's initial line-up of software was arguably inferior to what was being released on the Dreamcast at the time, but Sony's brand was so strong it sold on the name alone. In the US, the Dreamcast was given a shot in the arm as Sega announced that it would grant a \$150 rebate – basically the price of a Dreamcast system – to anyone who signed up to the SegaNet service for two years. Another price cut followed and



» The unique (not to mention disturbing) *Seaman* made use of the Dreamcast microphone.



» The NAOMI arcade hardware was essentially a Dreamcast with more memory

these two manoeuvres resulted in an astonishing 156 per cent rise in hardware sales. However, it's always worth looking at the bigger picture when quoting numbers like these; the Dreamcast still only held around 15 per cent of the US gaming market, with Sony and Nintendo out in front with 50 per cent and 35 per cent respectively.

Sega was in dire financial straits before the Dreamcast arrived, but its disappointing performance meant the company was in even more trouble. It clearly couldn't continue and although the announcement in 2001 that Sega would be discontinuing Dreamcast production and moving into third-party publishing came as a shock to hardcore fans, most industry experts had been predicting the move for months beforehand. Sega was quick to point out that games were still in development for the Dreamcast, but for all intents and purposes the Japanese firm had taken its eye off the struggling system and was looking very much to the future.

However, the Dreamcast's connection with NAOMI proved to be a crucial lifeline. The arcade system was incredibly popular and Japanese coin-op developers, finding their earnings diminishing as the industry began to shrink, gladly took up the low-cost solution that NAOMI provided. Over the next few years these companies would keep the memory of the Dreamcast alive with a series of shooting titles that, after successful arcade runs were granted small-scale domestic releases. Titles such as *Radiggy*, *Trizeal*, *Under Defeat* and *Trigger Heart Exelica* all found their way onto the system, and G.rev's *Border Down* was so highly sought after that it recently received a welcome reprint. Homebrew shooter *Last Hope* was released in 2007 and is (at the time of writing, at least) the last Dreamcast game to receive moderate media attention.

Pinpointing exactly why the Dreamcast failed is trickier than you might imagine. Was it lack of third-party support? Overreliance on arcade conversions? Poor support of online services that could have set it apart from its rivals? Lack of a DVD drive? The impending release of the PS2? Poor marketing in key territories? The most likely answer is that it was a combination of all these factors, but when dissecting the troubled history of the console it's easy to overlook just how potent a gaming platform it was. The thrill of playing *Crazy Taxi* in the arcade knowing full well that a pixel-perfect conversion (and not some cut-down port) was set to arrive on the Dreamcast is an experience gamers are unlikely to witness again.

Rudimentary as it was, online play with a home console was nothing short of revolutionary at the time, and Sega basically offered access to the internet for under £200 – something that PCs of that era were asking an awful lot more for. With titles of the calibre of *Rez*, *Jet Set Radio*, *Daytona USA*, *Dead Or Alive 2*, *House Of The Dead 2* and *Skies Of Arcadia*, the Dreamcast was unquestionably heaven for videogamers that appreciated the finer things in life. Sadly, out of that ludicrous projected number of 'six billion' potential players that Sega spoke about, the message only seemed to get through to a lucky few.

EVERYTHING BUT THE KITCHEN SINK

The range of peripherals available for the Dreamcast is nothing short of staggering. As well as the usual arcade stick controllers and dedicated 'fighting type' joypads there was an updated version of the Saturn's Twin Stick controller (for mecha-fighter *Virtual On*), a steering wheel, rumble pack, keyboard, fishing rod, camera, microphone and motion-sensitive maracas (for *Samba De Amigo*, naturally). Possibly the best-known addition to the Dreamcast stable was the Visual Memory Unit (VMU for short), which stored saved game data and acted like a small console when separated from the Dreamcast itself. Sega had audacious plans for this glorified memory card (as did Sony with its PocketStation), but battery life wasn't perhaps as good as it could have been and anyone who has owned a Dreamcast will be all too aware of the painfully annoying beeping tone a battery-less VMU makes whenever the console is switched on.



» People may have questioned the design of the Dreamcast but it could have been much worse, as these prototypes attest



DREAMCAST

PERFECT TEN GAMES

There are far, far too many great Dreamcast games, so here's a quick roll call of the other titles that just missed our list. *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*, *Sega Marine Fishing*, *Jet Set Radio*, *Border Down*, *Power Stone 2*, *Castle of Shikigami II*, *Crazy Taxi* and *Cosmic Smash*. So many amazing games, so little space



01

SOUL CALIBUR

- » RELEASED: 2000
- » PUBLISHED BY: NAMCO
- » CREATED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: PAC-MAN

01 While *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* is easily the superior fighter, we've given the beat-'em-up slot to *Soul Calibur* because Namco went above and beyond the call of duty with its actual conversion. Unlike Capcom's *3rd Strike*, *Soul Calibur* offers all the amazing playability and gameplay of the arcade original, but enhances it by delivering a truly staggering additional mode that increases the longevity no end. As well as delivering some truly spectacular visuals, *Soul Calibur* upped the ante on the Dreamcast by offering a whole host of console-exclusive extras including the fantastic Mission mode and more unlockables than you could imagine. Little wonder then that it went on to sell over a million copies.

SAMBA DE AMIGO

- » RELEASED: 2000
- » PUBLISHED BY: SEGA
- » CREATED BY: SONIC TEAM
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: NIGHTS INTO DREAMS

02 The Dreamcast featured an astonishing range of peripherals during its release, but none could match the sheer magnificence of *Samba De Amigo*. Essentially a port of the popular arcade game and coming with a set of maracas, *Samba De Amigo* is an excellent rhythm-action game that had players shaking the maracas in a frenzy, as they matched the on-screen prompts. With its gaudy visuals and brilliant tunes that ranged from Quincy Jones' *Soul Bossa Nova*, to a bizarre take on A-Ha's *Take On Me*, *Samba De Amigo* proved utterly essential, even if the original package saw little change from 100 notes. Fans may wish to seek out the Japanese-only add-on *Samba De Amigo Version 2000*.



02

RESIDENT EVIL CODE: VERONICA

- » RELEASED: 2000
- » PUBLISHED BY: EIDOS
- » CREATED BY: CAPCOM
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: POWERSTONE

03 Capcom's fourth *Resident Evil* title caused quite a stir on its release. Mainly because it was the first time the franchise wouldn't be debuting on a Sony console, but also because it was the first game in the series to use proper 3D backgrounds. Spread over two discs and focusing on the exploits of Claire and Chris Redfield, *Veronica* moves away from Raccoon City and focuses on a small island owned by the Umbrella Corporation. Granted, its gameplay is almost identical to the original *Resident Evil*, but it's saved thanks to far more impactful cut-scenes and a shockingly good storyline.

IKARUGA

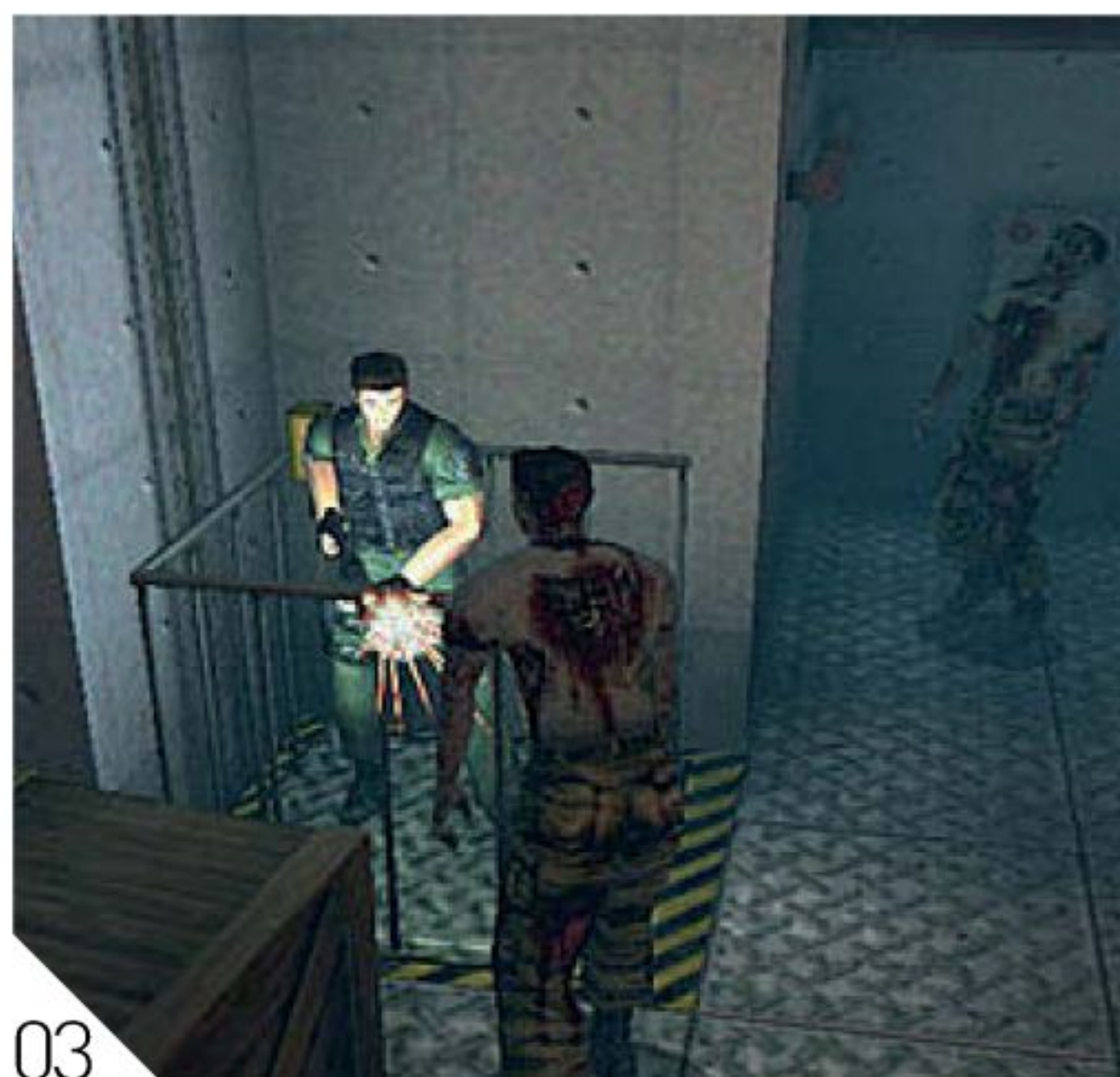
- » RELEASED: 2002
- » PUBLISHED BY: ESP SOFTWARE
- » CREATED BY: TREASURE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: GUNSTAR HEROES

04 There's a slew of great shoot-'em-ups on the Dreamcast, but not one of them can touch the sheer elegance of *Ikaruga*. The first of many 'last ever' Dreamcast releases, *Ikaruga* expanded on the duality themes that Treasure explored with *Silhouette Mirage* by having your ship flip between two polarities. While you could absorb bullets that were the same colour as your ship, enemies succumbed quicker to opposing coloured fire, which presented a superb risk-and-reward system. Add in its complex chain system and Treasure proved that when it comes to high-quality shooters, its pretty much untouchable.

METROPOLIS STREET RACER

- » RELEASED: 2000
- » PUBLISHED BY: SEGA
- » CREATED BY: BIZARRE CREATIONS
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED

05 We recently sung *MSR*'s praises in our top 25 racers, but this innovative racer is so special we're going to mention it again. Part simulator, part arcade racer, *Metropolis Street Racer* was essentially the forefather to the now-popular *Project Gotham Racing*, and delivered a driving experience that few other games of the time could match. With its excellent handling, well-constructed tracks and inventive Kudos system, *MSR* was a welcome alternative to Sega's hardcore racers that were available on its system and proved that Dreamcast owners had little need for Sony's *Gran Turismo*.



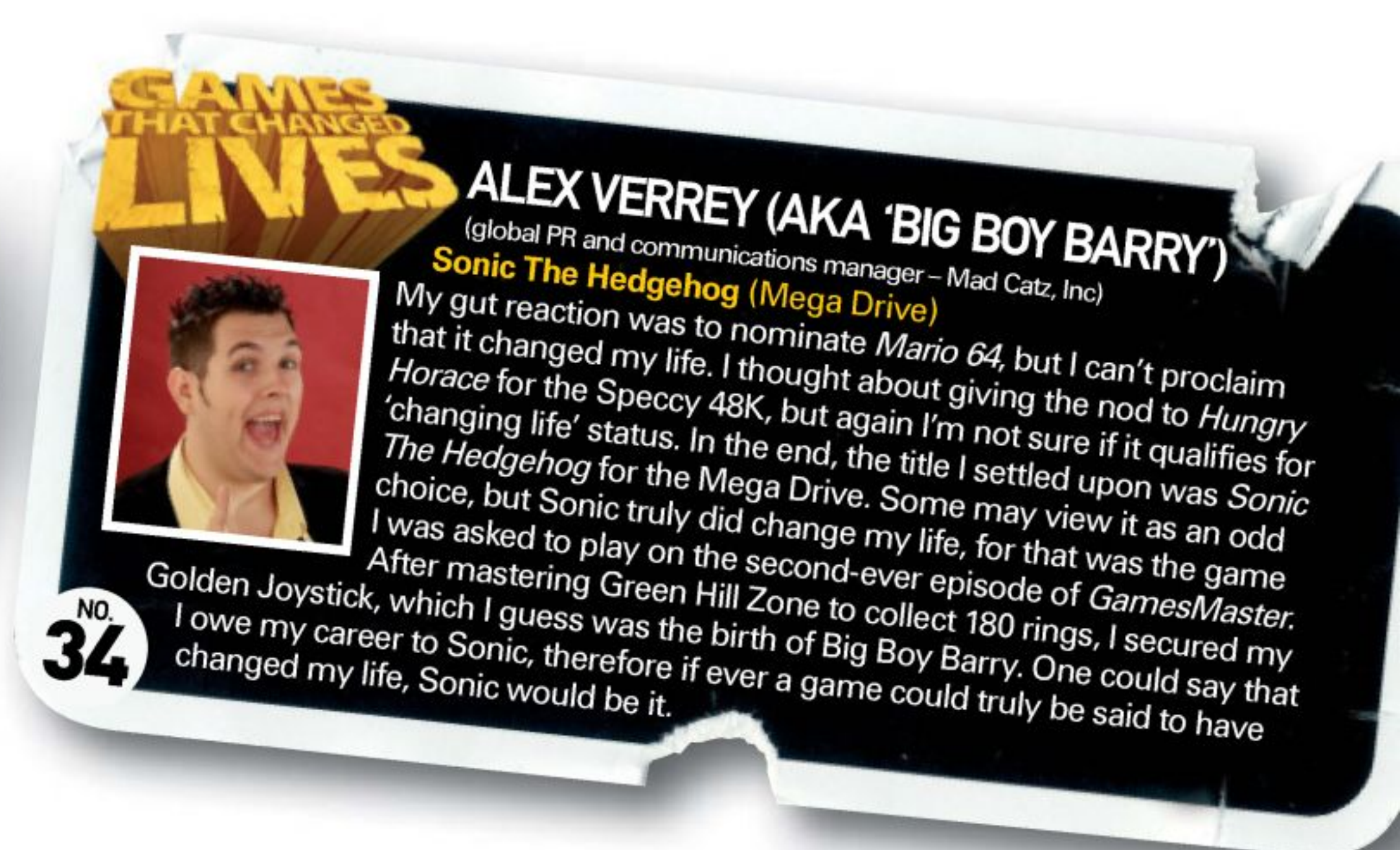
03



04



05



06

SHENMUE I & II

- » **RELEASED:** 1999, 2001
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- » **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SPACE HARRIER

06 Okay, so we're cheating here, but you really can't talk about Yu Suzuki's highly acclaimed game without including its incredible sequel. Greatly revered and reviled in equal measures, the *Shenmue* franchise cost Sega millions to make, while *Shenmue II* remains its most requested game. Huge in scope and with an incredibly complex narrative – that annoyingly, has yet to be completed – the *Shenmue* franchise delivered an experience that no other game of the time was able to match. After all, here was a series that not only allowed you to visit an arcade and play many of Yu Suzuki's past hits, but was even able to make menial tasks like working enjoyable.



07

SEAMAN

- » **RELEASED:** 1999
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- » **CREATED BY:** VIVARIUM
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ODAMA

07 Sega's *Seaman* isn't really a game as such, but that doesn't mean that you should miss out on this incredibly clever piece of software. Narrated by Leonard Nimoy, *Seaman* requires you to raise the titular character from an egg to a fully grown adult, and saw you raising and coaxing the creature via Sega's Microphone peripheral. Despite never receiving a UK release, we urge you to track down the US version and a boot disc so that you can experience this utterly bizarre creation for yourself. If you need further insight into *Seaman*'s strange world visit Lofarius's current diary at www.rlmukforum.com/index.php?showtopic=179577.



08

PHANTASY STAR ONLINE

- » **RELEASED:** 2000
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- » **CREATED BY:** SONIC TEAM
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SONIC ADVENTURE

08 Falling asleep at your keyboard was a common experience in *Phantasy Star Online*. It wasn't due to it being boring, but because it was so damn addictive. Never mind that level grinding was a chore or that phone bills could constantly run into three-digit numbers, Sonic Team had created a world that was so imaginative you couldn't stay away from it. Incredibly basic when compared to recent offerings like *World Of Warcraft*, it's easy to forget what an impact it made on its release and just how successfully Sonic Team had evolved the franchise from its RPG roots.



09

SKIES OF ARCADIA

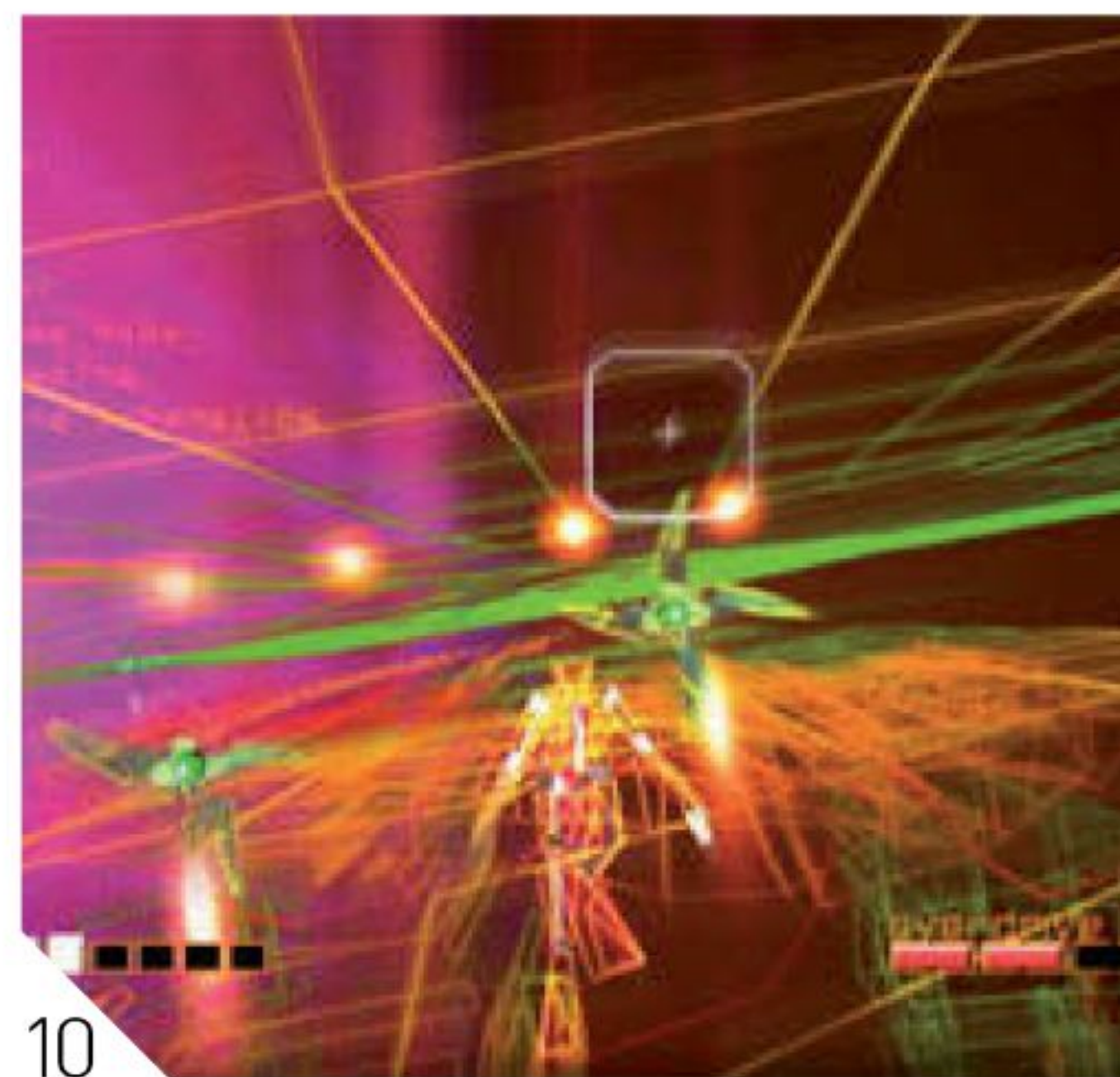
- » **RELEASED:** 2000
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- » **CREATED BY:** OVERWORKS
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHINOBI

09 We absolutely adore *Skies Of Arcadia*. The score is sweeping and magnificent, the world you explore is incredibly huge and full of mystery. Add to this the fact that each and every character you meet is larger than life in a way that only the best RPGs can manage, and you have yourself a beautifully immersive title. Following the story of a young air pirate called Vyse, *Skies Of Arcadia* is a wondrous adventure that's set in a Jules Verne-inspired world where islands float in the sky and flying ships are the main form of travel. While *Skies Of Arcadia* follows the well-trodden path of many other games in the genre, it has been put together with so much passion and love that you can't help but fall in love with it.

REZ

- » **RELEASED:** 2001
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- » **CREATED BY:** UNITED GAME ARTISTS
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SEGA RALLY

10 Alright, so the frame rate is lower than its PS2 counterpart and the lack of built-in vibration hurts it somewhat, but there's no denying that *Rez* on the Dreamcast remains an utterly compelling experience. Arguably one of the greatest contenders for those many 'Are videogames art?' discussions, *Rez* pushes boundaries and mixes gameplay, sound and vision in a way that few other titles have been able to manage. Beautifully abstract and boasting the sort of creative gameplay that matches its truly astonishing aesthetics, *Rez* is just as much an experience as it is a game and is further testament to just how innovative and imaginative Sega once was. A truly stunning game that needs to be in every Dreamcast owner's collection.



10



DREAMCAST and the rest...

While the Dreamcast boasted some truly excellent arcade ports, there was plenty more to Sega's machine than just the latest Sega release. It's a truly wonderful machine and it makes us sad to think that it will probably remain Sega's last console

- 01 JET SET RADIO
- 02 POWER STONE
- 03 COSMIC SMASH
- 04 VIRTUA TENNIS
- 05 BANGAI-O
- 06 CRAZY TAXI
- 07 F355 CHALLENGE
- 08 STREET FIGHTER III: 3RD STRIKE
- 09 GAROU: MARK OF THE WOLVES
- 10 RE-VOLT
- 11 SKIES OF ARCADIA
- 12 GRANDIA II
- 13 CHUCHU ROCKET!
- 14 BOMBERMAN ONLINE
- 15 MARVEL VS CAPCOM 2: NEW AGE OF HEROES
- 16 SOUL CALIBUR
- 17 EVIL TWIN: CYPRIEN'S CHRONICLES
- 18 SPACE CHANNEL 5
- 19 SONIC ADVENTURE 2
- 20 VIRTUA FIGHTER 3TB
- 21 ECCO THE DOLPHIN: DEFENDER OF THE FUTURE
- 22 REZ
- 23 DOGA BOOGA
- 24 VIRTUAL ON: ORATORIO TANGRAM
- 25 PROPELLER ARENA
- 26 TOY COMMANDER
- 27 SHENMUE
- 28 CASTLE SHIKIGAMI 2
- 29 COOL COOL TOON
- 30 STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3
- 31 THE LAST BLADE 2
- 32 SAN FRANCISCO RUSH 2049
- 33 VAMPIRE CHRONICLE
- 34 MARS MATRIX
- 35 GIGA WING 2
- 36 POWER STONE 2
- 37 WORMS ARMAGEDDON
- 38 DEAD OR ALIVE 2
- 39 CANNON SPIKE
- 40 THE KING OF FIGHTERS: DREAM MATCH 1999
- 41 BORDER DOWN
- 42 ALIEN FRONT ONLINE
- 43 STUPID INVADERS
- 44 GUILTY GEAR X
- 45 PSYVARIAR 2
- 46 BLUE STINGER
- 47 JOJO'S BIZARRE ADVENTURE
- 48 TRIZEAL
- 49 FUR FIGHTERS
- 50 CAPCOM VS SNK
- 51 CHAOS FIELD
- 52 FIREPROWRESTLING D
- 53 WETRIX+
- 54 TRIGGERHEART EXELICA
- 55 IKARUGA
- 56 SONIC SHUFFLE
- 57 CONFIDENTIAL MISSION
- 58 THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD 2
- 59 SEGA BASS FISHING
- 60 SONIC ADVENTURE
- 61 FLOIGAN BROS
- 62 WACKY RACES
- 63 MORTAL KOMBAT GOLD
- 64 D2
- 65 ILLBLEED
- 66 PHANTASY STAR ONLINE
- 67 TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2
- 68 READY 2 RUMBLE BOXING
- 69 EVIL DEAD: HAIL TO THE KING
- 70 GAUNTLET LEGENDS
- 71 4X4 EVOLUTION
- 72 AEROWINGS
- 73 BUST-A-MOVE 4
- 74 VIRTUA STRIKER 2
- 75 DYNAMITE COP!
- 76 THE TYPING OF THE DEAD
- 77 GRAND THEFT AUTO 2
- 78 SILENT SCOPE
- 79 HEADHUNTER
- 80 NFL 2K2
- 81 HIDDEN & DANGEROUS
- 82 RESIDENT EVIL 3: NEMESIS
- 83 NHL 2K
- 84 QUAKE III ARENA
- 85 INCOMING
- 86 HYDRO THUNDER
- 87 FIGHTING FORCE 2





ANDY COOK

(art director at the Microprose UK Studio and lead artist on the Geoff Crammond F1 games)

Grand Prix II (PC)

I'd go to work each day not believing my luck at being paid to work on the best F1 game with artists as creative as those at Microprose and a developer as talented as Geoff Crammond. It was still a time when a major project could be created with a very small art team, encouraging us to turn our hands to many different areas. At the end of the project I really felt I'd made a very significant contribution, meaning that if I hadn't worked on it, it wouldn't have turned out the same. That's a level of job satisfaction I'd never achieved with any previous company and I knew I'd found my vocation.

NO. 35



DREAMCAST GALLERY



Power Stone Year Released: 1999



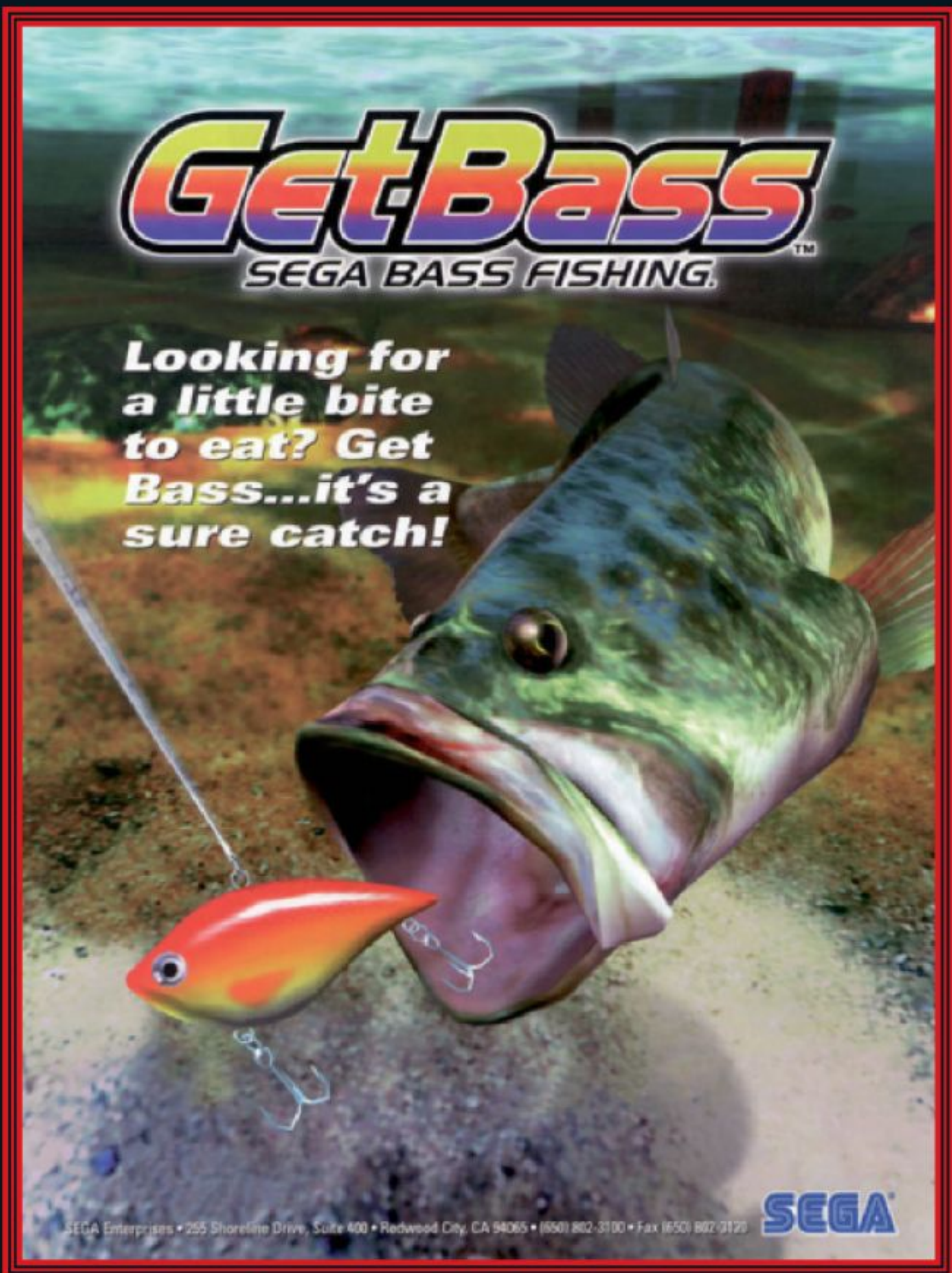
Crazy Taxi Year Released: 1999



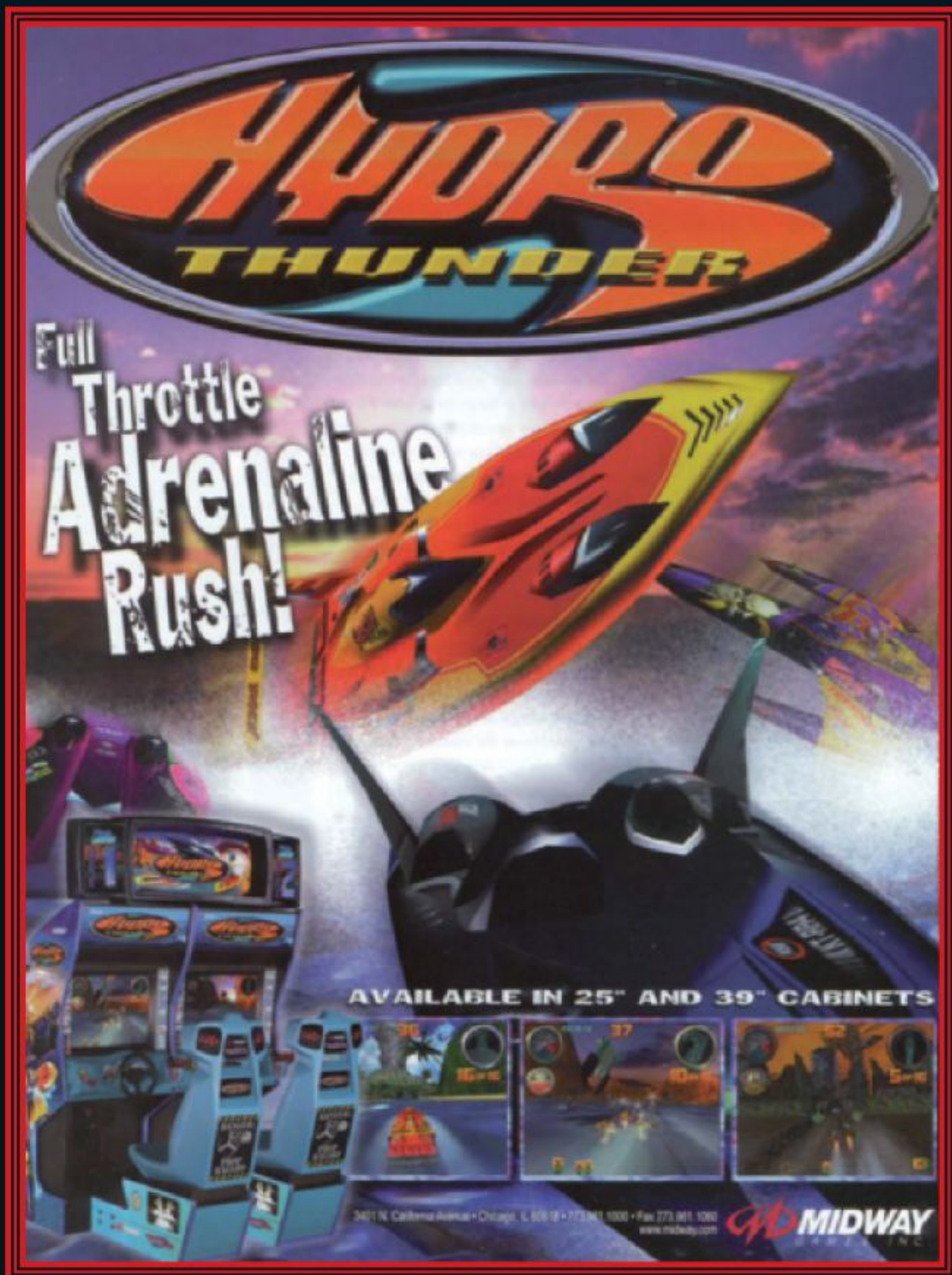
Cosmic Smash Year Released: 2001



Gauntlet Legends Year Released: 1998



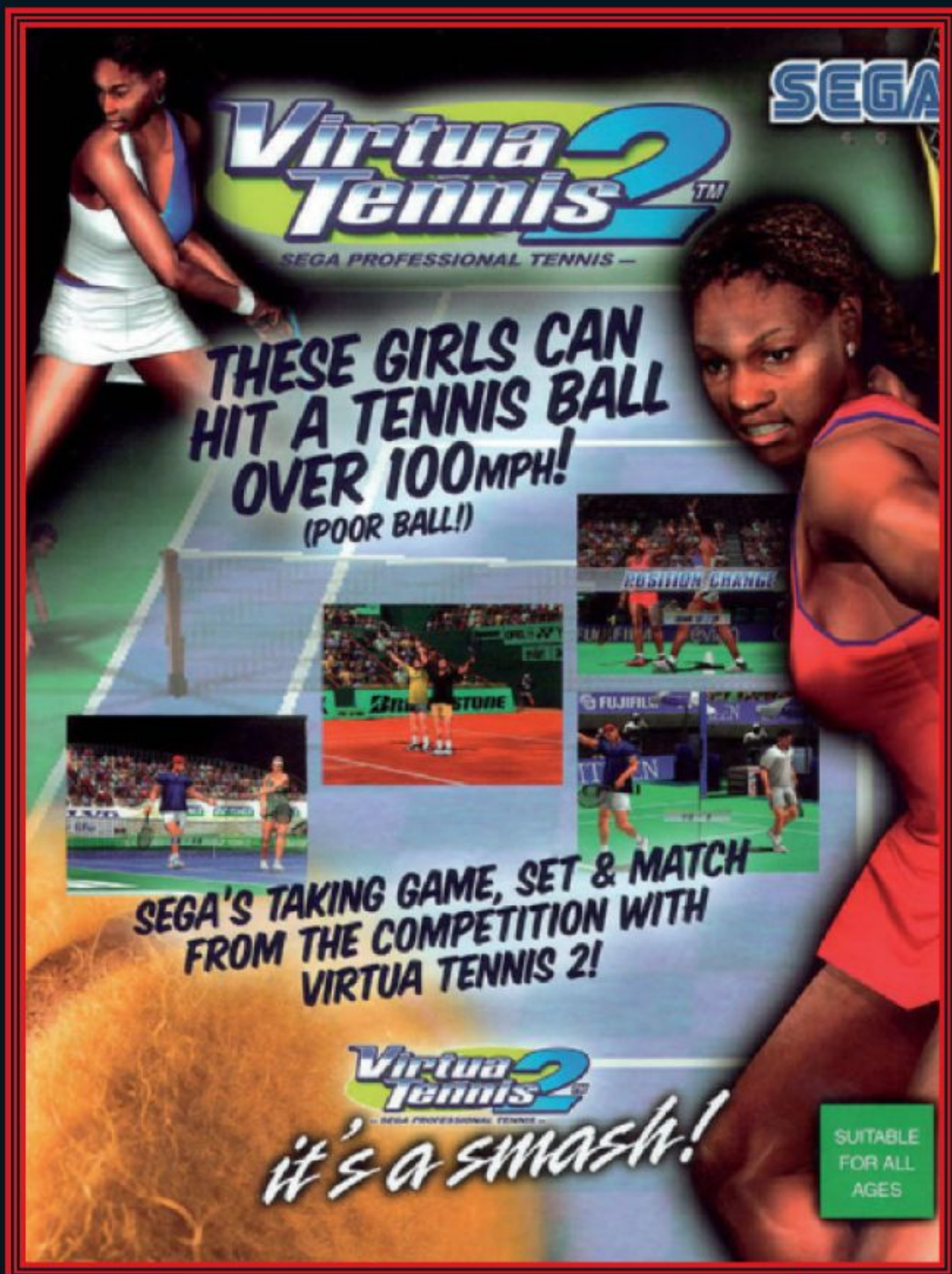
Get Bass: Sega Bass Fishing Year Released: 1998



Hydro Thunder Year Released: 1999



Marvel Vs Capcom 2: New Age of Heroes Year Released: 2000



Virtua Tennis 2 Year Released: 2001



CRAZY TAXI™

16 years after the series first blasted The Offspring into arcades, Retro Gamer flags down Kenji Kanno to chat about Sega's hit driving franchise

Dear reader, allow us to set the scene for you. It is 1:24 on a Saturday morning in Essex, where a man is disembarking from a cab outside his house, visibly shaken. This man has just completed a 12-minute journey home in half that time, thanks to a driver whose skills include an incredible aptitude for paint-scraping near misses and an inability to see red lights. The driver's heavy Glaswegian accent rendered most of his chatter unintelligible to the passenger, and while the passenger shared the sentiments he understood, they are unsuitable to print in a publication like ours. Any normal person leaving this cab would note the number plate and report this menace to the authorities, but the passenger wasn't normal – the passenger was us, and instead we simply thought 'this is probably the closest we'll ever get to being in *Crazy Taxi*'.

For the more law-abiding drivers amongst us this kind of action is a mere fantasy born of M25 tailbacks, and a congested road is where inspiration struck Sega's Kenji Kanno. "I'm a bit of a car enthusiast, and one day I was out driving for fun but I got stuck in traffic," Kanno tells us. "But the other side of

the road was completely clear! When I saw that, I thought there must be hundreds of other people thinking like me – if I could drive on the other side of the road, I could have a lot more fun and get there quicker." That fleeting feeling of rebellion against the rules of the road became the basis for *Crazy Taxi*'s death-defying driving action, but it was far from the only influence that Kanno drew from. "At the time, there were a lot of racing games. To be honest, I was quite tired of them," he reveals. "There are a lot of films based on car action. I thought that if I could make a game that was like them, people would get a lot of enjoyment from it."

It's a revelation that is a little surprising given that racing games are a staple of the arcade market, but one that makes sense. Driving scenes in films had also inspired the development of *Driver*, a title that joined *Crazy Taxi* in laying the foundations for the open-world driving subgenre. But where *Driver* had been inspired by the classic car chase movies of the Seventies, *Crazy Taxi* drew on more contemporary influences – not least California's punk rock scene, whose output would prove crucial to the game's development due to Kanno's design philosophy. "Although this is seen as a racing game, I always

THE HISTORY OF CRAZY TAXI





» Frequent collisions are a staple of *Crazy Taxi* – the only car you can't flip is your own.



» The downhill leaps that kick off the first game are arguably the most iconic moment in the series.

► intended to create it as an action game, and with action games it's all about rhythm and tempo," he explains. "Before making the game, I actually already had the music that I wanted in the game set first, and then had the creators go away and design the game around the music, so that the rhythm would be in sync with the music."

The California spirit didn't just extend to the inclusion of The Offspring and Bad Religion on the soundtrack. Kanno's desire for a bright and hilly environment resulted in an environment based on San Francisco, and while it wasn't an accurate recreation of the city, it did include real-world locations. "I wanted it to have a sense of realism," Kanno recalls, "the best way to get that across, I thought, was to have places that people would relate to." Passengers would frequently ask to be taken to destinations such as Tower Records, KFC and Pizza Hut as well as the game's generic locations such as the stadium, the police station and the mall.

These appealing factors ensured that *Crazy Taxi* quickly became an arcade

staple when it launched in 1999. Players were grabbed by the bright visuals, driving stunts and an attract sequence that literally cried out for players to have some fun with the game. However, they were kept around by the addictive game mechanics. Driving dangerously wasn't just encouraged but rewarded, with players gaining additional tips on their fares for near misses, drifts and jumps. Although the customer's destination would remain a secret until they were picked up, coloured icons above their heads would alert you to the distance and difficulty of their desired journey – important, because a quick journey rewards players with additional seconds on the clock.

Having experienced success with the coin-op, Sega was keen to get the game onto the Dreamcast quickly. Although the title shipped on the NAOMI arcade board – essentially, a modified Dreamcast – the conversion still posed some problems due to the size of the city environment. In the arcade, the

“It succeeded because it offered something that other games at the time weren't offering”

Kenji Kanno



» Kanno is an enthusiastic interviewee, clearly pleased that *Crazy Taxi* retains its strong appeal.

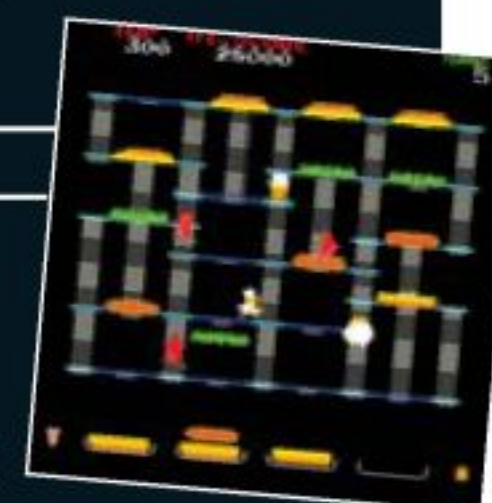
EXTREME EMPLOYMENT

Crazy Taxi wasn't the only game to intensify a mundane job

BURGERTIME

■ ARCADE ■ 1982

Poor old Peter Pepper puts up with some nightmarish working conditions in Data East's arcade classic. The poor chef is trying to put together burgers while being chased by anthropomorphic eggs, hot dogs and pickles. We don't imagine staff at McDonald's are forced to put up with murderous food...



POWER DIGGERZ

■ PLAYSTATION ■ 2000

JCB drivers already have a sweet deal thanks to the awesome power of their vehicles, but this overlooked gem made construction equipment even more fun than normal. Destroying cars, scooping turtles from swimming pools, serving 200 litres of curry onto giant plates – Taito's game lets you do all this and more.



SEGAGAGA

■ DREAMCAST ■ 2001

Sega's Japan-only RPG lets you take charge of Sega in the year 2025, by which time it has become just a tad different. Developers are locked behind gigantic blast doors producing games like *Final Pharmacy VIII*, and are occasionally required to blast into space to fend off attacking Sega hardware...



PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY

■ GAME BOY ADVANCE ■ 2001

Being a lawyer might not sound like the most exciting thing in the world, but Phoenix Wright's cases are full of shouting and table-banging – and that's before any of the game's spirit mediums get involved. At one point, you'll even need to bring a parrot to the stand for cross-examination.



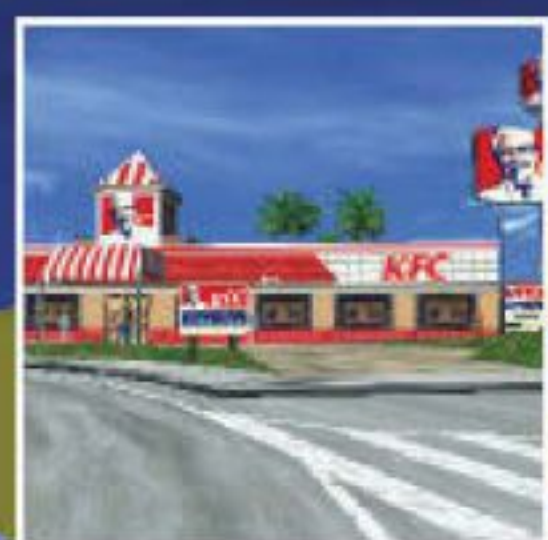
TRAUMA CENTER: UNDER THE KNIFE

■ NINTENDO DS ■ 2005

Extraordinary healing powers gained from the Greek god Asclepius are only the start of the weirdness in this surgery simulator from Atlus. The plot sees you taking on a man-made disease known as GUILT, being spread by an organisation of terrorists whose leader is 121 years old.



» *Crazy Taxi's* sense of humour even extends under the ocean, where snorkel-wearing passengers await.



Kentucky Fried Chicken
1.20km

open driving environment wasn't such a large issue because the NAOMI had the benefit of loading the game from cartridge, and twice as much RAM as the home system. To overcome the Dreamcast's limitations, Kanno's team had to program a method of streaming city data from the disc during gameplay. It proved to be worth the effort, as the Dreamcast conversion proves virtually indistinguishable from the original arcade game.

As well as being a practically perfect port, the Dreamcast version of *Crazy Taxi* included additional features. Most prominent was the Original Mode, which allowed players to enjoy a brand new city with a twisting street section and a railway. There was also the Crazy Box Mode, a selection of driving mini-games, in which taxis were used to pop balloons and knock down bowling pins. Kanno asked the team to think independently about mini-game concepts outside of work, before coming together in the office to select the ideas that would be used in the game. "We looked at different elements of the game that could be scored against, like drifting or dashing," recalls the director, highlighting the mode's role in teach players advanced techniques.

"It was something that people could play and have fun with, but also use as practice."

» Confronted with a Dreamcast, Kenji Kanno tries to remember *Crazy Taxi*'s advanced techniques.



» Drifting is a speedy way to negotiate the 90-degree corners in downtown areas.

Launching at the beginning of 2000, the Dreamcast version of *Crazy Taxi* received a massively enthusiastic response from the press, gaining acclaim for the quality of its conversion. Surprisingly, it's acclaim that Kanno himself had been unaware of. "I didn't actually know that it was regarded that way," he responded when asked for his thoughts on the game's reception. "I think the key reason that it succeeded is because it offered something that other games at the time weren't offering. Maybe it's down to who is giving that feedback."

The public

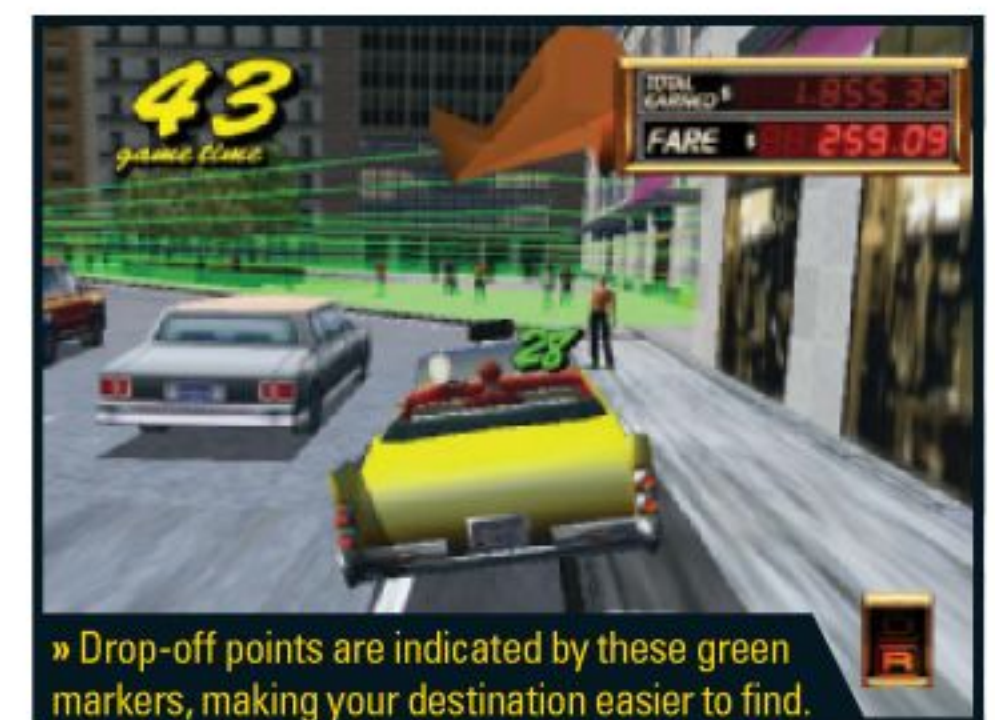
responded with equal enthusiasm, purchasing over 1 million copies and providing the Dreamcast with an early highlight in its lifespan.

But financial realities had hit Sega hard and just a year later the company announced its exit from the hardware business and made plans for its games to appear on the consoles of its former competitors. Acclaim licensed the game and developed PlayStation 2 and GameCube conversions in-house, while Sega contracted the development of the PC version to Strangelite. None of the conversions had the critical impact of the Dreamcast release, though the PlayStation 2 version eventually outsold its predecessor. Free of all the conversion work, Kanno's team at Hitmaker had time to produce something far more exciting – a *Crazy Taxi* sequel.

Despite its hardware woes, Sega never planned *Crazy Taxi 2* as anything other than a



» A good job will reward you with more money and a five-second time bonus.



» Drop-off points are indicated by these green markers, making your destination easier to find.

Dreamcast game. The basic formula of driving recklessly to get customers to their destinations hadn't changed, but the setting had as *Crazy Taxi 2* introduced four new characters and two new maps. Based on New York, these maps were dense urban environments with fewer natural hills, with roads bordered in by skyscrapers. This design played into the team's plan to give the player a new kind of control. "With *Crazy Taxi*, it was basically a lane-

"I wanted it to have a sense of realism. The best way was to have places people relate to"

Kenji Kanno



» Kanno's memory serves him well, as he remembers how to reach some oddly-located fares.

► based game and you could only avoid by going left or right, so it was very much a 2D game in that sense," Kanno explains. "With *Crazy Taxi 2*, we wanted to bring a bit more of a 3D element into the game, and the Crazy Hop is the result of what we were trying to achieve."

The Crazy Hop was a new ability introduced in *Crazy Taxi 2* which allowed taxis to jump. Though *Around Apple* and *Small Apple* didn't have a lot of hills, they made up for that with overpasses and rooftop shortcuts, allowing players with quick reactions to shave seconds off their times. What's more, the new mini-games in the Crazy Pyramid Mode made heavy use of the new addition, with jumping-based games such as *Crazy Stairs*. Another new addition was passenger groups. Up to four customers were now able to board your taxi, each with different destinations in close proximity to one another. Time limits for groups were noticeably strict, but expert players could rack up crazy money for taking them – as

well as awarding larger fares, groups gave a multiplier on tips for each passenger.

While *Crazy Taxi 2* launched to good reviews in the middle of 2001, it didn't achieve the same level of praise as its predecessor. Critics praised the retention of the original game's manic action and the inclusion of more music from The Offspring, but felt that the game didn't do enough to improve over its predecessor, thanks to its near-identical visuals and minor gameplay enhancements. In fact, the most major change was the most controversial. "Some people find it difficult, some people find it really enjoyable, but we see it as a mixed reception," explains Kanno, talking about the Crazy Hop. For purists, the thrill of dodging traffic was diminished by the ease of leaping over it – you'd receive tips regardless – but proponents of the mechanic enjoyed the additional shortcuts it provided. Despite the mixed reception, the Crazy Hop would carry over into the last of the major *Crazy Taxi* releases.

Crazy Taxi 3 was one of Sega's early exclusives for Microsoft's Xbox. At



» Kanno gesticulates while explaining the origins of the Crazy Hop mechanics from *Crazy Taxi 2*.





» As well as a new city, *Crazy Taxi 2* brought a new set of cabbies – here's Slash in action.



» The environments are nice, but the tall buildings obscure Sega's blue skies.

the time it was a surprising choice of platform – it's easy to forget that the Xbox was something of an unknown quantity even as late as 2002, thanks to Microsoft's lack of experience in the console market. What's more, *Crazy Taxi* had already sold well on the PlayStation 2. However, Kanno tells us that it was the American company's enthusiasm for the series that influenced the decision. "We had a chance to talk to Microsoft about *Crazy Taxi* and they were really keen, they had a lot of love to show for *Crazy Taxi*. It was all about love!"

Early plans for *Crazy Taxi 3* were more ambitious than for *Crazy Taxi 2*. Early interviews with Hisao Oguchi, who had served as producer on the first two games, mentioned that multiplayer had been experimented with but ultimately abandoned. Other plans included the addition of day and night cycles, so that customers and destinations would change as the day went on. The team undertook location scouting, even returning to previously used cities like New York. "I didn't want to go," Kanno

explains of the trip, "but the designer did go on a really tough schedule. Exactly a week before 9/11 he was in the building. In that sense, it's a location scout that left an impression. It's a bit eerie, isn't it?"

Unfortunately, these plans would not come to fruition. "As you know, in development we always have to battle between shipping what we really want to do, and the time that we realistically have set to complete the challenge," begins Kanno's response when asked about the scrapped features. "We didn't have an infinite amount of time to do everything and it's true that there were certain things that we wanted to do, but we couldn't complete within the time that we had." Ironically, these time constraints would ensure that *Crazy Taxi 3* was the

“It's true that there were certain things we wanted to do, but we couldn't within the time we had”

Kenji Kanno



» [Dreamcast] Picking up multiple passengers is a risk, but success is highly rewarding.



» *Crazy Taxi's* director takes great care in explaining the careful design behind the series' reckless driving.

► most conservative of the trilogy in design terms.

The final version ended up serving as a kind of greatest hits package, albeit one with significant additions. Two maps from previous games returned with updates – *Crazy Taxi's* arcade map West Coast came back with some new areas designed to take advantage of the Crazy Hop, alongside *Crazy Taxi 2's* Small Apple, now set at night. *Crazy Taxi 3's* sole original map was Glitter Oasis, a Las Vegas-themed map set at night to allow the bright lights to take centre stage, with the outskirts including a canyon area. Four more new characters made their debut alongside the eight existing drivers, and another set of mini-games was on offer in the Crazy X Mode.

Crazy Taxi 3 arrived in the middle of 2002 to a reasonably positive but undeniably underwhelming critical response. While critics still generally enjoyed the game's core mechanics, the consensus was that the game just didn't bring enough new content to the table. The game also struggled on a technical level, with reviewers complaining of noticeable draw distance problems and prominent slowdown, particularly in the flagship Glitter Oasis stage. The 2004 PC conversion, once again handled by Strangelite, fared little better. However, *Crazy Taxi 3* did manage to make a return journey to the arcade. Sega adopted the Xbox-based Chihiro board for arcade releases in 2003, and Kanno saw an unusual home-to-arcade conversion as the natural choice. "It seemed to be a natural fit, a case of 'hey, if we release this content, we'll have happy consumers'," he reflects.

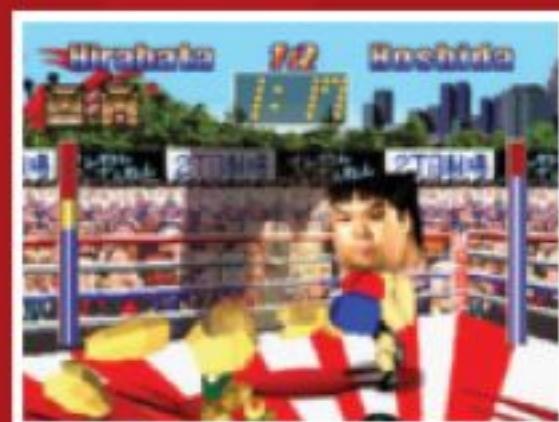
RETURN JOURNEY

A look back at what Kenji Kanno did before *Crazy Taxi*



JURASSIC PARK

■ Sega's excellent lightgun shooter was Kenji Kanno's debut as a game director. While it didn't utilise the 3D graphics technology of the time, *Jurassic Park* proved that 2D games could still impress players, thanks to memorable attacks from a herd of stampeding triceratops and an absolutely enormous T-Rex.



FUNKY HEAD BOXERS

■ This boxing game utilised Sega's budget ST-V arcade board. The Saturn-based hardware wasn't the best at displaying complex 3D characters, so the team utilised a different approach – box-headed pugilists with detailed facial textures, who reacted to blows with some bizarre expressions.



TOP SKATER

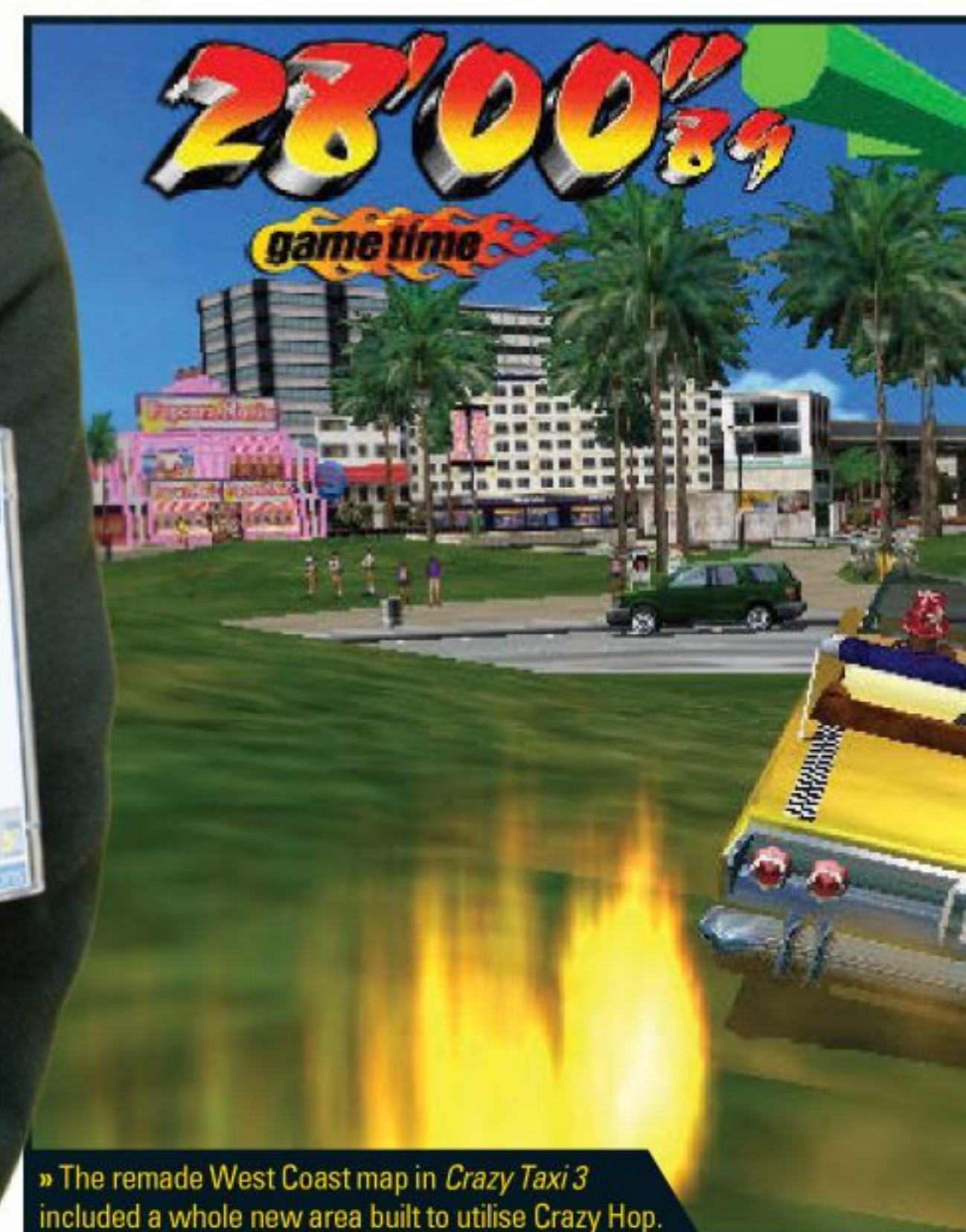
■ This arcade cabinet is memorable for its controller, which allowed players to play with their feet. Players needed to complete courses without time running out, collecting time bonus tokens and performing tricks along the way. Like *Crazy Taxi*, it features a licensed punk rock soundtrack – this time courtesy of Pennywise.

In 2003, THQ acquired the rights to publish a Game Boy Advance version of *Crazy Taxi*. Developed by Graphic State Games, *Crazy Taxi: Catch A Ride* proved to be an awkward fit for the handheld system. Much like other attempts at 3D driving games on the system, *Crazy Taxi* suffered from blocky visuals and a poor frame rate and the game received a critical battering when it launched. Later that year, the series managed to make the news thanks to a patent infringement lawsuit. Sega sued Electronic Arts, Fox Interactive and Radical Entertainment over *The Simpsons: Road Rage*, a 2001 release that had been noted for its extreme similarity to *Crazy Taxi*. The lawsuit was settled out of court for an undisclosed sum soon after being filed.

In recent years, *Crazy Taxi* has been employed primarily as a nostalgic capacity. 2007's *Crazy Taxi: Fare Wars* was a PSP compilation of the first two games. While the game suffered the loss of licensed shops and music, it did benefit from the first-time inclusion of multiplayer modes. The original *Crazy Taxi* later found its way to Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and PC, again missing its licensed aspects. These versions did at



» Setting Glitter Oasis at night allowed for the Vegas-inspired bright lights to shine.



» The remade West Coast map in *Crazy Taxi 3* included a whole new area built to utilise Crazy Hop.



CRAZY PYRAMID

Some of the best mini-games the series has to offer

CRAZY ARCHES

■ A right royal pain, this game requires careful use of the Crazy Hop to leap from arch to arch. Repeated drowning is probable.

CRAZY PARKING

■ Battle your way to the top of a packed multi-storey car park! The tight time limit here is a killer.

CRAZY BALLOONS

■ A classic, in which you chase balloons around and pop them. Another game that made multiple appearances.

CRAZY HURDLES

■ This one's pretty easy, you just need to leap over the hurdles and reach the finish line. This one's good for score competitions.

CRAZY GOLF

■ You need to use Crazy Hop to drive a ball as far as possible – an easy but enjoyable task from *Crazy Taxi 2*.

CRAZY SPECIAL

■ *Crazy Taxi 2*'s final challenge is a nightmare – you must visit every drop-off point in Small Apple with a useless guide arrow!

CRAZY ZIGZAG 2

■ One of the tougher mini-games – seven passengers, 40 seconds and one narrow road in the middle of the ocean. Don't get wet!

CRAZY BOWLING

■ Drift into the pins to score seven consecutive strikes. It sounds simple but this mini-game proves deceptively tough.

CRAZY STAIRS

■ Easy to explain, hard to master – hop up a series of ascending steps in order to reach the goal. Expect plummeting.

CRAZY JUMP

■ A series staple appearing in all three games, *Crazy Jump* sees you hurling your cab off a ramp as far as possible.



least include an option to use custom soundtracks, for those desperately missing their Bad Religion fix. Versions for iOS and Android restored the soundtrack, but not the shopping.

The newest *Crazy Taxi* release to hit the market is *Crazy Taxi: City Rush*, a free-to-play mobile game which deftly combines the spirit of Sega's series with the runner format as popularised by games like *Temple Run*. "Crazy Taxi is in essence a casual game, but it's got this charm and allure that makes it really addictive," says Kanno of the decision to take the series in this brand new direction. "Because mobile is so widespread now, we thought that would be a perfect platform to go onto." The conversion has been handled by Hardlight, a UK-based Sega studio that specialises in games for mobile platforms – a decision which

Kanno attributes to the game's greater popularity in the West.

While the game is unmistakably a part of the runner genre, it does contain some of *Crazy Taxi*'s signature mechanics – for example, players are still awarded Crazy Through combos for dodging between vehicles. But mechanical authenticity hasn't been the key for Kanno, who is more concerned with retaining the spirit of the series. As he puts it, "it's not really about the techniques, the technicalities or the mechanics, it's more about 'does it feel like a *Crazy Taxi*?'". In that regard, the game delivers, with original characters like Gena and BD Joe even making cameo appearances. *Crazy Taxi: City Rush* also introduces new gameplay elements, such as upgradeable taxis.

Such advances seem core to Kanno's outlook on games, as he is firmly focused on the future. This is a trait





BRING TERROR TO THE MALL BY DRIVING THROUGH IT

THE KNOWLEDGE

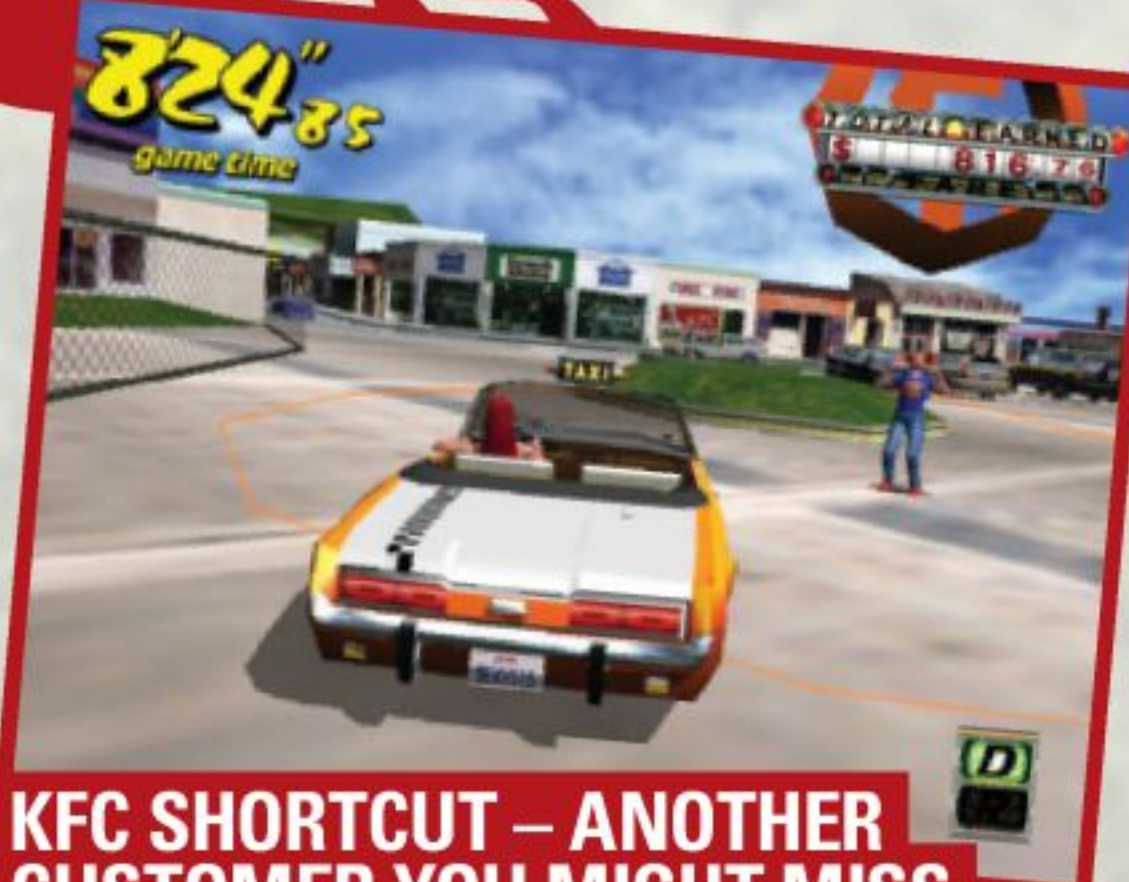
A cabbie's guide to picking up crazy money



DON'T WAIT FOR THE END OF THE ROAD TO DO A U-TURN!



BEING ON THE ROOF IS TOTALLY PUNK ROCK, RIGHT?



KFC SHORTCUT – ANOTHER CUSTOMER YOU MIGHT MISS DOWN HERE



COOL GRANDMA, JUST CHILLIN' ON THE ROOF



MOTEL SHORTCUT – SMASH THOSE BOXES!



MULTI-STOREY CAR PARK – AWESOME JUMP OPPORTUNITY!



RESCUE THIS LADY FROM HER BROKEN-DOWN CAR!



CHEEKY SHORTCUT – YOUR ONLY CHANCE TO CHANGE LANES HERE



WHAT'S THIS GUY DOING UNDERWATER?

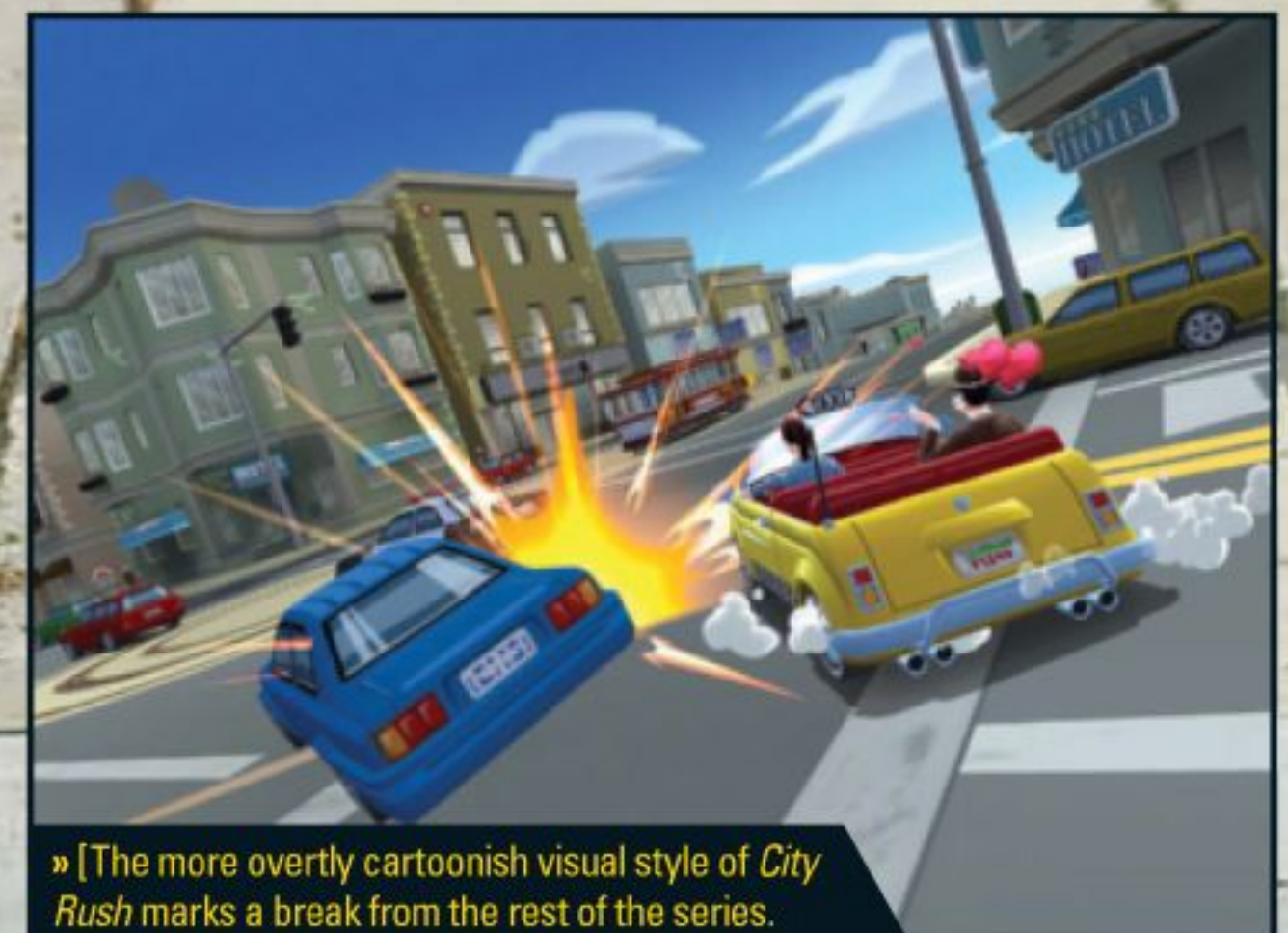
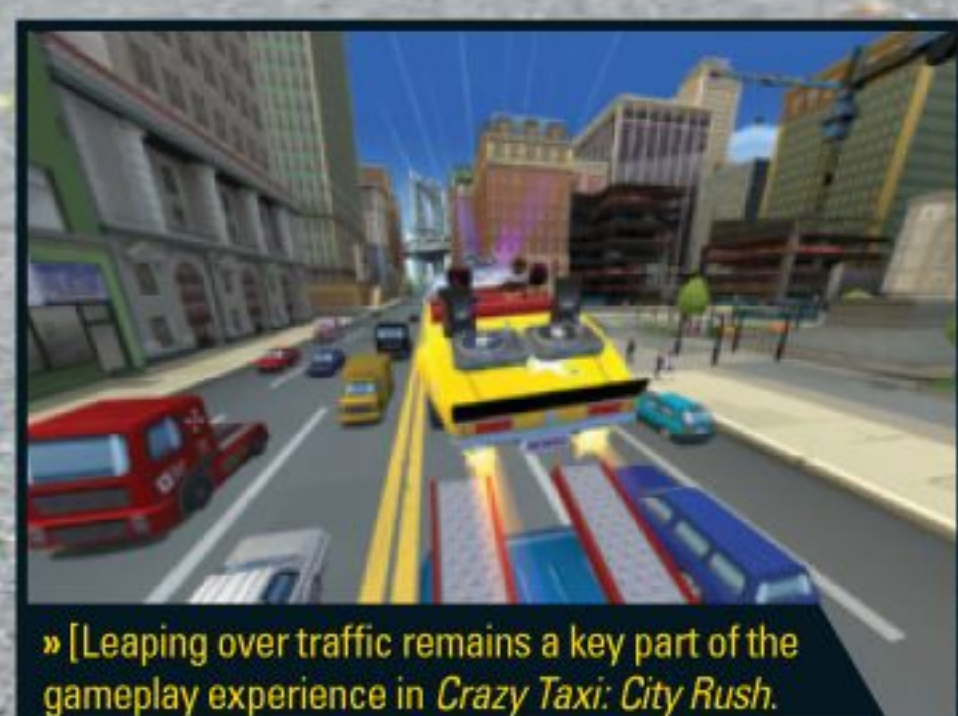
“For me, as a creator, I’m always thinking about what’s next”

Kenji Kanno

► most evident when he’s asked about what achievements he takes pride in. “To be honest, throughout *Crazy Taxi* 1, 2 and 3 I don’t have anything that I’m particularly proud of,” is the surprising response. “You probably interview a lot of people and for me, it’s great that you’ve played our game and you’ve really enjoyed it,” he continues, “but for me, as a creator, I’m always thinking about what’s next.”

Even so, *Crazy Taxi* has left its mark on gaming history. Well over a decade after the first arcade-goer was challenged to make some crazy money,

the trademark action of the series still has an appeal that resurfaces any time a player sees a dangerous driver, just as it did for us. And, as his final anecdote reveals, it’s an appeal that even Kanno has experienced first-hand: “I was in Las Vegas once, on holiday, and this taxi driver was just driving at breakneck speed to get me to my destination. And then, just as I was getting out of the cab, he said ‘I’m *Crazy Taxi*!’ but he didn’t even know who I was! He was just some crazy taxi driver!” We can only hope he was awarded the customary ‘Speedy’ bonus.★



2560

points

100 + 50
200 + 50

200

Jet Set Radio

A GAME THAT PLAYS AS GOOD AS IT LOOKS



» DREAMCAST » SMILEBIT » 2000

Ever since *Jet Set Radio* was first announced at the Tokyo Game Show in 1999 it was instantly on radar of gamers worldwide. The main reason for the interest was due to the rendering technique that Smilebit was using, which would make *Jet Set*

Radio to be one of the first cel-shaded videogames. We'd also argue that it was gaining fans because it looked incredible fun.

Gamers weren't wrong with their assessment. When *Jet Set Radio* arrived a year later, it proved to be as inventive as it was striking to look at and proved that Sega's console was the place to be when it came to delivering fast-paced thrills-and-spills.

The aim of *Jet Set Radio* is to become the main skating gang of Tokyo-To, whilst evading the clutches of Captain Onishima, who wants to put The GGs away forever. Most levels simply revolve around tagging your graffiti symbols throughout the city, so that the tags of rival gangs are nowhere to be seen. Things are made more difficult however by Onishima and his police force who will constantly hound you down as you skate across the stunning looking environments.

It's possible to pull off a variety of tricks and grind across various objects as you attempt to become the leader of Tokyo-To, but *Jet Set Radio* is a whole world away from games like *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, playing more like a traditional platformer. It's also worth noting the incredible soundtrack that features a dazzling array of music suits the game's rather distinctive look perfectly.

It's been re-released on various consoles recently, including the Vita, PS3 and Xbox 360, but many still prefer the original. We can't say we blame them. ★

» RETROREVIVAL

The Making Of...

Shenmue

Record-breaking, technically astounding, but crippling expensive and still unfinished. Cole Machin asks why Shenmue continues to command such a following?



IN THE KNOW

» PUBLISHER: SEGA

» DEVELOPER: SEGA-AM2

» PLATFORM: DREAMCAST

» RELEASED: 1999

» GENRE: ADVENTURE

Over the years there have been many games hailed as triumphs of game engineering, as milestones of progress in the industry and as huge leaps forward in terms of depth and gameplay. Of these titles, few have encountered as many difficulties or been as beloved by its fans as *Shenmue*. Within its development, the series has outlived two consoles, racked up a monumental price tag and created a fan base that has endured nearly a decade since the last release.

As many *Shenmue* fans will already know, the series' beginnings were rooted deeply in another Sega-AM2 series, as a planned RPG expansion of the *Virtua Fighter* universe intended for the Sega Saturn; a genesis that can still be seen not only in the character modelling, but in the source code as well. The brainchild of Yu Suzuki, even in the final release of the game, Ryo's character ID remains 'AKIR', a shortened form of 'Akira'. Although it is difficult to pin down exactly when the game grew beyond these humble roots, it would certainly seem that it came late in the project's two-year-long development for the Saturn or early in the Dreamcast development. In fact, it's hard not to develop a knowing smile looking over early pictures of the character that would become Ryo while comparing them to images of Akira from *Virtua Fighter 2*. Even in the video of a development version of Saturn *Shenmue*, packaged with the Dreamcast *Shenmue II* release, the resemblance to Akira is obvious.

Despite the obvious amount of progress made during this two-year

span, the writing on the wall was becoming clear for the Saturn as North American sales lagged, developers struggled with the notoriously difficult setup of the system's hardware, and support from Sega of America began to fail. Work on the Saturn version was halted; it was clear that if the *Shenmue* saga was ever going to see the light of day, it would have to be done on a different console, and Sega had just the console in mind.

Thus was the beginning of *Project Berkley*, the codename used for the early development of *Shenmue* on the still pre-launch Dreamcast. Several videos of these *Project Berkley* tech demos can still be found on the internet. It is interesting to note that the age of these demos marks *Shenmue* out as possibly one of the very first games to begin development for the Dreamcast. The *Project Berkley* moniker remained attached to the project for some time, sticking long enough to appear on the teaser disc attached to the Japanese launch release of *Virtua Fighter 3tb*. This disc was, for most, the first glimpse of AM2's new project.

Although it's tempting to blame much of the cost of *Shenmue*'s development on the difficulties encountered during the Saturn era and the shift in development from the Saturn to the Dreamcast, it would not be entirely accurate. Regardless of the change to the more coder-friendly console, the *Shenmue* project was still no laughing matter. The sheer cost of manpower and organisation for such an undertaking is immense. In fact, when we asked lead systems programmer Tak Hirai about his role in the development of

Shenmue for the Dreamcast, he replied: "I was responsible for managing a team of 87 programmers. I also made final judgements regarding the overall program behaviour of the whole game. Managing this huge team of programmers was a nightmare since it could take more than 14 and a half hours a day just speaking with each person individually. If I only spoke with each programmer for ten minutes, you can see how it would add up."

In terms of his own programming workload alone: "I was in charge of not only constructing the coding environment but also coding a fundamental processing architecture to make system programmers easier to work with. I was also in charge of the character system, rendering pipeline, lighting engine, and also optimising the performance of these systems. I had my hands dirty on playing around with SH4 assembly [programming language] on the Dreamcast to tune up the performance. Small and detailed codes used in the cut-scenes such as physics simulation of phone cords, handcuff chains in the second chapter, and trailing visual effects of the car signals were also done in my spare time. I finally ended up creating around 200 source files out of more than 300 files in total."

To this day it's amazing that the project was completed at any cost. Although it's possible to point to other games released in the same era with a similar scope of story, we've encountered nothing on the same level in terms of the game systems. With such a large team and array of smaller projects involved, development required fantastic organisation of not only the



The Making Of ... SHENMUE

Who's Who

The key players in Ryo's adventure on the streets of Yokosuka

Nozomi Kawasaki

Nozomi is a childhood friend of Ryo's, and the game's primary love interest and occasional damsel in distress. She's remained in Japan despite her parents' move to Canada and can usually be found working at her grandmother's flower shop. She has the largest number of unique phone conversations of any character.



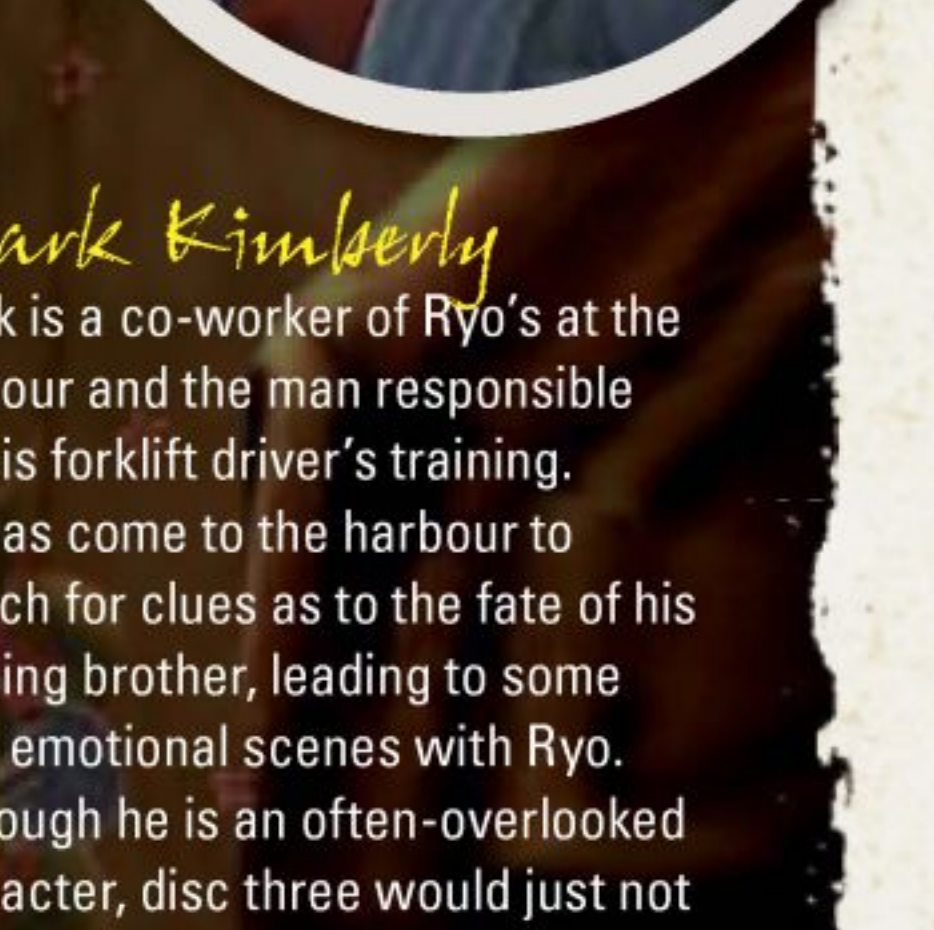
Masayuki Fukuhashi

Fuku-san is a former student of Iwao Hazuki and has lived in the Hazuki residence since a young age. He is often shown to be somewhat clumsy and socially bumbling, occasionally serving as comic relief. In spite of a few faux pas that make Ryo's life a little harder, he's extremely loyal and it becomes clear that Ryo thinks of him as a brother.



Gui Zhang Chen

Gui Zhang is the son and student of antiques trader and martial arts master Chen. Although the two have a rocky beginning, Ryo and Gui Zhang form a close, if unconventional, friendship. Their evolving friendship is perhaps the strongest relationship development found in the first game.



Mark Kimberly

Mark is a co-worker of Ryo's at the harbour and the man responsible for his forklift driver's training. He has come to the harbour to search for clues as to the fate of his missing brother, leading to some very emotional scenes with Ryo. Although he is an often-overlooked character, disc three would just not have been the same without him.



Lan Di

Lan Di, the antagonist of the series, is the man responsible for the death of Iwao Hazuki and the target of Ryo's quest for vengeance. Through the course of the first *Shenmue* he is left a mysterious character. Little is known about him beyond his connection to the Chi You Men, desire for the mirrors and apparent sheer brutality.

available manpower but also of the game's program and the programming environment itself.

Hirai was kind enough to go on to explain the streamlining required: "The programming section was roughly divided into two groups. The first was the system programming team and the other was the game event programming team. In-game events in *Shenmue* were driven by the scripting language. Regarding the program interface, we defined the table of functions associated with in-game event functions so that it wouldn't affect the event program structure whenever we updated the system components. In order to maximise the performance in an environment where up to 87 programmers had to work together, we eased the workflow by downloading pre-compiled object files, which didn't depend on source code, in an individual programmer's local environment. I thought it was ridiculous for 87 programmers to spend time recompiling just because someone modified one bit of source code."

Regardless of the expense of such a development, it was necessary to realise the vision intended for *Shenmue*.

"We took tremendous efforts to implement features that were invisible to the player," continues Hirai. "If the game felt natural to you and nothing stood out as particularly unrealistic, that's because we spent a lot of time to create the game's subtle details despite the very limited hardware horsepower and technology of the time. When it comes to the weather system, it heavily depended on the processing performance, so the most important issue was to optimise the performance. Regarding non-player characters, all 300 characters were specifically positioned in the game field so we didn't have to blindly calculate the collision between

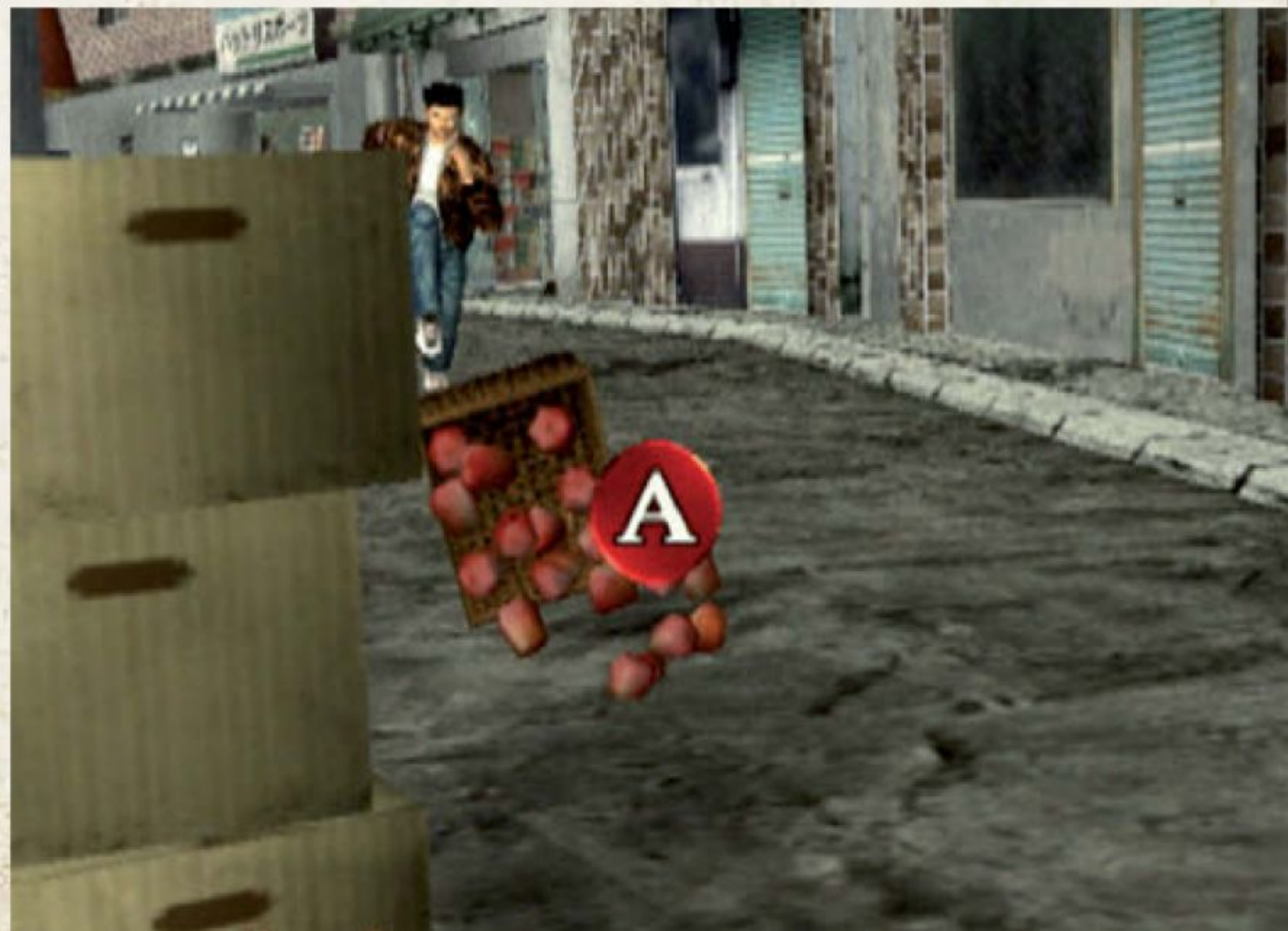


all characters if everything was in sync. However, when a non-player character had to change their walking path to avoid the player, it became increasingly harder to manage what would have been a very simple thing in the real world, such as making an off-track character stand right in front of a door."

It's difficult to explain to a modern gamer just how amazing these features were at the time of *Shenmue*'s release. We can still recall our awe, watching the fish swim in the koi pond or noticing Ryo's shadow falling in different positions depending on the time of day. Although the features may have been, as Hirai says, largely invisible to the player, they certainly did expand upon the game in truly amazing ways. Even if, unlike us, you didn't spend at least a few of Ryo's lunch breaks at work chasing birds that would scatter realistically as you charged towards them.

As the creation of the game progressed, of course some of the

» Love them or hate them, Quick-Time Events were a huge part of the *Shenmue* series.





Mini-games

You really can't talk about *Shenmue* without mentioning the sheer volume and playability of its mini-games. Although purpose-built mini-games such as *QTE Title* and darts were not entirely unheard of in RPGs and adventure games of the time, the inclusion of full classic arcade games such as *Space Harrier* and *Hang-On* was a unique touch. The mini-games were a big part of bringing the entire experience together, of giving you the feeling that you could do whatever you liked with Ryo's time. Throughout the existing series, we were treated to a wide variety of mini-games, including *Space Harrier*, *Hang-On*, *After Burner*, *QTE Title 1* and *2*, darts, pool, slots, *Lucky Hit* and a few variations of dice-based games. It's a selection of games that would have done early entries in the party game genre proud.



THE MAKING OF: SHENMUE

» The variety of moves was nothing short of astounding.

“ We can still recall our awe, watching the fish in the koi pond ”

features originally planned for the game did have to be scrapped, even in a game as epic as *Shenmue*. Of these features, the most talked about certainly had to be the ability to ride a bicycle, which was demonstrated in one of the early tech demos. We couldn't resist the urge to ask Hirai just why this feature didn't make the cut and what other features failed to make it into the final version that he may have liked to see on the published discs.

“Actually, I was the first guy who implemented the bike-riding feature,” he explains. “This was done at the early stage of the development. We originally intended to begin the game in China, so I made it as a showcase to see how it looked when you rode the bike in a meadow. Another programmer took over that part of the project and worked on the vehicle programming at the end of *Shenmue*. I personally think that we had to cut this feature out from the game because there wasn't a significant enough advantage for the player to ride a bike through the city over simply running around in Yokosuka.

“During the development, there used to be special features, like the player being able to lift up an object like a house and throw it. Fast-forwarding or rewinding the day and night cycles worked great for debugging the game, so I wanted to leave these features in the final product as Easter eggs.”

Regardless of what features failed to make an appearance in the published version, the final release suffered from no lack of things to do. Above and beyond the systems discussed earlier, the breadth of little extras is fantastic. You could choose to spend your time collecting toys, drinking sodas, buying crisps, taking care of your stray cat or playing games at the local arcade. It's a funny thing, as truly engrossing

as the story of *Shenmue* is, that it is quite linear, allowing only a few hidden scenes without any true branching of the main storyline. That said, the funny thing is that we've never felt at all constrained while playing *Shenmue*, which we believe is a result of these extras. Somehow the ability to waste a day playing darts, to choose dried fish over milk to feed your cat, to satisfy your voyeurism by rummaging through Ryo's drawers, or just to give Ine-san a call during your lunch break all comes together to give you an amazing feeling of freedom. Seemingly, that was no accident.

“We created a lot of innovations never seen before *Shenmue*,” says Hirai. “I would say the hardest part of this project was to imagine and create a ‘you can do anything’ kind of feeling, which did not exist in that era.”

Shenmue's impact on the gaming industry was huge, opening a door to a new sub-genre of games that did not previously exist. Even beyond this, it opened our eyes to what could be done, and it raised the bar just a little in terms of the effort and forethought that we demand from game designers.

“I think that *Grand Theft Auto* owes *Shenmue* a lot for its great success, even after coming into the 3D realm,” posits Hirai. “Everyone I've met also mentions the detail quality in *Shenmue*. I've been told: ‘Don't do so much on the quality to the extent of making a cod in a pond swim smoothly.’ Some even said this to me out of fear, since we might make this level of quality an industry standard! It might be simple to say it's about the quality, but I'd rather say it's about ‘quality to make it feel real’, which is how this project contributed to push the envelope of the gaming industry.”

Often the largest impact of a project like *Shenmue* lays in what the creators

The Making Of... SHENMUE

themselves take away with them, with the attitudes and ideas they carry into their future projects. As such, we couldn't help but go on and ask what effect the creation of this game had on Hirai personally and his team: "It makes me continuously think and express my thoughts as an engineer, since the project was filled with obstacles and impossible goals. The production took four whole years and I'm proud of myself as the lead programmer to have brought this game into the hands of players, even though we've now graduated through multiple generations of consoles. A lot of team members joined and left the project, and there were so many 'firsts' for us and it was very hard to see how it would all turn out, and how it would be remembered. I owe my accomplishment of four years of lead programming experience to those who worked at my side until the end of the project. Many thanks to all of the team members who supported me."

Despite any impact it may have had, the fate of the series itself was a sad one. The original release cost a colossal \$70 million to produce, which is still an astronomical sum and completely unheard of at the time. Dreamcast sales were simply not high enough to support such an expensive game – if every Dreamcast owner at the time of the game's release had purchased a copy, the production would still have lost money. Sales for the original instalment were, however, reasonably strong, at over a million copies worldwide. Unfortunately, the fate of the series

was tightly tied to the Dreamcast, a system that was about to run into some very serious competition from Sony's PlayStation 2. The game's release came just a few short months before the release of the PlayStation 2 in Japan, and only days after in the European and North American markets. It would only be another 16 months before the discontinuation of the Dreamcast in the North American market, which is a difficult place for a console-exclusive trilogy to find itself.

The second instalment was released for the Dreamcast in both Japan and Europe shortly before the system was killed in the European market, meeting reasonable sales. For the North American release, however, the writing was on the wall for its console of choice once again. *Shenmue* had outlived its second console. Demand for the game was still relatively high, however, with many fans importing the European release for play in North America, before the region's official release came almost a full year later for Microsoft's Xbox, which many observers consider a fatal mistake. The previous availability of the European import for the series' established fans greatly reduced the title's sales. Perhaps an even larger issue was the jump between consoles itself. At the time, the Xbox remained an expensive piece of hardware, staving off many Dreamcast owners who may have considered purchasing Microsoft's console in order to continue the series. In addition, Xbox owners who had not previously owned a Dreamcast were left

Magic Moments

Dobuita

It's hard to explain just how magical the first trip to Dobuita could feel at the time of *Shenmue*'s release.

The number of unique characters, the ability to talk to them all in full audio. The freedom of being able to go to the arcade, or drop in to the Tomato Convenience Store. Being able to explore the town and its shops. It remains, to this day, one of our fondest memories of modern videogaming.



“ If every Dreamcast owner had purchased a copy, the production would still have lost money ”



» Anyone who has ever played *Shenmue* is extremely familiar with this scene, and with sneaking into Dobuita the back way so you won't get harassed to buy him yet another soda.



» Ryo's morning forklift race goes a long way to both kick the day off and show just how much workplace health and safety regulations have changed over the years.

Shenmue III



Through the long years since the release of *Shenmue II*, the sizable

Shenmue fan community has not suffered silently in its desire to see the series continued. There have been the more conventional campaigns aimed at getting Sega's attention, including mass mailings of letters, an online petition that has earned over 60,000 signatures, and general forum griping. There have also been some very inventive and interesting campaigns, such as the mass mailing of toy capsules to Sega's offices.

The *Shenmue* community has managed to keep itself busy with other pursuits as well. Shenmue Dojo (www.shenmuedojo.net) has been the most prolific in its modding and exploration of the two existing games. If you've ever wanted to see Lan Di sobbing on a park bench or learn all about the character modelling, then it's certainly the place for you. Mind you, if you want to ask a question, you just might want to use the search feature, as with seven years of posts available, numbering almost half a million, most of the newbie questions that could be asked have been answered.

Flashbacks

By killing off Iwao Hazuki in the opening moments of the game, the story writers were left in the difficult position of making you truly care about his death retroactively. It was done predominantly with sepia-toned flashbacks, building his character in the early stages of the game, and it certainly worked. You'd need a heart of stone to sit through Iwao's training and feel nothing.



Nozomi in the park

We never fully understood why it was that Nozomi chose to finally tell Ryo about her feelings for him until shortly after the death of his father – it just seems like bad timing. Regardless, by the time you reach this point, you're likely pretty invested in the romantic subplot between the two. It's one of the rare points of the series where you wish that you had just a little more control over what Ryo says.



Lost brother

Mark's quest to discover the fate of his lost brother provided more than one great moment in the latter part of *Shenmue*. This scene stands out as the best example. It's hard not to let your heart go out to the fellow as he begins to open up to Ryo regarding his suspicions and fears.



Sail away

It may be a little obvious, but it's hard to discount *Shenmue's* final scene when discussing the game's magic moments. It's impossible to stay as implacably stoic as Ryo himself as he sails away from everyone in his life, from everything he knows, to continue his quest.

with the second instalment of a story-driven game – a title that picks up in the middle of a story they have not become attached to. All of these factors came together to form a death sentence. Sales were dismal.

Any possible third entry was left in a nearly impossible condition. It had no console and, in the minds of the executives, no market. To continue the series, much of the initial cost and time spent on character modelling and environment building would need to be abandoned and re-created, making any possible climb to profitability for the series a steep and difficult one. Due to the sudden cancellation of the series, conjecture has been widespread for years as to what state the third in the series was left, with some even maintaining that a playable build exists somewhere, however unlikely this may be. It was clear that the Dreamcast would not be continuing far into the future during the production of the second game; Sega had no intentions of building another console to shift development to, even if it felt that it could be made profitable.

All of this logic, however, couldn't kill all hope of playing out just a little more of the *Shenmue* story. We had to ask Hirai if he was aware of any development on a third instalment in any form. This was all he had to say on the subject: "There was none that I know of, but I personally would love to see this saga continued."

Although there have been several fan-based campaigns for a third *Shenmue*, Sega has been stoic regarding the possibility of a third entry, often citing the poor sales of *Shenmue II*, and Sega

officials have been clear that there are currently no plans to continue the series. Regardless of official word, there have been several hoaxes over the years regarding pending announcements from Sega, some of which have included footage from an ill-fated tie-in called *Shenmue Online*: a massively multiplayer conceptualisation of the *Shenmue* universe publicly announced in 2004 as a joint venture between Sega and JC Entertainment.

Development work on *Shenmue Online* ran into difficulties a year after its announcement when JC Entertainment withdrew from the project. Due to the nature of the joint development agreement, it became unclear as to who would continue to hold the rights to the *Shenmue Online* concept. Seemingly, Sega did continue production on the title for some time after the split, but little to nothing has been heard about the project for several years. Although it has never been officially announced that development has been cancelled, it seems unlikely that the game will ever see the light of day.

In the face of these cancellations and years of delay, *Shenmue* fans were handed some hope recently when Sega announced the inclusion of Ryo Hazuki in the kart-racing title *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing*, a decision made by Sumo Digital that garnered much attention. Sega itself made use of this inclusion to market the game, teasing Ryo's inclusion as well as holding a raffle for limited edition Ryo Hazuki figurines, bringing the series more attention than it has received in many years and fuelling the hopes of those who wish to see it continued.

» Although many gamers preferred the Free Battle system, the QTE fights could be quite cinematic.



» The rumours about what happens when you swallow watermelon seeds are true, apparently.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

The House Of The Dead 2

» PLATFORM: DREAMCAST » DEVELOPER: SEGA » RELEASED: 1999

There are many satisfying moments that happen when you play Sega's insanely good sequel to *The House Of The Dead*.

And why wouldn't there be? After all, Sega filled the game with a huge menagerie of bizarre and dangerous foes that ranged from possessed owls to killer moss men (well, that's what they look like to us). And let us not forget the insane bosses that will test your aim and punish you for sloppy shots. If we had to pick just one amazingly satisfying moment from *The House Of The Dead 2*, however, it would easily be some of the headshots that you are able to pull off. Yes, they're admittedly easy to make happen thanks to your onscreen reticule when playing with a controller (light guns don't work too well with modern monitors unfortunately) but the gooey visceral way in which those undead noggins explode like overripe melons gets us again and again and again. ★

BIO

Although Sega's *The House Of The Dead* was a very good game, a weak Saturn port meant it failed to garner the attention it deserved. Sega left nothing to chance when it ported its sequel to the powerhouse that was the Dreamcast and the end result was a stunning conversion that not only captured all the magic of the arcade original, but actually managed to improve upon it. Several games have followed, including the hilariously silly *The House Of The Dead: OVERKILL*, but none come close to this excellent Dreamcast effort. Perfect proof that style over substance is occasionally more than fine.



MORE CLASSIC THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD 2 MOMENTS

Helping Hand

Throughout your adventure you'll come across a variety of folk who need protecting from the zombie horde. You're typically given only a scant few seconds to help them before they're zombie chow. It's worth doing, though, as in addition to the warm feeling you'll get inside, you'll also typically receive a useful item and raise your overall points multiplier.



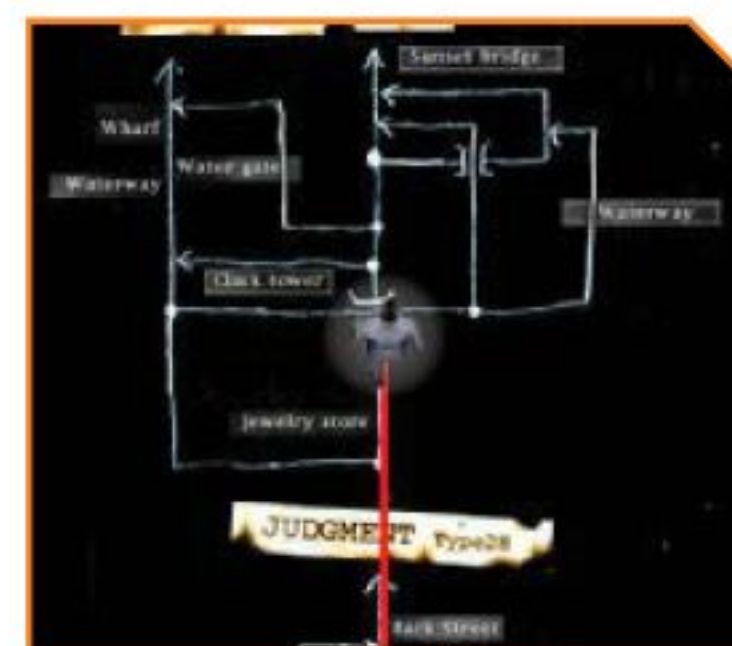
Mini-Game Heaven

Sega certainly offered value for money with its great sequel. While there are good boss rush modes and an alternative version of the arcade game, it is the intense training mode with its varied range of missions that offers the best value. Protecting people and using a specific number of shots to kill all enemies are just a few of the many challenges that are on offer.



Choices

Lightgun games often get accused of being too short and being quite light on content. *The House Of The Dead 2* appears to follow this tradition, but you soon notice inviting alleyways that just beg to be explored. It's not until you die and your last steps are reconstructed and mapped out that you realise just how much choice Sega's game actually offers you.



Suffer Like G Did

There is something about the first boss you encounter that sets the tone brilliantly for the chaos that follows. Essentially a big hulking metallic behemoth, you soon realise that the real enemy is actually the tiny little imp that accompanies him. His erratic flight pattern makes him a right bugger to hit, but it feels so good when you finally make him eat a few bullets.



PRESS START BUTTON
CREDIT(S) 5

THE MAKING OF...

ECCO

THE DOLPHIN DEFENDER OF THE FUTURE

Embracing everything from the sublime beauty of nature to the ridiculous inventiveness of unfettered science fiction, a relaxed atmosphere suited to casual players to a series of difficulty spikes only conquerable by the devout, Ecco's Dreamcast outing was a mixed bag. Tim Henderson is still sifting through the pieces

IN THE KNOW



- » PUBLISHERS: SEGA
- » DEVELOPER: APPALOOSA INTERACTIVE
- » RELEASED: 2000
- » PLATFORMS: DREAMCAST, PS2
- » GENRE: ADVENTURE

It's a clear day, and the rays from the sun are shimmering upon the pristine white sand of a calm ocean floor. A tranquil mood is set as a school of vibrant fish swim casually by, slowing to hover around a few bobbing strands of seaweed. Above the shimmering slate, a dolphin has but a few moments to take in the colour of the sky before plunging back into the water. Bubbles of oxygen trail behind him as he slices downward, disturbing the sand of the seabed before charging forth and snapping up a brightly coloured snack. Tranquillity then returns as the dolphin, a chipper critter known as Ecco, turns his attention to using his tail to skim his vertical form above the water's surface, chirping happily in the naked sunshine.

Role-playing is core to much of the gaming experience: players are frequently asked to fill the boots of a busty grave robber, put on the overalls

of a portly plumber, or slip into the bright red shoes of an oddly coloured hedgehog. From the perspective of standalone gameplay, these skins are largely interchangeable. Level design does take certain traits into account, but when push comes to shove, *Tomb Raider* isn't about being a woman, *Super Mario* isn't about being a plumber, and *Sonic* sure as all hell isn't about being a supersonic hedgehog.

But there are exceptions. Csaba Soltész, co-producer on *Ecco The Dolphin: Defender Of The Future*, is well aware that his game is a mish-mash of design decisions of varied virtue, but he remains confident about at least one aspect: "Right from the beginning, it was a design principle that Ecco was to be a real dolphin. Our reference was actual dolphin footage, behaviour research papers, et cetera. A huge amount of time went into animating and modelling the dolphin as close to reality as possible."

The effort paid off, and the result was a game of twin focus: on one hand, *Ecco* was a game about protecting the Earth and restoring the future; on the other, it was a sandbox where players could simply enjoy dolphin life. The sense of this was immediately palpable, subtly highlighted by a tutorial level that encouraged players to muck around. "We came up with the concept of a 'tutorial basin'," Soltész explains. "There is no threat, no puzzles to solve, air and fish are plentiful – all the player can do is experiment with the controls, get familiarised with the underwater world, and be stunned by the ambience."

This design decision was gradually tightened up a bit, and this basin would eventually be interrupted by a short cut-scene that set a greater objective in motion. Carefree play came first, though, and a player's introductory moments in *Ecco* would inevitably be spent learning how to swim around,



» Tail-walking was a curious addition to the game. Although never an essential skill for progression, its addition is indicative of Appaloosa's greater goal of ensuring that Ecco was as realistic a dolphin as he could be.

racing other dolphins, communicating via sonar, leaping out of the ocean for air, swimming through gaps in the underwater architecture, tail-walking on the water's surface – everything was keenly focused on replicating the actions and behaviour of the dolphin species.

From a perspective of pure, untethered play, this opening was a sublime showpiece. But from a perspective of comprehensible, taut gameplay, it was the indicator of a muddled experience: "The real issue was the struggle in the design," Soltész admits. "We simply could not decide what *Ecco* really was: is it a glorified tech demo with stunning sight and sound? A hardcore action game with devious difficulty? Or, perhaps, an underwater *Zelda* clone with epic exploration and puzzles?"

Such schizophrenic design may have been the price of attempting to be ahead of the times, and this lack of a concrete focus didn't help with locating a fan base. Soltész himself recognises that, "The ideal target audience had to be the devoted *Ecco* fan who could see beyond the obvious technical issues such as the confusing camera or devious difficulty." This is a less than

ideal pool to swim in for a franchise that had skipped a hardware generation entirely, especially when considering the way it polarised both the casual and hardcore markets: "I think that *Defender Of The Future* may have been a bold, unintentional stab at making a more casual experience. Hardcore fans felt quite mad about the relaxed beginning, lack of cinematic storytelling, and abundance of new-age influence," Soltész sighs. "But on the other hand, casual gamers really liked the tranquil nature of the game but were puzzled by the punishing difficulty later on."

Defender Of The Future has become famous – some might suggest infamous – for its difficulty, and it's frequently cited as one of the Dreamcast's most punishing titles. The blame for this may well be directed towards the effort that went into building the technology; all the time spent ensuring that each environment in which Ecco travelled was rife with character and activity, at the cost of other considerations. Soltész is terse with his explanation, stating that, "There were endless struggles about the look of the environments.



» The core narrative of *Defender Of The Future* involved humanity reaching for the stars. The visual representation for this was an oddly unique, but agreeably organic, take on space travel.

However, accessibility was never a critical factor – hence the uneven difficulty." A quick pause follows before he allows himself a chance to elaborate upon the irony of this admission. "Even though the game is as hard as a rock, it allows relaxed exploration in stunning environments and immediately falls into the territory of the infamous 'it's not a game, it's an experience' kind of thing."

An even greater irony lies in the conception and creation of the revered Hanging Waters stage, wherein Ecco had to traverse a maze made out of tubes of water suspended in the sky. When Soltész notes that "at one stage in development the game was very easy, so we had to come up with something challenging," the tone in his voice is so thick that you'd need to bring a stick to have half a chance of wading through it. "I think we succeeded..."

Hanging Waters has since gone down as a classic stage for various reasons. While it was visually stunning even by the standards of an already jaw-dropping game, it also did a fantastic job of adding a fresh approach to the gameplay. "The

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ECCO THE DOLPHIN (PICTURED)

SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, MEGA CD, MASTER SYSTEM, GAME GEAR, WINDOWS
YEAR: 1992

ECCO: THE TIDES OF TIME

SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, MEGA CD, MASTER SYSTEM, GAME GEAR
YEAR: 1994

THREE DIRTY DWARVES

SYSTEMS: SATURN, WINDOWS
YEAR: 1996



FURTHER FICTION

David Brin is obviously keen on dolphins – almost as keen as he is on promoting his work. "I've always found dolphins fascinating. Like many people, I wondered if they were peers of ours. Not only do they seem very smart, but they are also known to be generous, sometime altruistic, which I convey in my next novel, *Existence*."



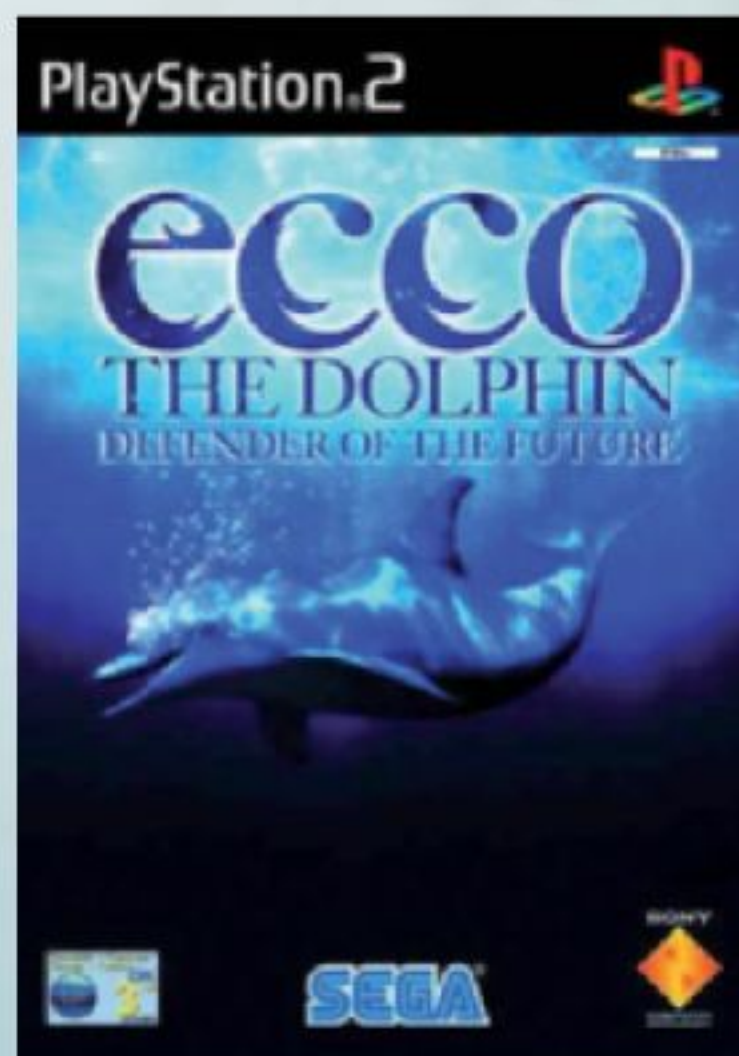
Shameless flogging of wares aside, David's *Uplift* universe is widely recognised as integral to the existence of the *Ecco* franchise, with parallels of dolphin intelligence and human co-operation. There are differences, though, such as the *Uplift* mythology, which sees dolphins needing to be 'lifted' to reach a state of sentience: "I deliberately chose a scenario situation different than my *Uplift* universe. Instead of needing human help to gain final sapience, the dolphins [in *Ecco*] had been waiting, with their intelligence deliberately damped-down, for humans to be ready."



THE MAKING OF...

ECCO THE DOLPHIN DEFENDER OF THE FUTURE

SECOND LIFE



Hindsight is a peculiar thing. It can completely reframe the way we perceive events and provide entirely new context for them. As a risky game released for an underdog console, it's difficult to escape the twisted irony that comes with knowing that *Ecco The Dolphin: Defender Of The Future* was released on 11 September in the USA.

While you can't rest the blame on one peculiar coincidence, the Dreamcast did nonetheless meet an untimely end, and *Ecco's* status as a platform exclusive jumped ship when Sega itself made the switch from platform-holder to publisher. *Ecco* was re-released on the PlayStation 2 in 2002 and featured a fistful of tweaks as a response to listening to feedback from the

Dreamcast release, although Soltész stops shy of calling them anything other than tacked-on. "*Ecco* was criticised for its vague hints, and rightfully so. Later, the PS2 version was upgraded with a 'mission compass'. However, it was more of an afterthought than a solution to the problem."

stage lived its own life," Soltész explains. "The team really loved platform games and they came up with an idea to integrate some jumping/hopping into the gameplay. The artists envisioned flowing streams of water suspended high above the ground – hey, why not? – and our programmers created a very unique, jelly-like 3D liquid effect. The final result was an interesting mash-up of ideas catalysed by a true labour of love. It turned out to be the most memorable part of the game."

Why not? Well, that was for science-fiction author David Brin to figure out. As a writer, he was an ideal fit for the project, in no small part because he was himself a potential inspiration for *Ecco's* initial, 16-bit inception. His 1983 novel, *Startide Rising*, is often cited as a key inspiration for Appaloosa's dolphin,



» Owners of the Dreamcast's VGA box were treated to some especially splendid imagery. *Ecco* still looks impressive.

although this is something he has adopted a bashful stance towards: "I think people get too uptight about who inspired what. Heck, when I was ten I read the *Freddie The Pig* detective stories and wondered about writing in a dolphin character. So, *Ecco* can trace its lineage back to a snorting, four-legged land animal!"

Within the direct context of *Ecco's* Dreamcast adventure, however, Brin's job was to make sure that all the situations that *Ecco* found himself in were coherently tied together; something that seemed to fit in perfectly with some of his habitual activities. "I love looking at a work of art, or even a bizarre piece in the news, and weaving a little 'what-if' tale around it," he explains. "So when Appaloosa brought me a summary of the gameplay scenes in *Ecco*, I had fun conjuring up a grand story arc to tie the scenes all together and give *Ecco* some personal motives."

These motives ended up being pretty extreme and would focus around the

intellectual ascent of dolphins, an alien invasion by a menace known only as 'The Foe', time travel, and the theft and reclamation of the virtues that made dolphins such resilient, enlightened creatures within the game's fiction. This in itself allowed for *Ecco* to be broken up into several themed blocks, while also catering neatly towards the structural need for fetch quests and the progressive acquisition of new abilities.

More still was expressed through the game's visual design, something that in itself was somewhat dependant on the sheer grunt under the hood of the Dreamcast. Soltész recalls a lukewarm relationship with the Saturn hardware, noting that, "The development tools were clunky and the hardware capabilities were somewhat weird." As a result, Appaloosa had begun the development of its 3D technology on the original PlayStation, but it was with the chance to tinker with a prototype Dreamcast that the spark was lit: "We saw the potential sorely missed on the



» At the start, the architecture was built to appear natural. Things became increasingly synthetic as the game progressed.



THE MAKING OF: ECCO THE DOLPHIN: DEFENDER OF THE FUTURE



» The yellow harness strapped to Ecco's back was one of the harder plot elements to swallow, but it served an integral role to gameplay.



» Being set underwater, *Ecco* could to use hardware limitations to its advantage. Fogging, for example, was manipulated to simulate the murkiness of ocean water.

Saturn and vastly upgraded our 3D technology."

Thanks to a mixture of solid architecture and art direction, as well as economical distribution of resources, the end result was a game that still looks impressive today. There was no shortage of care in how detail was distributed, and environments were created with complete awareness of ocean aesthetics. Frequent use of fish and coral kept the scenery colourful and interesting to look at, while drawing free inspiration from HR Giger ensured a menacing flipside future. The murky nature of deep water allowed a chance to increase detail by legitimising shorter draw distances. This extended to the way in which the engine worked, as Soltész explains: "The 3D engine treated the underwater and surface graphics quite differently. The view distance is longer when Ecco surfaces and looks around. Therefore, the artists had to be very careful while constructing the surface world: they could not create as

"WE SAW IN THE DREAMCAST THE POTENTIAL SORELY MISSED ON THE SATURN" SOLTÉSZ ON THE DREAMCAST

detailed environments as in underwater due to performance problems."

Defender Of The Future was, if nothing else, a slightly confused visionary achievement – Soltész is hardly reticent about his admiration of the Wii's *Endless Ocean*, seeing it as the sort of experience his own game could have been – that was met by equally confused critical responses. It was often complimented and criticised for similar aspects of its design, although nobody dared sing anything other than praise for its pristine underwater world and the way that Appaloosa had come up trumps in creating such a lifelike marine mammal to play as. The game even received accolades for aspects that Soltész himself was uncertain about, such as the choice of soundtrack: "I think the new-age style music was a big mistake – it drags the pacing down too much. Still,

the critical reaction praised the in-game music beyond belief."

Released as the Dreamcast was reaching the high of its power, *Ecco* would go on to become one of the last true Sega games: a breathtakingly beautiful, risky, and unique gaming experience that was inherently flawed by a reckless willingness to plunge headfirst into untested waters. As with all the genius that was associated with Sega throughout its hardware era, it proved to be a memorable and triumphant experience in spite of its shortcomings. And although *Ecco's* future isn't looking promising, and although Soltész may have moved on, he still shows signs of attachment to the studio's mascot. Would he be happy to work on a hypothetical PS3 or 360 *Ecco* game? "Hypothetically, yes." That smile says it all, really.

» It's easy to forget just how stunning *Ecco's* cover image was, being, as it was, one of the first games to have an obnoxiously large Dreamcast logo pasted across the top.



» Jellyfish bubbled and bulged with hypnotic realism. The surreal, floppy texture of their tenuous bodies is perceptible even in still images.



Mars Matrix

PROVING IT'S WHAT'S INSIDE THAT COUNTS



» DREAMCAST » CAPCOM » 2000
Mars Matrix is one of the ugliest shooters we've ever played. Set against a palette of dreary browns and blues, it's a truly miserable-looking blaster that lacks the sheer vibrancy and sheen that many other Dreamcast shooters are so famous for

and just leaves you feeling rather empty inside. It's like the Seasonal Affective Disorder of videogames. Still, even though *Mars Matrix's* appearance can inflict uninterested discord in even the hardest of hearts, it quickly comes alive once you get past its unattractive interior.

Similar in style to *Giga Wing* and *Giga Wing 2* (hardly surprising as they're all by the same developer), *Mars Matrix* not only features the same shield system – hold down the fire button to charge your shield and suck in nearby bullets that can then be spat out to cause damage – but also boasts a horizontally aligned screen. This is something *Radiant Silvergun*, *1944: The Loop Master* and *Soukyugurentai* all share, and is surprisingly rare in vertical shooters.

Unforgivingly tough and requiring the sort of hyper-reactive reflexes that even Superman probably doesn't possess – we can't be really sure though as we've never seen him play it – *Mars Matrix* is as merciless as it is ugly and constantly pounds you with enemies, bullets, bullets and, well... even more bullets. Granted, clever juggling of your shield (it takes a while to recharge) will enable you to get through some of the thicker bullet clusters, but you're going to need an insane amount of skill if you ever plan to complete this puppy on a single credit.

Mars Matrix may well be lacking in the visuals department, but there's nothing at all wrong with its pounding and pulsating soundtrack. Plus, Takumi also saw fit to include plenty of abrasive effects to ensure that every enemy's demise brought a satisfying ring to your ears.

Add in an exhaustive – and Dreamcast exclusive – shop that featured a ridiculous amount of unlockables and an incredibly satisfying two-player experience, and *Mars Matrix* proved that first looks can be very, very deceiving. ★

» RETROREVIVAL



MAKING OF...



Kilik – Kilik is a strong all-rounder in possession of a staff, which he wields at great speeds and via which he is able to make long-range attacks with ease.

Edge Master – Edge Master has access to all of the weapons found in *Soul Calibur*; there's nothing he doesn't know.

Astaroth – Astaroth packs a giant axe, which is a lethal weapon when used correctly. Mastery of his attacking potential is needed to make up for his slow movement.

THE MAKING OF: SOUL CALIBUR

Yoshimitsu – An example of the collusion between Namco's *Tekken* and *Soul Calibur*; Yoshimitsu in *SC* is essentially the same as his *Tekken* self.

JONTI DAVIES MEETS SERIES PRODUCER HIROAKI YOTORIYAMA TO JOURNEY THROUGH THE EVOLUTION OF THE CLASSIC ONE-ON-ONE FIGHTER THAT WOWED IN THE ARCADES AND ON DREAMCAST

Until the Dreamcast was released in Japan at the end of 1998, only SNK's eccentric and much-loved Neo-Geo AES console had achieved perfect parity with arcade technology, and that was limited to crossovers between the AES and its dressed-up-as-a-coin-op MVS sibling. Dreamcast, however, was something else. Sega's final home console didn't merely bring console games to the level of contemporary arcade experiences: in many cases its technology enabled developers to surpass the quality of late-Nineties coin-ops. The most obvious example of this phenomenon was Namco's *Soul Calibur*, which went from being an excellent arcade fighter to an even greater, more technologically advanced experience when pressed to GD-ROM.

But to get to the start of the *Soul Calibur* story, we first need to journey back to the series' origin: *Soul Edge*. It was *Soul Edge* (known in the UK as *Soul Blade*), which ran on the System 11 arcade board, that marked Namco's sidestep into the relatively unexplored territory of 3D weapons-based beat-'em-ups, a sub-genre that the *Soul Calibur* games would later claim as their own. The team behind *Soul Edge*, led by ever-present producer Hiroaki Yotoryama, used the project as a means of taking baby steps into an area in which they were not fully confident of success and where the potential for a special gameplay experience had not yet become apparent. "We announced that we were working on the *Soul Edge* coin-op in 1995 and then we followed that up with a PlayStation conversion in 1996," Yotoryama recalls. "[During 1995 and 1996], with *Soul Edge* we were just able to basically explore the possibilities for a fighting game that used weapons."

The result of the team's experimentation was a partial success. Fighters were limited to performing sidesteps so as to evade attacks, rather than using the truer eight-way movement that would be pioneered in *Soul Calibur*. *Soul Edge* did, however, establish the core group of characters that would reappear in *Soul Calibur* and its sequels, giving debuts to fighters such as Siegfried and Voldo. Above all, with its utilisation of weapons in a 3D environment, the team's initial effort presented an alternative to the then-dominant schools of *Tekken* and

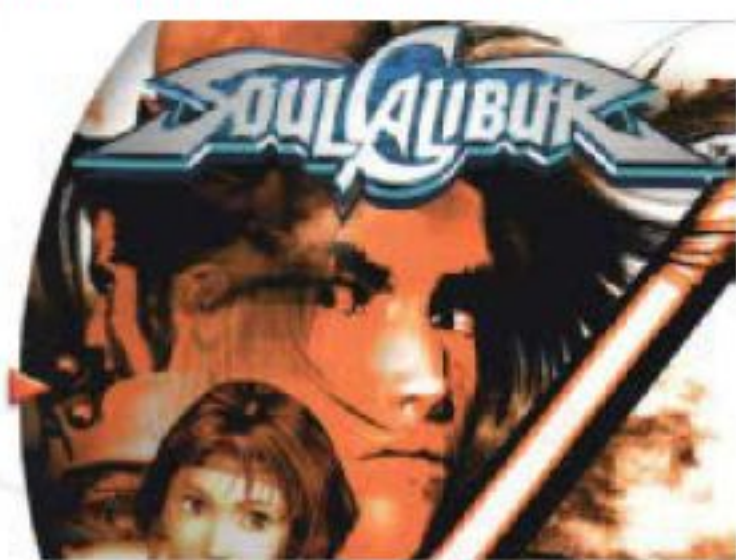
Virtua Fighter. The successful PlayStation port of *Soul Edge* also gave an early indication of Yotoryama and team's willingness to augment its arcade-to-console conversions with additional, console-exclusive content.

Instead of opting to quickly develop a *Soul Edge 2* with better graphics and more combatants, Namco subsequently took a step back to evaluate how best to capitalise on the game's successes. Yotoryama realised there was the possibility of taking Namco's *Soul* on a more interesting journey, and a name change was in order to reflect the game's rebirth. "After our work on *Soul Edge*," Yotoryama explains, "we turned our attention towards developing a fighting game that featured normal weapons known the world over, which we moved into quite naturally. From that time on, Namco's beat-'em-ups were running along two lines of production – the *Tekken* line and the *Soul Edge* line – but we were combining our powers: we had mutual technology and we shared our development know-how."

The benefits of co-operation between internal teams at Namco were such that what had been the company's flagship fighting game was in danger of being upstaged, though there seems to have been more camaraderie than rivalry between the developers of *Tekken* and *Soul Calibur*. "As a result of this [mutually beneficial alliance] we were able to produce the greatest weapons-based fighting action game in the world," Yotoryama boasts, in reference to *Soul Calibur*. And he's arguably accurate in his (self-)assessment: *Soul Calibur* was the second game to be awarded a perfect 40/40 score in *Weekly Famitsu* and it also received top marks and glowing reviews from some of the most reputable English-language publications. The Dreamcast version has aged exceptionally well and is regarded by some as the most refined game in the entire series. Plus – money talks – more than a million copies of *Soul Calibur* were sold worldwide. It was, and should still be seen as, a remarkable success.

Behind the strong retail performance and the hype, *Soul Calibur* proved to be such a formidable experience principally because it was doing things differently. Obviously the use of weapons (which other developers had failed/declined to emulate in their own beat-'em-ups since the appearance of *Soul Edge*) played a big part in setting *Soul*

IN THE KNOW



- » PUBLISHER: NAMCO
- » DEVELOPER: IN-HOUSE
- » RELEASED: 1999
- » GENRE: 3D WEAPONS-BASED BEAT-'EM-UP

THE MAKING OF... SOUL CALIBUR



“Extra content key to the game’s replay value was infused into Soul Calibur”

Calibur at a tangent from the ubiquitous punch-kick-dominated school of beat-'em-ups. But there was more to it, not least the lightning-quick and multi-directional movement of characters on *Calibur*'s gorgeous stages. Now there was more to evasion than sidestepping.

“Once we’d finished *Soul Edge* and had moved on to work on *Soul Calibur*,” Yotoryama clarifies, “it wasn’t the case that we decided at the start of the redevelopment process to implement an eight-way running system, but rather that it came about as the result of much time spent conducting various trial-and-error experiments. At that time, [Namco] had a separate game project at the prototype stage, which involved running around a field. We thought that looked like a lot of fun for some reason, so we ended up borrowing that motion [system] and just tentatively tried to reuse it in *Soul Calibur*. When we implemented that technology, we were surprised that it appeared to have an affinity with the system of vertical and horizontal weapon attacks that was already in place in *Soul Edge*. It was then that we first saw the potential for developing a really entertaining game along those lines, and from there we began work on a project that adopted the eight-way running system in-game.”

Eventually, after persistent experimentation, *Soul Calibur* had taken shape as a dynamic, free-moving beat-'em-up and had appeared in the arcades of Japan on 30 July 1998. More importantly in the long-term, a Dreamcast version went into development as soon as work on the coin-op was finished. The Dreamcast version wasn’t a sequel, but was clearly a level above the System 12 original, in spite of Namco’s decision to streamline the development process for *Soul Calibur*'s Dreamcast conversion. “For the arcade version,” Yotoryama says, “we had around 60 to 70 people working on *Soul Calibur*; for the Dreamcast version, our team comprised only around 40 to 50 people. The coin-op took us roughly 14 months to develop, but development work on the Dreamcast game lasted only half of that period – around seven months.”

In 1999 Sega introduced the Dreamcast-based NAOMI arcade hardware, bringing its console and coin-op divisions together with two unified formats that were almost as compatible with each other as SNK’s AES and MVS had been. Prior to that shift, however, Japanese developers with both arcade and Dreamcast plans had no alternative but to port their coin-op code from a disparate array of technologies. (The NAOMI format was open to use by third-party developers, a notable example of NAOMI-to-Dreamcast success being Capcom’s *Power Stone*, so in principle Namco could have availed itself of such convenience had *Soul Calibur* not already been designated as a System 12 project.)

In Namco’s case, the pressure was on to transform *Soul Calibur* from a System 12 game to a Dreamcast one. Yotoryama remembers the redevelopment period with something of a grimace: “I remember how different the special characteristics of the System 12 and Dreamcast hardware were – colouring methods, the accuracy

of internal calculations, translucency display methods... the

differences seemed to be endless. Porting the game from System 12 to the Dreamcast might seem like a

simple proposition, but [even] then [neither piece of] hardware gave us a surplus of power to

work with – it wasn’t like today. So while we were aiming for ‘total balance’, the fact that we had to economise various aspects of the Dreamcast game was no different to how things worked with the System 12 version. And on top of all that, we only had seven

months to develop the Dreamcast version,

which was a really short deadline and put a terribly strict [imposition] on development...”

With a development window of only seven months, it’s hardly surprising to hear that the final Dreamcast version of *Soul Calibur* was not quite what the team had hoped for, although at the time it was far more than early Dreamcast adopters could rightly have expected. But Namco was determined to do things the right way. It might have been easier to use Windows CE as a development shortcut, as per the rush-job Dreamcast conversion of *Sega Rally 2*, but there would have been a drop in performance. Yotoryama’s team were sufficiently motivated to settle only for the best and he is rightly proud of his team’s refusal to compromise, and of the classic game they produced: “Visual design, character motions, programming, sound... every part of the game was, at that time, even looking at things from a global perspective, at a high level and also had great balance. It’s the fact that *Soul Calibur* was a production of fine balance that I like more than anything else. Every aspect of the game was developed by people who would not give up and who possessed the will to investigate all [possible solutions]. It was the product of people who did whatever was necessary. Being able to bring such a game to users and have it evaluated by them, and sensing that they’d appreciated what we wanted to put across... we were extremely happy.”

Players, too, were generally elated with what Namco had to offer. The Dreamcast version made use of hardware features such as VGA support, and was also compatible with the Puru Puru Pack (providing force feedback) as well as the Sega-built Dreamcast Arcade Stick, which – as one of the most robust joysticks ever manufactured – completed the arcade-at-home experience perfectly. And, as with the PlayStation build of *Soul Edge*, extra content key to the game’s replay value had been infused into Dreamcast *Soul Calibur*. There was a Team Battle mode, not found in the arcade edition, which borrowed a page from the book of *Virtua Fighter 3tb*; a Survival game to test fighters’ endurance; and a Mission mode was added to challenge players with various objectives, rewarding success with the in-game currency needed to buy bonus items.

These features, as well as some gameplay balance tuning and the inclusion of other Dreamcast bonuses, such as additional costumes and an extra character (Cervantes De Leon), were the culmination of typically thorough planning and research by Yotoryama and his team. “We examined various beat-'em-ups that were being launched around that time,” Yotoryama says, “and we considered how far we should develop existing play styles and to what extent people would be willing to play fighting games developed in [various] styles. We only decided which [direction to take Dreamcast *Soul Calibur* in] after considering what would be the best path for users to walk along when playing. We wrote in detail on paper the process through which users would play the game, and we then decided whether we should adopt or reject various features and contents while at the same time making mock-ups [to project how such features could be integrated].”

The development of *Soul Calibur* was a race to meet a seven-month deadline, partly enforced so that *Soul Calibur* could be shipped at the launch of the Dreamcast hardware in the United States, so it’s hardly surprising to learn that some ideas had to be shelved. But, as Yotoryama is quick to remind us, any omissions were fed back into the *Soul Calibur* loop as the series progressed to its situation today, with the latest iteration taking *Soul Calibur* back to the top of the charts: “We had a few ideas that didn’t quite make the [final Dreamcast version], including [a reappearance of] the Extra Weapons mode from *Soul Edge* and the ability for fighters to enhance their weapons. But happily we were able to implement these and other features in *Soul Caliburs II* through *IV*...”



» The historical settings for the fights, as well as a complex story that takes players back many centuries, gives the game a mythical flavour.



Mitsurugi – Mitsurugi, a samurai, uses a katana (no Dreamcast link) blade. He’s one of the sharpest fighters in *Soul Calibur*, renowned for his quick movement and immense power.



Sophitia – Buxom Sophitia is a Greek warrior armed with a fairly standard sword and shield combo – a pretty all-rounder.



Lizardman – This odd-looking character has a shield, which helps him guard against attacks, and a short axe-sword that has great close-range impact.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ROLLING THUNDER (PICTURED)

SYSTEMS: ARCADE AND VARIOUS CONSOLES AND MICROS
YEAR: 1986

SPLATTERHOUSE

SYSTEMS: ARCADE, PC-ENGINE, FM TOWNS
YEAR: 1988

TEKKEN 2

SYSTEMS: ARCADE, PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1995



THE MAKING OF: SOUL CALIBUR



» The attacking range of fighters in *Soul Calibur* is largely dependent on the weapon(s) with which they're equipped.



Cervantes – This deadly Spaniard is an unlockable character who uses two swords. One is longer than the other and his attacking speed is ferocious.

Inferno – *Soul Calibur*'s final boss character is unlockable as a playable character in the Dreamcast version. Inferno has everything at his disposal.

Siegfried – Siegfried is the closest thing *Soul Calibur* has to a lead character. He's clearly dressed for the part with a shimmering silver outfit.

Nightmare – Nightmare owns the Soul Edge sword and is a formidable opponent. He's not the quickest, but he makes up for it with his power.

Xianghua – Xianghua is a Chinese girl with Chinese blades. She's quick off the mark, but is something of a lightweight.

Taki – Taki is the quickest *Soul Calibur* contender. She not only moves like a ninja late for an appointment: she also carries two ninja swords.

Hwang – Korean Hwang is armed with a Chinese sword and has strong kicking. He's not as easy to use as the similar Xianghua, but he looks cool.

Rock – Rock carries a mace and is certainly intimidating, although he can be defeated relatively easily by taking advantage of his lack of speed.

Voldo – Voldo is something of a contortionist, a master of the sneak attack. He carries katars in both hands and as a result looks like a botched Edward Scissorhands.

Ivy – This English lass uses the Ivy Blade, a sword that is essentially a whip, which adds to her position as *Soul Calibur*'s bondage queen.

Seung – Seung Mina is the second Korean character to feature in *Soul Calibur*. She's extremely quick and carries a long-reaching spear.

Maxi – Okinawan Maxi wields a nunchuk, so you'd better watch your shins.

THE CLASSIC GAME



SPACE CHANNEL 5

For many, Sega's Dreamcast was the best console the company ever produced, offering a variety of stunningly original titles that immediately made the machine stand apart from its peers. *Space Channel 5* is one such title, and it's one that just gets better with age. It's a game that marries a deceptively simplistic rhythm-action mechanic to some of the most spectacular and, let's face it, funky music this side of *PaRappa The Rapper*. Created by the legendary Tetsuya Mizuguchi, who would go on to blend his love of music and videogames with the likes of *Rez*, *Lumines*, *Meteos* and *Every Extend Extra*, *Space Channel 5* is a refreshingly unique release that still feels as fresh as a proverbial daisy. How could you not love it?



PUDDING

Ulala's rival. Pudding is a reporter from Channel 42 and is the first character that Ulala faces off against in her bid to become the ultimate reporter. Pudding later teams up with Ulala to stop a brainwashed Chief Blank from starting the alien invasion on *Space Channel 5*'s final stage.



SPACE DIVA

This sultry female can be found on the second level of *Space Channel 5* and is being kidnapped by some of those pesky Morolians. Fortunately, their dance routines are fairly straightforward and aren't too difficult to decipher, so the diva is easily rescued from her alien captors.



JAGUAR

Jaguar rescued Ulala many years ago, which set her on the path to wanting to become a reporter for the legendary Space Channel 5. He now runs a pirate radio station and, despite getting on in age, still has what it takes when he faces off against our plucky heroine.

WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



It's the music game that never gets dull

Rhythm-action games come and go, but like the aforementioned *PaRappa The Rapper*, Ulala's adventure remains fantastically refreshing to play. By keeping the controls simplistic, Mizuguchi was able to create a title that anyone could pick up and play but couldn't master without extensive play. Brilliant music, charming characters, epic bosses and a kooky storyline all combine to create one of the most mesmerising experiences on Sega's console. The fact that we're still returning to it a decade later tells you everything you need to know. Is *Space Channel 5* going to become a timeless classic? You betcha.

STANDOUT MOMENT



Meet Michael Jackson...

You're approaching the end of the game and as you turn a corner you come face to face with none other than Michael Jackson, who, as many readers will know, was a big fan of Sega's gaming output. Known as Space Michael and actually voiced by the King of Pop himself, it's a nuttily surreal moment that's typical of *Space Channel 5*'s quirky humour. Sadly, Space Michael doesn't stick around for too long, although he does have a far larger role in the 2002 sequel. Good luck finding a copy though, as allegations against Jackson at the time meant that Sony and Sega pulled the PS2 and Dreamcast UK releases.

BEST STAGE



Asteroids, psychedelic walls and more

For sheer variety you can't go wrong with level 3. Starting off in a huge asteroid field, Ulala uses a flying disk to negotiate the space debris, before facing off against flying space bikes and Jaguar. A mind-warping trip through a psychedelic tunnel has the pink-haired reporter facing off against Pudding again, before she finally infiltrates the enemy base and encounters one of *Space Channel 5*'s most memorable adversaries: a weird rubber alien that splits in two. When the base has been destroyed, it's time for Ulala to make a speedy retreat from a giant fireball that threatens to engulf her. Top stuff.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

BEST CHARACTER



The girl in the tight orange skirt

With a spray-on dress, gloss-coated lips and an extremely sexy voice, it's Ulala without a shadow of a doubt. Allegedly based on Deee-Lite's Lady Miss Kier – she raised an unsuccessful lawsuit against Sega after claiming that it offered her \$16,000 to license her name and image – Ulala's strong attitude and fantastic dance moves have made her a role model to female gamers and an object of lust to males. And yes, we're fully aware that she's not real. With her girl power image, shocking crop of pink hair and carefree attitude, it's little wonder that so many Ulala's crop up whenever there's a cosplay event in town.

BEST MUSIC



The rhythm is gonna getcha

The music of *Space Channel 5* covers a wide variety of styles and genres, and although some of the boss battles are particularly mesmerising, it's the first that we constantly return to. It's a magnificent number that instantly captures your attention and, like later levels, continually changes in style based on how well Ulala is doing. Easily our favourite section, however, is when you face off against Pudding and finally beat her. You immediately gain control of her guitarist, who lays some meaty riffs over the tune. It's a fantastic moment and is typical of Mizuguchi's ear for music and the game's slick presentation.

BEST BOSS



Enter Evila

Space Channel 5's fourth boss is an evil replica of Ulala that's been created by Chief Blank to finish off the galaxy's most gorgeous reporter once and for all. She has some devilishly tricky routines that are so fast that they can be easily missed, and it takes a fair amount of practice to beat her. Eventually she'll outsmart you and you'll get knocked to the ground and given two more attempts to beat the evil crone. Successfully complete either of her routines and you'll move on to a showdown with Blank. Fail and *Space Channel 5* gets shut down for good.



What the press said... ages ago

GameSpot 7/10

"Beyond a few unlockable character profiles, there isn't much replay value – in fact, you'll probably find yourself tiring of mimicking the aliens' moves long before you finish the game."

What we think

We disagree. Yes, *Space Channel 5* is short and lightweight, but for us that's where the charm lies. The fact that it's incredibly short just means we can get even more games with Ulala in, which is fine with us.



IN THE KNOW

- PLATFORM: DREAMCAST
- DEVELOPER: UNITED GAME ARTISTS
- PUBLISHER: SEGA
- RELEASED: 1999
- GENRE: RHYTHM-ACTION

PHANTASY STAR™ ONLINE

ファンタシースターオンライン

SEGA'S PHANTASY STAR HAS GONE THROUGH ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT METAMORPHOSIS OF ANY RPG FRANCHISE. SINCE FIRST APPEARING ON THE SEGA MASTER SYSTEM, IT HAS TRANSFORMED INTO SOMETHING THAT IS NOW VIRTUALLY UNRECOGNISABLE FROM THE ORIGINAL 8-BIT GAME. MIKE TOOLEY TALKS TO SEVERAL PHANTASY STAR DEVELOPERS AND DISCOVERS HOW THE EVOLUTION OF THIS SUCCESSFUL SERIES HAS OFTEN GONE HAND IN HAND WITH SEGA'S OWN TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES OF THE TIME.

THE
COMPLETE
LOWDOWN
**PHANTASY
STAR**
1987-2015

Phantasy Star started life way back in 1987. Sega's perennial RPG was crafted and sold as the best reason to buy the

Master System, with Sega aiming to take on Nintendo's all-conquering NES. Even by Sega's standards it was a bold design brief, and, despite the odds, it was almost fulfilled. *Phantasy Star* would become one of Sega's biggest console franchises, though at the time this was almost unimaginable. The story of the *Phantasy Star* series, lying as close to Sega's internal machismo as it did, serves to chronicle the Sega legend itself. With each instalment of *Phantasy Star* something new was added to the RPG genre or to the technology of the time. The series has brought Sega success and awards, but along the way, as has so often been the case, the Japanese giant has suffered for its art.

By 1986 the Japanese games industry had really hit its stride. Gamers the world over were enjoying stellar arcade titles from the likes of Taito and Capcom; hits like *Bubble Bobble* and *Strider* were heavy on character art and gameplay, and proved to be instantly popular. Sega, though, was in a different league altogether.

Having recently been successfully floated on the Japanese stock market its arcade games, like *After Burner* and *Space Harrier*, were a tour de force of speed and pyrotechnics – they were bolstered by the raw power of custom hardware and cabinets that had no equal at that time. Thanks largely to the formidable Isao Otiawo's drive for growth and the talents of the Sega arcade teams and their leader Yu Suzuki, in the arcades, Sega was unstoppable.

However, in the home computer and console market Sega wasn't having much success at all, and it was Nintendo and its aforementioned NES that was enjoying the lion's share of gamers' money.

Isao Otiawo wasn't prepared to give up on this lucrative market though. Moderate success was previously achieved through Sega's range of SG1-3000 computers, with some of its hardware being used in the then current Master System architecture – Otiawo knew that the hardware was good, and was acutely aware of the problems facing Sega's overseas competitors.

So from 1986 to 1996 Sega ran a club called S.P.E.C. (The Sega Players Enjoy Club). Spec's membership consisted



MAGNIFICENT

One of the many new and innovative features that *Phantasy Star* brought to the series was the ability to nurture a support character that would assist the player on their quest. Mags as they were known were either found or traded with other players. They needed constant feeding but like all living things would thrive and grow based on the food they were given. If a mag's diet consisted of recovery foods then it would have healing bias, likewise if a mag was fed on magic recovery foods or photon drops it would become aggressive. Mags had three evolutions: its original state; at level 20 it would split in two; the third evolution happened depending on character and mag class but defined the mag's attributes and photon attacks. Mags took their power from photon damage taken by the player in battle – once the power bar hit 100 it was ready to send off its photon blast.



» Noah or Lutz as he would later be known, provided a great source of debate regarding the chronology of *Phantasy Star*.



» Odin was the universe's first real hero. When we first encounter Odin he is a stone statue; Myau get Alis to help restore Odin.

of Sega staff and fans alike, giving the developers a chance to speak to fans about their work and vice versa. The format was honest and open; looking back, this was perhaps the industry's first iteration of a focus group. The idea of S.P.E.C. repaid Sega well when it wanted to know why Sega arcade gamers were playing on Nintendo's NES at home. The Nintendo Entertainment System was dominant in Japan and North America, but at that time had few spectacular games, whereas the Master System had accurate home versions of Sega's burgeoning arcade catalogue.

The results of the S.P.E.C. survey told Otiawo all he needed to know: the most anticipated game of the year was *Dragon's Quest 3*: a NES exclusive! *Dragon's Quest*, *Final Fantasy* and *Ultima* appeared to be



» This where it started, innocence abounds.

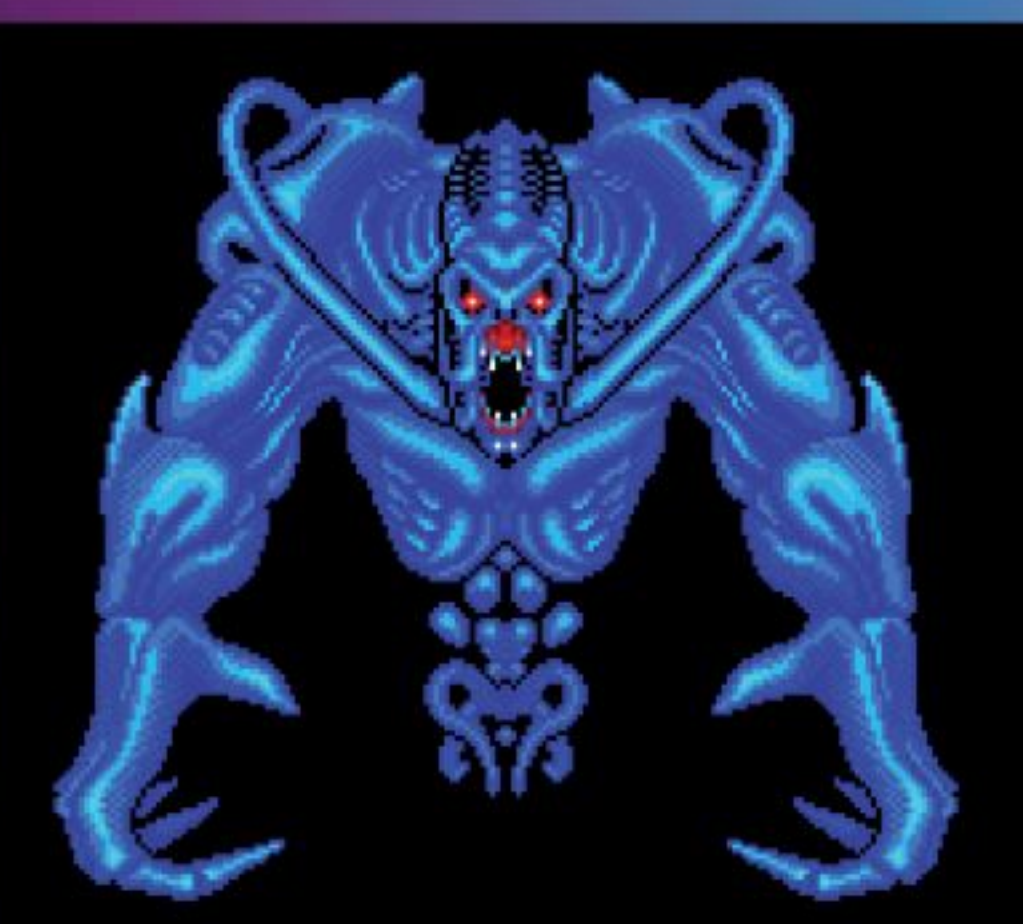


» The first *Phantasy Star* villain. The once magnanimous King Lassic.

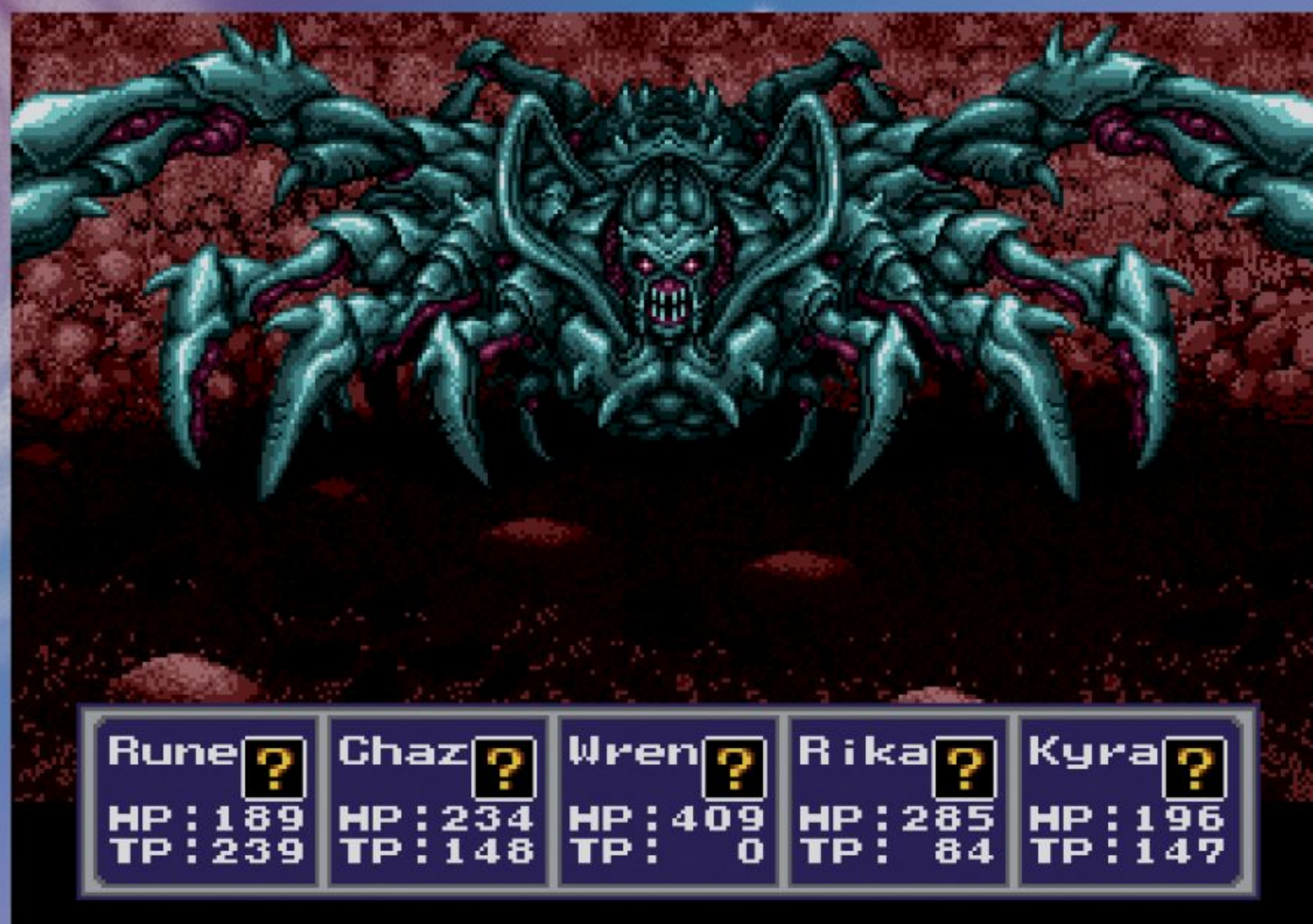


I'M MYAU.

» Don't be fooled, despite having no finger, Myau was an amazing asset to the party.



» The first time incarnation of Dark Falz as seen in *PS1*.



the difference – three massive franchises, three massive RPGs. All exclusive to Nintendo consoles and Sega had nothing to offer that was even slightly similar.

It was the decade of *Dungeons & Dragons* and Otiawo wasn't about to let Sega miss the adventure. And so it was that he assembled a team of talented individuals from within Sega to produce its very first RPG.

AM8, as it was to be known, started as a disparate group of talent and drew little interest from the other teams at Sega at the time. Ironically, *Phantasy Star* the game would bestow success on all who were involved with it. Yuji Naka was to cut his teeth designing a game world, something that had eluded him up until this point (most of Naka's previous portfolio at Sega was made up of home conversions of Yu Suzuki's arcade games). As Naka's idol and mentor, without even being connected to the project, Yu Suzuki's influence would be felt throughout the *Phantasy Star* universe. Yuji Naka was joined by Reiko Kodama who had started with Sega in 1984 and was no stranger to success thanks to her work on the arcade title *Ninja Princess* and the Master System's flagship title *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* – responsible for overall game design she would eventually persuade Naka to develop the 3D engine that would make *Phantasy Star* stand apart from its competitors. Joining the senior Kodama was Naota Oshima, again tasked with overall game design – his contributions were to make Naka and Kodama's ideas a reality. Of most significance to the franchise though was

the inclusion of two others not directly involved with creating the game: enter Miki Morimoto and Tokuhiko Uwabo.

Morimoto had been around Sega for a couple of years at this point; he had joined to become part of the arcade division. Sadly, this opportunity didn't present itself for Morimoto, so he continued to work somewhat begrudgingly in the home entertainment sector. His career high at this point was to be director of the seminal *Ys*.

Morimoto was a big player within S.P.E.C. and his mandate for *Phantasy Star* was to ensure that the gamers got exactly what they asked for without recreating the Greek legend of Homer. As for Uwabo, his job was to score the works of the team and provide a suitable set of sound effects – not an easy transition when your previous musical scores have been for fast, action arcade games like *After Burner* and *Space Harrier*.

With the team members in place, it was time to create the game. "I don't really remember all the details, but Yuji Naka indicated basic concept with game style, while each team member broke this down further to eventually create *Phantasy Star's* design," begins Reiko Kodama. "We wanted a game that was unlike any other consumer RPG that was out there. We thought the 3D dungeons in PC games were interesting, and detailed event scenes would be a unique way to convey the story – two features that weren't in any other console RPGs at the time. The game's mix of sci-fi and fantasy setting was also part of this desire to create a unique RPG," she continued.



» Dark Falz gets stronger through each game and became a much tougher proposition each time.



Rune	Chaz	Wren
HP: 188	HP: 216	HP: 4
TP: 266	TP: 69	TP: 0

» Above left and right: By *Phantasy Star 4* Dark Falz had evolved again. And by *Phantasy Star Online* Dark Falz had evolved into one of the most spectacular bosses to be seen on a videogame.



With the game skeleton created, it fell to the designers and programmers to add flesh to the bones. Development gathered at pace and at this point the game really started to take shape.

Oshima and Reiko were determined to have their 3D dungeons and event scenes and as such tasked Naka with developing a 3D engine for the Master System, asking him to use all that he had learnt from the Yu Suzuki code he had seen as a conversion programmer. Naka rose to the challenge and delivered an engine that was beyond the then known threshold of Sega's 8-bit console. The same incentive was applied to Tokuhiko Uwabo for making *Phantasy Star's* soundtrack. "How would you have approached this in the arcade division?" was the question that was asked. The answer would hit gamers in the pocket as Tokuhiko did exactly what the arcade division would do: increase the spec of the hardware. So Otiawo green-lighted the incomplete *Phantasy Star* to have its own FM sound chip built into the cartridge. This wasn't all though – to accommodate the 3D sections *Phantasy Star* would need a bigger cartridge. Again the team were told, "whatever it takes". As *Phantasy Star* took shape and the story line progressed it was decided that

the lead character should be female. "Back then the idea of a female hero was practically unheard of," continues Kodama. "We wanted to do things that hadn't been done before, like animated monsters and 3D dungeons, so the idea of a female came naturally; we thought it would be an interesting change."

Phantasy Star eventually shipped on 20 December 1987 and launched to expectant Japanese gamers on a cartridge weighing in at 8-mega bits, some 16 times the size of a standard Master System cartridge. It also came with the aforementioned built-in FM Chip and the console's first in-built cartridge save system – all in all a fitting swansong as the last game released on the MK1 Master System.

Set on the planet Palma, *Phantasy Star* followed the story of Alis Landale as she sets out to avenge her brother's death and free her people from the corrupt rule of King Lassie. Interestingly, as the story unfolds Lassie is shown as a magnanimous and fair leader, who has been corrupted by a demon called Dark Force. Dark Force we would learn later would be the omnipresent boss throughout all the *Phantasy Star* games. AM8 had done it. It had delivered a



» By *Phantasy Star 3* gamers had an expectation of who was behind the evil of the game.

DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN...



YOU ENTERED THE LOBBY?

Walking into the lobby of *Phantasy Star Online* for the first time is one of the series' biggest highlights. Despite only being able to use a keyboard to communicate, Sonic Team's ingenious chat system instantly broke down the boundaries for players all around the world.

first class RPG that had bowled over reviewers and gamers alike. It had steamrollered formulaic RPGs to create new standards of its own. Players were awarded a space ship for interplanetary travel; the 'boss who's not a boss' was seen here for the very first time; but most importantly AM8 hadn't just created a timeline, it had created a universe: a universe gamers would want to return to over and over again.

Pleased with *Phantasy Star's* success, Sega commissioned a translation and ten months later *Phantasy Star* was released in North America. Retailing for \$10 less than the hardware it was played on, even Sega was surprised to see the speed that the game was selling. The translation wasn't good, name changes made to some key characters changed the sex of the characters (even changing the story) and some gamers treat it as a different game entirely. Still, *Phantasy Star* was considered a great success and as such a sequel was quickly put into production. AM8 stayed together but were strengthened by Toru Yoshida joining AM8 as team manager. Sega had learnt from the past and knew that with a new console almost ready for launch, in the shape of the Mega Drive, it had a great chance to get an RPG established before Nintendo had finalised the specs for its then next generation SNES.

The first thing Toru Yoshida did was to make the decision that the game should be in 2D: "I wanted to lose the sparse 3D dungeons of the first game and create a densely-populated environment to give a sense of scale," he told Mega magazine at the time. The battles would play out in three dimensions though and the character animation had improved immensely

"BACK THEN THE IDEA OF A FEMALE HERO WAS PRACTICALLY UNHEARD OF, WE WANTED TO DO THINGS THAT HADN'T BEEN DONE BEFORE, SO THE IDEA OF A FEMALE CAME NATURALLY"





» PS3 was much darker than the first two games, something gamers noticed from the sinister introduction.



» Special thanks to www.shinforce.com who supplied us with many useful images, including this rather splendid boss from Phantasy Star Online.

THE OTHER PHANTASY STARS

Being a Sonic Team franchise has seen *Phantasy Star* locales and characters appear in many other games, usually as hidden extras. Some are interesting curios but some really are something to behold. *Hoshi Wo* on the Sega Master System allowed players to visit Palma, Motavia and Dezoris via a shuttle that must sound familiar to some of you. *Super Daisen Ryaku* on the Mega Drive contained a map of the planet Mota. *Shenmue 1* and *2* featured a Myau Musk Cat toy while the bus Toy had the journey Paseo-Zema on its information board. Rouge's final stage in *Sonic Adventure 2* contains PSO pick up boxes containing rings, and the subsequent *Sonic Adventure 2* battle contained PSO costumes for Shadow and Sonic, unlockable by attaining all A grades. Even as recently as the GameCube *Beach Spikers*, Sonic Team have been hiding away goodies – just type PHANTA2 as a girls' name to unlock two outfits, some green hair and Numan ears. A Humewearl face also becomes available.

SET 1000 YEARS AFTER THE FIRST GAME, A DESPERATE FUTURE IS PAINTED WHERE TECHNOLOGY AND NATURE STRUGGLE TO CO-EXIST

since the first game. The cutscenes remained as well and demonstrated the power of Sega's new hardware, with Rolph, the main character, having the end of *Phantasy Star* narrated to him through a series of cutscenes.

Phantasy Star II is where the themes of the series really started to emerge. Set 1000 years after the first game, a future is painted where technology and nature struggle to co-exist – a future where ecology is governed by a machine: Mother Brain. Developed to manage the ecology of the Agol system she has started to malfunction. Where Alis had to make do with the companions destined to meet her, Rolph gets to choose his own party to take on his adventure. Then there is, Nei, Rolph's partner through this adventure who would go on to become a firm fan favourite and prove once and for all that videogames can be emotive; Nei's fate would be mirrored in many games after *Phantasy Star II* (*Final Fantasy VII* for instance), but as in life you never forget

the first time.

Another reason *Phantasy Star II* stands out in the series is due to its impressive boss battles. "I remember that both Dark Star and Mother Brain were remarkably tough," recalls Yoshida. "I don't quite know what inspired me, but Mother Brain comes from a mother with an unmistakable sense of language. I borrowed elements from computer and mothers, so when I brought her to life I managed to give her a Godlike feel." And they were tough too; techniques became integral to the game, and battles moved to a higher plain as a result, challenging players who were used to a one-dimensional attack tactic. Team play was now a necessity.

Released in March 1989 in Japan, an English translation hit stores in North America in time for Christmas, where the game dominated sales charts for the coming months.

With success now assured for *Phantasy Star*, Sega developed a third instalment almost back-to-back with the second, using the same game engine, but with a vastly different team as many of the original team had moved on to new projects. Step forward Kazunari Tsukamoto, who would join Reiko Kodama and Toru Yoshida in what has become the most talked about *Phantasy Star* of the early years.

Phantasy Star III: Generations Of



» *Phantasy Star 3 CARD Revolution* was a fantastic game, with some of the prettiest in-game visuals seen on the GameCube. Worth looking up just for the offline mode.



IF YOU PLAY ONE PHANTASY STAR GAME...

PLAY THIS...



PHANTASY STAR ONLINE - DC

Never mind the many console firsts it broke, *Phantasy Star Online* should be enjoyed because it took the beloved series in an exciting new direction, whilst ensuring fans wouldn't be disappointed with the end result. Those with a 360 or PS2 may want to try *Phantasy Star Universe*, as it's the same game but on a far grander scale.



» *PSO* took materials from the original *Phantasy Star* and brought them right up to date, as the evolution of the dragon shows.

game being a direct continuation. I think it is an interesting game in its own right. The reason why the story was so radically different is that the development team wanted to create a unique *Phantasy Star*, something they achieved and I'm very happy with the outcome"

After the run away successes of the first three games, Sega and gamers alike were hungry for more *Phantasy Star*, and a couple of minor releases on the Game Gear did little to sate the thirst for a return to Algo. The first *Phantasy Star Adventure* was an adaptation of the Sega Game library download title *Phantasy Star II: Text Adventure*. This game sought to provide a background history for the characters of *Phantasy Star II* and was greatly enhanced by the use of graphics. The second, *Phantasy Star Gaiden*, is set between *Phantasy Star 1* and *II*, where the player learns that Alis has gone off to set up her own colony. Although solid to play the game was aimed at a younger audience and the anime graphics didn't convey the feel of *Phantasy Star* like other games. By now, 1993, Sega was a vast tidal wave that swept over everything before it. Its arcade machines dominated, it



» *Phantasy Star II: Text Adventure* kept the feel of the first games, but had no animation.

was out-performing Nintendo in homes outside of Japan, and the team that Isao Otiawo had put together to make an RPG had served up a blue hedgehog that had become one of the most recognisable characters in the world. Sega's R&D departments however were finding it difficult to progress the Genesis hardware and within four years developers had almost maxed the capabilities of the machine. And so it was that Sega released the Sega CD, a CD add-on for the Genesis that incorporated hardware upgrades that would allow sprite scaling and 3D effects akin to Mode 7: Nintendo's standard at that time.

Development of *Phantasy Star IV* began in early 1993. Pictures of a 3D game world started to surface in the Sega press at the time and rumours persisted that *Phantasy Star IV* was Mega CD-bound, to give the new hardware a much-needed killer app. Debates raged through letters pages in magazines as to whether the game should be released on a new format, with existing users worried they would lose the opportunity to play what was already being heralded as the end of the story. At the eleventh hour the format was changed and it was decided that *Phantasy Star IV* would indeed be a cartridge game for the Genesis. The 3D dungeons were removed and the game took a similar form to the previous games, albeit enhanced beyond the expectations of the hardware it would appear on.

"We really wanted to use those 3D dungeons in the game," regrets Kodama. "The ideas we had proved to be a little too much for the hardware to handle and unfortunately, we just couldn't convey the sort of setting we really wanted."

Released in December 1993, the *Phantasy Star* team threw everything

that they had at the game, resulting in a title that would tie up the unfinished threads of the earlier games, while introducing 16-bit gamers to anime storyboards and animation and a much more refined graphics set. The battle configurations had also changed and it was now possible to chain techniques together to create combinations, making boss battles much more palatable. Alternatively you could fight while riding vehicles in the "Machine Battle". It was interesting how the team that created *Phantasy Star* all wanted to contribute to the final episode. Kodama, who by this time could pick and chose projects, said "I worked on this title because I really wanted to illustrate spiritual exchanges, friendship and love among different races" while Toru Yoshida tells us that, "with *Phantasy Star IV* our biggest goal was to finish the game neatly. This was the one where I worked as a director and as such I dedicated all my energies to it" finally, Akinori Nishiyama adds "I focussed a great deal of creative energy on painting the lives of the people inhabiting Motavia and am very pleased with the results". It seems everyone involved wanted to ensure that the universe was summed up properly.

For six years *Phantasy Star* had enchanted its players and drew unbridled passion from its design teams and then nothing. It all stopped. *Phantasy Star* had reached a hiatus that would last for six years. With hindsight this made perfect sense, as *Phantasy Star* had achieved all that *FFVII* did, except a generation earlier; the rumoured Saturn Betas would only have delivered more of the same and after six games *Phantasy Star* needed technology to catch up so that it could progress again.

On 19 September 1999 Sega made the headlines at the Tokyo Game Show by announcing that a new *Phantasy Star* game would be released for the fledgling Dreamcast system and would make full use of the console's online technology. Sonic Team would take responsibility for the development of what would go on to be one of Sega's biggest games of the last ten years and for many would provide an entry level to the *Phantasy Star* universe.

Development was beset with problems: the Japanese beta was running late and was proving unstable. This was to be the first online console RPG and as such Sega was breaking new ground and had no history or best practices in place – every milestone had to be learnt along the way. As the launch



» *Phantasy Star 4* told the story through animated story boards that added a vibrant feel to *Phantasy Star*.



» Dark Falz has an astonishing array of attacks, and unlike other bosses doesn't follow a set routine.

STILL IN THE DARK

Dark Falz or Dark Force is the only recurring character that has made an appearance in every game. Seemingly destroyed on countless occasions he just keeps coming back. As far as videogame bosses go he has killed more lead characters than any other.

He panders to the weakness and vanities of the worlds that he dominates and watches as citizens evoke their own downfall.

Phantasy Star 2 talks of people getting complacent and lazy after the events of *PS1*, living as they have in a Eutopia for 1000 years.

Dark Falz has evolved down the years and tackling Dark Falz at the end of *PSO* on Ultimate setting

is one of gaming's toughest challenges; his Megid attack alone can reduce a whole party's health to one HP, leaving them all but dead – once you leave a boss battle to resurrect, you can't rejoin until the boss is vanquished.

For maximum frustration try tackling Dark Falz with a retro editor, who accidentally sells the epic weapon you leant him when he was meant to be buying trimate, doh!

approached Sega hit upon the idea of giving away *ChuChu Rocket!* – an addictive puzzle game – to Dream Arena users. The idea was that if you gave a game away en-masse, you would negate the relatively low (at the time) online user numbers by encouraging use of one game.

Naka agreed and told Sega World back in 1999, "in this case it was the network. We learned a lot of lessons from *ChuChu Rocket!*, but for *PSO* we had to learn a lot about the differences of networking in different countries, since this is a global RPG. I realized in a sense how great Microsoft is, because as long as you have Windows, you can connect to the network and play online games anywhere. So with *Diablo* and *Ultima Online*, Windows takes care of most of the networking stuff, whereas in making *PSO* we had to start with the game, and then one level below that – the network." He then went on to add some light to the biggest struggle facing *PSO* at the time: "A PC costs maybe ten times as much as a Dreamcast, and people generally look at the many PC games that are online and think it must be easy, since there's a whole bunch of them. But people probably don't realize how much more difficult it is to make network games for a machine that costs one-tenth of a PC. I think that in the end, we were able to create something that was even better."

As the deadline approached, last minute changes were made and some features were dropped or reduced in size. *Phantasy Star Online* launched in Japan on 21 December

2000 and the response was overwhelming. Players were awestruck by the vibrant world that Yuji Naka and his team had created and few

» Right: The Anime displays of *Phantasy Star 4* were superb, and depicted the game in a way not seen by western gamers at that point.



ever noticed that the sounds of *Phantasy Star Online* were largely a reworking of the original score; *PSO* had absorbed all that had been *Phantasy Star* before and restructured it into a world draped in beauty and shrouded in foreboding. The timeless tale of machines and nature failing to coexist was to return and there is much evidence to suggest that *Phantasy Star Online* was borne from a backstory of *Phantasy Star II*. The story unfolds against a backdrop of helpless optimism on the planet Ragol and Pioneer 2: a ship carrying a race of settlers looking

for a new home after their home world was destroyed. The Hunters Guild (which first appeared in *Phantasy Star IV*) offers quests onto the planet surface that drive the narration. Each quest acts like a burlesque dancer slowly and tantalisingly unwrapping layer upon layer until all you see is Ragol without the veneer. And then *PSO* unfolds into a warped fantasy, a future-world Hotel California you can check out any time you like. But this is a world you can never leave; the harder you look the less hospitable Ragol becomes, until it dawns on you that the reason there are no

» The instantly recognisable Mother Brain from *Phantasy Star 2*. She evoked the powers of planets in an attempt to thwart your attempts at shutting her down.





survivors from pioneer 1 is that the world is consumed by an evil that is feeding off anything that has the misfortune to be alive on Ragol. No one can be trusted and as your character develops and grows you can't help but feel an affinity with Red Ring Rico, who, although missing, has littered the planet with useful information for the gamer to discover. Despite never meeting her, the fate that befell her would melt even the most savage beast.

Online the game allows four players to meet up in a lobby. Online quests are available, but soon give way to character levelling and rare item exploration. *PSO* included another innovative online feature in the way that chat could be carried across the world, a user interface that transcended language by enabling icon chat. Now for the first time European players could play and communicate all around the world. Sega also gave *PSO* its own time zone; linking up with Swatch, *PSO* operated on a beat time system, that meant in-game everyone played on the same time frame. This was useful for the special event quests that were periodically launched to tie in with holidays like Christmas and Easter. Such was the success of *Phantasy Star* that

Sega published these figures showing online statistics just four months after the Japanese release: Japan (release 12/21/2000): 130,000 players; America (release 1/31/2001): 70,000; Europe (release 2/16/2001): 35,000. Remember that in 2001 most Dreamcast connections were dial up, Japanese gamers had to pay for a hunters licence and less than five per cent of European users had broadband and as such had to pay per minute to play. 26000 simultaneous players was the record at that point – some six months later this number would double.

Midway through 2001 Sega released *PSO Version 2*, which was a slight update offering interactive lobbies, a higher-level cap and far tougher bosses. In 2002 and 2003 respectively the Nintendo GameCube and Microsoft Xbox would receive their own versions in the form of *Phantasy Star Online Episode 1* and *2*. The first was a bug-fixed update of *PSO*, while *Episode 2* was a reworked version of *2* that featured new levels, weapons and bosses.

2004 saw Sega release *Episode 3: C.A.R.D Revolution* as a GameCube exclusive. Staying firmly with Pioneer 2

this title aimed to conclude the story that *PSO* started. Using a totally different play mechanic to the previous *Phantasy Stars* it had more in common with the earlier *Phantasy Star* games than *PSO*, but played out through a series of card battles. The character classes remained the same as *PSO*, as did the enemies and the game proved once again that innovation is never far from the franchise's creators.

Sadly, recent years haven't been as kind to the franchise. Although we've had a number of games, including *Phantasy Star Online IV: Blueburst*, *Phantasy Star Online 2* and *Phantasy Star Universe*, they've all failed to make a huge impact on their respective consoles. Things have fared little better for the *Phantasy Star Portable* series on PSP either, mainly because of the success of *Monster Hunter*, a series which was inspired by *Phantasy Star* in the first place. *Phantasy Star Nova* on the Vita remains confined to Japan, while an English version of *Phantasy Star Online 2* exists but is bafflingly region-locked to south east Asia. Here's hoping Sega manages to turn the franchise around for future installments.

PSO INCLUDED ANOTHER INNOVATIVE ONLINE FEATURE IN THE WAY THAT CHAT COULD BE CARRIED ACROSS THE WORLD, A USER INTERFACE THAT TRANSCENDED LANGUAGE BY ENABLING ICON CHAT

Sonic Adventure

SONIC ENTERS THE THIRD DIMENSION!

» RETROREVIVAL



» SONIC TEAM » DREAMCAST » 1999
Anticipation for *Sonic Adventure* was absolutely huge. Apart from the enjoyable *Sonic R*, there had been no 'proper' Sonic game on Sega's last console, meaning all eyes were focused on his Dreamcast debut.

Although *Sonic Adventure* didn't manage to make the Dreamcast's launch, it did follow a few short weeks later, and fans and critics went wild. While it lacked the sheer scope and gameplay of *Super Mario 64*, there was no denying that Sonic Team's game was extremely impressive. This in part was mainly down to Sonic Team doing everything it could to ensure that Sonic's adventure was as linear as possible. Yes he could still explore the environment in the specially designed 'Adventure Fields' but the 'Action Stages' were far stricter, allowing the hedgehog to do what he did best – run insanely fast.

It worked though and while they could occasionally suffer from glitches and some bizarre camera angles they were able to capture all the speed and frenetic fun that could be found in Sonic's earlier 2D adventures. Filled with dynamic set pieces – the killer whale sequence sold me a Dreamcast on its own – and clever level design, *Sonic Adventure* was just that, a journey of epic proportions.

And yet there were additions to *Sonic Adventure* that weren't really wanted and they slowly helped to dilute the series, namely the introduction of needless sidekicks – although we do love Big the cat – and terrible story sequences that featured some of the most annoying voices to ever appear in a videogame.

We can forgive all that stuff though, because when Sonic got fed up of exploring the big 3D hubs and simply concentrated on running from checkpoint to checkpoint it resulted in some of the most exciting gameplay to be found on the then next gen system. ★



THE MAKING OF...

“When I played Metal Black and experienced the Beam Level system, I thought, ‘I want to play with this more!’”

HIROYUKI MARUYAMA EXPLAINS HIS LOVE FOR
TAITO'S METAL BLACK





» Level 3 culminates in battles between the Red, Green and Yellow Antares ships, whose pilots have lost it. It's like *Gunstar Heroes* all over again...

ONE OF THE MOST HIGHLY REGARDED LATE-ERA DREAMCAST RELEASES, G.REV'S BORDER DOWN WAS POWERED INITIALLY BY ONE MAN'S DREAM, AND THEN BY THE NAOMI ARCADE HARDWARE, BEFORE GOING ON TO BECOME AN EXPENSIVE AND RARE GD-ROM. JONTI DAVIES CHATS WITH THE GAME'S PRODUCER AND G.REV'S PRESIDENT, HIROYUKI MARUYAMA

Gamers are occasionally sniped at by developers of (commercially unsuccessful) leftfield titles for wanting only "more of the same", but in *Border Down*'s case such a strong desire for more of an already-sampled gameplay style led to its creator pushing ahead with production – and *Border Down* is hardly a stereotypical result. "When I played [Taito's 1991 coin-op] *Metal Black* and experienced the Beam Level system, I thought, 'I want to play with this more!' That became a real impetus [for the development of *Border Down*]," says the game's producer, Hiroyuki Maruyama.

The 'Beam Level' gameplay system Maruyama got hooked on in the early Nineties, and which appears in slightly mutated form in his own *Border Down*, provides these games with an alternative take on the weapon power-up operations used by 99 per cent of shmups. Instead of picking up floating symbols to transform/upgrade your ship's weapons, *Border Down* shifts its attention onto the charge of your laser, which increases automatically with the passing of time and is boosted every time an enemy is destroyed. It's a system that is integral to how *Border Down* plays, and one that gives G.rev's game an unusually tactical bent when played for high scores.

It would be a bit facile to describe *Border Down* as a mere homage to *Metal Black*, though. Maruyama explains how *Metal Black* was just one of the influences on his pet project: "Basically, there were various things that influenced *Border Down*, but the influences change with each part of the game. Among those sources of inspiration, obviously a major one was Taito's *Metal Black*. But as for the 'Border System' of stage divergence, well, I produced *G-Darius* while I was working at Taito and that game had a 'Branching Fork' system, but it was really difficult to put together. That served as my excuse [to have another crack at it]. It's an idea centred on not having to develop that many levels if you have parallel worlds. I felt that in the future, if I could work on that idea again, it would be a sweet thing," Maruyama laughs.

The eventual consequence of Maruyama's experience on the *G-Darius* team is seen in *Border Down*'s 'Border System', which splits

the game into three concurrent strands of play: the top (green) border is 'For Beginners', the middle (yellow) border 'For Middle-class' players, and the bottom (red) border is reserved 'For Maniacs'. Each level can be approached from three separate perspectives, with each border explored by an alternative ship-pilot team, following separate routes to similar conclusions. It's an ingenious setup, and one that really puts pressure on the player: there's no room for careless life loss, because every life lost forces you to drop to the next, harder border. On the other hand, if you want to see *Border Down* from every angle, you need to play through every border. Each credit can result in a different path through the game.

Another strong influence on *Border Down*'s design came from Maruyama's bookshelf. "For the graphical concept," he reveals, "I took inspiration from Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* novel, which we used a lot as a reference during development." Having not read the book in question, we can't confirm exactly how it informs *Border Down*'s graphical style, but one look at Don Dixon's cover art shows an apparent link between the two projects. We promise Maruyama that we'll add it to our 'to read' list, and he seems happy with that.

Maruyama is a chirpy and upbeat fellow, and his small band of ex-Taito employees have an evident fondness for explosive shmups. They're clearly not in it purely for the money. G.rev (pronounced 'gu-ref', in a Slavic style, even though it's a truncation of 'G.revolution') is such a small unit that it's not really equipped to produce all facets of its games, as Maruyama explains: "There are only five of us here at G.rev – one designer, three programmers, and me. For *Border Down*, and for our other games, we commissioned help from outside the company for sound and extra design work."

It turns out that *Border Down* took root a long time before the game could be realised, and Maruyama had to establish his own company – and secure the necessary capital – before he could get those Antares ships off the ground. "I first had the idea for *Border Down*'s original concept well before I founded G.rev," Maruyama states. "However, from my original game idea only the stage divergence system really

IN THE KNOW



- » PUBLISHER: G.REV
- » DEVELOPER: IN-HOUSE
- » RELEASED: 2003
- » GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP

THE MAKING OF... BORDER DOWN



“G.rev’s such a small unit that’s not really able to produce all facets of its games”

made it into the final version of *Border Down*. To be honest, the rest of my concept was for a completely different kind of shooting game. After establishing G.rev, my initial objective was to produce an original shooting game. I started planning *Border Down* right away, but to achieve the goals of this original shooting game the company would need the appropriate skills and know-how, as well as capital – which, of course, is the most important factor! Eventually, though, everything came together and I had a chance to put *Border Down* into gradual development.” We ask Maruyama how much of his life has been taken up by *Border Down*. “If we start counting from the early planning phase, development took an extremely long time! But the actual production period was only about ten months long...”

G.rev wasn’t an independently wealthy company when Maruyama set up shop in Kanagawa prefecture in July 2000, and a lack of capital was one of the team’s biggest obstacles when producing *Border Down*. “Because of our ongoing struggle to obtain funding, we had to make various cuts to parts of my original plan for the game – we were left with no option; if we didn’t make those cuts, we couldn’t have continued with development – but I think positive results came about from some of those cuts,” Maruyama reckons.

One of those cuts that had a negative effect resulted in the disappointing ending sequence beyond defeating the final boss. After all that hard work, it would have been nice to see something more than a few anime stills and a closing credits comedown. Maruyama admits to not being happy about how the game ended, and he was also dissatisfied with the quality of the opening sequence: “We wanted to include some production ideas that we couldn’t – for example, a ‘phantom closing screen’. We also wanted to produce a longer opening sequence, and even now I regret that we didn’t do that. I really think we would have been fine without bothering to include the opening scene we ended up using.”

Still, such oversights can be forgiven – the playable bulk of the game is a joy to experience, and G.rev can be commended for producing such an interesting, pretty title on a limited budget. The game’s boss battles in particular, can end with crescendos of laser fire, resulting in hugely satisfying finales where players are encouraged to time their boss destruction carefully for maximal bonus points. “My personal favourite is the boss at the end of Level 4,” Maruyama reveals. “Also, the Level 5 boss was great fun to make...”

Maruyama returns to the subject of Yen: “In the end, we were able to get together most of the capital we needed from producing our first game, *Doki Doki Idol Star Seeker*. The deficit, the amount we still needed over and above that, we supplemented with an accumulation of capital from previous subcontracting work.” That freelance work included stints working with Treasure on *Ikaruga* and *Gradius V*, which must have been a valuable experience in both monetary and skill-forming terms.

Ikaruga, in particular, provided G.rev’s programming trio with some vital hands-on experience of coding for Sega’s NAOMI arcade board. *Doki Doki Idol Star Seeker* (G.rev’s first game as an independent developer) was released at roughly the same time as *Ikaruga*, and it too was running on the NAOMI hardware, but *Star Seeker* was a fairly basic puzzle game. Maruyama is a huge fan of Sega’s virtually Dreamcast-spec arcade board, though, and programming *Border Down* was made relatively simple by the board’s architecture and power. “The NAOMI and Dreamcast hardware was already approaching a transition period, so the development environment was really excellent. As you would expect, developing for this hardware felt like a luxury at the time. But in terms of performance, it wasn’t possible to achieve everything we wanted to do at the time. In fact, I’d say around a third of the things we wanted to display, we couldn’t – which I still grieve about.” Maruyama laughs wryly. “We were planning for a much flashier background, with explosions going on there, but...” He trails off, envisioning what might have been.

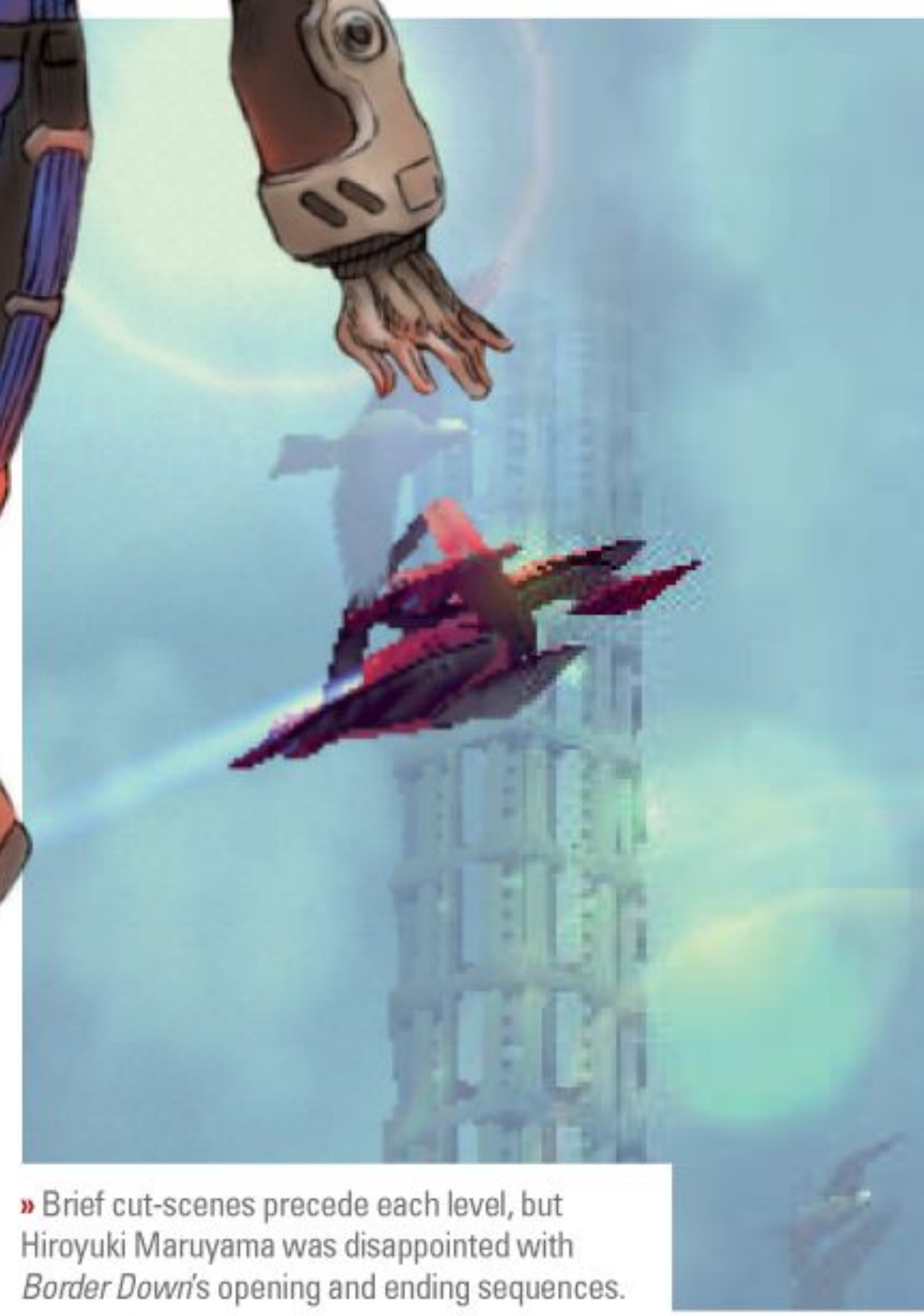
By 2003, Sega had effectively pulled the plug on the Dreamcast in Europe and America, but in Japan the console retained some forward momentum. Consoles were still being manufactured in small quantities, and games – now led by NAOMI-to-Dreamcast conversions of 2D shoot-em-ups – kept the most dedicated of Sega fans enthralled with the evident power of the hardware. *Border Down* appeared in arcades across Japan during April 2003, and by 25 September of the same year it had been converted to the Dreamcast and was being packaged and sold to Sega loyalists nationwide.

Early reactions from Japan’s arcade-goers were mixed, however, as Maruyama recalls: “It’s a really individualistic type of game, so when we first released it [in the arcades] it received both positive and negative reactions. I’m full of gratitude to the people who came to like *Border Down* [the coin-op]. I’m always thinking, ‘It would be great if we could create something even more enjoyable for those players next time.’ We feel as though those players [in the arcade] who have come to love our games are really supporting us, G.rev.”

Although a Dreamcast conversion of *Border Down* could have been a formality (what with it being a NAOMI title), once the coin-op version of the game was finished G.rev spent some time contemplating which console(s) a conversion would be best suited to. “At that time the only choices other than the Dreamcast were the PS2 and GameCube,” Maruyama recalls. “But we decided that porting *Border Down* to the PS2 would incur too many technical difficulties. It wouldn’t have been impossible, but we would have had to do virtually everything again, starting over from scratch. If we were going to go to those lengths, we’d be better off just making a completely new PS2 game, we thought. And as for the GameCube, we didn’t think *Border Down* really suited its type of user. So, ultimately, we chose to go with the Dreamcast. The biggest factor in this was the ease of porting *Border Down* [from NAOMI to Dreamcast], which in turn enabled us to focus on putting effort into additional components such as the Remix mode. Our final decision was largely influenced by these considerations.”

The Dreamcast-exclusive Remix mode Maruyama refers to offers different enemy attack patterns and a slightly realigned balance of play, but these subtle differences were more than sufficient to stir a frenzy among Japan’s most dedicated shmup fans. With fewer than 20,000 copies of the Dreamcast version in circulation, *Border Down* has since become one of the most highly prized Japan-exclusive games on the format. As a result, copies typically sell here in Japan for anywhere between 12,000 yen (roughly £60) and 25,000 yen (£125).

Surely G.rev could have ameliorated the situation by producing more copies after *Border Down*’s initial release? “When we first launched *Border Down*, the orders we received exceeded our expectations – and those of Sega,” says Maruyama. “After release, we continued producing copies for a while and we thought there were enough copies being distributed in the market, so at that time we didn’t think the game’s value was likely to increase. At the beginning of this year we did another production run and sold the new copies exclusively through Messe Sanoh. Those copies have already sold out. So I’d just like to say thank you to everyone! And the number of copies we sold this year... well, that’s a secret!” Maruyama is laughing, but probably not all the way to the bank.



» Brief cut-scenes precede each level, but Hiroyuki Maruyama was disappointed with *Border Down*’s opening and ending sequences.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DOKI DOKI IDOL STAR SEEKER

SYSTEMS: ARCADE, DREAMCAST
YEAR: 2001

UNDER DEFEAT

SYSTEMS: ARCADE, DREAMCAST
YEAR: 2005

SENKO NO RONDE (PICTURED)

SYSTEMS: ARCADE, XBOX 360
YEAR: 2005

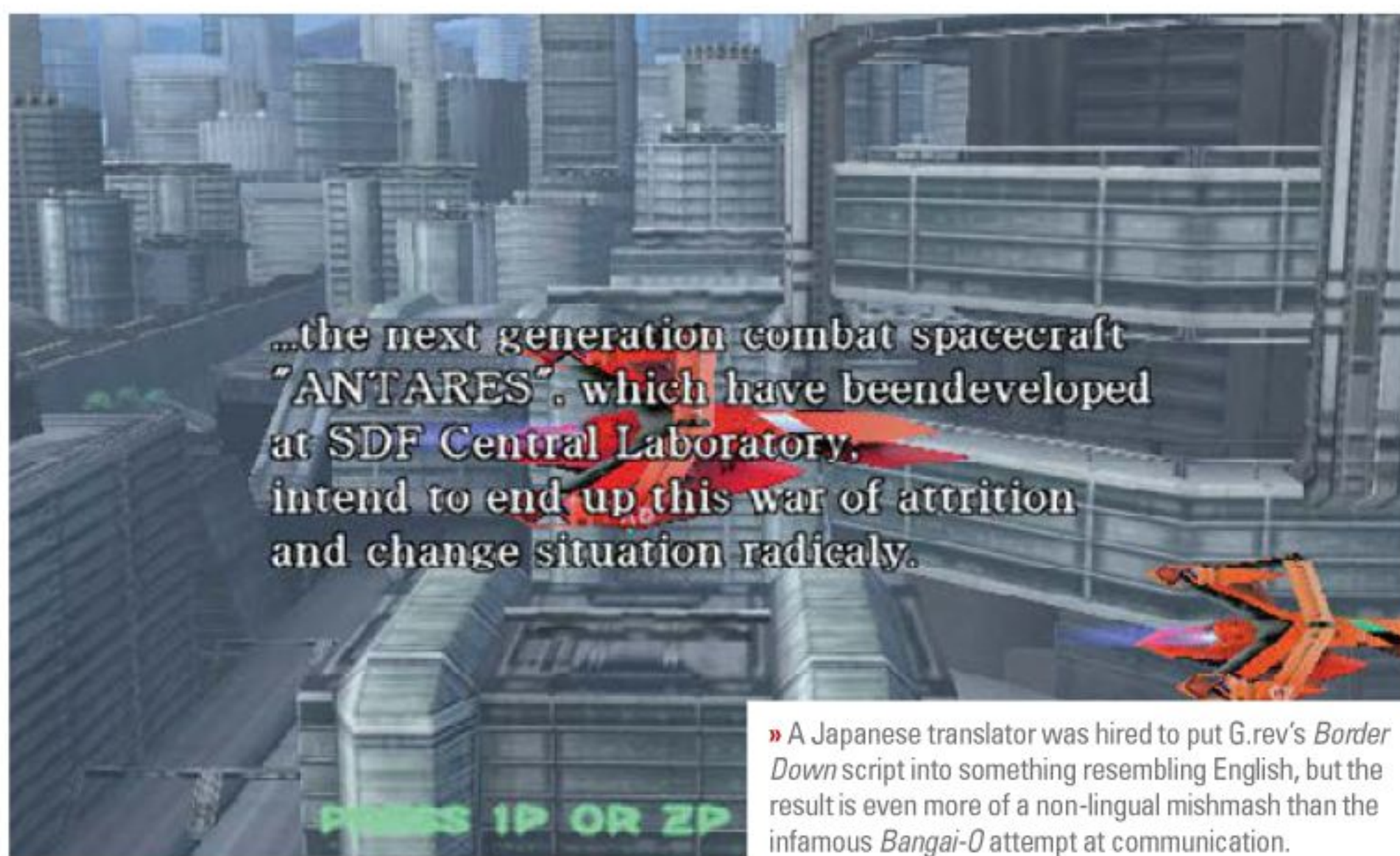


» Laser interference, which damages anything within range of its field, occurs when a beam from the player's ship is met with a countering laser from a boss.

THE MAKING OF: BORDER DOWN

HOW MUCH?!

While G.rev's Dreamcast debut, the anime-gal-packed puzzle-game that is *Doki Doki Idol Star Seeker Remix*, sells in Japan for around 4,000 yen (£20), the company's subsequent shmup excursions are much more expensive. *Border Down* can go for anything up to 25,000 yen (£125) in Japan, while *Under Defeat* tends to fetch 20,000 yen (£100). "Even second-hand, a lot of our games are comparatively expensive," Maruyama concurs. "I think it's because we manufacture just the right number of games [to satisfy initial demand]. As long as they're not too expensive (or too cheap), I think this is a good model. When they get really expensive, I feel a bit awkward!"



» A Japanese translator was hired to put G.rev's *Border Down* script into something resembling English, but the result is even more of a non-lingual mishmash than the infamous *Bangai-O* attempt at communication.



BORDER DOWN OST



The only *Border Down* contributor who worked on Taito's *Metal Black* is Yasuhisa Watanabe, composer of both games' soundtracks. His work on *Border Down* is idiosyncratic and pulsating, reminiscent in places of Susumu Yokota's litting off-key house excursions, and in other areas recalling the cheesier side of Yellow Magic Orchestra. Overall, Watanabe's score is strong enough to stand on its own, which is part of the reason (along with generous fan service) for the *Border Down* OST being included in the Limited Edition version of the game. The soundtrack is also available separately for those who have only the Standard Edition of *Border Down*; while a second album has also just been released.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Sega Marine Fishing

» PLATFORM: ARCADE, DREAMCAST, PC » DEVELOPER: WOW ENTERTAINMENT » RELEASED: 2000

We love *Sega Marine Fishing* and it's not just because it looks beautiful with Sega blue skies and an amazingly jolly soundtrack. No, we love it because it delivers a number of heart-stopping moments that you just wouldn't think were possible from a fishing game. Fishing in real life can be incredibly thrilling when you catch an actual fish, and *Sega Marine Fishing* captures those moments perfectly. It's none more memorable than when you've hooked a suitably big fish like a Sailfin and watch it burst through the brine to fly majestically through the air in a desperate attempt to escape your hook. Don't worry though. We always put them back afterwards. We're good like that.

BIO

Sega Marine Fishing was first released in arcades before getting ported to both Dreamcast and Windows. It's an excellent evolution of the *Sega Bass* series, delivering a bewilderingly diverse range of fish to catch, plenty of unlockable extras and a variety of different locations to fish at. The home ports were particularly memorable, being suitably enhanced over the original arcade game with extras like fun mini-games and the ability to simply free fish to your heart's content. Sadly, *Sega Marine Fishing* only reached American and Japanese Dreamcast owners, meaning there's a great many gamers who have probably never experienced the best fishing game of all time.

WIN

MORE SEGA MARINE FISHING MOMENTS

Getting hooked

You'll never forget the first time you hook a fish. There you are cursing your apparent bad luck as fish after fish fails to take interest in your bait. Then, all of a sudden, a critter starts homing in on your hook and you poise ready for the inevitable strike. A quick tug on your rod (you're using a rod right?) and you're ready for a tense battle that either ends in a successful landing or a snapped line.



It's my aquarium, mine!

Catch fish in Free Fishing and you're rewarded with unlocks that range from new clothing and lures, to corals and fish for your aquarium. That's right, you have a gigantic aquarium that slowly fills up with all sorts of goodies as long as you keep catching fish. Once you've got enough you can set a route and leisurely move through its watery depths staring in wonder at what all your fishing exploits have brought you.



Mini-game mania

Mini-games are fun, and Sega knows this. As a result it crammed *Sega Marine Fishing* full of them, delivering five different games that double up as brilliant timewasters in their own right, particularly when played with a group of drunk friends. Casting Training and Fight Training are the best for multiplayer shenanigans, but Lure Action Training, Fishing Training and Total Weight Training shouldn't be ignored either as they all offer endless amounts of fun.



Hidden wonders

One of the best aspects of *Sega Marine Fishing* is the stuff you can discover while you're casually casting your line. The Offing is the best stage for this as it features all sorts of interesting objects and creatures in its murky depths. Submersibles and sunken ruins can be found, but one of the best moments comes when you discover this huge whale, which casually swims by as you reel in your latest catch.



IMAX

MSRTM

METROPOLIS STREET RACER

Metropolis Street Racer was a groundbreaking title, yet its path to retail was as troubled as the Dreamcast console itself. Martyn and Sarah Chudley tell Kim Wild how the race began



IN THE KNOW

» PUBLISHER: SEGA

» DEVELOPER:
BIZARRE CREATIONS

» RELEASED: 2000

» PLATFORM: DREAMCAST

» GENRE: ARCADE RACER

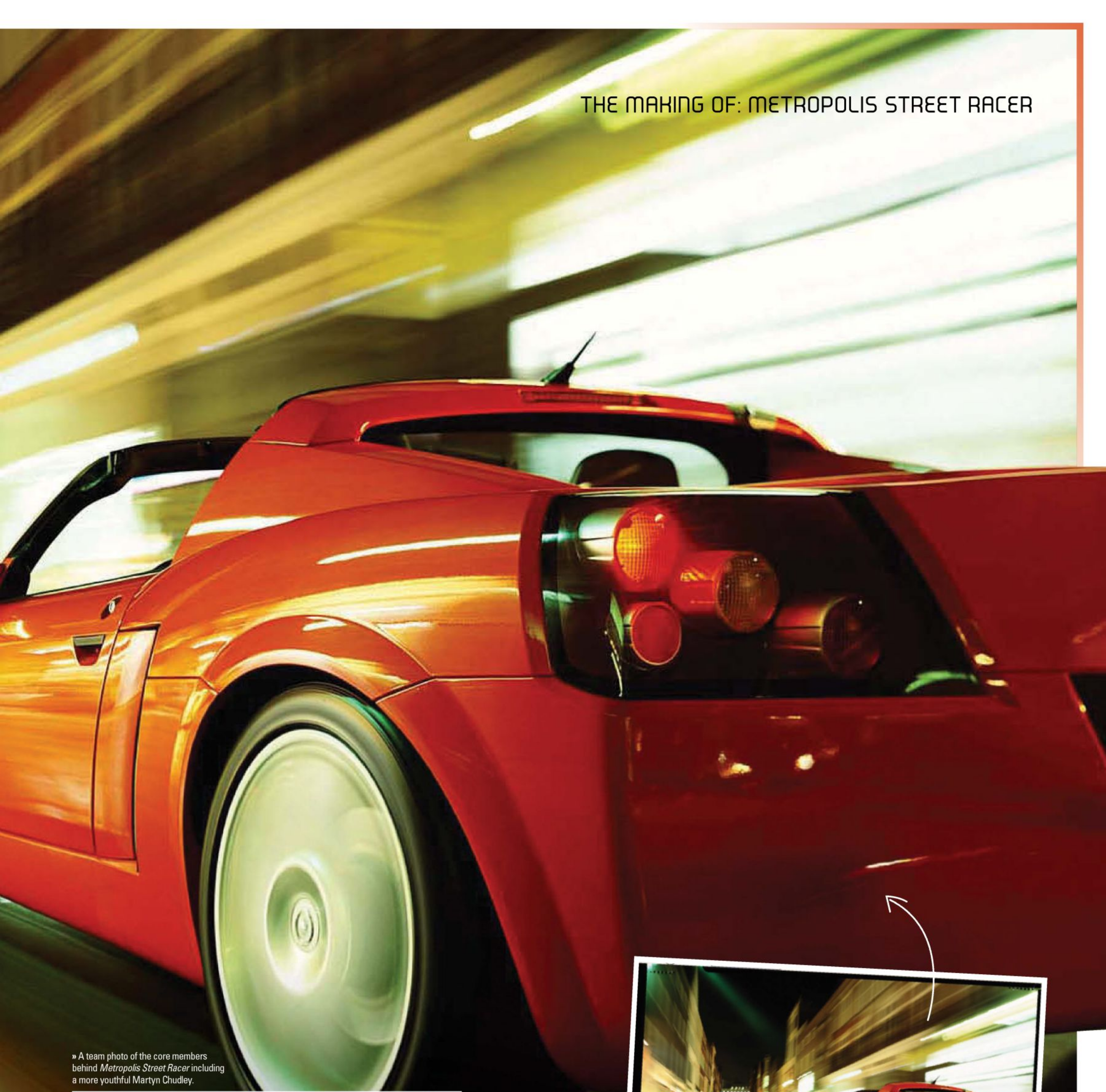
The story of how Bizarre Creations came to work with Sega is just as memorable as the game itself. After visiting ECTS in 1997, and impressed by Sony's *Formula 1* series, Sega's Kats Sato pulled the plug out of the PlayStation running the game so he could view the start-up credits. The developer was Bizarre Creations. With the prospect of five years of *Formula 1* games on the horizon, the team decided it was the perfect opportunity to branch out. "It was great as we were always huge fans of [Sega], and we got the chance to get to know their team and meet some of their most famous designers – most notably one of the nicest guys in the industry, Tetsuya Mizuguchi, and we were present at the late Kenji Eno's Dreamcast D2 announcement, which was awesome," recalls Martyn Chudley, Bizarre Creations' founder. "The guys we had contact with on a regular basis such as our producer Kats Sato, Naohiko Hoshino, Kazutoshi Miyake and Jose Aller were/are all great guys."

Yet despite being hired to create a new racing title, the form it would take was to be decided. Talk of Sega obtaining the Ferrari licence (codenaming the project 'Crimson') failed to come to

fruition and even an idea of an *Italian Job*-style Mini-based racer was considered. In the end, the team favoured the world of sports cars. "We wanted it to be a little different so focussed on convertibles and lower-end, affordable cars – cars that were more realistic for the gamers to own or aspire to own, rather than the high-end playboy style of 'exotic' cars," explains Martyn about MSR's range of vehicles. "We loved the idea of having convertible versions of the cars as the roof-on-or-off versions were based on weather and time of day settings, and we also did territory specific versions of cars such as the VX220/Opel Speedster, Mazda Miata/MX5/Eunos Roadster and Nissan Fairlady Z/300ZX – this gave a real sense of ownership and made the cars feel special."

The game was based upon the *Sega Rally* school of handling and a basic design was written down but still incomplete. At this stage the concept was for a street racing title akin to *Crazy Taxi*, including checkpoints and crates that could be driven into, throwing more than a nod to American cop TV shows. Work on an early internal technical demo in September 1997 (by the initial team of six programmers, four artists and four support staff) based on Trafalgar Square led to the decision to incorporate major cities into the game, including London, San Francisco and New York. "Each of them

THE MAKING OF: METROPOLIS STREET RACER



» A team photo of the core members behind *Metropolis Street Racer* including a more youthful Martyn Chudley.



» Sega formed a relationship with a car manufacturer to have the VX220 car feature on promotional materials.





» Even when driving it's possible to recognise shops from their stunning real-life locations.



» Photos such as the above were among the thousands captured to research locations for the game.

Sarah recalls, discussing the potentially disastrous incident.

While considerable research went into the look of the cities, care and attention also went into the actual cars. Rather infamously, the team hired a Mercedes SLK in order to capture engine recordings with microphones. Unexpectedly, the engine blew up, with the car then towed into a country lane so the AA could be called. Unfortunately for them, the hire company worked out what was going on and sent Sega a large bill. Interestingly, Sega was quite amiable over the whole incident. "We were shielded from any 'blame' by Sega, which was appreciated!" remembers Martyn. "I can't remember off-hand but we did record many of the cars to get a good range of accurate SFX and engine types, although there probably were a few duplicates used."

Lee Carter was involved with the creation of textures for the cars featured in the game. "Car textures were hand-drawn. I drew a side profile of the car; lighting and shading included in the texture themselves, almost like an airbrush drawing. Fitting the side, front, back and top textures together was quite hard at first, but towards the end we got so good at it we had to start again, as the first textures didn't look as good as the newer ones."

Although the initial schedule was to be launched in August 1998, the scale of the project meant this wasn't realistic. Heading into 1999 and known as *Metropolis Street Racer* ("Metropolis means urban area, we added 'street racer' to make sure people knew what type of game it was. We wanted it to be *Street Racer*, but Ubisoft already had that!") the team needed to develop a demo for E3. At this point the lead coder of the game left the company and a senior artist moved away from Liverpool. It became increasingly apparent that MSR wouldn't make the launch date for the Sega Dreamcast. With game code incomplete but also not up to the title's ambition, a re-write was in order, hindering development further.

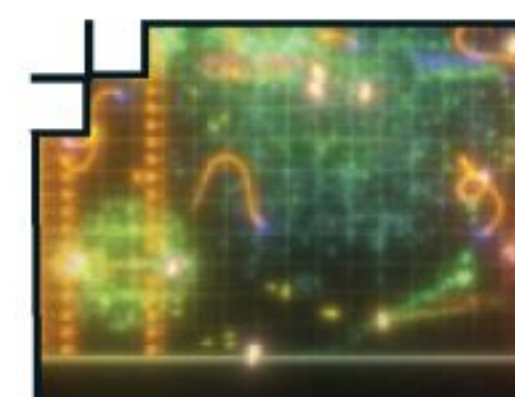
► were the best-known, iconic cities in each of Sega's main territories," explains Martyn about the design decision. "Sega also had offices and people locally who could help with research. London is a cool, world-wide known location, there were loads of iconic car-chase movies set in San Francisco and Tokyo was renowned for its car culture and 'Rice Racers'. Sometimes we did wonder if our street racing games were picked from the holiday lists of the designing artists! Our personal favourite has to be Tokyo in terms of visiting and research – what an amazing place! And even now when we're in London, we're still mentally driving the game!"

One of the most remarkable aspects of *MSR* was not the decision to feature cities but to recreate them down to the finest detail. As a result, considerable amounts of photos needed to be captured. "It was over 40,000 in the end, all taken traditionally with film and SLR cameras," recalls Sarah Chudley about the mammoth project. "[They were] printed out, catalogued and stored in big boxes round the studio! Of course, there were many

photos that weren't quite right, taken to duplicate areas and a surprising number ended up being taken of pretty girls which ended up on the walls next to the artists..."

Lee Carter, an artist for the game, recalls the experience. "A lot of work was done before any modelling or texture work. The initial researching of the routes, height data, flying out to the locations to photograph every building, road surface and street furniture, then getting back to organise the actual artwork. A lot of work was re-built and remade as we got better as time went on. I personally had a trip to Tokyo with another artist, spending a full week photographing everything from lampposts to paving stones. It wasn't a holiday as we even photographed the same buildings at night too."

There were downsides to this methodical approach to photography however, as during a research trip to Japan, one of the research photo reels was dropped between two lift doors, 30 stories high, and bent beyond all recognition. "The worst bit was that we had no idea which film/area it was until it was developed! Thankfully we had Sega's people to help replace the missing photos!"



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

FORMULA 1
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1996

FUR FIGHTERS
SYSTEM: DREAMCAST, PC
YEAR: 2000

GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED 2
(PICTURED)
SYSTEM: XBOX 360
YEAR: 2008

PLAYING THE JOKER

Despite the tortuous development process, the team still managed to have fun, especially with the producer Kats. "There were always practical jokes played on him, mainly due to his reluctance to ever make the tea," recalls Martyn Chudley. "So how do you explain piles to a Japanese person? Give them a bunch of grapes. Then we left him holding them for about three-quarters of an hour whilst on a phone call to his boss, arm outstretched and drooping. Eventually we had to explain you 'get these up your bottom' and holding them was just for our own gratification". One amusing addition came from Walter, technical director, who decided to make the AI cars beep their horns upon crashing. "More gallows humour from some tired people in 'crunch' time. It would have been amusing if it wasn't something he put in on the night we were mastering!"

Why all work and no play isn't the way to make great games



THE INFLUENCE OF MSR

The modern racers that share DNA with Bizarre Creations' superb game



BURNOUT

■ Criterion's flagship driving series started out with a points system where driving dangerously or in a stylish manner earned you more points that would eventually lead to a full boost bar. Later games in the series would build upon the concept, including a Crash mode where the aim was to smash your car and cause ultimate destruction.



FORZA HORIZON

■ As well as neatly recreating real-life locations to drive around, this open-world racer features an in-game radio station and a multitude of objectives that can be accomplished by performing certain driving manoeuvres during races or off the track to gain prestige or sponsorship.



RACE DRIVER: GRID

■ Both the original *GRID* and its sequel used the concept of reputation points: driving skilfully in different events to progress your career. Harder difficulty levels had more reputation points available for you to earn. Mastering the drift button was the key to building up large point combinations.



JUICED

■ A street racing-based title, *Juiced* uses 'respect' points as a means for progression. Respect points could be earned from performing stunts in events, customising your car and winning races. It was also possible to gamble your car against another, much like the ability to gamble Kudos credits in *MSR*.



MIDNIGHT CLUB

■ A street-based arcade racer, *Midnight Club* follows in *MSR*'s footsteps by recreating cities to drive around in a bid to build up your reputation among the crew members. Each game in the series refined the concept, with the third game incorporating motorbikes, something Bizarre would later explore with *PGR4*.



FORZA MOTORSPORT

■ Although geared as a simulation, later games in the *Forza Motorsport* series, in particular *Forza 3* and *Forza 4*, enabled players of all skill levels to progress with an adaptable difficulty level. This included braking and cornering guides to help you find a neat racing line, progression in the form of driver levels (chapters) and car customisation.



NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT

■ *MSR*'s point system is apparent in *NFS: Shift* only with a twist. Drive accurately around corners and overtake skilfully and precision points are earned; be more physical against other cars and aggression points are yours. *Shift 2* developed this concept with experience points where the race wasn't just about winning.



SPEED KINGS

■ Although a fairly unimpressive motorbike combat game, *Speed Kings* used a points system, where points were gained from successful fisticuffs against other riders, powersliding under trucks and performing other such skilful acts on two wheels. A modern day *Road Rash* – only a bit rubbish.



SPLIT SECOND

■ This explosive racer may not have much in common with *MSR* on the surface, but game progression relies on the player earning 'power plays' used to trigger explosions, accomplished by driving stylishly and with skill. Credits are then earned to unlock chapters (or in this case, seasons) and progress to the end.



TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

■ Going one step further, *TDU* re-created an entire island, where every detail could be seen and it was possible to recognise roads from real-life locations. Every car had its own mileage counter, animated drivers and an in-built radio station to enjoy while racing or exploring the island's many secrets.

BIZARRE RACING

More hit driving games from Bizarre Creations



FORMULA 1

■ Licensed *Formula 1* titles had until this point been something of a mixed bag, but Bizarre Creations' work made this an impressive game with its realistic handling, intelligent opponents and authentic car models. The backing of a licence with official tracks, racers and the intrepid Murray Walker sealed the deal.



FORMULA 1 97

■ Although it was a sequel to an ambitious title, *F1 97* managed to improve upon the original with neatly refined visuals, audio effects and more intelligent drivers. It would turn out to be the title that gave Bizarre Creations the opportunity to work on a new racer and leave a five-year contract of *Formula 1* titles.



PROJECT GOTHAM RACING

■ The first game in the series to use Xbox Live, players could challenge other racers around the world. Several expansion packs adding tracks based on Paris and California were released through the service. *Project Gotham Racing* was a revelation upon release, and Microsoft founder Bill Gates went as far as to name it his favourite videogame.



PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

■ The first game in the series to use Xbox Live, players could challenge other racers around the world. Several expansion packs adding tracks based on Paris and California were released through the service. It also featured hidden mini-game *Geometry Wars* in the garage, later re-built onto Xbox 360's Live Arcade.

► “The code was written to create a demo for the show, but lacked a lot of structure needed for a full game. The coder had worked on *F1 97*, but *F1 97* already had a lot of game-logic framework in place from the original. Being on a new platform, for a new publisher, *MSR* had to be built from scratch. However after the show and the subsequent re-design and re-focus, we realised a complete re-write was needed in order to put in flexible systems to link with the ‘unique’ game structure, UI, AI and scoring mechanisms.” says Martyn. “However the biggest (and first!) improvements that we made were to up the polygon counts in the cars and make the camera viewpoint more realistic – the code we were left with had this super-stretched *WipeOut*-style camera, which added to the speed but made you feel like you were on acid! As soon as the camera was ‘brought in’ the game felt about ten times more realistic

and set us on a really good path – before this we were just looking at ‘another’ arcade racer – after this we started down the innovation/realism route and all the cool features such as Kudos were born. The coder leaving hurt us at the time, but it probably made us in the end!”

The most innovative addition to *MSR* that has gone on to influence many racing titles was the Kudos system. “We wanted a name that showed you were gaining respect for something from your peers, and Kudos (‘acclaim or praise for exceptional achievement’) seemed to fit the best,” explains Sarah. “It’s funny, as it’s a singular word in nature even though it sounds plural (‘Kudos is due’ rather than ‘Kudos are due’) but the Americans, even in their marketing and manual, think it’s a plural, and said you could earn ‘one Kudo’ for something!” Kudos is the currency system upon which all

KNOW YOUR BRANDS



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HONDA



JENSEN



MAZDA



MERCEDES

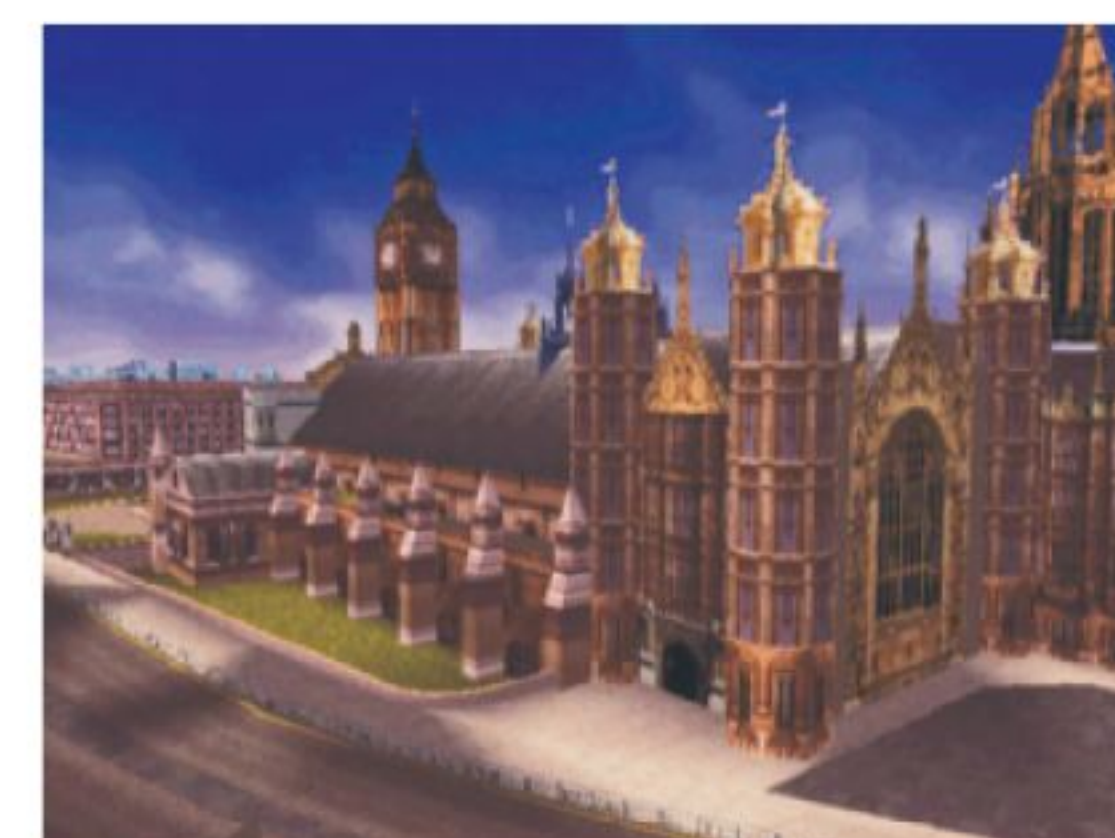


MG

actions of the player earn or lose points and style of racing, not just winning, is important. “Kudos was actually born out of an incident that Martyn had whilst ‘racing’ his MR2 against an Fiesta XR2 on the M62 – his car ended up a little sideways, and all Martyn could think of was ‘Wey Hey!’ and not ‘I’m going to die’. From this Martyn realised it wasn’t about going fast or even ‘winning’, but it was *how* you drove that gave you the buzz,” continues Sarah.

Yet innovations didn’t just lie at the heart of the Kudos system. The clever use of the Dreamcast’s clock meant racing at night in real time would be replicated in-game and across time differences for other cities. The amount of detail included was staggering, with a milometre for each car, animated drivers and personalised number plates among a few others. “Don’t forget (trying to blow our own trumpets here) weather, car showroom, radio stations, variety of game-modes, online functionality including leaderboards (way before Xbox Live) and VMU challenges!” adds Sarah. “We really did try and push the boat out and innovate as best we could for both ourselves and Dreamcast, to the point of biting off a little more than we could chew! The Kudos and gambling ideas Martyn was especially proud of – it made the player in charge of game

» “One of the driving factors for the artists was they all wanted to create something that pushed boundaries.”



» Bizarre Creations did a wonderful job of capturing the look and feel of a city environment.



PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 3

■ A launch title for Microsoft's new Xbox 360 console, *PGR3* contained four cities (Las Vegas, London, New York and Tokyo) boasted over 80 cars from 30 manufacturers, improved on multiplayer modes with additional scoreboards and tournaments both off and online. It also included arcade title *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved*.



PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 4

■ The final game in the series, the fourth iteration added the much-demanded motorbikes, real-time weather conditions during races and a revamp of the Kudos system. Like all aspects of *PGR*, even weather conditions could be customised before a user-created race. Despite its age, *PGR4* is still highly enjoyable.



BLUR

■ The last racing game to be developed by Bizarre Creations, *Blur* was a well-built arcade racer that merged real cars with futuristic weaponry and planted a focus on multiplayer battles. Social networking features such as being able to link with Facebook and Twitter was an idea ahead of its time.

"The last disk was burned after a double all-nighter, but as it had to be sent off at 9am, there wasn't time for a final test cycle other than basic tests. The game was too big! At this point, Martyn – who had been awake for 48 hours solid coding and bug-fixing – had to leave the office leaving Kats and Pete in charge," remembers Sarah. "Martyn had to drive home during said storm – with Brian (producer) in hot pursuit (as he was to be the best man) – in order to leave home for the airport at 7am to fly off to Crete to get married! Obviously there was one more drama – the fully-laden car refused to start meaning Brian had to cram everyone and everything into his car and tear off to the airport!"

Metropolis Street Racer finally hit the shelves in December 2000, during the Dreamcast's last Christmas. With sales of only 120,000, the game fared poorly; not helped by the lateness of the title, the decline of the Dreamcast and major bugs that were found in batches of the game, leading to a recall. Despite the game's difficulties, both Martyn and Sarah remain proud of their achievement. "It didn't sell particularly well, it was late and stressful, but it was a game we all were particularly proud of for pushing the envelope in terms of design, graphics and audio." *Metropolis Street Racer* may not have been the launch title originally intended, but its legacy continues, living on in the spirit of Bizarre's very own *Project Gotham* and many other popular arcade racers.

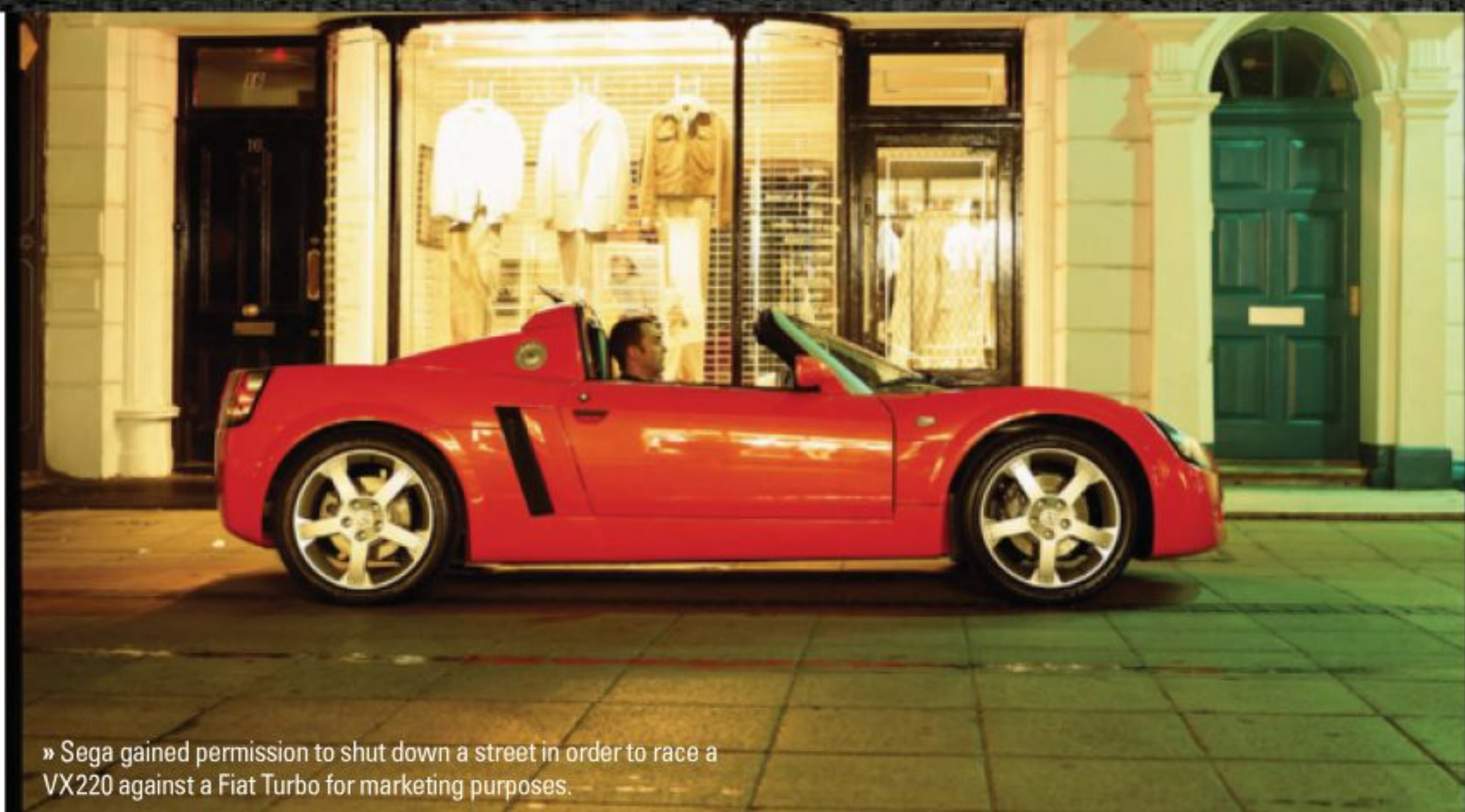
Special thanks to Stefan McGarry and the Chudleys for their help with this article



» £1 million had been invested into *MSR* but thankfully teaming up with Microsoft kept the company going.



» Despite the Kudos system, *MSR* was often mistaken as yet another city racing game.



» Sega gained permission to shut down a street in order to race a VX220 against a Fiat Turbo for marketing purposes.

“We really did try and push the boat out and innovate as best we could”

Sarah Chudley

progression in a way that hadn't been done before, some of our biggest differentiators.”

The use of a fictitious radio station added to the appeal. “Our audio coder/designer Nick wanted to include real music, but to make it as realistic for those driving round the cities as possible. What's more realistic than listening to an actual radio station from that location? The DJs and song choices added to the reality of the game. Richard Jacques did a great job working with us on this.” says Martyn.

As 1999 progressed, times became more stressful for the development team. Some people were working over 40 hours of overtime every week over a period of 14 months, and the entire game was far from completion. “It's impossible to describe the hell other than to have been there,” says Martyn. “But with

takeaways provided every night (we earned 50 per cent discount from the local pizza place due to being ‘good customers!’), Red Bull by the truckload and the horrors of a small office with no air-con, you can imagine.”

During the final stages, the first set of master discs were burnt, each taking an hour to create on the Dreamcast's GD discs to prevent write errors. It was here they discovered the first major error with demo loops where cars would crash into each other randomly. Once Walter Lynsdale, technical director, hacked the code to restore car behaviour, another set of discs were burned. Yet another problem emerged, where the music from the front end disappeared having been previously disabled by a programmer. Once fixed, the next set of final discs had to be burnt and then tested at 6am at the exact time of a thunderstorm.



MITSUBISHI



NISSAN



OPEL



QUESTION



PEUGEOT



RENAULT



TOYOTA



TVR



VAUXHALL

A screenshot from the video game Virtua Tennis 2. It shows a tennis match in progress on a green grass court. A female player in a blue and white outfit is on the left, and a male player in a blue shirt and white shorts is on the right. In the background, two line judges are seated on chairs. The court is enclosed by a dark blue fence with 'Augustine Technology' logos. The net is visible in the foreground.

Virtua Tennis 2

THE DREAMCAST SEQUEL WHERE LESS IS MORE

» RETROREVIVAL



» DREAMCAST » HITMAKER » 2001

The game of tennis has been around since gaming first began. There's something about the sport that translates perfectly to the competitiveness of multiplayer play, so it's hardly surprising that the likes of *Pong* were so popular in the early Seventies. As the years passed, the game of computerised tennis evolved so it eventually had very little bearing to the tiny number of pixels that first appeared in those very early games.

While the likes of *Super Tennis* and *Pete Sampras Tennis* pretty much tied up the 16-bit consoles for tennis brilliance, it was Sega's incredible *Virtua Tennis* series that took the game to a whole new level of graphical fidelity and complex gameplay that would have had gamers from the Seventies staring slack-jawed with wonder.

While *Virtua Tennis* was an insanely good game, our focus is its sequel as it delivered a number of important additions – most notably the ability to finally play as female characters. Created by Hitmaker, it delivered stunning visuals, the ability to slice the ball (far more important than it sounds) and mixed doubles. The cast roster was impressive, featuring the likes of Tim Henman, Serena and Venus Williams and Monica Seles, while the gameplay was absolutely incredible.

The amazing thing about both *Virtua Tennis 2* and its slick predecessor is just how much control you have over the game. The face buttons enable you to pull off an impressive range of shots, while the pacing and AI of the game remains constantly challenging. Then there's the excellent "World Tour" mode that requires you to train both female and male characters by competing in a number of highly enjoyable mini-games that will test all aspects of your player's skills.

It admittedly does very little to improve on the base gameplay mechanics of *Virtua Tennis*, but that's because they were so well-crafted to begin with. While it admittedly started off life as an arcade game, it's the enhanced Dreamcast version that we spent all of our time with. ★



THE MAKING OF...

SAMBA DE AMIGO





» The Dreamcast version of *Samba* features an exclusive Love Love mode for co-op play between couples. Spicy stuff.



SAMBA DE AMIGO REMAINS ONE OF SEGA'S MOST INNOVATIVE GAMES AND WAS A HUGE SUCCESS ON THE DREAMCAST. JONTI DAVIES TALKS WITH THE GROOVY CHAP WHO GOT US ALL SHAKING OUR MARACAS IN THE FIRST PLACE – SEGA'S DIRECTOR OF SAMBA, SHUN NAKAMURA

If you've played *Samba De Amigo* you will know full well why it's being featured in these pages: its sense of fun is undeniable and all-conquering, and those maracas, sought-after and prized, are brilliant extravagances from the historical moments before Sega's demotion from the world of console manufacturing. Okay, it's only just last century, but *Samba's* position in the (recent) history of videogames is a highly significant one. For one thing, it gave impetus to the global uptake of rhythm-action games using instrument controllers, with *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero* both owing a debt to Sonic Team's innovation. For another, it anticipated the current Wii-led craze for very physical interaction with games.

"*Samba De Amigo* was conceived in 1999," the game's director Shun Nakamura recalls. "That was when I drew up the plans for the game, and it all went from there. At that time Japan was experiencing the same kind of music game boom that is currently taking over Europe and America, but I think [Japanese rhythm-action games] were trying a bit too hard to appear cool and therefore were quite difficult to enjoy actually playing. Games are supposed to be fun, but those games were too difficult to approach – I remember thinking, 'I really want to play music games that are just fun...' So it was with that in mind – wanting to increase the fun quotient [of Japanese rhythm-action games] – that I produced the plans [for *Samba De Amigo*]."

Samba De Amigo's maracas controllers are key to both arcade and Dreamcast versions of the experience. We ask Shun whether other instruments were considered before he decided that maracas were the way to go: "No," he explains. "From the beginning right through to the end of development, there was no question that we'd use maracas with the game – we didn't even think about other instruments, because we knew that maracas would have the greatest impact and would also throw up plenty of interesting possibilities because of the versatility of the instrument and its wide range of applicable playing styles."

Although Shun's confidence in the merits of maracas was unshakeable (sorry), outsiders seem to have been sceptical. "Whenever I mentioned this idea of using maracas to anyone [outside

of the dev team], the response was always the same: people laughed at us. They'd say, 'Are you serious? That sounds like a stupid game...'"

Konami's *Guitar Freaks* and *DrumMania* were popular in Japan's arcades back in 1999, but Shun wasn't taken with such games. For a start, they were perceived by the *Samba* team to be too difficult, too complicated and not really conducive to "stupid fun". Part of the problem with such games, Shun reckons, is simply down to the instruments they use: "I think guitars and drums and such difficult instruments are cool," he says, "but you have to use your head – you have to think when playing them – and the threshold [for being able to play] is quite high. As far as I was concerned, anyone could easily have some fun just by shaking a pair of maracas, so I felt that maracas were far and away the best choice of instrument for this project. For all of the staff working on *Samba De Amigo*, this was our first experience of making a music game, so we researched other music games first and then went ahead with production by trying to do something simpler and more easily enjoyable than those games."

The decision-makers at Sega, however, never had much faith in the *Samba De Amigo* project, and this was reflected in a number of key areas: team size, deadlines and pressure. "*Samba De Amigo* was seen within Sega as being something of an experimental title," Shun explains. "We were told [by the higher-ups at Sega] that if the arcade location tests were a failure, the project would be cancelled immediately. Because of that [kind of pressure], we felt we had to work extremely hard to ensure that it would be a success. The production team on *Samba* was less than ten people – it was a really small team. The same team members produced both the arcade and Dreamcast versions, and we ended up doing *Samba De Amigo* and *Samba De Amigo Ver. 2000* [without any additional members]. And on top of that, most of the developers were newcomers who had no previous game development experience. That's how experimental [Sega deemed] this project [to be]..."

In spite of the internal pressure on Shun and his team of maracas-shaking developers, he says *Samba De Amigo* progressed well in the face of adversity: "I think development was relatively smooth. Production of the game itself took us only five months, which

IN THE KNOW



- » PUBLISHER: SEGA
- » DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
- » RELEASED: 1999
- » GENRE: RHYTHM-ACTION

THE MAKING OF... SAMBA DE AMIGO

was obviously a really short period of time. From the beginning of development the project's deadline for completion was already in place, and we knew that if the arcade location testing didn't go well, that would be it. At first we didn't even have any prototype controllers to use, so we really had to use our imaginations and guesswork while we were making the framework of the game, but our most difficult challenge was to get the controller movement recognised by the game. Initially, we didn't know whether it would be possible for the controllers' co-ordinates and movement through the air to be recognised, and we were also concerned that people might not be willing to play something so far removed from traditional games with traditional control methods. We had to conduct all sorts of experiments, because before *Samba De Amigo* no games had used controllers like these. After the arcade machine had gone into production, I remember going to the factory for an inspection just to check on how the maracas controllers were turning out."

Ah yes, the maracas. The tools that made *Samba De Amigo* what it was. The red plastic, the convincing weight and the satisfyingly real percussive noise of the Dreamcast-adapted maracas controllers made them more desirable even than the *Virtual On: Oratorio* Tangram Twin Sticks or the *Get Bass* fishing-rod controller. And Shun explains that we're lucky the coin-op replica Dreamcast maracas controllers, and the console port itself, were even manufactured: "At the time of the development of the arcade version, the Dreamcast maracas controllers hadn't been approved and production of them hadn't been given the go-ahead. The coin-op's maracas controllers were using a new sensing system [which we] called 'space recognition' – they weren't simple devices – so the production cost there was considerable. We were really worried about whether or not people would buy the controllers [if we made Dreamcast-compatible versions of them], but on the other hand, the arcade machine had gained a really good reputation by that point, so we eventually started to discuss developing a companion Dreamcast conversion of the game. The *Samba* arcade was a hit in Japan, which helped the Dreamcast *Samba* [and maracas controllers] sell reasonably well here. Abroad, because the coin-op wasn't as well known, fewer people were willing to pay over the odds for the [Dreamcast] maracas controllers."

It's ironic that although Shun set out to make *Samba* a simpler experience than what he saw as the overly difficult Bemani-oriented games of the day, *Samba De Amigo* itself ended up pushing players' rhythmic abilities to the limits. The difference, of course, is in *Samba*'s fun-fun-fun exterior and its well-paced progress towards becoming genuinely difficult – it carefully eases players into the game and never takes two steps at a time, but does eventually become an intense challenge. Yet, without sufficient backing to undertake focus group testing or hire external QA assistants, Shun reveals that *Samba*'s gameplay balance was left for the development team to sort out.

"*Samba*'s difficulty curve was entirely set according to our own experiences of playing the game," Shun confirms. "Because it's a

music game, you need to be able to dance to the rhythm, so there's a limit to how complex the rhythms could be. And there were also the physical limitations of what players would be able to achieve. Super Hard mode went beyond those two principles, more or less taking it to the point where you wouldn't be able to play without first remembering everything. Of course we imposed a proviso to the effect that we, the development staff, had to be able to clear the tracks in Super Hard mode 100 per cent. I remember shaking the maracas from morning to the following morning as part of the game testing process. And as I was shaking the comparatively heavy arcade maracas, I ended up getting really bad muscle pains in my arms..."

After the maracas controller, the next most important ingredient of *Samba*'s success was the soundtrack. "It seems that many people initially thought of *Samba* as a game that specialised in Latin music," Shun complains, "but as far as we were concerned there wasn't any reason for us to be limited to Latin music. Generally speaking, we selected bright, cheerful and fun tracks that would be impossible to play along to nonchalantly – the kind of tunes you have to be really stupid [with the maracas] to enjoy. We also thought it was important

to choose music that most people would have heard somewhere, be it on TV or in commercials, even though they might not know the names of the tracks. Then, when they heard a tune in the game [after selecting a title they weren't necessary familiar with], players would say, 'Oh, I know this!' We chose

tracks like that because there's a massive difference in how easy it is to ride the rhythm of a song you're familiar with and one that you've never heard before. But we still found it difficult to choose [the most] appropriate tracks..."

Ultimately the arcade location testing went well enough for Sega to keep the project alive, and Shun says the game was also helped by a strong positive reaction whenever it was shown at events around Japan: "At the Tokyo Game Show and the AOU exhibition and other events, I have fond memories of how popular the game was and how happy the *Samba* team members were to see the reaction of attendees. But I also remember being told to get up on stage and dance, which was so embarrassing it was quite painful..." Oh well, that's the price you pay for developing software and hardware that can be enjoyed by onlookers as much as by the participants.

Eventually, with the *Samba* coin-op proving popular in Japan and production of the Dreamcast game and its controllers complete, Shun and co were able to look back on the whole experience and class the project as a job extremely well done. The ongoing popularity of *Samba* has proved Shun's 'Theory Of The Universal Appeal Of Puerto Rican Percussion Instruments' to be correct, but he humbly refuses to say 'I told you so' to any of the doubters. Instead, he signs off by telling us: "To be honest, I'm surprised that people still think of *Samba* so highly eight years after its release. But then, I'm seeing people laugh and smile as they watch and play the new Wii version... There are a lot of 'serious' games out there, but I really like the fact that anyone can behave stupidly and thereby enjoy [*Samba*]."

"At first we didn't even have any prototype controllers to use, so we really had to use our imaginations and guesswork while we were making the framework of the game"

SHUN NAKAMURA ON HIS TEAM'S DEVELOPMENT CONSTRAINTS



» The Dreamcast-exclusive battle mode introduces a competitive angle to the action, but *Samba* never feels like anything other than a party.



SIX CLASSIC SONGS



Magical Sound Shower

Yu Suzuki's favourite *OutRun* tune appeared in *Samba Ver. 2000* via the game's download service. *Magical Sound Shower* is the (instrumental) anthem of an entire generation, of course – the syntheuphoric ode to videogaming joy.



We Are Burning Rangers

The theme song to Sonic Team's superb *Burning Rangers* Saturn game, it was available on three-inch CD as part of the Japanese version of that title prior to reappearing in *Samba 2000*, again as a downloadable track.



Hot Hot Hot (Arrow)

Alphonso Cassell's 1983 soca-pop classic's easy adaptability for the lyrically challenged means you'll hear versions of *Hot Hot Hot* at football grounds around the world, but its greatest adaptation is naturally in *Samba*.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

NIGHTS INTO DREAMS...

(PICTURED)

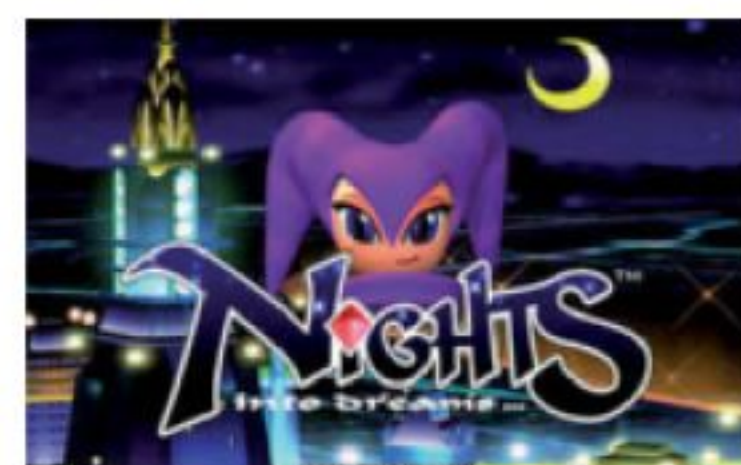
SYSTEMS: SATURN, PS2
YEAR: 1996

BURNING RANGERS

SYSTEMS: SATURN
YEAR: 1998

CHUCHU ROCKET!

SYSTEMS: DREAMCAST, GBA
YEAR: 1999



» Mistiming shakes in *Samba De Amigo* sours the atmosphere somewhat, so it's best to really get into the game and shake like your very sombrero depended on it.



» Pure percussive electricity.



» New mini-games were added to the mix for Ver. 2000.



» Amigo the monkey grins with obvious tequila-fuelled passion. Shun Nakamura wanted a fun game, not a "cool" one, and this is how it turned out.



Tequila (Terrorvision)

Produced by none other than Edwyn Collins, Terrorvision's *Tequila* is thematically well suited to *Samba De Amigo* and the spirited activities surrounding its play in homes around Britain (if not so much in Japan).



Macarena (Los Del Rio)

For pure cheesiness, *Macarena* is without equal. It's a track that is perfect for dancing and ripe for percussive augmentation. And, with its Latin vibe, it fits in nicely with *Samba De Amigo*'s imagery and Amigo's bobbing sombrero.

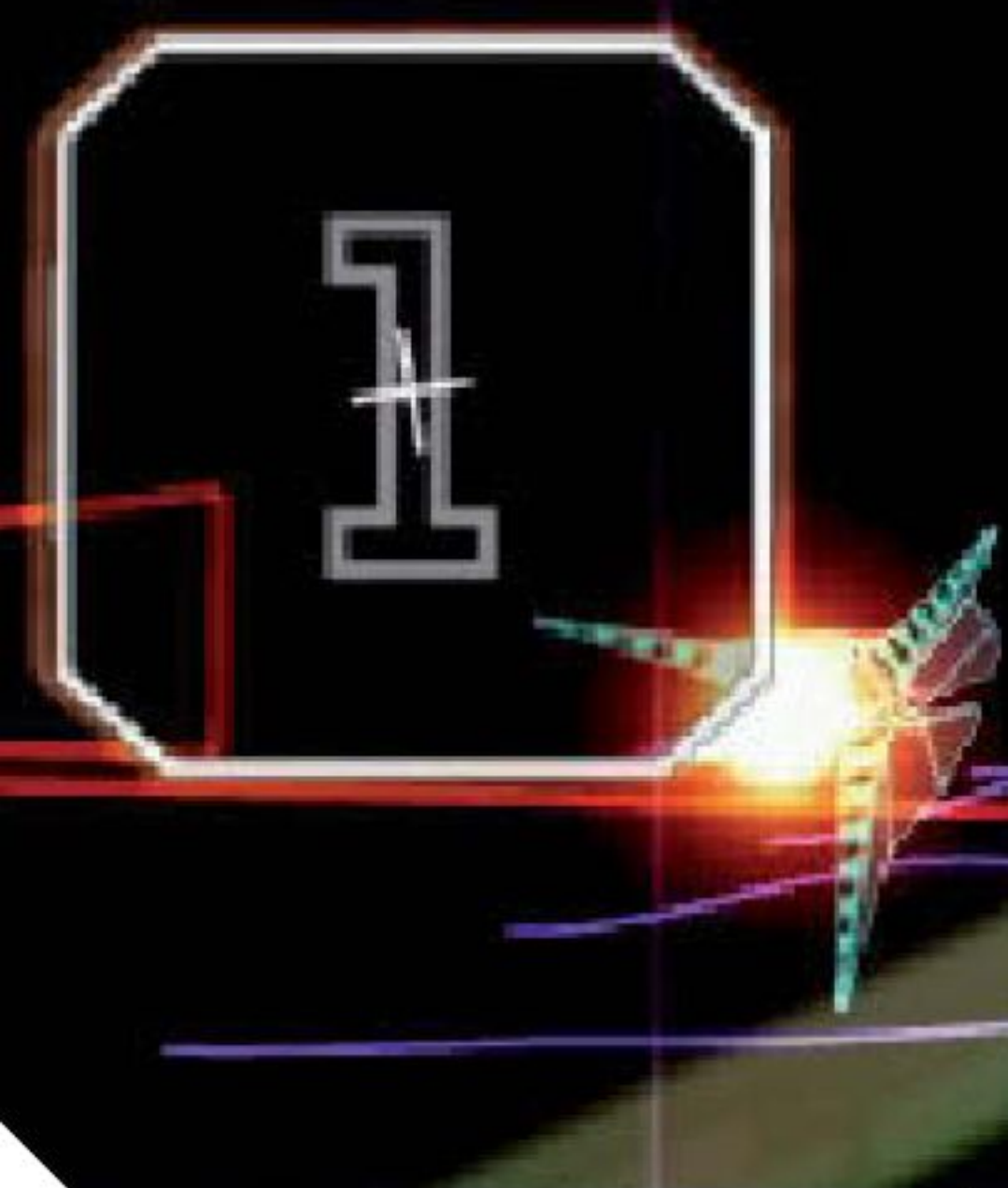


Tubthumping (Chumbawamba)

If any song captures the anarchy of *Samba De Amigo* most aptly, it's Chumbawamba's *Tubthumping*, which was one of the early tracks in the original game. Riot of colour on screen, riot of sound from speakers: nice match.

THE CLASSIC GAME

Rez



initially known as *Vibes*, *Project Eden* and the *K-Project*, Tetsuya Mizuguchi's secret assignment

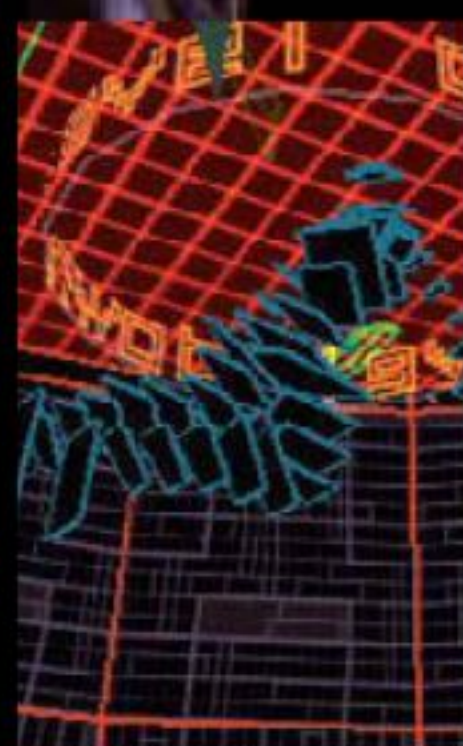
transmogrified into the truly astonishing *Rez*. Released simultaneously on both the PS2 and Dreamcast, it was further proof of Sega's brilliance and how studios like United Game Artists flew in the face of expectation in order to deliver highly innovative, utterly unique videogames. Some regard it as the highest form of videogame art that's currently available, while others see it as a bland and soulless shooter.

While we wouldn't really agree with either, there's no denying that Mizuguchi's game is one of the most enthralling experiences around, and while it certainly isn't to everybody's taste, it remains one of the greatest on-rails shooters we've ever played. Join Darran Jones then as he examines the majesty that is Sega's *Rez*.



ZERO FORM

Get hit in this spherical form and it is game over for you. Needless to say you better be careful.



FIRST FORM

Taking on the shape of a humanoid, you need to evolve from this form as quickly as possible.



SECOND FORM

Now you're getting somewhere. You still look fairly basic but you're definitely starting to evolve.



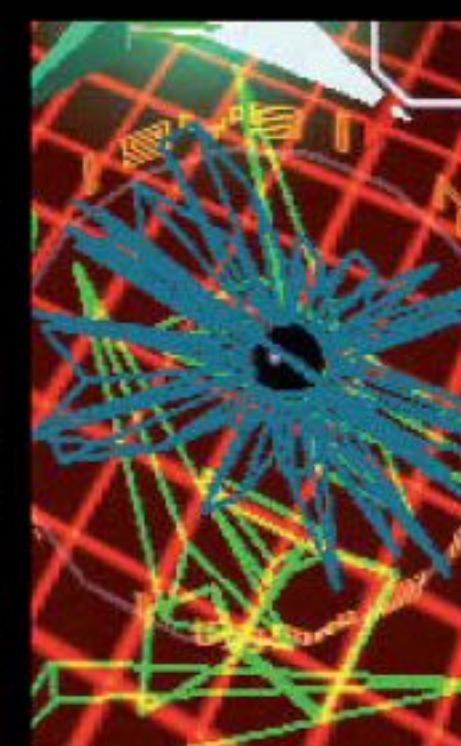
THIRD FORM

Your fully formed humanoid shape, looking very funky. Your next ascension is even weirder.



FOURTH FORM

This is our favourite evolution, as it reminds us of that spaceship in *Flight Of The Navigator*.



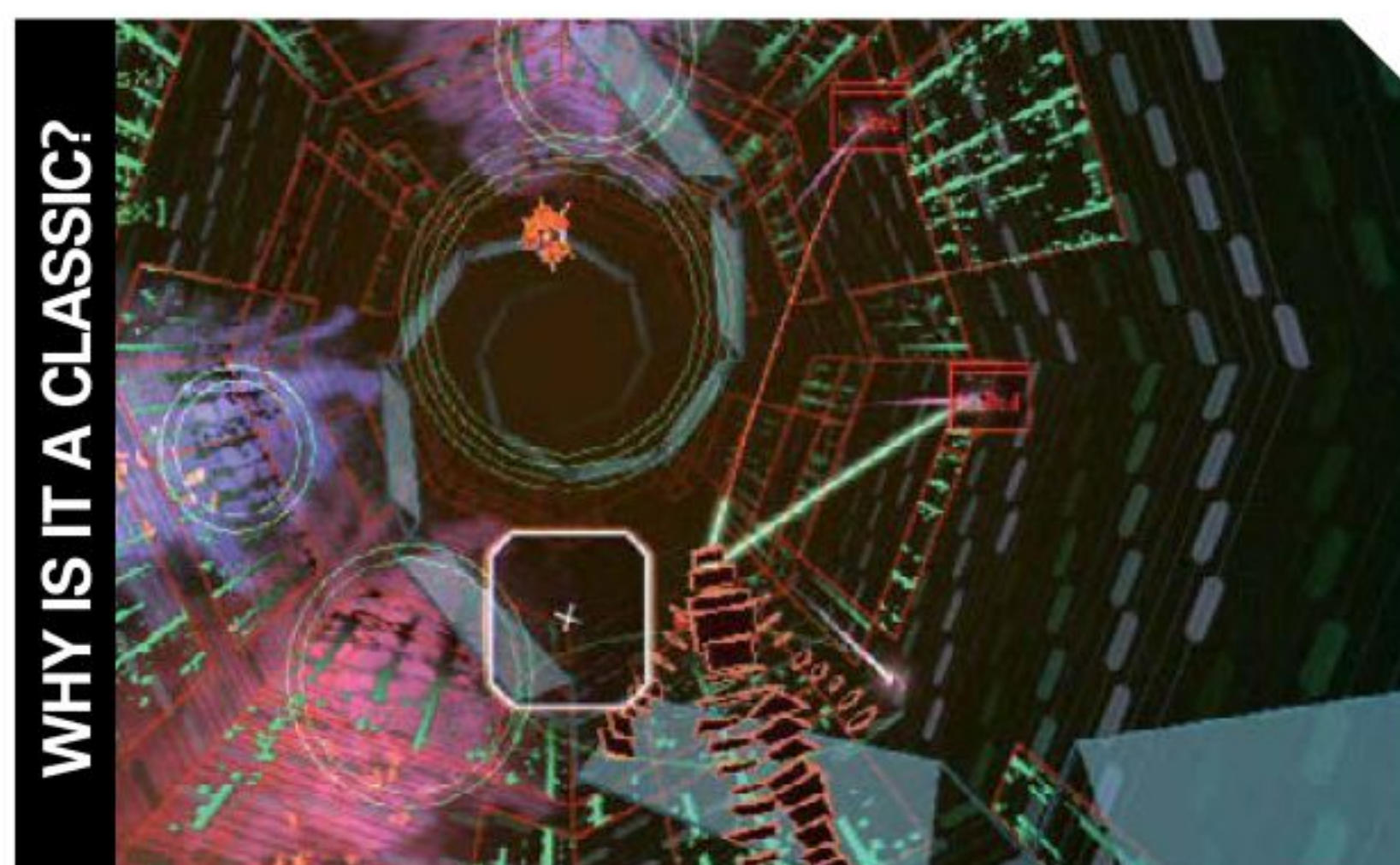
FIFTH FORM

This jagged amoeba is a step away from achieving oneness. It also reminds us of a *Futurama* episode.



SIXTH FORM

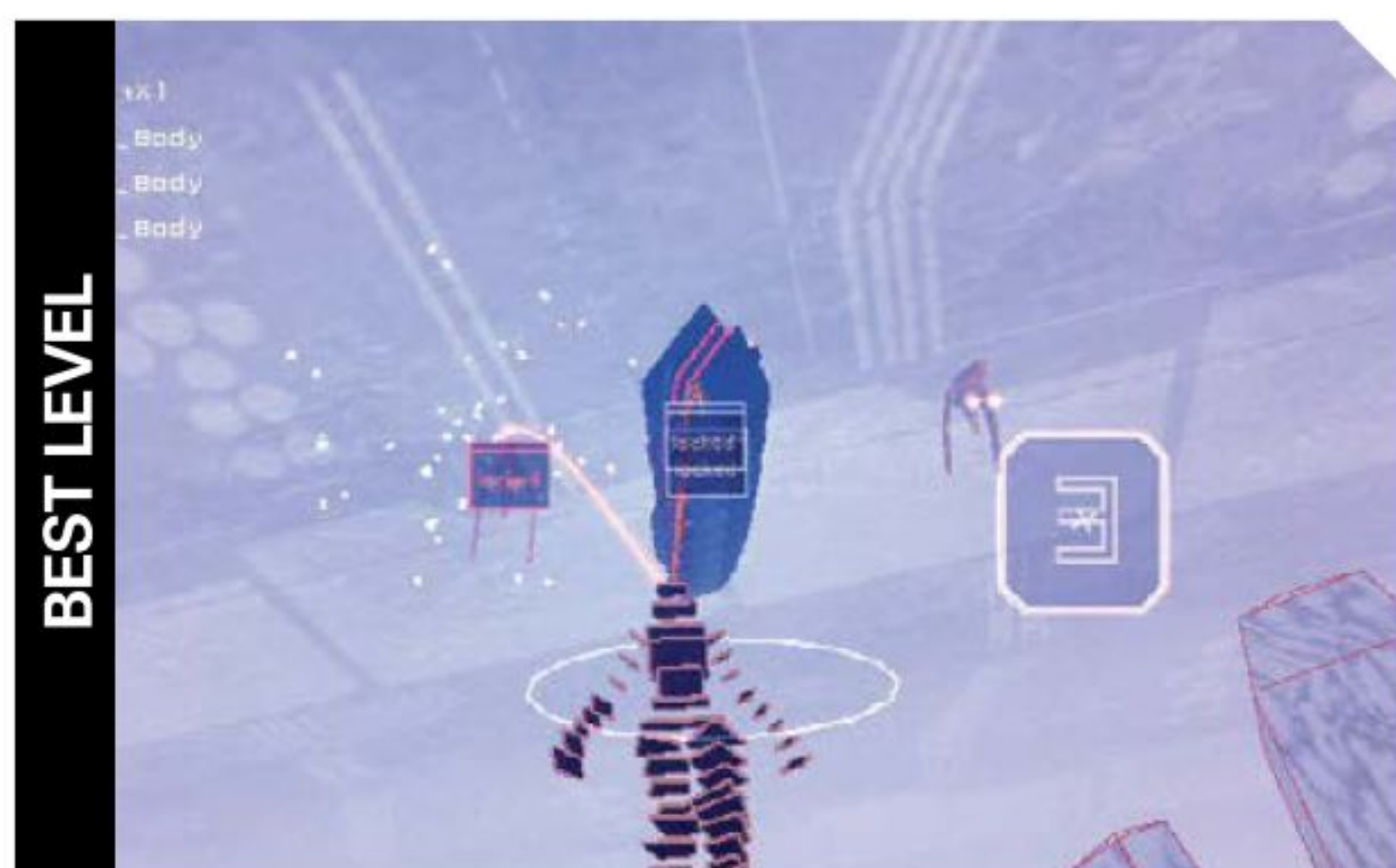
Your final form is quite possibly the creepiest of the lot, looking more than slightly foetal.



WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?

Fusion Frenzy

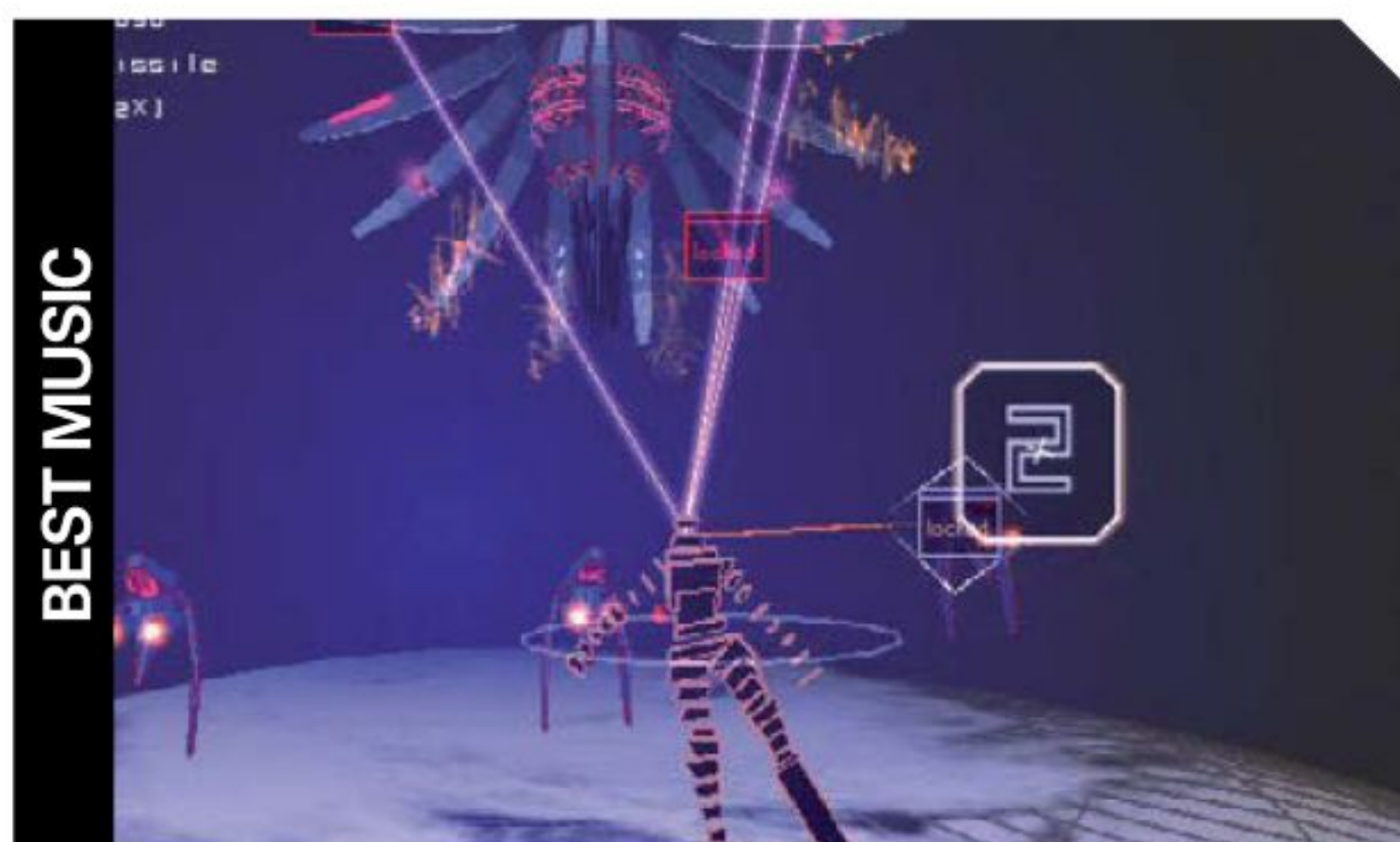
Everything, really. *Rez* initially appears to be a simplistic, linear on-rails shooter, but completion of each stage and the opening of subsequent score attack modes reveals that it's anything but. Then there's the incredible atmosphere, beautiful abstract imagery and tightly honed gameplay. Ultimately, however, *Rez* excels due to the way it skilfully weaves game and sound design to create one of the most enchanting, enthralling videogame experiences around. If you haven't played *Rez* on a big TV screen, with the lights off and the audio blaring out of your sound system, you really haven't lived.



BEST LEVEL

Evolution

Each of *Rez*'s levels dwells in the memory long after they've been completed, but it's the final stage that leaves the biggest impression. It's essentially an evolution of life and, as Adam Freeland's superb track *Fear* builds in the background, you're treated to some of the most wondrous visuals to ever appear on Sega's machine. Initially you're passing wispy, unfocused images, with your journey starting off in the sea. As it progresses, however, surroundings take on more substance, you're eventually thrust upon solid land, and the level's final moments take place high above the Earth's surface. Simply magnificent.



BEST MUSIC

It's A Mind Killer

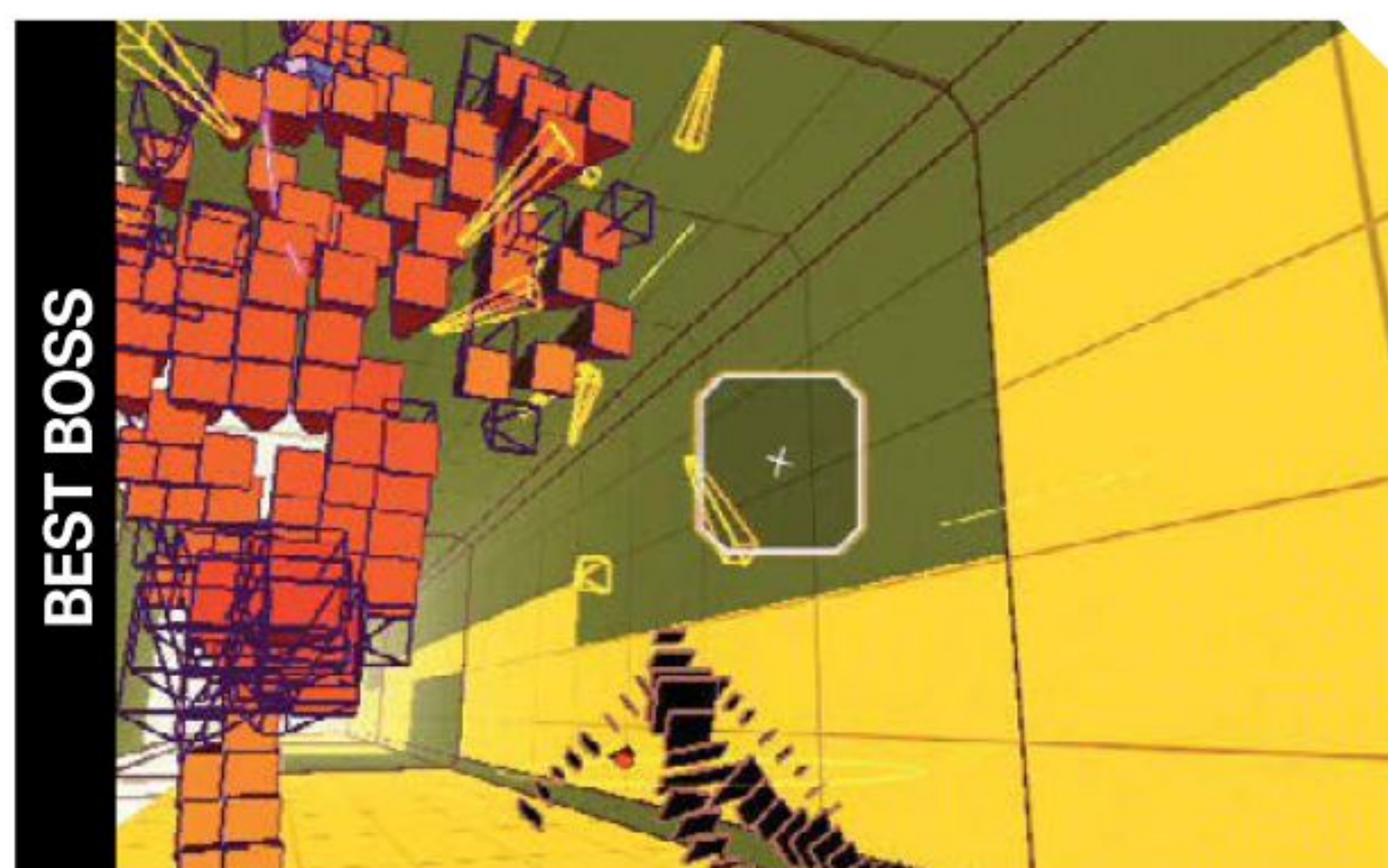
It seems a shame to once again credit *Rez*'s fifth stage when every level in the game is an audial and visual delight, but no other track matches the sheer majesty of *Fear*. Skilfully layered to match the on-screen evolution, it slowly builds in tempo and evolves just as much as the action. One minute it's dark and exceptionally moody; the next the sheer beauty of what you're hearing can lift your spirits. It's a masterful track that once again proves just how skilful Mizuguchi and the rest of United Game Artists were at blending gameplay and music for this game.



BEST MOMENT

Layer Cake

Rez is full of wonderful moments, but one of the most impressive is when you break through a new layer. Each level typically consists of ten stages that slowly add more visuals and enhanced music as you pass through them. Hit a waypoint and your avatar gets thrust forward; the screen melts away and the audio goes into overdrive. It's a totally mesmerising effect that still fills us with excitement to this day. The transition is made all the sweeter by the tactile rumbling, should you have the relevant peripheral equipped, which further immerses you in the on-screen action.



BEST BOSS

The Running Man

Rez is filled with unique boss encounters, but if we had to pick a favourite it would easily be the monstrosity found at the end of Stage 4. Flying through a twisting maze of blocks, you encounter a UFO that constantly changes shape thanks to the huge number of blocks that it drags behind itself. Eventually the huge mass solidifies and turns into a gigantic sprinting man that powers its way through long, winding tunnels as you struggle to keep up. It's a breathtaking encounter that's made all the better by the thumping soundtrack that accompanies the action.



WEIRDEST VERSION

Feel The Vibe

If there's one thing that makes *Rez* stand out from every other game it's the Trance Vibrator, packaged with the PS2 special edition. The USB device would pulse in time to *Rez*'s music, with far more power than a DualShock. Although designed as a way to extend the synaesthesia, it has reportedly been used for... ahem... naughtier things. The device was also compatible with Sega's *Space Channel 5: Part 2* and Irem's *Disaster Report*. *Rez HD* owners can pull off a similar, more powerful effect by using up to three additional 360 pads and strapping them to various parts of their body. We kid you not.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

What the press said... ages ago

Play (73%)

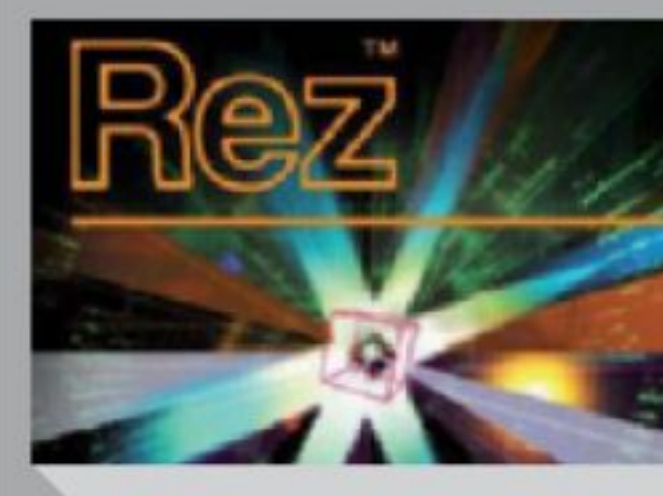
"In wishing to both typify and exaggerate the visual style of a bygone age, *Rez* ultimately commits the cardinal sin of placing graphics before gameplay – a facet attributable to Sega's desire for the title to be seen as art."

NTSC-uk (9/10)

"The fact that the game can stimulate such debate and wonder and remain, even now, huge fun to play is something for Tetsuya Mizuguchi and his very talented team to be rightly proud of."

What we think

Rez is definitely a Marmite experience, but there's no denying that it remains an incredibly accomplished piece of work. No other videogame has ever managed to successfully combine vision, gameplay and audio like *Rez* did, and while Mizuguchi has come close many times since, *Rez* remains easily his greatest achievement.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** DREAMCAST/PS2
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** UNITED GAME ARTISTS
- **RELEASED:** 2001
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-EM-UP

The Top

25

Dreamcast Games

It's a pity that Sega is no longer in the hardware industry, as it's last console was an incredible machine that never really reached the audience it deserved. Don't believe us? Why not read the following list of classics that proves Sega was still the king when it came to delivering amazingly inventive and innovative games



Toy Commander

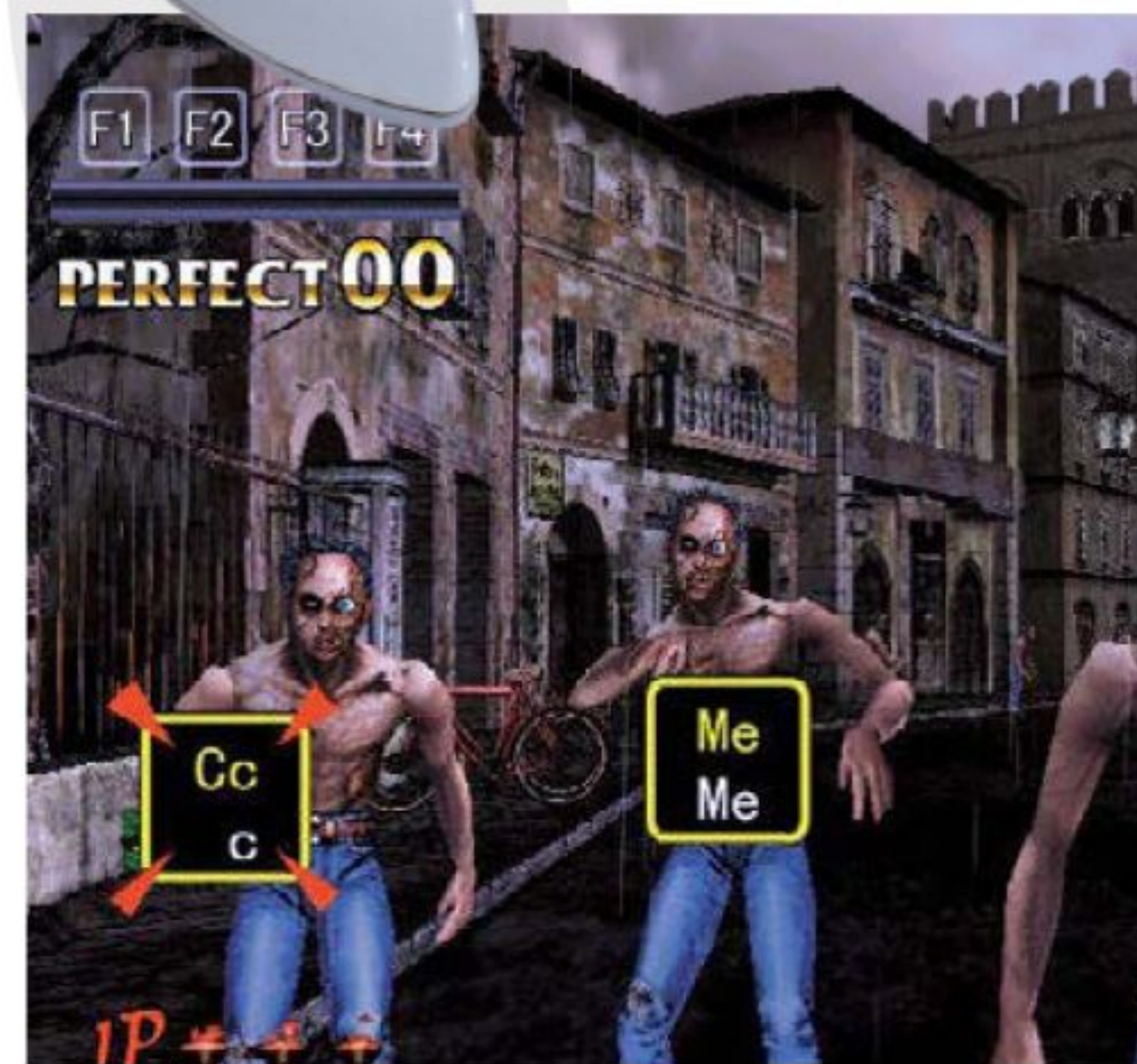
DEVELOPER: NO CLICHÉ YEAR RELEASED: 1999
GENRE: RACING

25 An early release for the DC, *Toy Commander*, in the tradition of films like *Toy Story* and games like the excellent *Clockwork Knight*, saw children's toys used in a weird racing combat game. A multitude of vehicular playthings could be driven into battle, from biplanes to jeeps and even tanks, and the missions all played out in various household environments too, à la *Micro Machines*, making for one quirky and fun little DC title.

Dynamite Cop

DEVELOPER: AM1 YEAR RELEASED: 1998
GENRE: SCROLLING FIGHTER

24 In terms of outlandish beat-'em-ups, it doesn't get more peculiar than *Dynamite Cop*. The spiritual sequel to the arcade/Saturn hit *Die Hard Arcade*, DC's overblown slapstick/action gameplay quickly became one of the earliest must-owns for the machine. Set on a luxury cruise liner usurped by a band of 'modern day' pirates, it was your mission to rescue the President's daughter, who's travelling on the vessel, basically using whatever you could get your hands on, be it a fire extinguisher, anti-tank missiles or salt and pepper shakers. A guilty pleasure, and it's B-movie gaming at its best.



The Typing Of The Dead

DEVELOPER: WOW ENTERTAINMENT/SMILEBIT
YEAR RELEASED: 2000 GENRE: PUZZLE

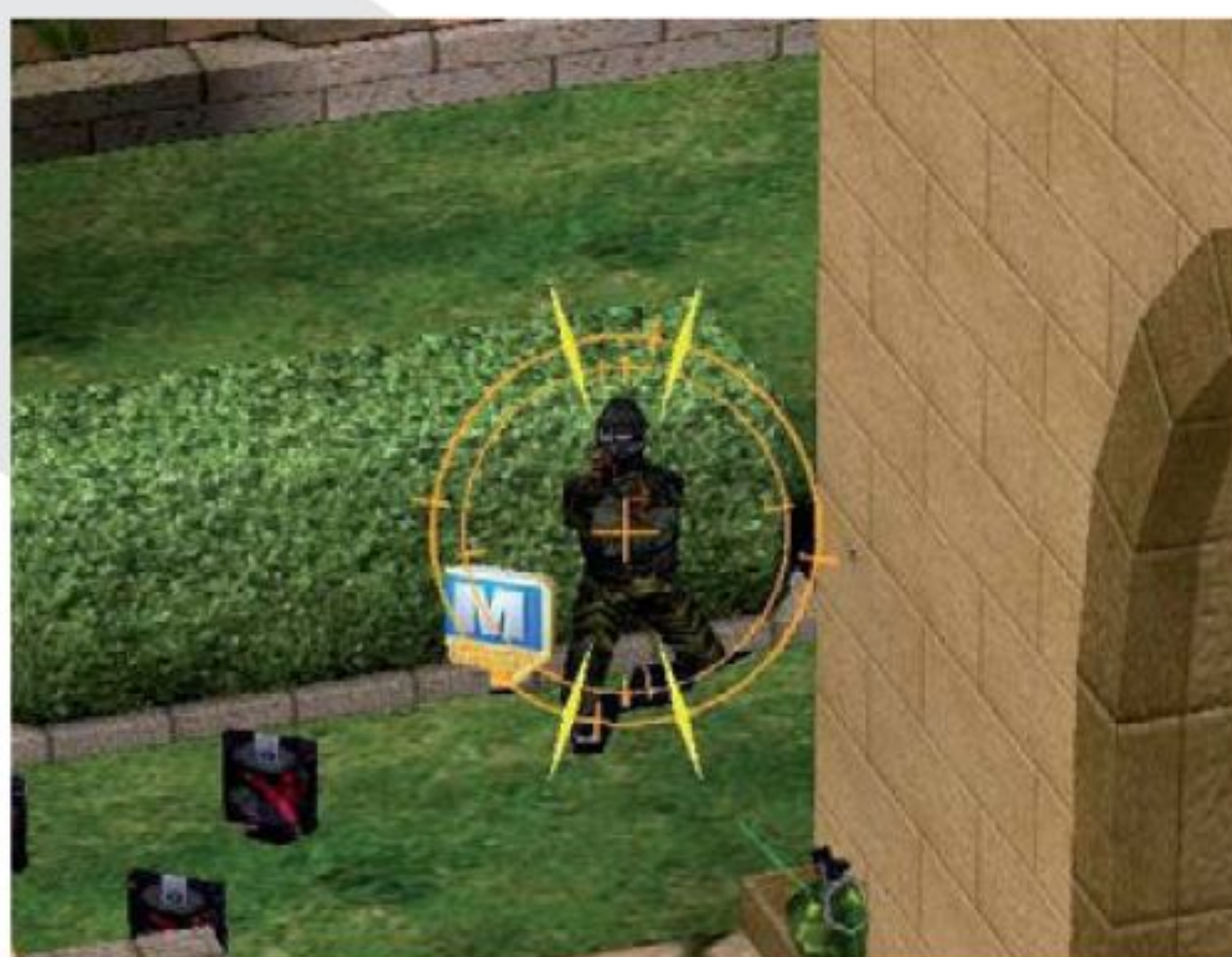
23 The guy who suggested playing *House Of The Dead 2* using a keyboard, and then suggested simply typing odd combinations of words like 'Santa has some sausages' instead of firing bullets was, in all honesty, a complete genius. This hilarious marriage of a gory arcade lightgun game with a secretary trainer remains one of the quirkiest experiences you can find on the DC, and is wholly worth forking out for the keyboard peripheral alone.



Virtua Tennis 2

DEVELOPER: HITMAKER
YEAR RELEASED: 2001 GENRE: SPORTS

22 Boasting the same stunning gameplay and crisp animation that had served *Virtua Tennis* so well, Sega's sequel ramped things up further by offering a plethora of options. Female players swelled the list to 18 famous stars and the World Tour mode was significantly expanded, while the mini-games were crazier than ever. Along with *Power Stone 2* and *Chu Chu Rocket!*, it remains some of the best fun you can have with four players.



Confidential Mission

DEVELOPER: HITMAKER
YEAR RELEASED: 2001 GENRE: LIGHTGUN

21 Many believe that *Virtua Cop* never found its way to the Dreamcast, but actually it did. *Confidential Mission* is Sega's inaugural 3D lightgun classic in every sense other than name... and the fact that it stars spies instead of cops. But apart from those two pretty significant points, the gameplay, the colour warning target system, the slightly more sedate look and feel to the action and the Justice Shot all remain present and accounted for. This remains one of the best arcade conversions to appear on the Dreamcast, as it actually improves on the arcade version by adding the all-new Agent Academy mode.

Sonic Adventure

DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
YEAR RELEASED: 1998 GENRE: PLATFORMER

20 It's fair to say that *Sonic* and 3D don't really work. This, the best 3D *Sonic* game, is over a decade old now, and in 11 years Sega still can't quite get it right. *Sonic Adventure* was the first *Sonic* title to hit the DC and was a great game with exhilarating *Sonic* bits, interspersed with character-swapping sections, which, while not as good as the Blue Blur's sequences, were enjoyable enough in their own weird chat-to-someone-about-something way.



Le Mans 24 Hours

DEVELOPER: INFOGRAMES MELBOURNE HOUSE
YEAR RELEASED: 1999 GENRE: RACING

19 It was tempting to pick any one of Sega's better-known racers for this list, but *Le Mans 24 Hours* is just so damned good. Not only does it still manage to look absolutely sensational – especially through a VGA monitor – but it remains the most in-depth and satisfying racer on Sega's machine. Like *Ferrari F355 Challenge* it's a proper sim, but don't let that put you off, as you'll be missing out on one of the Dreamcast's most exhilarating experiences.



Space Channel 5

DEVELOPER: UNITED GAME ARTISTS
YEAR RELEASED: 1999 GENRE: RHYTHM-ACTION

18 With her shock of pink hair, skintight clothing and sexy voice, *Space Channel 5*'s Ulala easily catapulted herself to the top of the sexiest videogame character list. Developed by Tetsuya Mizuguchi, who would later go on to helm both *Rez* and *Lumines*, it's a wonderful rhythm-action game that sees *Space Channel 5*'s top reporter facing off against the cute Morolians due to their desire for galactic conquest. Effectively nothing more than a musical version of Simon Says, *Space Channel 5* gets elevated to Dreamcast greatness thanks to its sexy female protagonist, brilliantly catchy tunes and the fact that, despite being ridiculously easy to complete, we still find ourselves constantly returning to it.



THE TOP 25 DREAMCAST GAMES



Marvel vs Capcom 2

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
YEAR RELEASED: 2000 GENRE: BEAT-'EM-UP

17 The climatic smashing together of two popular geek worlds – videogames and comic books – was always going to be a dream matchup, and with the quality of a developer like Capcom pulling the strings what *MVC2* represented was the most lavish and over-the-top beat-'em-up to ever find a release. With 56 characters, three-on-three fights, and screen-saturating special moves, it was an utter must for any DC collection.

Samba De Amigo

DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
YEAR RELEASED: 1999 GENRE: RHYTHM-ACTION

16 Ported from the original arcade game, *Samba De Amigo* is further proof of just how original and innovative Sega's Dreamcast actually was. Played via a pair of funky maracas and sporting a superb selection of party songs, it's a brilliant rhythm-action title that was bolstered by garish visuals, utterly charming characters and plenty of downloadable content, including lots of arrangements of classic Sega arcade games. Nowadays it sells for well over £100, but to be honest it's worth every penny, especially if you've played the disappointing Wii version.





The Top 25 Dreamcast Games

Sega Marine Fishing

■ DEVELOPER: WOW ENTERTAINMENT
■ YEAR RELEASED: 1999 ■ GENRE: SPORTS

15 After getting bored of catching bass in Sega's first two Dreamcast fishing games, *Marine Fishing* proved itself to be a massive improvement. As well as enabling you to catch a huge variety of different fish, an additional game mode rewarded you with a variety of items and fish that could be used to stock a huge aquarium. Add in a host of excellent mini-games and *Marine Fishing* becomes the best fishing game on any system.

Power Stone 2

■ DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
■ YEAR RELEASED: 2000 ■ GENRE: BEAT-'EM-UP

14 While you could argue that the one-on-one gameplay of *Power Stone* makes for a better-balanced game, it can't hold a candle to the sheer chaos that takes place in the sequel. A real friend destroyer, sit down with three pals and watch the sparks fly. Even if *Power Stone 2* didn't feature one of the best multiplayer modes, we'd still fall in love with it thanks to its impossibly vibrant visuals, great levels and huge number of weapons to unleash on your hapless opponents. Simply unmissable.



Chu Chu Rocket!

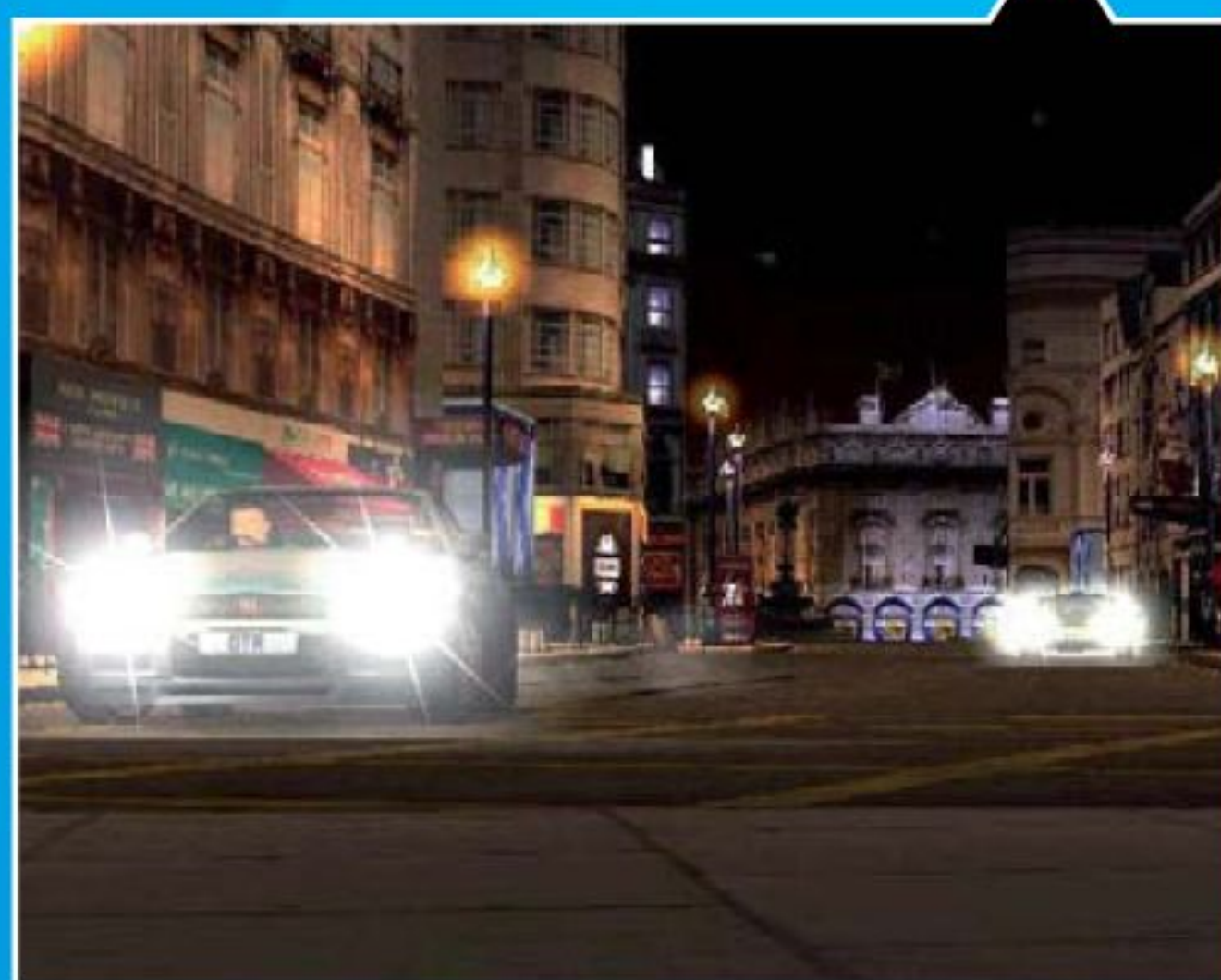
■ DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
■ YEAR RELEASED: 1998 ■ GENRE: PLATFORMER

13 *Chu Chu Rocket!* was to the DC what *Tetris* was to the Game Boy. The first online console game for the machine, and given away free to lucky Europeans who signed up and ordered it via Dreamarena, it was a frantic puzzle game by Sonic Team that found the player helping mice avoid cats and escape on a spaceship.

Metropolis Street Racer

■ DEVELOPER: BIZARRE CREATIONS
■ YEAR RELEASED: 2000 ■ GENRE: RACING

12 It's somewhat telling that a decade after its release we're still waiting for a direct high-definition counterpart to this fantastic racer to appear. Amazingly ambitious and offering plenty of clever little touches – weather variations, the kudos system, the transition from night to day, radio stations – *Metropolis Street Racer* is easily the Dreamcast's best racer and is thoroughly deserving of all the high accolades that were bestowed on it back in the day. Now available for under a fiver, it's easily the DC's best non-arcade racer and is an essential part of any Dreamcast owner's collection.



Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike

■ DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
■ YEAR RELEASED: 1999 ■ GENRE: BEAT-'EM-UP

11 With *Garou's* naff loading times hurting its chances of making our prestigious list, Capcom's *3rd Strike* just manages to steal the 2D one-on-one fighter crown. Still incredible to look at some ten years after its release, it's a wonderful port that becomes even better when played with the DC's excellent arcade stick. With its instantly accessible but amazingly complex gameplay mechanics, exotic assortment of characters and wonderful parrying system, *3rd Strike* remains one of the best 2D fighters of all time.

Ikaruga

■ DEVELOPER: TREASURE
■ YEAR RELEASED: 2001 ■ GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP

10 It would have been all too easy to simply fill this top ten with shooters, but we've decided to plump for just one. As much a puzzle game as it is a shooter, *Ikaruga* takes the polarity ideas that Treasure first explored in *Silhouette Mirage* and evolves them into a far more complex and exciting mechanic. Notable for being the first of many games to get released after the DC's commercial death, it's a beautifully arresting game that features a perfectly pitched difficulty level, inventive level design and an array of fantastic bosses. Utterly essential.



Resident Evil: Code Veronica

■ DEVELOPER: NEXTECH
■ YEAR RELEASED: 2000 ■ GENRE: SURVIVAL HORROR

9 It's weird to think that one of the best *Resident Evil* games in the series never actually came from Capcom, but instead from a little-known freelancing development outfit called Nextech. Formerly Gau Entertainment, which was responsible for the awesome *Ranger X* on the Mega Drive, it's no wonder the game is the most cinematic and epic-feeling instalment of the series to date. CV was the first instalment to use proper 3D backgrounds instead of pre-rendered images, meaning real-time interaction with objects and a dynamic camera, and to add a first-person mode, leading the way for *Resident Evil 4* in many ways, a title that most regard as the pinnacle of the series.





Jet Set Radio

DEVELOPER: SMILEBIT
YEAR RELEASED: 2000 GENRE: PLATFORMER

8 *Jet Set Radio* basically had three things to help it stand out from the crowd: J-pop, unique – for its day – cel-shaded graphics, and some unusual gameplay. Playing the leader of a colourful gang of rollerskating graffiti artists, the game involved skating through three levels set around Tokyo and battling with various gangs who are trying to seize control of their turf. To keep these gangs at bay, rather than waiting for them down dark alleys with shanks and chains, you skated around, avoiding cops and gang members as you tagged and re-tagged the streets with your gang motif as if competing in some kind of *It's A Knockout*-style event for urban street artists.

Phantasy Star Online

DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
YEAR RELEASED: 2000 GENRE: RPG

7 **Sega and Sonic** Team broke many boundaries with the innovative *Phantasy Star Online*, and also saddled loyal followers of the cult game with insane telephone bills. Before various cheat devices ruined it, exploring *PSO*'s huge worlds with three friends was one of the most unique gaming experiences that Sega's machine offered. There's something about facing off against that huge dragon before realising that you're out of Scape Dolls that those who weren't there from the beginning just won't understand. Trust us, though: it was amazing.

Crazy Taxi

DEVELOPER: HITMAKER
YEAR RELEASED: 2000 GENRE: RACING

6 *Crazy Taxi* certainly lived up to its name: you drove a taxi and the game was crazy. Insane, in fact. You basically played one of four idiot taxi drivers who act like their life depends on ferrying people to places like KFC and the FILA Store in milliseconds. Anyway, the game was great fun in the arcade, and the arcade-perfect conversion that cropped up on the DC a year later in 2000, replete with an extra city to tear around and Crazy Box mini-games, made for essential DC gaming. It was also one of the most successful releases to ever appear on the machine.



Soul Calibur

DEVELOPER: NAMCO
YEAR RELEASED: 1999 GENRE: BEAT-'EM-UP

5 **A faultless arcade** conversion, *Soul Calibur* was the killer app for Sega's Dreamcast, dethroning even the majesty of its arcade rival *Virtua Fighter*. Featuring visuals that were actually significantly better than the original arcade game, *Soul Calibur* was as perfect a beat-'em-up as you could ask for. Slick, smooth visuals, and great playability that was bolstered by a great cast of varied and surprisingly balanced characters, plus a bevy of bonuses including extra modes and unlockables, made it the must-own fighter for the machine. It still holds up today, and the series has arguably never reached such heights since.



Skies Of Arcadia

DEVELOPER: OVERWORKS
YEAR RELEASED: 2000 GENRE: RPG

4 **We've lost count** of the hours poured into this beautiful creation from Overworks, but it's well over 100 hours now. Filled with whimsical and often fantastical imagery – the flying pirate ships still amaze – unforgettable characters and an extraordinarily good story that sees a young boy and his friends facing off against gigantic elemental Gigas, *Skies Of Arcadia* has everything you'd expect from a classic RPG. Modeled on the later *Zelda* games, its engaging storyline, extensive use of the DC's VMU and fantastic visuals make it one of the best RPGs of the last decade.

THE TOP 25 DREAMCAST GAMES



Rez

DEVELOPER: UNITED GAME ARTISTS
YEAR RELEASED: 2001 GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP

3 *Rez* is one of the most unique rhythm-action games around, if only because it's far different to anything that's come before or since. With its dreamlike visuals, amazing trance music that slowly builds up in layers as you complete segments of each stage, and simplistic yet challenging gameplay, *Rez* is quite unlike anything else on Sega's system. A simple on-rails shooter at heart, *Rez* nevertheless possesses plenty of challenge under its gorgeous exterior and once again proves just how fertile and imaginative the minds at Sega Japan once were.

The House Of The Dead 2

DEVELOPER: WOW ENTERTAINMENT
YEAR RELEASED: 1999 GENRE: LIGHTGUN

2 **To this day**, *The House Of The Dead 2* remains the best lightgun game to sprint its way from the arcades and into our warm, cosy homes. The chasm of visual finesse and quality that existed between the first two instalments of Sega's survival-horror series was so large that you couldn't help but fall into its impressiveness. Sega really did pull out all the stops for this sequel, turning round an astonishingly faithful DC conversion in just six months, which boasted an all-new 'original mode' that added weapon and health upgrades hidden around the levels and rewarded subsequent playthroughs.



“An epic, sprawling adventure, Shenmue was unlike anything gamers had seen before”

Shenmue I and II

DEVELOPER: SEGA-AM2 YEAR RELEASED: 1999, 2001 GENRE: ADVENTURE

1 Seriously, did you really think it was going to be anything else? *Shenmue* was the game that the Dreamcast was building up to; a game it's likely the Dreamcast was built for, and the one game to really turn Sega's fortune... well, not quite. *Shenmue* was originally scheduled to appear on the Sega Saturn before its development was carried across to Sega's 128-bit beast.

The first shots of *Shenmue*, then titled *Project Berkeley*, started appearing in issues of *Sega Saturn Magazine*, along with the rumour that Yu Suzuki and his AM2 team were working on an RPG tied in to the *Virtua Fighter* universe and putting Akira in the central role, but the game never materialised. However, on a brand new console, under a new name and with a new story, *Berkeley* became the beautiful butterfly that was *Shenmue*. An epic, sprawling adventure

game that harked back to the classic revenge martial arts flicks of the Eighties and dripped in Sega-isms – such as *Virtua Fighter*-style combat; a loose, arcade-style approach to RPG gaming; and a beautifully realised world that brilliantly mixed Eastern and Western tastes – it was unlike anything gamers had seen before.

At \$70 million to develop, *Shenmue* is one of the most expensive games ever created, an achievement that has earned it a place in the *Guinness Book Of World Records*. Similarly, it is also the most ambitious, with Suzuki's plan to split *Shenmue* across 16 chapters over 4-5 games. This unique episodic nature of the game has meant that because of high production costs and less than favourable sales, the game has become a bit of an unfinished symphony and a bone of contention among scores of passionate *Shenmue* fans who are eager to find out how Ryo's story ends.

Predictably, given the large bubble of hype that was surrounding the game, many felt that *Shenmue* failed to live up to its promises. And while it's true that the game has its faults, there really was nothing else like it. An admittedly slow burn to begin with, the true brilliance of *Shenmue* opens up when you venture outside your home and really start to become enmeshed in the story, the characters and the beautifully constructed city of Yokosuka.

Two years later and Yu Suzuki treated the Dreamcast to the next instalment in the series. Featuring three chapters of the story – *Shenmue* only featured one – *Shenmue II* was bigger, more lavish and more epic than the first, but once again, because the game saw only moderate success, it was then that Sega pulled the plug on the Dreamcast and with it the potential future of the series.



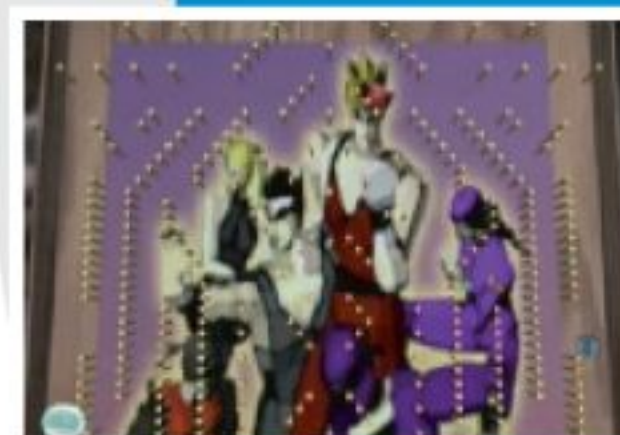
Five reasons why we love Shenmue



1 Great scenes
In one of *Shenmue*'s most poignant moments, Ryo says goodbye to his Rastafarian hot-dog selling pal, who's leaving him in his time of need to go travelling in America. Cheers, then. Oddly, the goodbye bit and subsequent wave to Tom as he's riding out of Yokosuka on a metal bird happen in the same place, in the exact same cut-scene. Weird.



2 Arcade games
If there's one thing *Shenmue* is, it's retro. The game is set in the Eighties, people dress in clothes that you can only buy now in charity shops, and the arcade parlour in the first town of the game features plenty of treasures and classic arcade games, including full versions of *Hang-On* and *Space Harrier*.



3 Lucky hit
If you fancy earning yourself a quick yen to buy yourself a capsule toy of Dural then you can always have a punt on *Shenmue*'s addictive carnival-style mini-game. The game involves dropping a ball down a board littered with pins, and winning rests on the ball dropping into a win zone.



4 The story
The compelling story of *Shenmue* is what has fans so eager to find out exactly how Ryo's adventure ends. What starts off as a simple tale of vengeance after Ryo's dad is murdered by a mysterious assailant soon spirals into an epic and mystical adventure involving ancient mirrors, kung fu mysticism, destiny and a magical tree.



5 Battle royale
The combat in *Shenmue* was obviously inspired by *Virtua Fighter*, and early on in *Shenmue*'s development both series were entwined. *Shenmue*'s combat is excellent, and Ryo learns to expand his move set during the course of the game, culminating in an epic 70-man rumble.