

DISPOSABLE MEDIA

issue one point one

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issue one

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ISSUE 01 // August 2005

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This, if you haven't been told is Disposable Media. This is our first issue, and it most definitely won't be the last. It will however, change, and this is why this first impression isn't too important. Every month we'll change, adapt and look and read differently. Because we are different; we're here to put forward our opinion, to entertain and to do show off. We're not here to sell advert space, to link to other websites or scratch PR backs. Disposable Media is here for the writers as much as it is for the readers and as much for fun as it is for serious discussion. We hope the magazine looks as good we think it looks, and hope that it reads as well as we think it's written. We've spent a lot of time getting to this stage and hope that this is reflected in the quality of the magazine. It hasn't been easy to get to this very first issue, but we're all genuinely proud of what we've put together and would sincerely like



to hear your comments—we'll be adding a 'letters page' in some form next issue for discussion and for you to tell us what to do. And it doesn't stop there; fancy writing for DM? Why not? We're open to any and every suggestion and we're happy to let everyone use the magazine to put forward debate, opinion or to just promote themselves and their talents.

This issue, as with every other, we have a theme. Beginnings is this month's apt choice, and that includes a wealth of thoughts, judgments, ideas and comments. We've got some cracking columns, features, galleries and reviews of pretty much anything. We aim to cover all sorts, and if there's something you'd like to see covered, be it more in-depth, not at all, or just as a footnote, let us know, we're here to stay and to evolve.

This they say, is just the beginning. ■

As a small aside, Blinky would like to use a sweeping brush to thank anyone and everyone who has helped in getting to this stage; everyone who even sniffed an interest on the original Rllmuk thread, anyone who has contributed and especially those who scoffed at the idea. A special thank you to Tim Cheesman and Kerem Shefik for giving up so much of their time and talent to put this together, and particularly to Chris Barratt for the name!

THE PLEASURES OF THE NEW BY REV

THE LOVELY FEELING OF
TAKING THE POLYTHENE
AND TAPE OFF THAT NEW
BOX AND OPENING IT.
CAREFULLY REMOVING THE
POLYTHENE COVERED
CONTENTS AND GINGERLY
AVOIDING DAMAGE TO THE
POLYSTYRENE TO ENSURE
THE ROOM STAYS CLEAN.
THERE'S CARDBOARD TO
BE THROWN AWAY BEFORE
YOU CAN REMOVE
INTRICATE PIECES OF TAPE
BEFORE FINALLY OPENING
THE BAG THAT HOLDS THE
CONSOLE. MEANWHILE THE
ENTIRE AREA AROUND YOU
GETS COVERED IN AN
INEVITABLE POLYSTYRENE
SNOW-STORM. A FEW TIES
TO BE UNFASTENED
AROUND WIRES AND
THAT'S IT. YOU'RE NOW
FREE TO SET IT UP.

Of course that means finding an empty plug socket which is inevitably lacking. There's always that adapter that gets used for the Christmas lights so a quick trip up in the loft is needed. Up and down the ladder and you're back. Plugging in the scart lead is easy—you know exactly where it plugs in after much practice so that's a two second job. The minutes of fumbling blindly suggest otherwise though so you end up balanced on one leg with your head dangling behind the TV to reveal you were in the correct place but holding it upside down. Blind panic. No power. Panic is quickly ended by turning the socket on at the wall. Now you can finally play. Well, after you've put in the date and time. As well as your full name. And date of birth. And credit card details. And address. And national insurance number, favourite colour and T-shirt size. Once that's all done though you're free to play. Deep breath.

Apart from the fact you haven't opened any games or accessories yet. The accessories, of course, will be sealed in airtight plastic. You always think you can manage to open it nice and neatly in case it is faulty and needs returning. Blood curdling screams and angry stabbings with a kitchen knife soon occur though and you start hoping that the contents aren't faulty. After they have no effect you soon dive back in, tearing at it while it returns the favour and tears into you.

Finally opened, the end result is a slightly damaged controller and the need for several stitches in your hands, arms and face—proof that biting doesn't work either. In fact, rumour has it Accident and Emergency wards up and down the country are

requesting fresh batches of Geek-Positive blood to make up for all the blood lost trying to get entirely unnecessary second controller's open. Being thorough isn't always the best idea.

At least you can play it now though.

What is it though? This year if it involves delving behind your TV it's probably an Xbox 360. Next year you'll probably get the pleasure of doing it twice if Sony and Nintendo get their way.

The hassle isn't the only problem though. There's the price too. Just because it was cheaper than you thought it would be doesn't mean it won't be several hundreds cheaper in 18 months time and when it does you'll be able to buy more games as well.

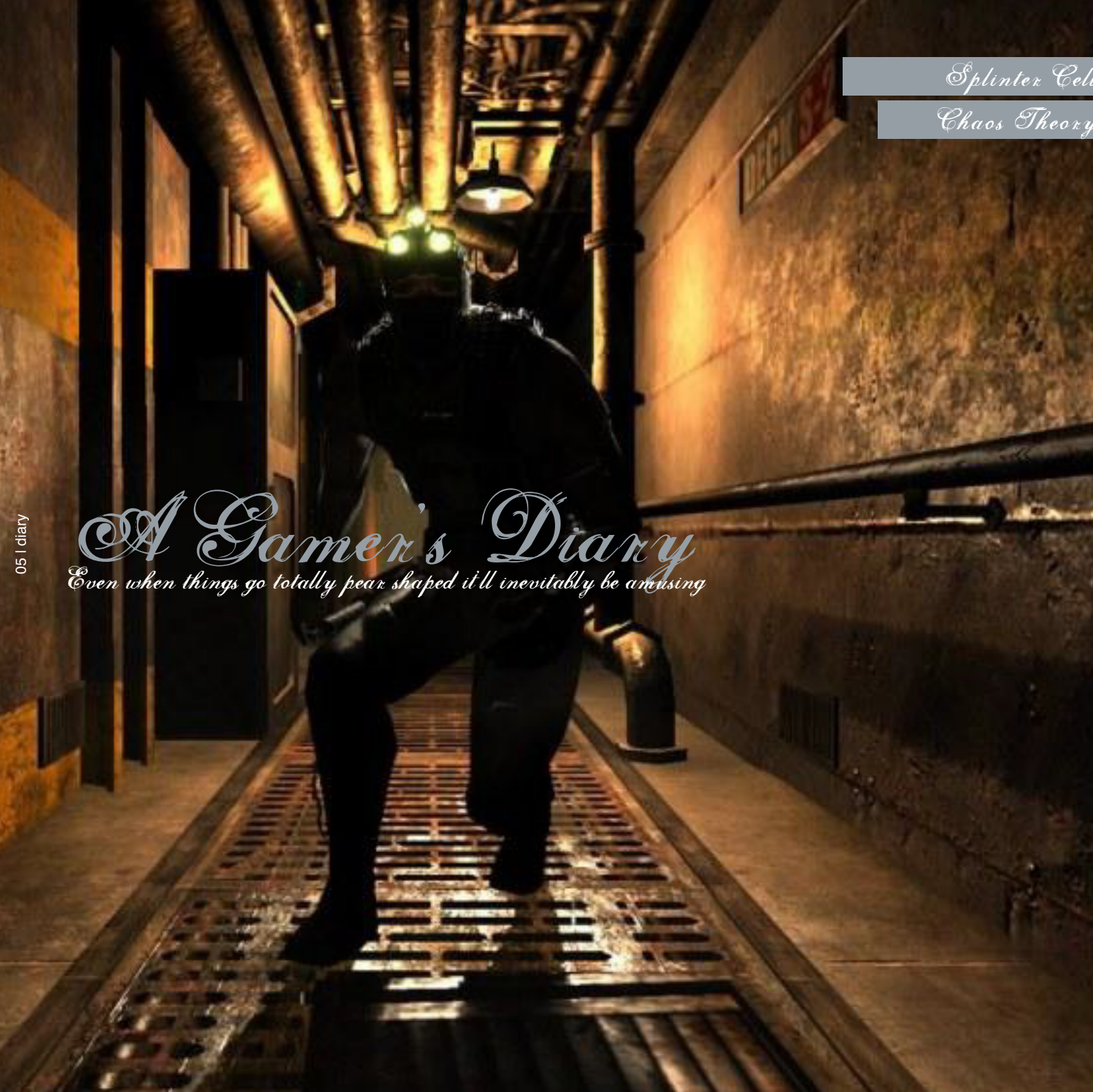
Same amount of money, more stuff. Despite common sense though, people still dive at the opportunity to buy on release day.

Why though? Some even queue for the pleasure of doing it and yet no-one knows why. Everyone knows it is a huge waste of money. The game you are looking forward to will not come out just after release—it will come out in two years. The games you will buy will not be as much fun as the ones you were playing on your old console. Pretty though.

Here is some advice. It won't be worth the extra money you paid for it. You'll regret it in advance and even more afterwards. Most of the games will be crap and all will be overpriced. Do not be an early adopter. Do. Not. Do. It.

So, see you in the midnight queues then? Thought so. Remember to bring a thermos too - it gets cold in November. ■

BLOOD CURDLING
SCREAMS AND
ANGRY STABBINGS
WITH A KITCHEN
KNIFE SOON OCCUR



Splinter Cell

Chaos Theory

A Gamer's Diary

Even when things go totally pear shaped it'll inevitably be amusing

There's a simultaneous gasp from myself and my beer can as I pull back the ring, sinking into the sofa I stare at the mildly blurry but, undeniably huge projection TV in front of me, a cursory glance across at the widescreen CRT beside it confirms how sharp the picture should look, but hey, it was only 250 quid second hand, and that's a big gaming window. "Shall we fire up Splinter Cell then?"

I'm over at a mates house for an evening of system link Splinter Cell:Chaos Theory. Having thoroughly enjoyed the single player antics of Pandora Tomorrow I'm thinking; more gadgets, and a fellow agent by my side, this is going to be great.

Basically it's the same as your standard single player campaign but with added extra high walls or drops which require you to either stand on/be thrown by the other player or hang off their legs. They've not revolutionised co-operative gameplay but merely adjusted a few things so that two of you can make your way through the world of Sam Fisher with the occasional two person task thrown in as a waypoint to stop one of you running off and getting lost.

SC's arsenal of gadgets and weapons are shared between both of you, one being more stealth, sticky cameras and stun shots, the other, grenades(frag and chaff), flashbangs etc.

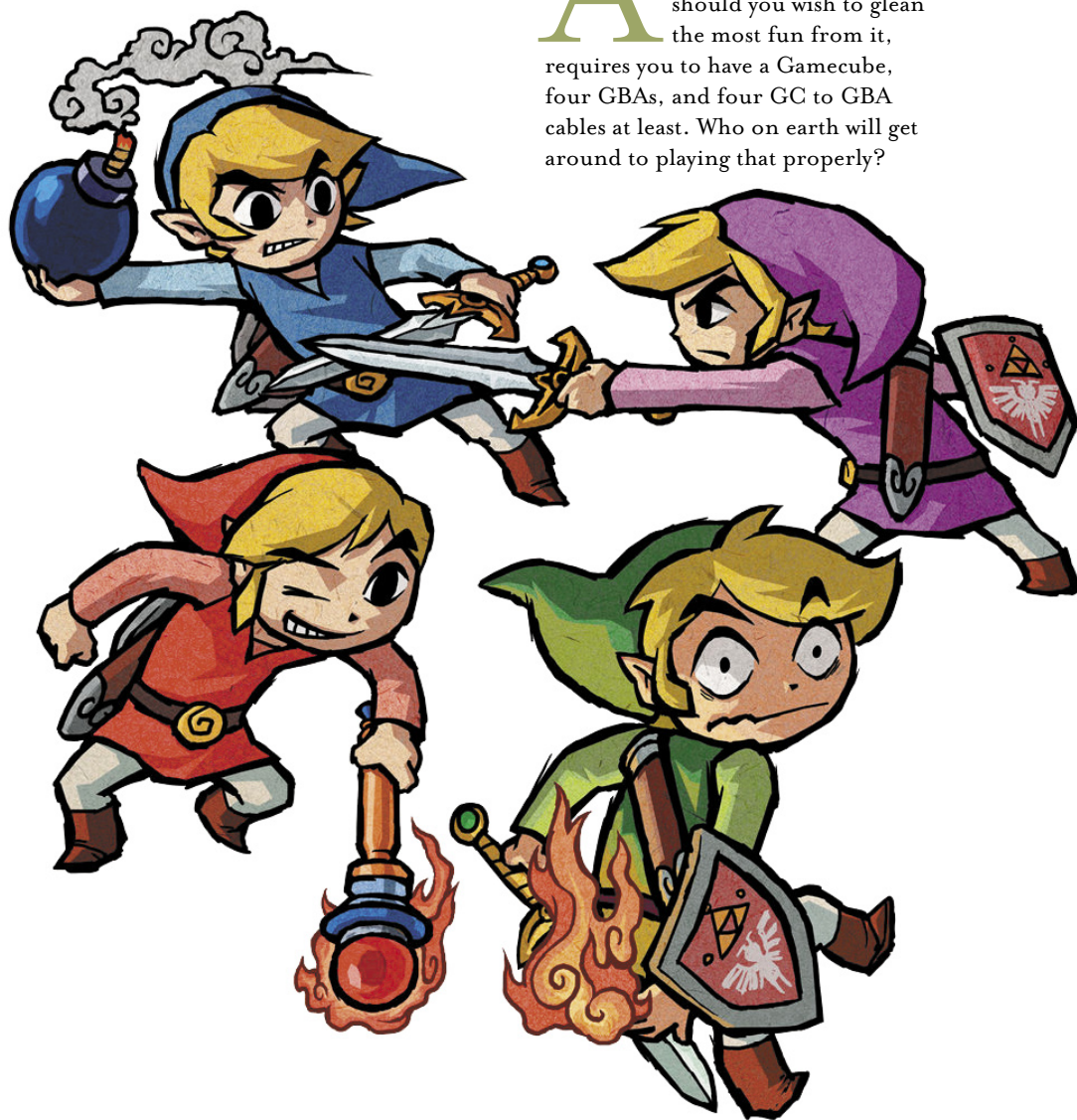
With both of us familiar with SC's format I'm immediately running off into the shadows whilst my buddy clammers up on a truck to pick off the enemies. I'm on stealth standby, if he misses a shot, the enemy will spin round and try to take him out, cue me springing out with the knife for the fatal blow. I whistle by the bottom of the stairs to get the guard down, my partner steps out and breaks his back. He lobs a smoke grenade into a room and I bust in poised with infra-red vision. You get the idea.

Should anything go wrong you can revive a fallen comrade as long as you can get to the body within a time limit, so basically it's SC with the pressure off, pistol in one hand, pizza in the other, chat about lovely brick textures whilst rappelling down a wall, you can't fail the mission so just try everything until you progress, feel free to experiment.

And you will, it's far more rewarding to choreograph a set piece and pull it off than to just plug through firing your rifle with gay abandon. Even when things go totally pear shaped it'll inevitably be amusing. I throw a grenade in through a doorway as it closes, only for it to bounce off the frame and detonate in my mates face, revive, continue until the last train home. ■

The Legend of Zelda Four Swords

A brave move by Nintendo, releasing a game that, should you wish to glean the most fun from it, requires you to have a Gamecube, four GBAs, and four GC to GBA cables at least. Who on earth will get around to playing that properly?



The wonders of a games forum, several of us gather for an evening of Four Swords. After the initial 'does anyone need batteries?' and 'can I borrow a GC - GBA link cable?' we're plugged in and raring to go. Instantly we're picking each other up, being thrown off ledges, and collecting gems only to have them beaten out of us by our fellow Links'. Well, the bullies anyway. You'll instantly see people's playing styles but the game brings everyone together brilliantly.

The play area scrolls slightly but is divided into screens that require all players to walk to the same exit for it

Instantly we're picking each other up, being thrown off ledges

to scroll, someone wants to hang back and spend ages examining a wall? just go over, pick them up and take them to everyone else.

If you were a fan of Gauntlet back in the day you'll really appreciate this game. The weapons, instead of there always being four to share there will sometimes be just one, it becomes your skill, boomerang can fetch from afar, bomb can open new paths, spade..... well, spade digs, but at least you can swap with an abiding mate.

It does have its idiosyncrasies though, sometimes all four of you will be required to push or pull something, you press a button to grab hold but also have to push up or down, times this by four people who aren't convinced the piece of scenery needs pushing



or pulling and basic puzzles can be missed due to one person not doing the same as everyone else, entirely halting your progress. Add to this Nintendo breaking their own fundamental rules of play like having a hidden entrance that needs bombing but not leaving the tell tale cracks in the wall to 'make it more of a puzzle', and pettiness like a required switch being just out of view unless all of you stand in the right place and you're left with a bitter taste in your mouth. Oh, and if any of the GBA's run out of juice or should any of the - inevitably tangled - cables get disconnected during play.....the show's over kids, it's back to the title screen and you're going to have to start the level again.

The result of this is that we only managed the first two levels, and currently are struggling to get everyone together to finish the game off. Apparently the first couple of levels are the worst, then its plain sailing. I only hope we can get it together again to find out. ■

After a few glasses of Sake, Mr Iwata and Mr Miyamoto's conversation turned towards the DS.

After claiming the DS wasn't just a follow up to the Game Boy they now needed to prove it. They thought about it long and hard. Suddenly, Miyamoto burst into the office of Iwata. "I know what we need" he exclaimed, prompting Iwata to fall off his chair. Miyamoto continued unfazed "we need touchable media art!" And after receiving a slightly baffled nod from Iwata he hurtled off to hire Toshio Iwai to make something for the DS.

Maybe not entirely true but possibly not that far from the truth—certainly Toshio Iwai was approached to make a game for the DS. It has fulfilled its aim too—it is different to anything released on the Gameboy. It's not a game for a start—you don't have three lives and there isn't a score. You don't even have a controllable avatar. Another description is needed, with the official line being that Electroplankton is "Touchable Media Art". A more accurate description is that it is simply a toy that is slotted in the DS to be played with. Explaining Electroplankton in more depth is far from an easy task. It is essentially a music creation toy—the way you touch the screen and use the microphone affects the noises your DS makes. The little creatures onscreen which affect the noises that are being made are called Plankton.

There are ten different Plankton and each exist in their own section of the game. Each is described in more detail elsewhere around these pages but broadly eight are →

electroplankton was born.

Meet the plankton.

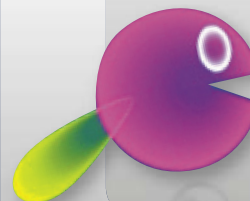


Luminaria

Four Plankton follow the series of arrows laid out in front of them while travelling at different speeds. Each arrow touched creates a different note so the Plankton need to be aimed to hit the notes you want.

Tip: Spin an arrow around several times to start it spinning constantly to ensure created tunes stay random.

Hananbow



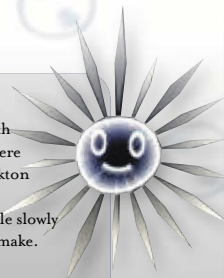
The Plankton are fired from a launcher and can hit off leaves which ring out a note when struck. Set up a path for them to bounce off enough leaves to make a flower bloom.

Tip: Pressing A shows the angles the leaves are held at so with a pen and paper handy you can recreate the exact situation at another time.

Sun-Animalcule

Touching the screen places a Plankton which then plays three notes which depend on where they were created. Placing subsequent Plankton makes them play three notes after they are created to make a tune. A day and night cycle slowly plays which alters the sounds the Plankton make.

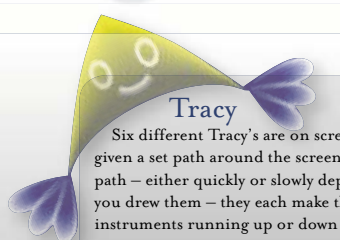
Tip: Press left and right on the directional pad to alter the time of day.





→ based entirely around stylus control, with your use of the touch screen affecting what sound is made, whereas the final two use the microphone as the main method of interaction. You don't ever use more than one at once—they are entirely separate. You simply choose the one you want from the menu and play with it. When you want to stop either return to the menu and re-select or turn your DS off and walk away.

A few things are worth mentioning. Foremost is the fact that everything to do with *Electroplankton* is beautiful. From the shiny metallic blue packaging, to the hand-drawn style manual and finally the itself. Each of the individual sections are minimal and consistent in look but each is instantly recognisable and all animation is subtle but excellent.



Tracy

Six different Tracy's are on screen and each can be given a set path around the screen. While following the path—either quickly or slowly depending on how fast you drew them—they each make the sound of different instruments running up or down through the available notes, like running your hand across a piano.

Tip: Give one or two of the Tracy's a really short path to give a background beat.



Vol-Voice

Touching the central shape starts a ten second recording from the microphone. The things said into the microphone in this time can then be played back in a variety of ways that manipulate the voice.

Tip: Record a phrase, then play it backwards. Listen to the sound and try to copy it while recording. Playing that backwards should result in the original phrase if you copied it correctly.

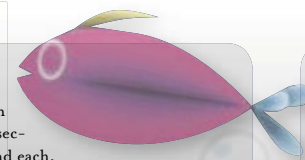
it's not even a game for a start—you don't have three lives and there isn't a score... you don't even have a controllable avatar.

Likewise, the noises you can make with it are at times just as beautiful as the best of the artwork. With very little effort—sometimes with none at all—you can make lovely sounds. With effort and practice it is possible to make something that would give many electronic bands reason to sit up and take notice—especially if you go beyond the cartridge itself and make use of recording software on a PC or Mac to your creations together.

Really, everything included is perfect. Unfortunately, one of the greatest problems is that there really isn't that much included. A solid twenty minutes of play you can have seen it all. A few small things will slip through but not enough for you to regret not seeing them. After that you will either be bored very

quickly or still be able to get plenty of fun out of it for a long time—it will entirely depend upon how you like to spend your spare time. While no videogame is really a constructive way of spending spare time they are structured to suggest achievement but *Electroplankton* has nothing of the sort.

Recording and making music gives it a purpose but even that isn't perfect. The only available method of recording is primitive and ends up with quite high levels of noise. Also some of the Plankton are impossible to reliably work with due to their random nature—fun to play with but impossible to



Rec-Rec

A basic sampler that has four Plankton each can hold roughly five seconds of recorded sound each.

This can then have different beats placed over it and sped up or slowed down. You can constantly record over the four Plankton.

Tip: Press A to return the Plankton to normal speed after you've altered it.

Beatnes

Plays Nintendo tunes that can then be remixed by selecting from a series of pre-recorded samples. The amount of time between the different presses is maintained for a period of time and constantly repeats what has been selected in that time.

Tip: Pressing left and right alters the speed at which the tunes are played back. Pressing down restores it to the original speed.

MAKING MUSIC

As mentioned in the article, one way of using Electrop plankton is to record sounds created in it to a computer and layer them with other recordings to create songs. The process is extremely simple. All you need is a computer, a 3.5mm Jack to 3.5mm Jack cable and a piece of recording software capable of including different tracks—for PC users Audacity is both free and more than adequate. Simply load up Electrop plankton and select the option for headphone sound, plug one end of the cable into the DS headphone socket and the other into the microphone socket of your PC. Ensure your sound recording software is set to record from the microphone and then simply press record.



→ replicate. Combined with no method of saving the only way of keeping something you have created to record later is to pause Electrop plankton and close the DS and leave it in sleep mode—which means you can't use your DS. Another problem is that in some cases the Plankton seem to become dull and repetitive quickly too as they feel to have too few combinations—although equally some which seemed awkward at the start go onto

become some of the most creative. Electrop plankton is different. Of all the things that can be said about it the one thing that is agreed upon is that it is different. Inevitably, some will love it and some will hate it but however you choose to look at it Electrop plankton is an item of wonder and is deserving of praise. It is one of the most interesting releases in a long time and is hopefully the first of many other interesting DS titles. ■



Lumi-Loop

Five Plankton, each create a long rhythmic hum when they are spun which alters as they spin faster and faster. They make a different noise if they are spun clockwise or anti-clockwise.

Tip: Pressing Select alters the noises that the Lumi-Loop can make.



Starting with 16 randomly floating Plankton, these create a sound whenever they make contact with either the edge of the screen or each other. The player can touch the screen to create ripples which also prompt the Plankton to create a noise.

Tip: Playing different sounds into the microphone cause the Nano-Carp to line up in different shapes.

Electrop plankton is an item of wonder and is deserving of praise for being unique.

NOTES ABOUT IMPORTING



At the time of writing Electrop plankton is only available in Japan. In this specific case, this should not be considered a problem. The amount of Japanese text in the game is minimal and all but one sentence descriptions of the Plankton are also written in English. Within a few minutes of experimentation you will fully understand what is on offer and at no point will you need the manual. If you do most features are understandable due to the hundreds of tiny illustrations. Many online stores ship from Asia to the rest of the world and buying from them is the same process as buying from any online store. If you want to try Electrop plankton don't let importing put you off as in this case it is simple as it could ever be.



Marine-Snow

Each time you touch a Marine-Snow Plankton it plays a piano note and alters in position. Effectively it works as an entirely random piano.

Tip: Hit select to change the layout of the Plankton.

REVOLUTION

BY STEVEN PICK

FULL NAME: STEVEN "SVEN" PICK
OCCUPATION: LEAD ARTIST
LOCATION: WALES
WORKING ON: RUSSIAN() VERSION OF DANCE EJAY 7.
PLAYING: WORLD OF WARCRAFT
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HTTP://PICKASSOREBORN.DEVIANTART.COM/
FAVOURITE SANDWICH: PEANUT BUTTER & BANANA
FAVOURITE CONSOLE: DREAMCAST
FAVOURITE VIDEOGAME: WE LOVE KATAMARI
MOST WANTS TO BE: KING OF ALL COSMOS





beginnings

*rolling monkeys, screaming babies,
and a boy with no fairy...
what's in a beginning?*

Writing a beginning is tough. In that moment just before a start, the ideas seem to stop dead, all previous thoughts just don't want to come out. And what a place to go wrong—those first few seconds can make or break any previous ideas or expectations. First impressions are so important, and a bad one could put you off reading a new magazine for life...

Equally if a game does something wrong in its first few moments, it can be difficult to ever trust it again. Donkey Kong 64, as great it turned out to be, did nothing in the first few minutes, so restricted it's instant appeal. Myst also suffered from similar problems, though it wasn't a problem restricted to the opening. Regardless, the importance of a beginning is undeniable—there's just not enough time to invest hours on the hope that there may be an improvement at some point, especially when there so rarely is.

On one level, the quality of a game's early moments comes down entirely to the quality of the game's core ideas, and the accessibility of its game play. Space Invaders will always have a great opening, because it's just so immediate. Regardless of previous game experiences, the game mechanics are obvious, given away by the title. The invaders at the top of the screen must be stopped. The big shoot button underneath your twitching hand needs pressing to defend your character at the bottom of the screen. Space Invaders has no obstacles, nothing to get in the way of just playing it, and as such nothing to spoil that first try.

Modern control systems, however, can easily alienate the player, and as a result of this some developers rely on heavy-handed tutorial sections as opposed to a simplified, easy to understand control system. Where used effectively, and where given some sort of logic within the game-world, tutorials needn't be a bad thing. A lot of players think nothing when Master Chief is asked to calibrate how his aiming system works in the early moments of Halo—it is a lot more intrusive however when an alleged super-spy has to be told how to walk more slowly, or how to aim his gun.

As the beginning of a game, the tutorial occupies a strange space. On the one extreme they are tedious—on the other hand, there are instances where they are required just to make the game playable. If the game gives the player a plethora of potential abilities, these abilities need to be explained, the whole thing made user-friendly very early on. The first impression tends to be one of complication, and often alienates the majority of players.

Testament to the importance of first impressions is the Nintendo DS, where the hardware manufacturers themselves have clearly observed the need for a positive first encounter. Where used effectively in development, the touch screen puts the player closer to the action, and takes away any potential problems of an awkward controller. The reason non-gamers are adopting this console quicker than many before is because the first impression here is that games on the DS are fun, accessible and instantly gratifying.

To many seasoned gamers, the best openings are about presentation, about diving into a room in bullet time in Max Payne, hearing distant screams of a baby, your wife in an upstairs room being attacked by drugged up thugs...

As a handheld though, there's a certain lack of immersion. To many seasoned gamers, the best openings are about presentation, about diving into a room in bullet time in Max Payne, hearing distant screams of a baby, your wife in an upstairs room being attacked by drugged up thugs. This sort of gamer cares more about atmosphere, tension, and the elongated rides around Black Mesa before everything starts going wrong.

Building tension, though, if it goes on too long, can be a terrible thing. Whilst Half-Life's lengthy tram journey can be endured the first time, and offers a limited amount of interactivity, other games make use of compulsory cut-scenes, which no amount of start-button-bashing will get past. Cut-scenes have their place in games for many reasons, but it's a fine line, and one treaded most nimbly by the Metal Gear Solid series. Here, some of the most exciting moments of action take place in the cut-scenes as opposed to the game itself, and Hideo Kojima takes great pleasure in telling the game's story via cut scene.



It's easy to be put off, the non-interactive nature of the cut scenes placing a barrier between avatar and player. The scenes also tend to be long, and self indulgent, and arguably unnecessary, but they have since become a hallmark of the series, and certainly not a blemish.

The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time is one game however, that carefully uses a cut-scene to open yet still manages to fully immerse the player and their attention. The introduction of the protagonist—a boy who has never fitted in—is told via a quite long, unskippable cut-scene. The FMV offers more questions than it answers. Who is this boy? What is his role? And while the reason for this introduction becomes more apparent later on, why isn't the player given the option of skipping this scene? If the player chooses to hit that button instead of watching it, he is missing out—but it should ultimately be his choice.

While a great first impression can hook a player for the rest of the game, so a bad game can't be saved by the memory of a good start, and more often than not, a great beginning can promise much, perhaps too much. Great emphasis is placed on the opening salvo of modern games, yet few back up that promise. Some however, build on these opening impressions.

GoldenEye's stunning opening level and conclusion; jumping off a dam, later becomes all the more impressive when it is followed by driving a tank down to a getaway plane, rendezvousing with a contact in a Russian statue park, and chasing an arch-nemesis around a satellite.

The best opening means a lot more when its early promise is delivered upon, and of course, the best first issue means a lot more when it's followed by a great issue two. With the greatest first play of games—the greatest first anything for that matter—there's always something deeper—but the games with the greatest starts of all are just great games through and through. ■

life after death

There is a fair chance that few gamers of today remember the phrase. Today, we are blessed with checkpoints, quicksaves, autosaves, energy bars, health packs, regenerating shields, health conversion facilities and some might wonder what the cause of it is. Life preservation in games differ wildly because of the nature of the game; for instance, if every game adopted the "one hit and you're dead" mechanic seen in games like Metal Slug, Bionic Commando, and Ikaruga (the latter being dependent on colour, naturally), then games of Street Fighter would be laughable, an imitation of the "Extra Survival" mode of Soul Calibur. As an unlockable game mode it provides an interesting diversion, but it isn't flexible enough a mechanic to fit to all games all the time.

Games are often said to be getting easier, but why then do many games go unfinished? Many gamers do not complete games because they find them too difficult, but many do. Learning curves can often be far too demanding too soon. Games are often accessible, easy to get into. This regularly changes, and welcoming games soon become chores. Jet Set Radio progressed away from the joys of Grind Square and

Bantam and forced challenges upon players often too early for some. Many were put off. But ultimately, a game is only as difficult as developers make it. It's not implausible to consider that a playtester could be testing Generic Firstperson Shooter 6 for the PC, be using the quicksave key excessively, and are able to complete the game in a couple of hours. Suddenly, the developer needs a quick and simple way of ramping up the difficulty as well as making the game last that little bit longer. The quicksave turns from a luxury into a necessity. Is that really what gamers wish for?

There have been solutions to this problem that don't involve ridiculous difficulty. Halo (and it's sequel), for example, helped to take the focus of firstperson shooters away from health packs and quicksaves, and instead bring it back to tactical combat. It's not a unique idea, one that G-Police on the PS1 used with the regenerating shield, but this created different tactical options to Halo. The shield regenerated very slowly and the player who waited around for it to recharge would usually allow the enemy to get away, failing the mission. Giga Wing uses the traditional shooter staple of limited lives, although it also implements an automatically regenerating shield that, like Halo, adds a →

**WHAT DOES "GAME OVER" MEAN IN
VIDEO GAMES ANY MORE? WORDS BB**

→ tactical edge to combat. And if we go further back to the 1980s, we have seen games like Iridis Alpha: a shooter that continues the trend for limited lives, but also has a shield that can be regenerated by shooting enemies, although certain enemies recharge the shield more than others. Given that the game also blows the player's craft up if the shield is overloaded, the game becomes quite tactical. Other methods of preservation? Carmageddon II: Carpocalypse Now, a game that allows you to spend money that can be used to "auto-repair" your car whilst you are tearing along the road.

A large part of the decision-making with regards to life after death often lies in tradition and how the genre's history has dictated how the player dies. Does a true compromise exist between difficulty, play time and completion time, as well as enjoyment? It is probably foolish to suggest that there is a single solution for each and every genre, because games in genres can be so varied: Serious Sam has too few moments of peace to justify the existence of a regenerating shield, and without it's reflect shield, Giga Wing wouldn't be able to throw hundreds of thousands of bullets at the player. And there's even more to consider: for example, should games have their life preservation methods altered when they are being shown to a new audience? Super Mario 64 to Nintendo's DS threw up many problems in conversion notably from the different control

system. With the DS, a subtlety offered by the analogue stick no longer exists, and the developer has had to find other ways to overcome these problems, often by granting a winged cap and therefore removing some of the hardest elements of the N64 original. With this change, Nintendo have been forced to admit that if this was a straight port, the player would no doubt be quite frustrated at how hopeless the control method is (could have Nintendo allowed the player to use the touch-screen to manipulate an image of an analogue joystick, instead of using it to manipulate the map).

No simple solution will fit every game, genre or demographic. The Halo answer to health replenishment is not one that can fit every game, despite it's obvious merits, and the quicksave has rapidly become a tool for exploiting. Developers need to find a middle ground, a simple and effective way of keeping the player involved in the game and allowing their natural skill to flourish without having to punish those who need some form of assistance. Infinite continues is one such device with the Metal Gear Series allowing the player to play the game their own way, but in the end, rating the skill of the player. The Game Over screen has become overly familiar, it's impact lost. The developer now needs to find a way to reintroduce the fear of failure into games, to scare the player into victory. Game Over should mean an end, not an excuse. ■

**IT IS FOOLISH TO SUGGEST THAT
THERE IS A SINGLE SOLUTION
FOR EACH AND EVERY GENRE**

[Shield Tactics]

[G-POLICE]



Having got your brief from another wonderful-looking FMV cut-scene, you head out to bring the fist of justice down on the evil-doers... only to be met by a whole load of little enemy fighters and one of those big Heavy Cruisers in the far distance. Turning to make a retreat, you are hit with a barrage of gunfire and your shield energy is somewhat less than it used to be. By hanging around in safety, you are able to let it recharge... only for your boss to tell you that the criminals have escaped and that the mission has failed.

[ODDWORLD: STRANGER'S WRATH]



The fourth Oddworld game to be released had an interesting take on Halo's regenerating shield technique: create an extra (recharging) bar for "stamina" that allowed the hero to fall from high places, for example, without suffering a loss of health, and also allow the player to convert spare stamina into health should he or she desire. In addition, the developer also included a quicksave function – perhaps a first in a console FPS – that resulted in the later battles feeling fairer than they would otherwise be.

[HALO]



One of the main games to bring the issue of health accumulation back into the spotlight. Whilst Halo had standard health pack methods to ensure you were kept health, it also had a regenerating shield, although this regenerated from minimum to maximum much quicker than G-Police's (and Halo 2's is even faster). This meant that you were always kept in the fight and that there were few retreats. The Covenant too are armed with shields, so that the player knew that every second spent allowing their shield to recharge was a second spent allowing the enemy's shields to recharge. You could say it was combat evolved.

[F-ZERO]



F-Zero X had a single gauge that determined both the amount of damage your craft could sustain when it collided with a wall or another craft, and also the amount of boost that you were able to use. It meant that the player who used his or her boost to get to the front of the line halfway through the first lap would then have to be incredibly careful not to smash into the sides of the course during the second half, and so races were incredibly strategic and very satisfying when a winning strategy was executed.

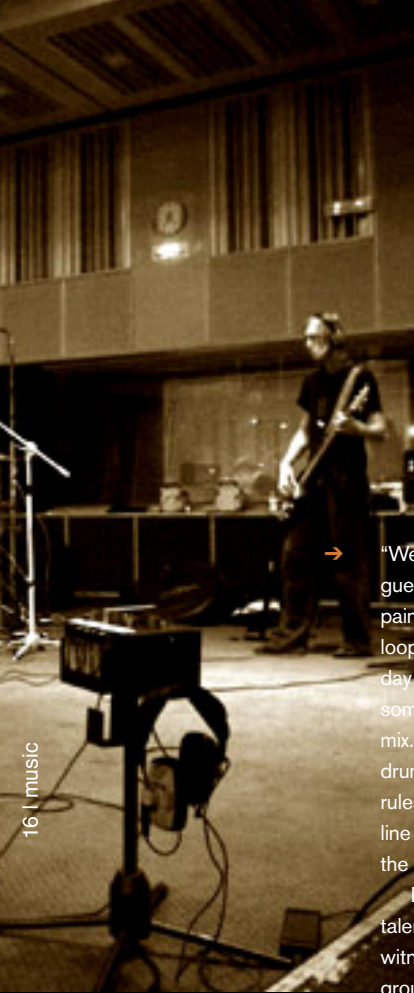
65 DAYSO STATIC

ONE OF THE FEW NEW BANDS IN
BRITAIN WORTH PAYING
ATTENTION TO, 65DAYSOFS
STATIC
HAVE CREATED A SOUND ALL
THEIR OWN. DISPOSABLE MEDIA
SPOKE TO THE BAND AND GIVE
YOU AN INTRODUCTION TO YOUR
NEW FAVOURITE BAND.

Accidents are underrated. Often painful and commonly embarrassing, accidents get bad press, and some accidents are unfairly ignored. There are few moments as memorable or pleasurable in life as experiencing a 'good' accident. Finding money, a new love, or even a newspaper put through your letterbox by mistake, most people can relate to this feeling. Now try 65daysofstatic. Like a cheese grater to the face, 65dos make music so scratchy, so glitchy and twitchy, it makes facial muscles react in ways that are normally induced by drugs. It's a special surprise hearing them for the first time; a barrage of guitars, vocal samples and a bizarre mix of live drumming, sharp bass lines and laptop bleeping, 65dos make

music that is almost as impossible to describe as it is to dance to. Common comparisons cite Squarepusher meets Mogwai, while not accurate, still provide an idea of the scope and the general sound: glitchy electronica and quiet/loud guitar sections, yet full of melody. It's noisy, often terrifyingly so, it's abrasive, and it's part of a huge wave of bands currently touring every toilet venue in the UK today. This is the sound of a disenchanted youth; angry, intelligent and painfully literate, 65dos and contemporaries are pushing boundaries by combining sounds, instruments and ideas that are as exciting this generation has yet produced. Not that they enjoy being part of a scene, and their diy ethos to their work highlight their almost maverick approach to their music. But how do they go about making music so unique? →





→ "We have no idea how the process is supposed to work. We're still guessing, (but) songs are generally constructed with lots of arguing, pained expressions, and unnecessary volume. Sometimes it's a drum loop, sometimes a riff, sometimes a sample, sometimes your wasted day at a shitty job. The Fall of Math was written with different, or sometimes no bass players and we had only just added drums into the mix. (The first EP (stumble.stop.repeat. was all programmed or sampled drums). So too much was changing to come up with any hard and fast rules. Then Simon Bass Viking joined which finally gave us a cemented line up. This is great, but the first few months Si was quickly learning the back catalogue, then the next few months we were touring solidly."

Live, the band are ferocious. Tight, articulate and clearly hugely talented, they've built up a dedicated fan base that regularly travels to witness the aural assault that is 65dos live. For such a small band, the group have had a considerable amount of success. Based on the tiny Montreme label, a lot of self promotion has been needed, with a punishing tour schedule for the last 2 years.

But it's paid off. John Peel was a fan, and the bands have done 2 sessions for the BBC, including one for the Mighty Peel himself. Are they surprised by the success they've had?

"Only in so much as it surprises us hugely that people who we've never met would want to buy our music and sing our praises. It's an odd feeling."

Adding: "We were very surprised by the positive reaction Math got. It's weird, glitchy beats and noisy sheets of guitar, with no singing, which isn't the sort of thing you expect to hear on early evening radio shows... But Peel played it. So then everyone started to take notice. Can't begin to guess how much he helped us..."

A string of independent awards and appearances on best of lists for 2004 gave the band further recognition for their full-length debut; The Fall of Math. So what's next for the band?

LIKE A CHEESE GRATER TO THE FACE, 65DOS MAKE MUSIC SO SCRATCHY, SO GLITCHY AND TWITCHY

"Writing new material has been a little tricky, but this is as much to do with us having spent most of 2005 so far touring. We've had a month or so off now, so it's all coming together and we're in the studio next week. So we have written new stuff. We're just not sure how."

With another tour announced for October this year, the band are obviously keen to stay fresh and continue with the momentum they've built up...

"The current plan is to have a new e.p out before the end of the year - for October in fact, when we go back out on tour - and then an album in the Spring of 2006. But it's all pretty open to change at the moment. New music is definitely coming, but the form may change..."

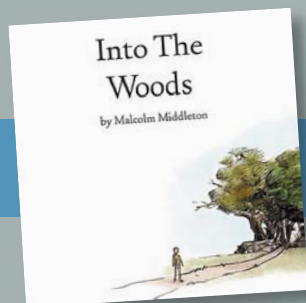
The last commenting provoking plenty of thought as to what the new material might sound like. Pre-gig, the band play their own brand of 'remixes', featuring cut up, distorted and mangled pop songs. Christina Aguilera, Justin Timberlake and Christina Milian are just some of the

'artists' to receive the 65dos treatment. The b-sides too, are often electronic reworkings of known songs, with Assault on Precinct 65, (a sharp, structured and noisy reworking of the Assault on Precinct 13 soundtrack) being a particular highlight. Whatever new direction the band take, it'll no doubt be as original and as it will be exciting and energetic. In the meanwhile, the 65dos website and it's community have plenty to listen to. [THIS \(link\)](#) radio blog on the bands' own website offers a great insight into the 65dos sound, and features album tracks, b-sides, and remixes for fellow bands. And what can the band recommend as interesting listening, other than their own work?

"Circle Takes the Square. Youth Movie Soundtrack Strategies. The Mirimar Disaster. Pendulum. We've heard in-progress stuff from Feedle and Digital (both based in Sheffield), which is fucking sweet. Keep an eye out..." ■

Every month Disposable Media looks at the best and worst of music.

This month: singer songwriters.



Good Malcolm Middleton 'Into The Woods'

As one member of Scottish Legends Arab Strap, Mr Middleton has been steadily producing wonderfully downbeat songs about love, death and booze that, for some reason have gone unnoticed by the general public. This summer he released his second solo album, *Into the Woods*, and it's quite frankly stunning.

His now famous almost monotone voice is a rasping, growling instrument capable of so much more than previously offered in Arab Strap. His lyrics, as downright bleak as ever, are that little bit more insightful, that little bit wittier, and that little bit more interesting. Few albums this year, no, this Century, are as ballsy and as confident in their lyrics. Middleton's ability with his words is in his frankness, and with this album he becomes self referential; "I'm sick of singing these shit love songs" (*Break My Heart*), as well as their unnatural wit, and all round intelligence. This allows for a witty streak to reign in the album; a dark, Cheshire Cat grin that make the album more dimensional than his previous work. Every song seems to have

a unique twist; a skewed perspective on life and each one is all the more individual and interesting for it.

The best moments in the album are those where things almost don't make sense, the bouncing piano chords clashing with the lyrics of heart break, but capped off with a wry humour, a playful and knowing twist of conventions. (*Loneliness Shines*)

The music too, is sprightly, soulful, strange and downright heavy. The music is so varied, and so accomplished that the album at times feels like a best of, or a show reel, Middleton highlighting his abilities and talents. Strings (*Devastation*), synth funk (*No Modest Bear*),

wailing guitar feedback (*Bear With Me*), dominate drums, are all there. Credit must lay at the feet of said musicians however, which includes members of Mogwai and The Delgados who all combine to turn Middleton's ideas into fully realised works of colour and life.

Middleton's album isn't so much brilliant, as down right arrogantly superior to pretty much anyone else making this kind of music at the moment. ■

"How can this shallow freak be accused of having charm?"

Malcolm Middleton, *Devastation*

Very very bad James Blunt 'Back To Bedlam'



Sometimes it's easier to cut to the chase with these things. *Back To Bedlam* is terrible. Blunt should be applauded for his success, not because it's undeserved, but for being someone who has achieved considerable record sales by word of mouth and a growing fan base. Most acts today rely on heavy airplay and NME hyperbole, but Blunt has quietly gone about and written very simple and very obvious songs which the general public have slowly come round to.

That's not to say any of his work is particularly interesting, original or memorable. The final track on the album, *No Bravery* is a clear stand out, death personified and discussed as a sweeping force, whom has no mercy and brings misery to everyone. But the delivery, and the music itself are tired, Blunt's vocals being particularly grating after an albums' worth of material.

Often referred to as unique, or as one Newspaper said "the voice of a fallen angel" Blunt's voice is the most obvious thing about his work. But not for the right reasons. Blunt sounds as though he struggles to reach any note, and instead hides behind a nasal whine that annoys as much as it frustrates.

Lyrical tired, the subject matter of the album is typical for such music, but made all the more annoying because Blunt apparently has a wealth of experience to bring to the album. A former soldier, Blunt served in the Balkans and apparently witnessed some shocking things. Which is all very well and good, but why oh why have "3 wise men got a semi by the sea?"

Too often Blunt relies on cliché, or tired

and overused metaphors to put across his 'pain'. He tries, but fails, to add a unique spin on old ideas and themes by adding his own brand of 'humour' or suffering. By the end of the album, every tack

fades into one long whining mess, and the listener feels as though they've been listening to Blunt for 3 weeks. None of this is helped by the production, as some sort of super varnish has been applied to the sound of the album, every instrument fading into the background as Blunt's voice is left at to puncture the ears.

Blunt is being banded about as some sort of moral crusader, genuine and heartfelt. Yet his subject matter, his lyrics and his music are anything but. It's smug, desperately bland and it's trite. ■

"We all need pantomime to remind us of what is real"

James Blunt, *Out Of My Mind*

WAGES OF SIN

Miller's Neo-Noir world is less Neo and more Noir

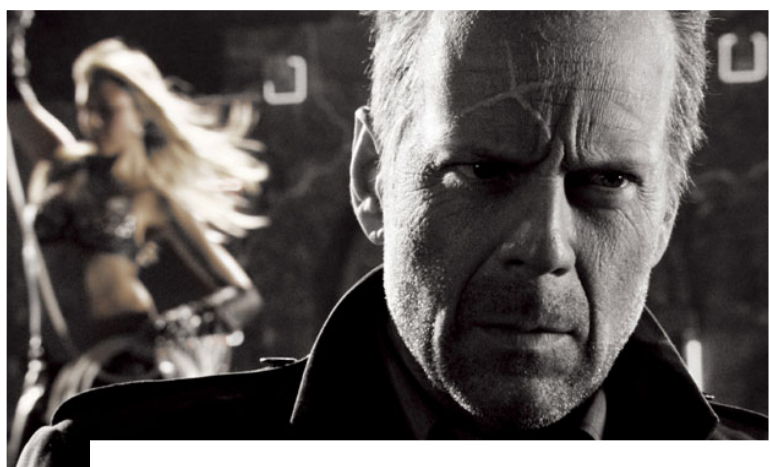
IF you didn't know better, you might say that Sin City is a film very much stuck in the past. Black and white – good and bad – it's a film that's structured around basic oppositions. Even characters whose actions are on the surface morally ambiguous boil down to figures who are essentially on the side of right or wrong. Frank Miller's neo-noir world is less neo and more noir, one concerned with visual and emotional darkness, fast cars, and the fast women that define a genre very much set in its ways.

But this film is not stuck in the past, not in any way. Like the dashes of colour across the otherwise monotone film, behind the walls of Sin City lies a refreshingly new method of filmmaking – an entirely digital, mostly green-screen,

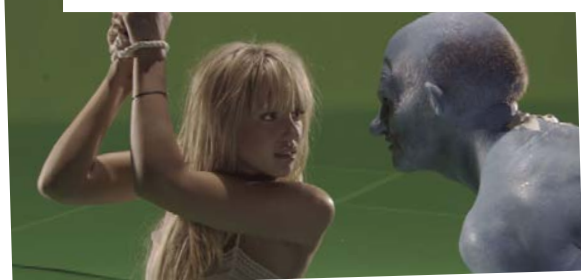
high-definition recording.

Robert Rodriguez has been at the forefront of fast-paced digital recording essentially since his blockbuster Spy Kids series, and exists as the antithesis to those filmmakers obsessed with more traditional techniques, and the alleged 'warmth' of celluloid. To call him a director is a great injustice – his talents include not only direction but camera operation, editing, even soundtrack – and his affinity with digital, which allows a scene to be shot and immediately played back without the long wait for developed film, is doubtless a product of his all-in-one nature. Spy Kids is of particular note as a signpost on the route to Sin City, since it uses many computer-generated backgrounds and props, in much the same way as the





Kadie's bar exists not only as the only physically constructed set in the movie, but also as an interesting centre of events, where the stories told cross paths. This is the film's heart – a black heart, somehow warm and attractive, but ultimately very ill indeed. Within the bar, Nancy Callahan (Jessica Alba) is present as something untouched by comparison to the rest of Sin City, a mark of hope that dwells within dirty walls.



Behind the walls of Sin City lies a refreshingly new method of filmmaking – an entirely digital, mostly green-screen, high-definition recording.

graphic novel adaptation – or rather, as director and obsessive hat-wearer Robert Rodriguez puts it, 'translation'. Not restricted by the search for locations merely baring a resemblance to Frank Miller's art, the director was able to replicate with detailed precision the author's intention. Frames taken from the movie can be matched against their print counterparts, and Miller's original art was used as the storyboard for the movie. Ultimately, translation is perhaps still a poorly fitting term, Sin City existing as something more like a digital reproduction. The original text exists wholly unedited in the film—and as a creative consultant on-set everyday, Miller took on a joint director credit with Rodriguez, whose modesty in what value he really added to the film is in all honesty fair—his role was simply in bringing together all the elements.

Though the close involvement of the author in the movie was not vital—one wonders how a text so distinctive could ever really be ruined by

The original text exists wholly unedited in the film.

the Hollywood process—Rodriguez clearly had no interest in making the film without the help of its creator. In a well-known (a cynic might say conveniently well-known) turn of events, the Director's Guild of America refused Miller and Rodriguez recognition as a true directing team, resulting in Rodriguez's withdrawal from the voluntary association. Following in the footsteps of close friend Quentin Tarantino and George Lucas, this decision is one that will impose restrictions on his future output—the big studios in the Hollywood system will not bankroll directors who do not have the backing of the Guild. But this is 2005—and for the most creative directors, those who want to challenge the status quo of American filmmaking, existing unattached to an outdated studio system is hardly a negative. New American Cinema is changing once again, from studio to the so-called art house, from big-budget to big-ideas. Incorrectly,

a big worry of digital filmmaking with CGI sets is that attention is turned to making realistic light up a wall, imitating reality when a camera is perfectly capable of simply capturing it. Rodriguez suggest, however, that working in this way is like 'performing on a theatre set', the focus of the director able to be entirely with the actors and their performance, with no need to be concerned about capturing a good angle of the location. Testament to this is Quentin Tarantino's involvement in the film as the director of one scene where Dwight (Clive Owen) is in a car, on his way to dump the body of Jackie (Benicio del Toro). Previous to this, the rivalry between the two directors was clear—one interested in the future of film, the other obsessed with cinema history. Unable to get the angles he required in a set car, it was suggested to Tarantino that he tried just filming it, and having the car added later—this was of course a massive success, and Tarantino's attitude to digital has reportedly been changed extensively.

The liberation that digital filmmaking gave the filmmakers was immense, one example being the clashing schedules of Mickey Rourke and Elijah Wood, not a problem in Sin City where they could film separately despite having to fight with each other. However, Rodriguez's knowledge of high-technology exists as a tool of his trade as opposed to an unhealthy obsession, and his knowledge of more traditional technique is aptly proven with this movie. Coupled with CGI are extensive prosthetics to make actors—and their stunt doubles—look more like their drawn namesakes, authentic built sets for Kadie's Bar, and vital attention to detail with props.

And essentially, it is in this blend of techniques that Sin City finds its strength, a cohesive collection of stories held together by a style that whilst unique from other films, is strict under its own rules and conventions. Just as many of the characters themselves – even lawmen - live outside of the law, Sin City exists outside of the Hollywood tradition in more ways than one, a hard-hitting demonstration of unreserved style over substance to the nth degree. ■

COUK

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