

DISPOSABLE MEDIA

issue three



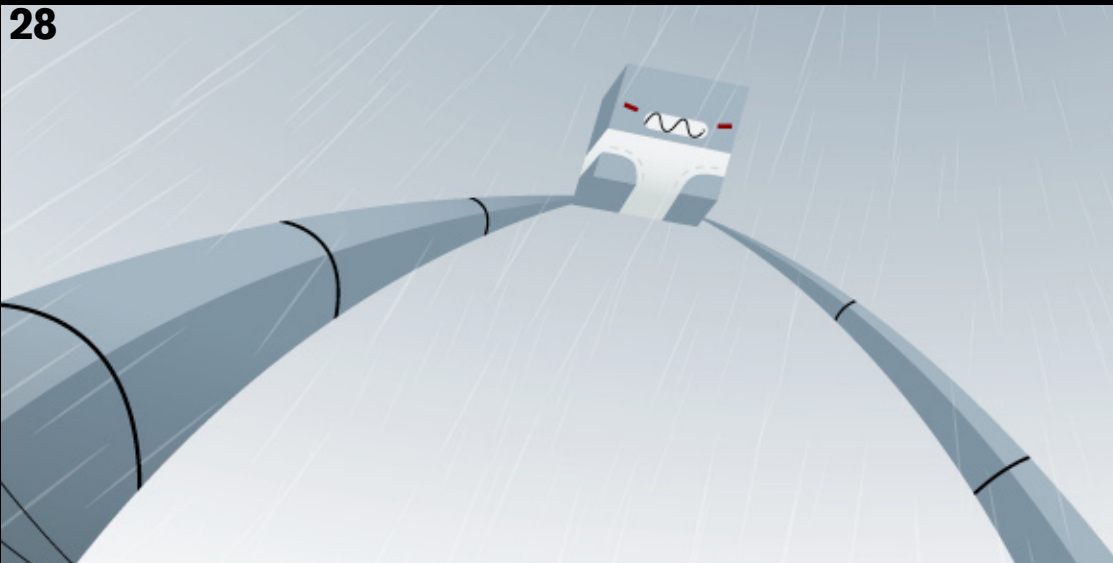
ART.
MUSIC.
GAMES.
LIFE.

planet **OF** sound

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Good day one and all, and Happy Christmas. Though for those of you who failed to pick up a 360, this Christmas might be lacking something. So let us fill that void left by the machine's absence and look on the bright side – we don't come with a huge PSU.

This issue we've decided to give you something extra, call it a Christmas gift as it's been so long since issue 2, in the way of a supplement. We take an extended look at the 360 launch and get the opinions of the public, magazine staff and even a gaming hero. And it's not Iain Lee.

As well as that, we've got a truly marvelous line up that revolves around Sound; we take a look at audio design in games, the rhythm action game and if that wasn't enough we've also got a Mario Kart Retrospective, a piece on the wonderful Nintendo Revolution and many other nuggets of pure Disposable joy.

As ever, if there's anything you've got to say or ask about the magazine, send us a mail contact@disposablemedia.co.uk or if there's anything you'd like to submit do so via submissions@disposablemedia.co.uk

So until the new year, when you can expect a few changes from us, enjoy the festivities and maybe we'll see you on Live for a few games on our shiny new 360?



Nintendogs for life, yo.
Not just for Christmas *

* Forgive the out of date festiveness - we did write this in late November. Unfortunately the guy who compiles it all is a lazy c*nt. We would fire him, but he pays for the server....

DID YOU KNOW THAT THE CABLES
FOR THE ORIGINAL XBOX PAD
WERE NINE FEET LONG?

NINE FEET.

THAT'S ENOUGH TO STRETCH
FROM HERE TO ALL THE WAY OVER
THERE SOMEWHERE.

DID YOU ALSO KNOW THAT MR
ALLARD OCCASIONALLY SKATE-
BOARDS AROUND HIS OFFICE?

IF YOU DIDN'T YOU WEREN'T
AROUND FOR THE LAUNCH OF THE
XBOX, WERE YOU?

Everytime there was a PR opportunity, everytime there was a mention of the Xbox someone dived at the opportunity to tell everyone that the cables were nine feet long - which wasn't far enough to make the machine look any smaller. Microsoft did seem to genuinely think that it would sell the Xbox though, they did seem to be certain that an extra couple of foot of cable was going to make people spend three hundred quid. No wonder people were wondering if they knew what they were doing.

It's fair to say that everyone was critical of their decision to launch a console. It didn't help their case putting a hard-drive in - was Windows the next step? Then people found out that there were blue screens for errors. The odd folk of the internet were kicked into overdrive, making "funny" images with Photoshop. The ones that spell Microsoft with a dollar sign and make jokes about what "Micro" and "Soft" could be describing. None of them were funny - but for once they did make a point. Why was Microsoft releasing what seemed to be a slightly under-powered PC to play games on a TV? And why was it so star-engulfingly big?

It would be great to be able to say that playing Halo for the first time was enough, that it was good enough to convince that Microsoft had made the right decision, that entering the console market was the right idea. It's not what happened though - I played it and all I remember of it was shooting some aliens and an extremely odd pad that could rumble for Britain. Afterward, I saw a console with monkeys in balls and the choice was made. Plus, carrying a GameCube back from the shops was nowhere near as intimidating a prospect.

The following Christmas though an Xbox was sat under my tree. Well, by it. It didn't actually fit under

it. Around that time is when it took off, a price drop, a better controller and the hugely impressive Splinter Cell. All in all, a much better proposition. It's gone from strength to strength since - Live coming of age with Project Gotham Racing 2 and peaking with Halo 2. A steady but constant supply of exclusive games - Panzer Dragoon Orta, Strangers Wrath and Outrun 2 all being great.

The exclusives are a small percentage of the software library though. It makes very little difference though - in almost all cases the Xbox version is the best version of multi-format games. Improved graphics, slightly faster loads

or just the fact you don't need hundreds of memory cards. Plus, if you're going to have that ugly lump under your TV you might as well use it regularly.

WOULD A COUPLE OF
FEET OF CABLE REAL-
LY BE ABLE TO SELL
A THREE HUNDRED
QUID CONSOLE?

And now there is a new Xbox. People aren't wondering what Microsoft are doing - through Live alone they've proved their worth as a console developer. They aren't

complaining about Windows functions sneaking under the TV - they're encouraging the Media Centre stuff. Admittedly they are still making jokes about the console thanks to the houseboat sized power pack. Apart from Halo and Live though, it's fair to say that Xbox did well because it had a hard-drive for saving and loading and that it was the most powerful machine available. With the hard-drive now a quite expensive optional extra and the reasonably safe bet that the PS3 will be more powerful since it is coming to market second and it seems likely that two of the three reasons the Xbox has done well have gone. It doesn't mean that the 360 is doomed - far from it. Just that there is going to be a lot more pressure on the exclusives to be great.

Here's hoping they are.

The Xbox 360 is a new videogame entertainment and multimedia device from Microsoft.

This is why the new machine is called the Xbox 360:

a) Their previous videogame entertainment and multimedia device was called "The Xbox Machine."

b) The number 360, when split into individual digits and added, gives you the number 9. J Allard's wife has given him exactly 9 years to get all the extreme-sportin', ear-piercin' and bull-shittin' out of his system.

I'm the pariah of the games writing field. I'm involved with a games TV show that's only watched by people who can't even

afford to buy new elastic for their trousers. (They burst these trousers by being grotesquely fat.) How could one such as I blag a free machine? The systems were winging their way to the Fraggdolls and the Paris Timberlakes of the world. I had to make do with a trip to a Tesco, where about eighty of us were given a raffle ticket each, for the chance to win an opportunity to buy one of six consoles. This was the only thing I've ever won in my life, and it cost me 300 fucking quid. It was like Charlie finding

the Golden Ticket, and then being told he had to pay for the maintenance of the chocolate factory.

The 360 is being referred to as a "next-gen" machine. Let me explain the subtle differences between "this-gen," "last-gen" and "next-gen."

This-Gen: A machine that we have in our possession right now. Such as, for example, the Xbox 360.

Last-Gen: A machine that we bought years ago. Such as, for example, a Sodastream.

Next-Gen: A machine that we do not yet own. A machine whose capabilities are so awe-inspiring as to make us stab out our own eyes at something as mundane as, for example, the birth of a child whose head is made of fire. The mysterious Xbox 360 is rumoured to be a "next-gen" machine.

The 360 sits off to my right, enthusiastically pushing hot air like one of those games journalists who use the word "indeed" all the time. Indeed, the machine is a powerhouse. Everyone already knows that the power supply unit thing is the same size as the Elephant Man's bell-end. I have been informed that the console's power-chips fire off videogame images at a rate of 40, 000 gigajoules a minute. The games that pop out the other end are so realistic that modern televisions are too fake to contain the truth of it all. Are there any downsides to this machine?

I will stake my hard-earned reputation on the answer being a very loud and annoying "NO." This machine is the greatest thing to hit earth since the asteroid that wiped out the dinosaurs. In fact, both of these events, the

asteroid and the 360 launch, surely prove the existence of God. Would dinosaurs have appreciated the Xbox Live Gold service? I think not. The asteroid was the first stage of Microsoft's launch strategy, a strategy surely approved and market researched by Our Holy Father himself. And yet, some of us still complain that we didn't secure a launch system. The alternative may have been standing in a queue outside Game, behind a Brontosaurus with a Firefly T-Shirt on.

I am the lucky owner of three 360 games. Call of Duty 2 is a game about a man who has become the character of a person in a film about World War Two. Condemned is what is commonly known as a "First Person Walking Game," and is quite a nerve-wracking experience, being a daemoninc incantation translated into code. Finally, there is Project Gotham 3, the Batman game about all the other cars Batman has. One wonders why he drives that crappy monster truck when he has such beauties as a red car, a blue car and another shiny red car in his garage, eh, readers?

I can't even begin to tell you about the life-changing experiences I have had while playing these games. The 360 is such an amazing entertainment device. Even the simple act of being dead in these games is a treat, because you are struck with the sudden realisation that the only thing that has died is your virtual avatar, and you are still able to move all of your limbs and recall memories like every other human!

Perhaps the 360's greatest achievement (and I do not exaggerate when I use the term "greatest achievement.") I'm talking about an achievement greater than the moon landings

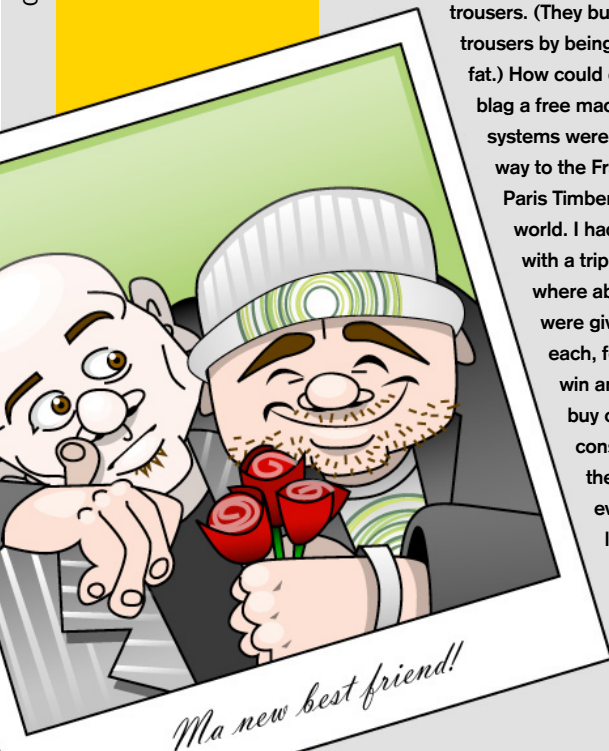
or Steven Seagal's On Deadly Ground) is the ability to listen to your own musical melody collection while interacting with worlds of videogame fantasy. You have not lived until you have slaughtered a hundred Germans to the strains of Hall & Oates' "One on One." In Project Gotham 3, you can indulge yourself in a merry and fantastical flight of fancy as you experience the wonderment of the act of LISTENING TO MUSIC WHILE DRIVING – an experience yet to be made available in the real world. Get to work, men of science!

Friends, I feel I have to do all I can to encourage every man, woman and child on this planet to buy one of these incredible dream machines. That girl from your dreams, the one who is vanished and forgotten when you wake? The 360 is she. When you are riding your girlfriend, and are unable to bust a nut? That labrador you visualise? The 360 is he. I guarantee that this machine will make all of your dreams come true, because the wizards (Angels? Saints?) from Microsoft have designed it that way.

If God should grant me a miracle, and allow me a chance meeting with J Allard, I will shake that great man's hand and keep shaking it until I'm arrested. And when I emerge from prison a muscular beast, my entire body tattooed with gamertags, I will find him and shake his entire family.

Biglime currently dresses up as obscure retro TV characters and gurns in front of TV cameras on BBC Scotland's Videogaiden.

"J Allard... I will shake that great man's hand and keep shaking it until I'm arrested. "





YEAH, SOUND MATE

Words: Tim Trimmings, Design: Andrew Revell

A few weeks ago, I found myself in Victoria station with a few hours to kill. Reaching in my bag for my PSP, I stopped myself. "Better not," I thought, "don't wanna use up the battery." I still had a coach journey ahead of me. So I wandered into Smith's and bought good old Edge magazine. After a few jags of Carling and a hearty laugh - possibly too hearty for someone on their own - at the Pegg, Brooker, Lineham and Bansey roundtable interview, I was going over the 'Incoming' section. For those of you that don't know, the 'Incoming' section is the preview part of Edge that features several games, each with one screenshot and a few lines of text that normally sum up the game and/or its development.

It's always find this section interesting, as both the developers and Edge are trying to give the reader a good idea of what the game is about and how it will play. Almost all the time Edge does a wonderful job. In fact, looking at the copy I have in my hand right now, I can see Nintendo's Super Princess Peach and from the screen I can tell you it's standard Nintendo cutesy platform fun. Atari's Timeshift: A sci-fi FPS. Polarium Micro: A GBA port of a DS

puzzle game.

I then look at Frontier's The Outsider. What do I get? A picture of two plastic looking men: one's a stereotypical action hero No. 108 and the other a bald man shouting behind him. So what the hell am I supposed to get from this picture? What should I be looking forward to about this? Oh...I see now, it's because the guy has over four billion polygons to render the crease in his head brought on by his macho thousand-yard-stare. And teeth. Individual teeth at six billion polygons each, give or take a few. That's what I'm supposed to be excited about? Fucking teeth? I let out a sigh too loud for someone sat on their own and look around the station. I wonder how long it took those developers to make that guys teeth? How many hours? How much money?

For teeth.

I'll tell you something Frontier. I'll confess, here's a big secret. When I'm running around shooting robots, or solving mysteries, or killing prostitutes or whatever the hell it is I do in The Outsider, I really can't see myself stopping and

saying to myself "This is great! Did you see that guy's teeth before I blew his head off? Fuck me!"

I close my eyes and rest my head on my arms for a few minutes. Now, I can't see a damn thing but I still know I'm in a train station. I hear people's voices; hundreds of them. Peoples footsteps; thousands of them. Train delay announcements; millions of them. iPod head phones. Individual conversations floating in and out of ear shot. A child having a tantrum somewhere in the distance. I could go on and on. But that's what I want the next-gen to bring me. Instead of a guy wasting his time sat in front of a computer bump-mapping incisors one way and wisdom teeth another he could be spending his time walking around with a microphone recording hundreds and thousands of sound samples and adding them to the people, the cars, the machines. It will take up disc space, but more so than a million plus polygons in a frown?

If we look at some of the most immersive games we've had over the last few years they did it right. Even with the limited hardware.

Rockstar's GTA series has been one of the leaders when it comes to immersion in games. Tell me, when playing GTA Vice City, were you immersed by the different radio stations playing in different cars, police radio in police cars and passers-by telling you to "Watch where you're going!" or was it the basic modelled cars, the blocky buildings and the bad draw distance?

Now, of course the visuals are a massive part of the immersion, still probably the largest. But how much more does the sound bring to a game? When first setting foot in the world of Mario 64, how different would it have felt if that bird wasn't singing on its own? The faint sound of the wind blowing past our ears? It was simple but it worked. Now imagine with the power of the next gen machine's what can be done. Cars driving past with their own choice of music playing, real conversations happening as a couple pass you. People's footsteps in the distance, beeping, laughing, and train announcements. A child having a tantrum somewhere in the distance. Now does that seem more realistic, more immersive to you than some shiny bald man's teeth?

"THIS IS GREAT! DID YOU SEE THAT GUY'S TEETH BEFORE I BLEW HIS HEAD OFF?"

Samba!

A gamer's diary

Go to the special stage! They're always at it, those damn gamers, they just can't help themselves. Someone releases a nice, family friendly peripheral and you can almost hear the cogs whirring in their minds as they assess how it operates and what ways the technology can be exploited.

When most people play Singstar they're singing their little hearts out, warbles, flourishes and even harmonies, but no, the gamer sings like a vocoder, recognizing points are only awarded for solid, continuous notes. Those same brains must've been doing overtime when they unwrapped Samba's maracas, 'sensors, that point to a bar on the floor. They're on flappy cables, and I have to shake the things the cables are attached to?!' Hmmm.

The family is together, the drinks are flowing and everyone's kicked off their shoes so's not to damage the lovely mats. We all laugh as dad starts off shaking the maracas perfectly out of time and freezes the moment there are more than four blue dots on screen, missing everything save

the occasional shake that could possibly have just been a spasm. Mum's up next, the game is perfect for mums, the approach: constant shaking and waving about in a roughly appropriate direction. This technique is a winner for the early levels, but when everyone's bored of Samba de Janeiro and Tubthumping it's time to introduce the gamers.

Things change when they step up. Cables are being wrapped around legs, stood on, and looped over shoulders. Strange poses are adopted, obscure square-fronted squats to 'help keep the maracas in their appropriate zones'. Frustration and determination on their faces as Samba De Amigo's beats alternate quickly from the top two positions to the bottom two and they try to cushion the maraca movement so as not to disturb the cable sensors. It all means it's over for the family members though, the initial amazement has worn off and it's off to the kitchen for more drinks. It's no fun when there isn't a level playing field and that's been ruined.

Damn geeky spoilsports.



The last Videogame Wish List focused on the world of Artificial Intelligence, and what it could mean for the future of gaming, as well as for the lonely geeks out there.

Perhaps a more pertinent question to have been asked, however, would have been where does intelligence come from? Simply asking for "intelligent characters" is all well and good, but once you've seen through the smoke and mirrors, mastered the binary nature of their routines, where then? We need to ask what intelligence is.

A dictionary definition of intelligence is "The capacity to acquire and apply knowledge," or "The faculty of thought and reason".

For true intelligence to exist, there needs to be a capability on the part of AI to acquire knowledge, from broad sources and inputs. At its current level, with simple button-presses conveying an onscreen response, it stands to reason that it will be difficult for intelligence to evolve in games: how would the average baby develop, for example, with little more than a combination of presses of square, triangle, circle, cross and four shoulder buttons?

Beyond the illusion of intelligence shining through Alyx's reflective eyeballs in Half Life 2, there is nothing. Perhaps she harbours unvoiced feelings of discontent at the gamesplayer and their insistence at firing crates off her face with the gravity gun, or taunting her pet DOG with a rocket launcher, but that is purely speculative. The truth is, there is nothing to feed her brain.



And that's where documentation comes in. Google, alongside its world-leading search engine, has just launched an online library

nothing more than a name or a quote, you can wade through a world of information, and extract the requisite resource - as,

“Are we heading for a future where all of the world's produce is also playable in a Matrix-type sim, which wirelessly co-exists in our world?”

service. Go to www.print.google.com, type in a passage from your favourite book, and you'll be able to find it, highlighted, on the relevant page of the book. It's still in its BETA stages, and thus does not have every book ever created stored on it (for how long!) but the implications of this are enormous. Google, as a corporate entity, represents convergence. Armed with

feasibly, could a videogame character whose software uses voice-recognition - when prompted.

It does not take a great leap of the imagination to picture the future of the Internet. The individuals' voice is already submitted to the online scrutiny of other web users - from forums and more

recently the jump in popularity of blogs, but what if that is taken to its extremes? Perhaps virtual psychologist bots will scour the Internet, mimicking political leanings, scanning personal correspondence (Google Mail users already give permission for their emails to be read) to try and gain an accurate picture of Internet users who allow their voices into the public domain. Psychological profiles will be built and will become the basis for cloned virtual identities. Easier said than done, no doubt. But, somehow inevitable.

What if documentation went further? Every household item modelled in game, just waiting to be used as input methods. Imagine a future where our clothes are interwoven with motion detection sensors and gaming platforms will automatically pick up on our movements making the controller a thing of the past. Ever-cheaper peripherals will end up in ever-more obscure places.

Are we heading for a future where all of the world's produce is also playable in a Matrix-type sim, which wirelessly co-exists in our world? A milk carton that also exists in game, it's real-life properties expertly modelled in terms of weight, the volume of milk remaining, the sound the material makes when thrown against a wall? Scan the barcode of your virtual reality-enabled golf clubs, and then go onto a virtual course with them, hacking the air in your bedroom?

The Nintendo Revolution may just be the beginning, surprisingly, of an enormous revolution. Whatever, the digital and the analogue worlds are beginning to converge. And that means the geeks won't have to feel lonely anymore.



PRINCESS

IN WHAT COULD BE
THE FIRST INTERACTIVE
FLASH MUSICAL,
DISPOSABLE MEDIA
LOOKS AT A CLASSIC
STORY TOLD IN A
RADICAL NEW WAY...

Developer: Agens.no
<http://www.rektor.no>

Disposable Media scours the internet to find you the best free games available.
Games tested on a PIII 450Mhz dinosaur by the lovely **Qazimod**

As commercial games still strive to deliver unnecessarily long epics that boast 800 hours of gameplay, of which 700 will probably have you doing pretty much the same thing over and over while the rest is cut-scenes you don't do anything in, it's always nice to know that we can rely on browser-based fun to deliver an accessible quick-fix. It has to be done - everybody knows that browser-based games are most popular when we need to fill time during the more boring moments of the day and this one is no exception. In Princess though brevity is unavoidable and no matter how you play it, the entire game is over in about three minutes. To understand why this is the case, we need to look at what the game is all about. Billed as "the world's first playable online music video", Princess is a promotional

piece for a single by the band Rektor. Created by Agens, it's an entirely on-rails interactive animation where players must perform actions at the right time to score points, whilst Rektor's music provides the soundtrack. It's a very clever concept, but the game stands out for a number of other reasons as well.

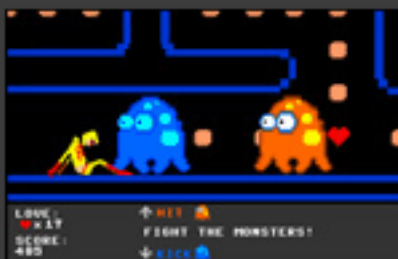
The style of the game is brilliant; from the mock C64 loading screen at the start of the movie to the pixelated game graphics, the computerised vocals (think Benny Benassi - Satisfaction) and the bleeps of the music itself mean that the resultant style feels permanently consistent and filled to the brim with retro-cool. On top of that, there are cameos from people such as Clark Kent, the Beatles and Elvis Presley, all presented in a loveable pixelated style, make the game all the more likeable.



THERE'S VERY LITTLE OUT THERE THAT'S QUITE LIKE PRINCESS...

As far as the gameplay is concerned, it's all very simple stuff - mostly pressing arrows in time with the beat to score points and hearts but other sections have you falling through the air controlling your hero to grab a parachute. The style of the game is so brilliant that you'll thoroughly enjoy replaying it time and time again, proving that fixed-path gameplay can hold lot of appeal just by being so fun to replay. Given that the game is so short, the length of a single song, you'd think that it wouldn't hold a lot of lasting appeal but it goes back to the comparison between quick-fixes and epics. Online games need to grab the player immediately, as he or she doesn't have a lot of time to spare in that coffee break, and Princess both hooks and enthralls the player in it's retro-chic world of cultural nods and amusing storytelling.

Without wanting to turn this into a music review, the track is brilliant too, sparkling and enjoyable and worth firing up the game just to listen to the tune. As well as the rhythm-action-style parts of the game being perfectly beat-matched to the tune, the mood and timing of the music fits in perfectly with the current task you are performing in the game; as the game changes from one scene to another, the music will revert to the chorus, or slip into the middle-eight style part of the tune. Of particular note is the build up to the final scene - when the music and game come together perfectly.



It all sounds too good at the moment, but there are a few reservations about it. Firstly, it obviously won't be to everyone's taste; some will see it as too experimental and not very entertaining, bemoaning the simplicity of the tasks at hand, or disliking the visual themes. Some will dislike the tune itself; the main problem with Princess is that it works so well together, but start pulling bits apart and it all falls down. If they don't like it, people will inevitably rubbish it as an overly simplistic experiment or as little more than a clever marketing tool. For this reason though it's a good thing this section has no scoring system.

This is a recommendation, then for people who are interested in how people are exploring Flash game design and/or online music promotion methods. There's very little else out there that's quite like Princess and whether it is a random cobbling-together of ideas or if it was genuinely created with delicacy and attention to detail it fits together extremely well. It works as a promotional tool too because the more you try and better your previous score, the more Rektor's catchy tune ingrains itself in your brain, with the rhythm-action bits ensuring that the player has to listen to the music instead of simply muting his/her speakers. True, some people won't like it but for three minutes of your time and not a single penny of expense you've no excuse not to and it's genuine fun for those that do enjoy it. [n](#)

RHYTHM IS GONNA GET YOU

THERE ARE FEW LESS EMBARRASSING MOMENTS THAN WHEN YOUR GIRLFRIEND AND SEVERAL OF HER ATTRACTIVE FRIENDS WALK INTO THE LOUNGE ONLY TO FIND YOU MARACAS IN HAND, ARMS FLAILING IN HOMAGE TO THE MUSICAL GENIUS OF RICKY MARTIN SAYS SJ...

→ The rhythm action genre has made this sort of scenario a regular occurrence. Thanks in part to the introduction of CD and DVD media on consoles, music games are now increasingly popular with hardcore gamers and novices alike. There is, of course, something not quite right about watching people at your local arcade pull off the sort of dance moves MC Hammer would have been proud of, to Take That's "Relight my Fire", in front of several bewildered on-lookers, and rightly so. It's through these games however, that people who don't have some of the co-ordination, patience or innate ability to play lead guitar, dance centre-stage or offer up fearsome drum solos on real instruments are given the opportunity to do so.

So, come with us, and in the words of Dewey Fin "Raise your goblets of rock" to a handful of the greatest music-rhythm games to have graced the home console market over the last few years.

PARAPPA THE RAPPER



Arguably where it all started, this early Playstation release saw you take control of Parappa, the misunderstood teenage pup as he tried to rap his way into the heart of his true love, Sunny Funny.

The game took on a Simon-says style of play, with the player having to hit certain button combo's in order for Parappa to spit lyrical genius in his quest to woo his girl.

// MEMORABLE MOMENTS //

- The Dojo Master Chop Chop explaining to Parappa that, although he had done well up to now, things may get a little tougher in later levels. "Don't get cocky, it's gonna get rocky!"
- Learning to drive with Instructor Mooselini as she explained the art of mirror-signal-manoeuvre. "Check, and turn, the signals to the right!"
- Getting a cool rating on a stage meant you could "freestyle" the level out, hitting any combo of buttons as you saw fit.



POP'N MUSIC



Making its first console appearance on the Playstation and Dreamcast back in 1999, Pop 'n' Music became a huge hit in Japan from day one. The game came bundled with the Pop 'n' Music controller, a large "Fisher Price" looking device with big brightly coloured buttons dotted over the surface. Players had to hit these buttons in time with on screen commands to play certain instruments in each song. The vast array of amusing tracks, quirky characters and bright, in-your-face presentation made this series hugely enjoyable and popular. It has become so popular in fact, that it has now reached it's 11th instalment in the Far East.

// MEMORABLE MOMENTS //

- Playing your first burning guitar solo on one of the games many J-Pop inspired songs
- Teaming up with a buddy and sharing half the controller each in an attempt to crack the game's tricky "difficult" mode
- One of the most sincerely disturbing videos on the net, <http://gprime.net/video.php/popnmusic> shows just how good young Japanese gamers are when it comes to rhythm action games



BUST A GROOVE



Some would say this was 989 Studio's best release on the Playstation. It saw you take control of any one of ten dancers as they attempted to "dance off" against some of the greatest rug-cutters in the land before the almighty show down with the great Robo Z.

The character choreography and motion capture were superbly done and gave the dancers an incredibly realistic feel as you timed your button presses to perfection.

The game also offered a unique "Dance Edit Mode" which gave player's the opportunity to choreograph a string of dance moves before playing, which they could then execute against player or CPU opponents at will, to score big.

// MEMORABLE MOMENTS //

- The first time you pull off a head spin with Disco character Heat
- The final showdown with the gigantic Robo Z
- Finding yourself singing one of the many stage songs whilst washing up. Unnerving.

SAMBA DE AMIGO



Samba de Amigo was one of the first instrument bundled titles to get a release on European shores and is now legendary for its superb “after-the-pub” entertainment value. Dreamcast owners were in for a treat as they shook their maracas to glorious pop-tastic tracks. “The Macarena”, “Livin’ la Vida Loca” and “La Bamba” all made an appearance along with classic Sega songs from years gone by.

The game was accompanied by two bright orange maracas and a mat complete with two height sensors. Players needed to shake each Maraca at varying heights, as requested by on-screen monkeys in order to successfully complete each stage. Perfectly normal behaviour then.

// MEMORABLE MOMENTS //

- Dueting with a friend as you both shake your maracas in perfect synchronicity to the wonder of “La Bamba”
- Playing “Magical Sound Shower” (from the 80’s racing legend Outrun) with maracas never felt so good.



DRUM MANIA



Complete with a full electronic drum kit (and the option to hook up a professional electronic kit too), Drummania attempted to put the player in the shoes of such legends as Steven Adler, Matt Cameron and Keith Moon. With a 5 piece drum kit at your disposal, you were challenged to drum along with “classic” tracks such as “Onion Man”, “Road of Thunder” and the slightly dubiously titled “Eyes of Kids”. Let down only by its extortionate release price and ludicrously impossible difficulty levels, Drummania gave gamers the chance, if only for a few minutes, to feel what it might be like to rock the socks of teenage girls all over the world.

// MEMORABLE MOMENTS //

- The first time you set your eyes on the drum controller in all its glory and take a seat on your stool of rock, ready to unleash rhythmical demons with your beat-wands of mercy.
- Laying down your first perfect drum solo and feeling, somewhat absurdly, cool about what you had just achieved

DANCING STAGE

(DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION)



Playstation owners were given the opportunity to become backing dancers when this Konami produced gem hit the shelves back in March ‘01. The game could be played using the Dual Shock controller, or with the Dance Mat (a large plastic mat with four directional arrows printed on the surface). Players jumped on to each arrow in time with onscreen cues in a vague attempt to dance along with each song.

Hardcore “DDR” players still flock to local arcades to show off new moves and methods of completing each song. Also, DDR can well be accredited with prolonging the life of the Playstation console, with hundreds of punters buying the PSOne just to get hold of this title. With various mixes and instalments, Dance Dance Revolution is still going strong and even Mario has got in on the act now, featured in the Gamecube’s version in Japan. With Konami planning “Dance Dance Revolution Strike” for early 2006, there doesn’t appear to be any stopping the revolution at present.

// MEMORABLE MOMENTS //

- The bizarre pride that could be taken from out-dancing a mate to “Video Killed the Radio Star”
- The inevitable “River Dance” technique that usually emerged as the game became too difficult for the player

//ELECTROPLANKTON//

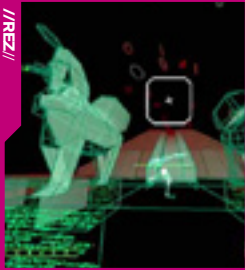


MOBILE MUSIC

The music genre looks set to expand on to the new handheld market too. The PSP has already seen Taiko no Tatsujin (Taiko Drum Master) make its way to the handheld world as well as Lumines joining the fold. DS owners

can try their hand at Elektroplankton (see issue 1 for a full rundown) or get in on the action with Dai Gassou: Band Brothers! which can be played by singing into the DS' onboard microphone, although playing either whilst on the bus or in any public place for that matter is not recommended.

//REZ//



HOME MUSIC

There are, of course, plenty of other musically inspired games available across all the current generation consoles which can be played using just the console's controllers. Here are just a few that we recommend you try at least once:

REZ // Sonic Team were behind this critically acclaimed 2002 title. The player had to steadily destroy enemy viruses which unleashed phrases of music sending the player into a "dreamlike world of sound and sense". It was easy to get lost in this musical masterpiece and find yourself totally absorbed as the pad shakes, drum beats and rhythmical melodies sent you into a virus killing trance.

//AMPLITUDE//



AMPLITUDE // Playstation owners were also treated to the sounds of top selling artists such as Pink, Garbage, BT and Herbie Hancock in this sleeper hit for Sony released in 2003. The main focus of the game was to keep separate tracks running by completing a series of well timed button presses to activate certain instrument sections of each song. Another title which you could easily become entranced by, Amplitude was as addictive as it was playable.

//VIB RIBBON//



VIB RIBBON // One of the most visually creative titles on the Playstation, the object of the game was to guide Vibri around a series of scribbled worlds avoiding obstacles such as loops and pits which the music created as it played. Depending on how well you were doing, Vibri would evolve or devolve between forms ranging between worm and winged fairy. The real beauty of this title though is the ability to put in any audio CD of your choice. The game then creates a world based on the chosen track and challenges you to guide Vibri

CREATIVE CONTROL



//POP'N MUSIC CONTROLLER//
DREAMCAST/PS2

//DANCING STAGE DANCE MAT//
VARIOUS PLATFORMS



//GUITAR FREAKS GUITAR//
ARCADE/PS2

//SAMBA DE AMIGO MARACAS//
ARCADE/DREAMCAST



//DONKEY KONGA BONGOS//
GAMECUBE

CUSTOM SOUNDTRACKS: RUBBISH

WORDS: DAN GASSIS DESIGN: MELANIE CAINE

Let me take you back to around about 1997-ish, where this very writer and his brother were sat in awe before a fairly dull-looking grey box emblazoned with the word "PlayStation" and that dodgy "PS" logo. There was nothing dull or dodgy about what was happening onscreen though; this was arguably our first real home 3D experience - nothing like it had ever been seen between these four walls of chez Qazimod.

Like it or loathe it, Sony's PlayStation offered many memorable gaming experiences for me, and right now we were watching another unfold before our eyes at 800 kilometres per hour. As the unstoppable, energetic beats of the Prodigy's "FireStarter" boomed around the room, the bass capabilities of the television were further stretched with the thumping sound of my thunder bombs and my brothers secret machine gun. The soundscape presented as vibrant an experience as the visuals making WipEout one of the best presented games of all time. Sure, sure, style over substance and all that, but the game would have been very playable with different music. The experience though, the culmination of all the elements together, would be severely dulled. The music is there for a reason - if the developers didn't think that the fantastic "Loops of Fury" by the Chemical Brothers would be a suitable piece of music for WipEout 2097, then they wouldn't have included it. Either that or they would have replaced the tune with a piece of music that they did consider suitable. Like...like...

KoRn's "Dead Bodies Everywhere"?

"What are you doing?" I said to my brother, as he paused WipEout and ejected the PlayStation disc. "Putting some different music on", he replied, as he withdrew "Follow The Leader" from his collection and planted the CD in the 'Station. The lid closed, the WipEout disc safe in it's case, he hit "resume" and I was now watching a very different WipEout 2097 from the one that I had grown to love. Everything seemed as playable as it was, but the experience was completely and utterly torn apart.

I can't stand custom soundtracks, and not just because of the above anecdote. Custom soundtracks give the people in charge of audio design an excuse for complacency - "no-one will bother listening to this anyway, they'll just stick in their own CD." And when they do, they'll likely do something similar to what my brother did. They'll play G-Police to the tune of Kelly Clarkson's teen trash hit "Since U Been Gone" because they like the gameplay of the former and the music of the latter, so the two are bound to be a great combination, right? No.

After WipEout 2097 I began to discover the better side of dance music: starting off with the Chemicals, Prodigy, and Future Sound of London, I explored their other works and those of Daft Punk, Lemonjelly, Royksopp. Upon hearing Future Sound of London's "Papua New Guinea" on Radio 1, I thought to myself: that would be an excellent tune for something like WipEout 2097. By this time, my brother is in possession of a PlayStation 2, and I discover that WipEout Fusion has "Papua New Guinea" - or one of it's remixes - as one of the songs in the game soundtrack.

I've continued to love most OSTs too. Beyond Good and Evil, Final Fantasy VII spring to mind. It all means the thought of searching for the custom soundtrack option in a game, or muting my television/PC volume and switching on my stereo, is quite odd. Now, everyone in my house has outgrown custom soundtracks and they only get used in the worst of cases. Even then I'd still only use them if I was totally sure that my own music would suit the game. I'd probably rather have the sound off if the original soundtrack was rubbish to see if I mind having

just the sound effects - I've been playing Burnout 3 like this for months now.

I have nearly always enjoyed game music, and if not, I have always given it another chance to impress me rather than just listening to one song and then dismissing the entire soundtrack. Some games, especially story-based ones such as Final Fantasy VII and Jet Set Radio Future, have location-specific tunes, and so they need to be given time before they can reveal all the facets of their aural masterpiece. For that reason, custom soundtracks should have to be unlocked, allowing the player to decide how much s/he likes the OST before dropping in their own tunes.

GTA gives PC and Xbox owners the opportunity to rip their own songs, but the OSTs of the games arguably offer a range of genres that is varied enough to have something for everybody. As a hip-hop fan, amongst many other things, GTA: San Andreas had an absolutely marvellous soundtrack that I wouldn't dream of tampering with. Yet it also had the rock station KDST, which appealed to my KoRn-loving brother.

While not all development teams have the money to deliver such rich soundtracks, they could still offer a soundtrack that fits in with the game effectively. And, as said, a lot of them do; despite the fact that audio design is perhaps not as varied as the things you might see or do on multiple plays of a game, few games these days have soundtracks that make me want to switch to one of my own CDs. And if that isn't a sign that the people behind audio design are doing their jobs properly, I don't know what is. Hey DJ, got any "Firestarter"?

CUSTOM SOUNDTRACKS: GREAT

WORDS: ANDREW REVELL DESIGN: MELANIE CAINE

Custom Soundtracks have been around for a few years now, from disc-swapping on the Playstation to ripping tracks to an Xbox hard-drive. With the launch of the Xbox 360, all games will allow custom soundtracks and you'll be able to move the files directly onto your Xbox without having to re-rip them. So they should become quite popular, quite quickly.

Whether or not this is a good thing is open to debate. While some games that offer only licensed songs as a soundtrack, others offer dedicated scores that fit the game perfectly. It's barely possible to imagine playing Streets of Rage or Monkey Island with anything but the real soundtrack. Other games, like the always referred to, but scarcely bought Rez would be impossible to play to any other music. Even playing it with music on in a different room makes it more difficult, let alone the fact it ruins half the fun. For every game that has a perfect soundtrack that fits the game entirely, there are three or four that either have music that is a boring after-thought or just licensed garbage.

One of the best soundtracks to any game is the one that accompanied Grand Theft Auto: Vice City. It wasn't the actual soundtrack though; familiarity and memories are what made it a thing of beauty. The actual songs, the specific notes are entirely unimportant. Forcing someone who has never heard a Cutting Crew song to drive a down a beach into the sunset will have very little response, sure, they'll notice the sunset and they might like the song but it won't be the same as someone who has known and loved the song for years. Change it to a song they do know and the response is going to be much better. It doesn't even have to be from the same era - Blue could provide

the pop instead and do just as well with a person whose musical taste is considerably younger. Admittedly, they probably shouldn't be legally allowed to play an 18 rated game but the point stands.

Music in games is about emotional response. It is about increasing the emotional response already created by the other facets of the game. Whether it is to create bouncy joy, or aggression, or a comforting feeling of warmth music should be able to add to that. Game music isn't something specifically more capable of creating a response, all music does it. With some games, it is fair to say that other music does it better.

In the case of licensed soundtracks, often the songs are chosen for equal reasons of cheapness and established deals with record companies. Worse, licensed soundtracks seem to try and cash in on an aura of cool surrounding artists at the time of release, but instead of getting the actual track they hunt down a cheaper remix that is rarely as good. When faced with this, custom soundtracks become seriously. You can even listen to music from the same era and same genre but replace the dross on the soundtrack with good examples instead.

Of course there are people who prefer listening to the actual soundtrack than the contents of their hard drive, and there always will be. Equally there are people who would rather listen to something they know that they like. Unless music is an integral part of the gameplay, what the player listens to should be their decision. A developer refusing to allow custom soundtracks in a game is petulant, but worse than that though is the amount of arrogance they must suffer from to be able to tell someone what music they should like. Maybe, in their opinion the music adds to the game but turning it off will be conscious decision. If that decision is made then clearly the music didn't add enough in the player's opinion. End of discussion.

If developers don't want people to make that decision all they have to do is provide a consistently entertaining score for all their games. If that happens, then most people won't turn them off. Those that do turn them off may be missing out, but that is their choice. Custom soundtracks, like customisable controls are something that should be included in every game. Just because the option is there doesn't mean it will be used, but those that want to use it will miss it if it isn't available.

exploring audio design

We need good music in games more than you might

think. If it can't add to the gameplay, it will add to the atmosphere and the immersive potential of a game. Blasting Halo to Benny Hill music would obviously sound out of place, but even small amounts of carelessness can shatter immersive qualities. Another obvious point is that audio design requires communication. You can't get whatever artist you can afford to provide a soundtrack; it has to fit the nature of the gameplay as effectively as possible. This kind of thing can be seen in everything from Psi-Ops (Cold's "With my Mind") to Big Mutha Truckers (Steppenwolf's "Born to be Wild") Whilst games will use popular songs to help gain

recognition, some people might enjoy the original music in games such as Halo, so unknown artists' work in a well-known game franchise can get their work recognised. Project Gotham Racing 2's OST not only has a number of groups some people are likely not to have heard of, but also delivers a different experience from the predictable mix of metal or dance that you used to find in racing games; providing variety as well as predictability. Another popular feature is location-specific or mood-specific tunes. Themes such as those in FFVII help make the world seem a bit more consistent, and also help deliver a certain mood to suit the location.

Most BGM's I've heard recently either completely transparent or very likeable: few have been noticeably bad. However, despite the increase in audio sophistication, the structural nature hasn't much changed since the 8-bit days: we still have certain tunes for levels or locations, even in games like Quake III. This is probably a conscious design decision, but whatever the reasons, game audio hasn't worsened. It's just a matter of atmospheric music becoming transparent, something which a better set-up might rectify...

ROUND-UP

Note that the tests do not deliberate over configuration settings but over the way in which sound is heard (volume, speakers, headphones) and how the game uses audio cues and other general (not gaming-exclusive) audio design methods to create an atmospheric environment. This isn't intended to read like a PC Format Hardware feature and I'd like to keep all hardware-tweaking talk to a minimum.

Doom 95



With the earphones, the simple MIDI soundtrack fits the simple audio quality that you get from cheap earphones like mine...but it was quite a dull experience, in all honesty. The PC speakers were less tinny than the earphones, even when I turned off my speakers' built-in bass boost function. However, such is the simplicity of the audio that I was still underwhelmed by the results, even when gunning down those roaring pink demons with my chaingun. Time for the next map.

And time for the big cans. Seconds into beginning the map, the intimidating bass creates a much moodier atmosphere, and with next to no outside noise to distract, the experience is much meatier. The use of stereo is also instantly more effective; the sounds of imps and fireballs now seem to be all around your head as opposed to in front of it.

WINNER: The big chunky Goodmans headphones displayed an immediate leap in immersive quality. They may be impractical, but they sure as heck improve a game of Doom.

BLASTING HALO TO BENNY
HILL MUSIC WOULD
OBVIOUSLY SOUND OUT OF
PLACE

Half-Life demo

In a demo with no music, even when simply wearing in-ear headphones, the "quiet... too quiet" nature is so effective that I almost want the zombies to appear and come after me. Within the sewer the simple but effective dripping sounds are accompanied by various squelchy alien sounds. As I send Gordon down a slope there is an eerie wail and I spot a zombie. Shooting it with my pistol demonstrates the sharp crack that gives a simple weapon so much character.

With not much difference between them and the PC speakers, the big headphones go in. I exit the sewer and outdoor ambience immediately fills my head, though I can still make out marine chatter on the radios. As I get discovered, the sound of the thrown grenades is deafening, and the cans seem to be able to cope with ear-splitting machine gun fire and grenade explosions just as capably as distant incidental noises.

WINNER: Once again the daft big headphones come out on top, but Half-Life itself must be commended in mixing characteristic sounds with incidental atmospheric noises. The most impressive so far.



Halo

Like Half-Life and Doom, Halo has enemies whose characteristics make them identifiable by their chatter alone. Attacking sound effects often carry plenty of weight through normal speakers, from the chug of the assault rifle to the painful smack of a zombie melee attack. Also commendable is the variation of ambience and weapon sounds when underwater or on ground.

Using in-ear headphones, it seemed a bit more crowded than on the default speakers, but Silent Cartographer remained playable. The real surprise was the PC speaker test: the speakers were on a par with my TV speakers, and only repeated listenings made me concede that the PC speakers were a little fuzzy.

The big cans performed competently on the Silent Cartographer; the sound was rich (although a bit messy because my frequency was a bit off), but like Doom95, the lack of background noise is welcome, creating a very immersive experience.

WINNER: To be honest, any way you play Halo you will end up with an enjoyable experience, and the tests disprove the theory that cheap PC minimalism can't handle big-screen console entertainment.

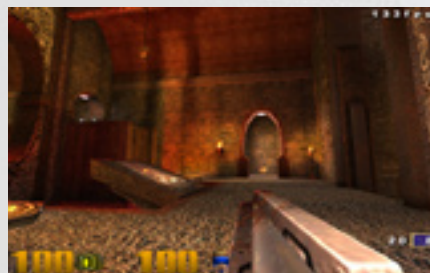


Quake 3 Arena

After listening to Halo in various ways, Quake III on the PC seems a bit...crap. Quake III is arguably a simple arcade game, which is perhaps why it doesn't impress in terms of atmosphere as much as the others. It's also worth remembering that it's an old game, but that argument is made redundant by the fact that Doom and Half-Life appear to be a lot more pleasing to the ears. However...could the Dreamcast save the day?

The television speakers almost immediately enliven the free-for-all that I find myself participating in, as does the new soundtrack. Even the rapid firing of your lowly machine-gun seems more potent than the PC game's sounds, and when headphones are plugged in it is only the in-ear ones that manage to disappoint.

WINNER: Quake III is a great game to play on PC, but without a decent sound set-up it seems very flimsy and simplistic, and it is embarrassed by the DC game.



Donkey Kong Country 2

Despite the possible inaccuracy of emulation, it's likely to be one of the easiest ways today's gamers will be able to experience any older console game. The PC suffers from sounding a tad too crisp and tinny, and so soundtracks and effects lose a lot of their weight. Playing through earphones is a joke, and only the big headphones offer respectable sound quality.

With the Xbox, everything carries substance and atmosphere, maintaining even the quietest of enemy effects. And whilst in-ear headphones sour the experience, there were no flaws when it came to the big cans immersing the player and picking up the tiniest of sound effects (but the bass occasionally fuzzed up.)

The revised GBA soundscape is appreciated much more easily when wearing in-ear headphones but again, the big cans drown out everything else, delivering a rich and detailed soundtrack.

WINNER: I would recommend playing this through big headphones, although you'll look a bit wearing them on the bus with your GBA. xSnes9x must also be commended for producing great sound through television speakers.



ATTACKING SOUND EFFECTS
CARRY PLENTY OF WEIGHT
THROUGH NORMAL SPEAKERS,
FROM THE CHUG OF THE AS-
SAULT RIFLE TO THE PAINFUL
SMACK OF A ZOMBIE MELEE
ATTACK

Hearing good things

In writing this article I've learnt how something as simple as the way we listen in our game world can improve the experience. The FPS games helped me gauge a sense of audio design through the ages, although Half-Life is still up there with Halo in terms of atmosphere and DKC2 offered many sound options, the traditional telly speakers being the best.

What makes a good soundtrack? I would say: attention to detail, as this can make for a believable game world, with lots of varied foot/surface noises, or the echo created by zombie screams when in a sewer. Audio design is definitely improving, and with the right tools gamers can immerse themselves in much more believable worlds than what we had before. The truth is, whether through software or hardware advancements, the future of audio design in games looks promising. Or should that be "sounds promising"?

Then Nintendo did that thing that they do every now and again - they amazed people. The controller seems to be a complex mix of gyroscopes and magic. To cut a long explanation short, it tracks movement. The long, slender remote like controller makes new gaming possible - it's as simple as that. Probably a discussion about the success it might bring back to Nintendo or about it bringing families back to gaming but neither would be that interesting. For now, the revolution is about inspiration. It is already inspiring people - from the simple game designs, Wario Ware style, decorating this article to Tsietsin who was inspired to make his own version of the controller. If it's having that effect with the commoners - what is it doing to the minds of the professionals? It's hard to imagine but it will be enjoyable finding out the details as and when they emerge.

A white Nintendo Game Boy Advance SP console is shown with a white Game Boy Advance Remote Controller. Several hand-drawn comic strips on yellow paper are taped to the console. The comics depict various scenarios, including a character being hit by a hammer, a character in a room, a character with a sword, and a character with a gun. One comic strip includes the text "Super nario fan boy!".

Tsietisin: revolutionary in the making



NINTENDO. The name alone sparks off a million imageries of love, happiness and pure gaming fun doesn't it? Nintendo is the reason we love video games the way we do. Now they've decided to change the way we play them. The chances are, you've seen the Nintendo presentation from The Tokyo Game show. You've stared at pictures of the controller. You've read how it works and no doubt you've had that pub conversation coming up with ideas for the Revolution controller. We have. Some people always go one better, such as the mysterious **Tsietisin**. So enamored with the idea of the Revolution controller, he went and made one and used it to play Half-Life 2. His set-up, which involves playing on a PC with a gyroscopic mouse in the right hand and an old ACII one handed Playstation controller in the left (via a PSX to PC USB converter), has started a revolution of its own on the Internet. He first posted his invention on rllmukforum.com and, by filming his set-up, he unwittingly made a lot of people take notice. So struck were we at his inventiveness, we tracked him down for a quick chat.



This controller set-up then. It's a bit, well, mad. Had you been following the Revolution Hype? Had you had a guess at what you thought the controller might have been?

I had been looking into the Revolution for some time. However the part of it that interested me the most at the time was the ability to play older games on the system, right back to the NES era. At that point I had no thoughts on the controller until Nintendo stated that it would be something that would change the way we play games from now on. When everyone else was coming out with their opinions, I had a theory that Nintendo would use some sort of "dual one handed controller setup" with gyroscopic action in each, to emulate the two analogue sticks on a normal controller.

So you were on the right lines of sorts then! But what were your initial reactions to the controller?

When I first saw it I got a little concerned. I was wondering how game would be played using something that looked like a TV remote. There was mention of the gyroscopic abilities in the controller, but it was not until I saw the analogue stick attachment that I really fell in love with it.

So when did you think you could 'make' a Rev controller? Was it something that came out of nowhere by chance or had you been planning it for a while after having seen the Rev controller?

It was not long after that I started thinking about the possibility. I have been using one handed controllers for comfort for many years so had a varying supply able to be used. I had actually tried playing an FPS before with a gyration mouse, but was used the keyboard. Because of that I found it easier to also play with the mouse on the desk. After I thought about it for a while, I decided that the best approximation that I could come up with was the two controllers that I ended up using. The most immediate issue was having to compromise for the fact that the majority of the buttons were on the left handed controller and next to none on the right.

Your version then; what do you make of it? How does it perform?

It appears to work very well. Playing games with it is as easy as playing with a normal keyboard and mouse. Some games are easier than others to play. For example, RTS games work very well as you do not need to be as accurate as with a FPS game. My main issue has been turning to the left and right in an FPS. Once I had turned as far left as my wrist would allow, I had centralize my wrist without turning the character on screen. This was possible with the button underneath the Gyration mouse which sufficed for this experiment; however I do not know how Nintendo aim to get past this problem.

Given your experience can you see the Revolution controller being useful, or is it simply a gimmick that kinda works with FPSs?



I think it will open up new avenues to explore for game genres and bring more interactivity with existing ones. We have been playing for a long time using the same basic controller and now here is something that has completely rewritten the rulebook. If used properly, this controller could go towards giving us back that feeling of new game playing when we were younger. Other than the same stuff churned out by everyone year after year (EA, I'm looking at you!)

I'd be up for a game of FIFA with the Rev controller attached to my feet! Speaking of which, have you had any ideas for games since using your own version? Has the hands-on approach changed your initial opinions on the Nintendo announcement?

I think that flying games will have a new lease of life using this controller. Having full motion response of a plane or other such objects on screen that moves in relation to the orientation of the mouse would be ideal. Being able to actually see a plane on screen, mimicking your exact movements of the controller would look fantastic.

What made you start the thread on rllmukforum.com? You went to alot of effort creating a video to show your idea, but you've not got anything to gain by this so why go to all the trouble?!

A lot of it is to do with people that will respect ideas like this. Other online forums

will quite happily shoot anything down if it's about a system that they do not like. I feel that rllmuk has a more mature set of users who actually take the time to read what is in front of them and make opinions based on what they see, not what they are told. There was a lot of speculation on how the controller was likely to work and everyone had their theories. The thing was that there is no video out there actually showing how the controller works. So I made this mockup to give me some sort of idea and to give other people an idea on how I expected it to work. Now that people have seen at least something in action, they can think about how can be used in existing games. From there, they can come up with new ideas.

Have you been surprised with the response?

Well, it's gone way, way, waaaay past what I was expecting. I asked a friend to host the file just for a few days as my hosting account was running out. About 3 days later he tells me that some 200Gb of transfer allowance was used up on that video alone. Added along with various other links to the video that I found appearing, it must be a shocking amount of people that have seen that movie. I expected maybe 100 people at the most to grab themselves a copy.

200gbs worth is alot of people downloading, but after the ridiculous hype that generated around the controller, I'm almost not suprised!

Big thanks then Tsietsin for your time, and we all look forward to failing miserably in copying your idea. ☐



“Playing games with it is just as easy as playing with a keyboard and mouse”

MARIO KART DISCUSSION

“I loved smacking my dad about courses with a well timed red shell.”

1 What are your earliest memories of Mario Kart?

Blinky: Buying it for £50 the day of release in Toys R Us with my parents. Was my birthday (10?) and had been looking forward to it for ages. I was a bit underwhelmed at first, and I remember my mum and dad playing it for hours on end. Says a lot about Nintendo games I think.

Qazimod: Unfortunately I never had the same experience as Blinky - I grew up with a Megadrive - but I remember reading about the game in magazines and seeing it on television. As a result, my first play must have been when I was getting into emulation in around 1998...

Rev: Same for me really, I played it very briefly in Debenhams at the time, quite good. I was a Mega Drive owner too so I have never played on a SNES properly until I bought one this summer and I traded Forza for a few SNES games. I've been enjoying it too.

Bastion: I was forbidden from owning consoles when I was younger, something I'm still bitter about. My parents buckled in the PlayStation era, but any titles/consoles released before then were experienced fleetingly at friends' homes, or later on through emulation. I probably first sampled it at a time when graphically superior titles were out (N64-era, I'd wager). I enjoyed it, but copycat pretenders that had been influenced by the title nullified the overall impact for me.

MrPogo: I first played it round my friend's house (who was always the first to get the latest everything), and it was probably getting on for a year before I obtained my own copy - although I borrowed it frequently in the meantime. My main memory's are that it was damn near impossible to beat most of his time trial scores, except for Ghost House 1 and the Bowser's Castle tracks,

where I pwnd him good.

pretentious_helvetica: Earliest memories of Mario Kart are probably seeing it in Total Magazine and wanting to play it - bright colours and happy environments appealed to me, plus it was when Mode 7 was “revolutionary”. Ended up playing at a friend's house and getting severely beaten by his expert power-up usage.

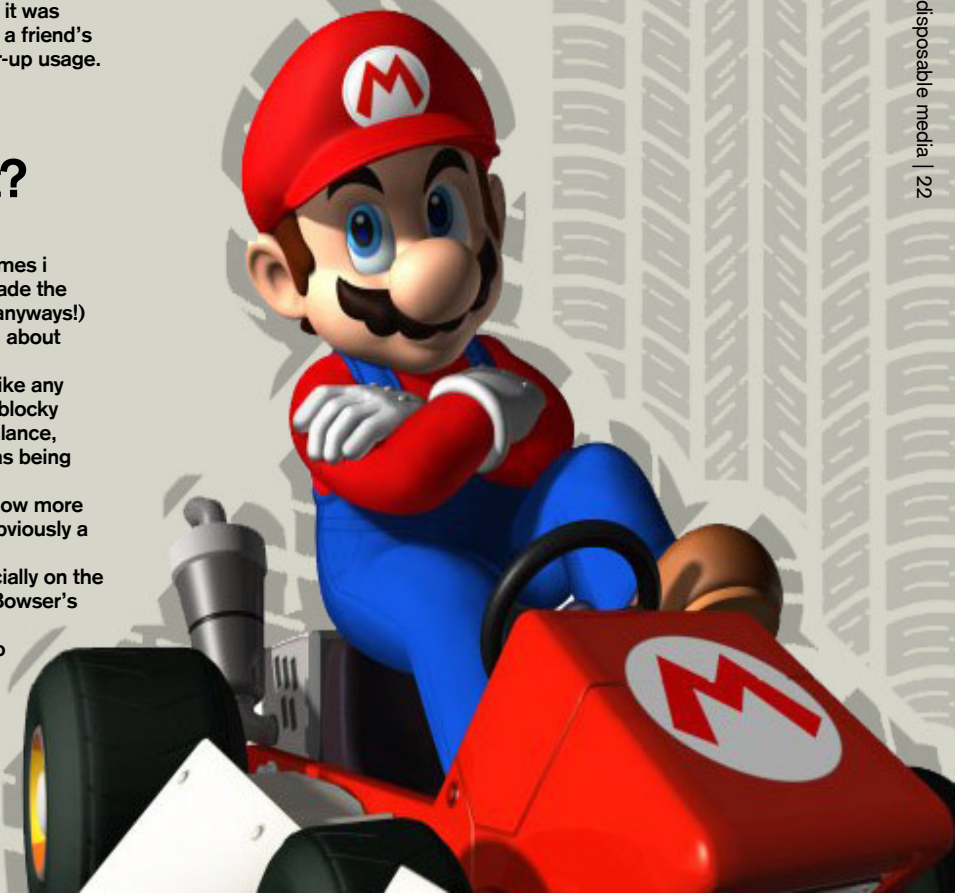
2 What was your favourite aspect of it?

Blinky: The speed. It was one of the first racing games I played and it seemed so quick. The mode 7 scaling made the whole thing look like a cartoon (at the time. To a child anyways!) and it just sucked me in. And I loved smacking my dad about courses with a well timed red shell.

Qazimod: I agree: the pacing and visuals were unlike any other game I had seen - it was a lot less primitive and blocky than the C64 racers I played - but I mostly enjoy its balance, and how it can appeal to hardcore game fans as well as being accessible to new gamers.

Bastion: I thought the graphics were great, somehow more honest than the washed-out 3D I had been used to. Obviously a fantastic multiplayer game, too.

MrPogo: I think it was the time-trials for me, especially on the courses with the ‘square bends’ - Ghost Houses and Bowser's Castle again - as setting new records became an exercise in utmost precision, where it was just down to you (unlike the GP's where the computer cheated at every opportunity, drawing upon infinite supplies of weapons). I used to spend hours racing round them over and over in an effort to shave a few fractions of a second off my best times.





Rev: The feeling of pinching victory at the last second with a mushroom or shell. I love that. I might just be evil though.

pretentious_helvetica: Definitely the environments. They each had their own character and charm which is something Nintendo do very well indeed.

3 What has made Mario Kart such a popular multiplayer game?

Blinky: Because anyone could play it with a minimum amount of instruction, but, as with all the best games, you could spend hours after hours mastering it, learning new ways to dodge shells, and alternative methods with weapons.

Qazimod: Because of the aforementioned mass appeal: even the best racers can get knocked down by a novice's red shell or a stray banana skin. However, as Blinky said, even novices can pick up strategies quickly.

Bastion: Ease of play, as stated above.

MrPogo: As Qazimod says, the weapons system puts everyone on a fairly level playing field (awarding better weapons more often if you're closer to the back etc), meaning the less skilled players could still place respectfully, rather than getting totally thrashed and giving up in frustration.

Rev: I think the fact everyone can start playing it is a part, but the fact that there is a bit of luck to it. Someone who knows every track is still liable to slip up and come a depressing last place.

pretentious_helvetica: I think the power-ups and the sneaky tactics involved with using those power-ups made the game a brilliant 4 player experience. Online is great, but seeing the expression on a friend's face when you chucked a Koopa shell at him as he was about to finish first was priceless.

4 Why do you think it is remembered so fondly?

Blinky: Difficult to say, but it was certainly one of the first games that I call that took one IP (Mario) and successfully changed the identifiable characters into something new and interesting. I don't think any old Karting game would have been so well received, or as well remembered.

Qazimod: I think it was partly because it arguably introduced a new genre to gaming, and partly because it's one of the few games that everyone can still find enjoyable today, although Blinky's mention of the game being an early success for videogame franchises is also true.

Bastion: It's the original multiplayer cart game. Just... pure.

MrPogo: Because it was the original and the best. I don't remember any 'fun' racing games existing before it, and by arriving towards the end of the 2D Era the graphics still represent the best in their field, rather than looking dated like when you compare earlier 3D games to what the current consoles can handle.

Rev: I think it felt different getting characters you knew doing something they weren't normally noted for. The fact it was extremely good probably makes it memorable too. And of course the fact that Nintendo won't let us forget it...

pretentious_helvetica: It had an undeniable fun aspect to it - very easy to approach and difficult to give up on. The multiplayer aspect also made for variety in the game.

5 What do you think about the sequels?

Blinky: The N64 one left me cold. The tracks were too big, too wide. There wasn't enough interaction with the other racers. I played it for about 2 hours and traded it for Diddy Kong, which, as hard as it is, is a much superior game. I probably played the multiplayer games on Diddy Kong as much as any game ever. I still rock at it. The GBA version was spot on for me. Played it insane amounts at college. It probably cost me a few friends to be honest. I like the GC version, more than most people. It does seem slow at first, but all the versions do nowadays comparatively speaking. The two character thing was a nice touch, adding a small amount of strategy if you wanted it. The DS version looks alright, but I've not seen anything, other than the wi-fi mode, that really convinces me to go buy it. It just seems a bit samey.

Qazimod: I've no idea. I've only played the GBA game, and it seems as enjoyable as the SNES original, with the added bonus of having a slightly more colourful palette. Spot on.

Bastion: I don't think I've played a sequel to it!

MrPogo: I disagree with Blinky entirely on his N64 views. Mario Kart 64 was another classic (and Diddy Kong Racing unplayable tripe). It lost a bit of the 'precision driving' I enjoyed so much on the original, but still ranks as one of the fines games of all time. The GBA version was also great (though there were a few little niggles that mean it doesn't quite live up to the SNES game), but I hated Mario Kart DD. The steering was awful - almost like every track was on an invisible layer of ice - and there was just too much random crap going on all the time. It was like a caricature of what Mario Kart originally was.

Rev: For me the GBA version is the best one. Everything felt right, good shortcuts, the weapons all work like you'd want them too and the coins to collect for higher ranks is a great feature. I enjoyed all the others - the Cube version is quite good fun, but unnecessarily cluttered. And put me in the camp that preferred Diddy Kong Racing over MK64. It was a lot, lot better.

"The N64 one left me cold. The tracks were too big, too wide."

pretentious_helvetica: Only played the N64 version at a friend's house - seemed like more of the same but with higher polygon counts (suits me fine!), and I bought the GBA version for the novelty of handheld Mario Kart. Got me 100% sold and was a great version to boot.

6 What about the other copy cat games that have been released?

Blinky: I liked Street Racer alot. Mostly for the Soccer Kart game. That's genius, right there. But generally speaking, Kart games leave me cold. I've certainly not bought one other than a Mario version.

Qazimod: Not wholly; a lot of them feel too gimmicky, either getting it wrong with balance or having an overall presentational theme that just doesn't work as harmoniously as Mario's.

Bastion: Speed Freaks on the PlayStation is the most obvious imitator. I've probably played this copycat more than the original Mario Kart, and I'd probably have to say I like it more. I also really enjoyed Crash Team Racing.

MrPogo: I haven't played many of them, only Diddy Kong Racing and Street Racer as far as I can remember, but they were both poor imitations in my book.

Rev: Street Racer was pretty good, although it quickly got boring. BC Racers was great, I really enjoyed that one. The highlight of the genre for me is Wacky Races, on the Dreamcast. A ridiculously good game. Cel Damage had an odd charm to it to, somehow.

pretentious_helvetica: I agree with Rev on the Wacky Racers DC game - I remember going into first person and being amazed at being "part" of the cartoon environment. Speed Freaks was also mentioned and I loved playing this too - the graphics for a PSOne game were something really special, and had some pretty neat character design too.

7 Do you still play Mario Kart? How console or emulated?

Blinky: I don't have time to play the PS2 games I buy every week like an idiot. But if i had the time to set it up on my PSP, I'd love to play it regularly again.

Qazimod: I sometimes have a bash on the Xbox emulator xSnes9x because I don't have to faff around with setting up stuff - PC emulation normally needs lots of configuration for me and I just find the Xbox environment more straightforward.

Bastion: I haven't played it for a long time. Though when I did, it felt very dated.

MrPogo: I still have the original cart stashed away somewhere.

Haven't played it for a few years now, but bring it out for a bit of multiplayer fun occasionally.

Rev: I just bought a SNES so I've been playing it on a 36" screen over the last few weeks. That's quite fun. The emulators are sat neatly on my PC though so I've been having a few blasts on that too. Both have their advantages, but I think I prefer playing on the console more.

pretentious_helvetica: Not had a chance to play it recently at all. Too busy on life-sapping MMORPGs and work!

8 Do you think it still plays well today?

Blinky: Rose tinted glasses. The game reminds me of my childhood, and playing the game with my parents. Playing it today I don't get the same spark i used to, but having said that, it still carries a bit of magic about it, and there's few better feelings in games than doing the feather jump to cut the ghost course in half.

Qazimod: Yes. If I play a game that I thought was good then and think it's crap now, I put it down to a shoddy first-time analysis on my part. Mario Kart looked stunning when I first heard about it and there are hardly any aspects of the game that feel out of place when I return to it today.

Bastion: Not having sampled it in its own era, and without the nostalgia for Nintendo's 'golden years' it's difficult to answer that. Probably not.

MrPogo: I think it does, but it's not as enjoyable because - going back to the 'precision' theme again - it's impossible to get anywhere near my old times as I no-longer know the tracks off by heart!

Rev: Yes, it does play well. Maybe not as good as it felt at the time and I definitely prefer the GBA version. But yes, it is still very good.

pretentious_helvetica: I agree that it still has a certain spark to it, though that could be nostalgia. I played the GBA version on emulation and it is still pretty addictive.

9 What is in store in the future for the series?

Blinky: Knowing Nintendo, a series *update* for every console. With something slightly new every time, but ultimately failing to reach the fun of the original. I'd love to now what Miyamoto would do with Mario Kart and a Revolution controller though...

Qazimod: More of the same? I am not really certain about how Mario Kart could be improved when the original game is still so playable after over a decade. I suppose customisation would be welcome - you could perhaps toggle weapons on or off to make success more skill-dependent, or tailor a character's specifications

"I just bought a SNES so I've been playing it on a 36" screen over the last few weeks. That's quite fun."



“Hopefully the inevitable Revolution version will be closer to the N64 game.”

for a driving experience you are more comfortable with: lowering the weight of your kart could speed you up but make shell attacks more damaging, for example.

Bastion: Greater dodging abilities, all wired into the Rev controller. We'll probably be leaning into corners, and somersaulting out of the path of shells come 2007.

MrPogo: Hopefully the inevitable Revolution version will be closer to the N64 game (as my brother and I both agreed: how did they mess up the Gamecube one so badly when all they had to do was keep the existing game engine and improve the graphics?), but I'm fearful they won't be able to resist adding in more stupid gimmicks and wrecking it further.

Rev: The DS version looks to be shaping up well, although online looks a bit rough. Be good if that does work well though. Hopefully something a bit more simple than the Cube version on the Revolution, maybe with gestures for throwing shells. Proper online play would be good too.

pretentious_helvetica: The DS version is looking really nifty - the WiFi online aspect of the game is going to be pretty interesting. I'm glad Nintendo have finally seen sense and started to put some of their IP online. I'd be curious to know if a Revolution version is in the works, because the controller will only add something extra to an already tried-and-tested mix.

KARTE BLANCHE



Super Mario Kart

The game that not only started a long-running series but kick started a genre too. Suffice to say that it was a very good game - easy to pick up and even relatively easy to master. It provided great multiplayer fun and the single player wasn't too bad if you didn't mind playing against cheats.



Mario Kart 64

A game that lots of people were looking forward to on the Nintendo 64. It was... disappointing. Some good points - it was still fun - but lots were disappointed and the audience was split two ways deciding whether Diddy Kong 64 was better.



Mario Kart Super Circuit

What many bought as a novelty quickly became a favourite version for many. Coins and ranks meant the single player had reason to replay. Tracks included great originals and unlockable SNES ones too meaning everyone was happy.



Mario Kart Double Dash

Something of a low point. Looking back at it, it's OK. Quite fun to play but it just wasn't Mario Kart. Complicated weapon systems, daft vehicles and some very average tracks made it almost instantly forgettable.



Mario Kart DS

Online play, proper karts and an extra single player mode mean it's good. An odd online system, extremely bad weapon balance and too much in common with the GameCube version mean it's bad. It's good - but it's not right.



Nintendogs™

Thankfully, when setting out to be multi-format Disposable Media hasn't committed to being fair to all formats equally. After all, there's only so much knowledge kicking around on the staff about the Amstrad CPC464 which means sooner or later we might start devoting more words to another console, like the always popular Sega Gamegear. That means you need graphs. Preferably, word-count pie-charts complete with a different colour for each console. Cunningly though, we've found that just writing about whatever we want means we don't have to bother with such statistical banality. Thanks to this writer in particular though, that means we are devoting a fair amount of page space to the DS. Well, an Electropunkton article a while ago and this one now. Still, that's quite a lot, especially if you count the few other references people have thrown around the rest of the magazine.



sit, sit, SIT YOU DUMB MUTT

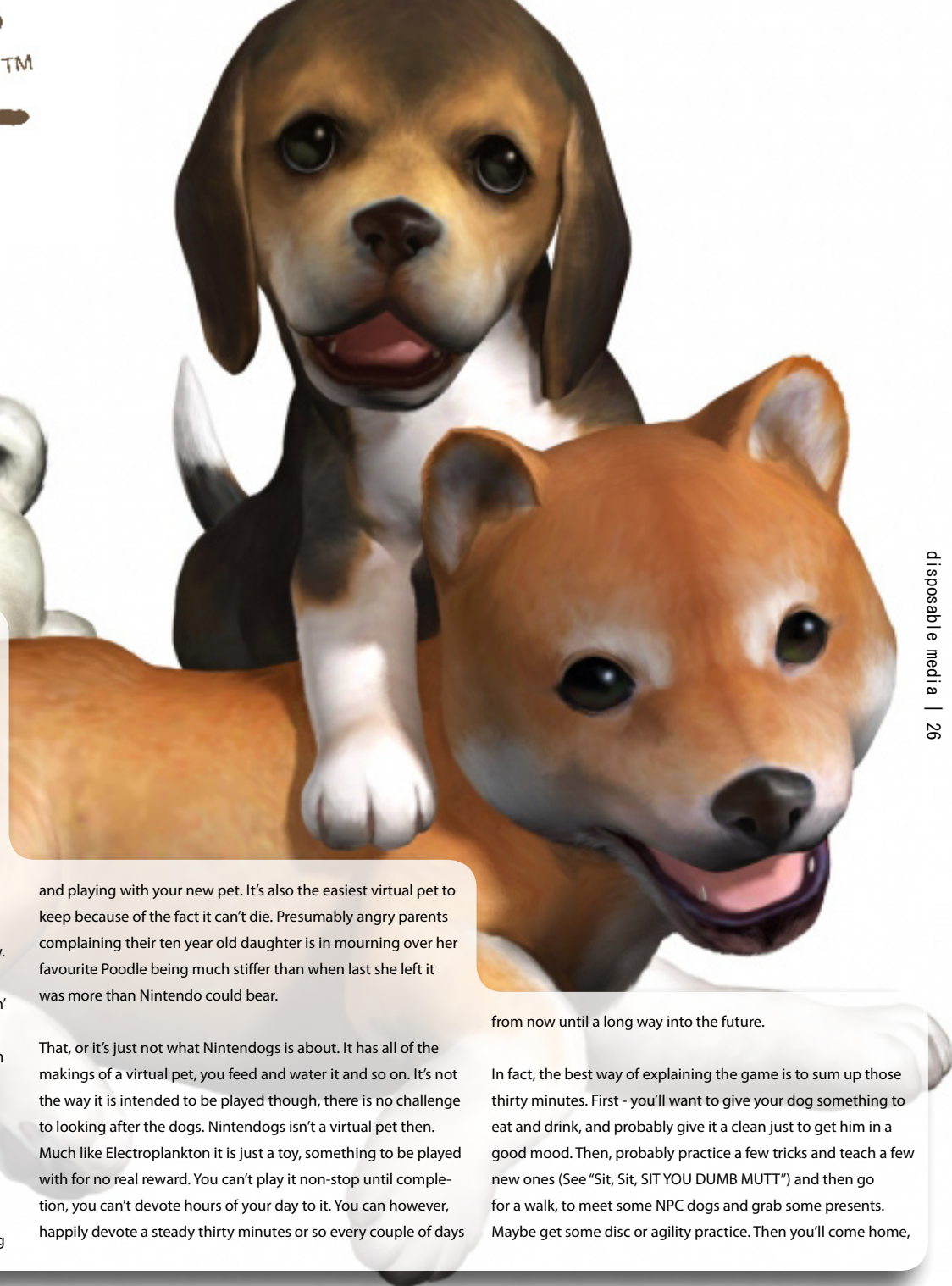
Probably the most impressive thing about Nintendogs is the ability to teach the dogs tricks, using voice commands. It gives training the dogs a lovely feeling of simplicity – discovering new tricks and seeing your dog learn them, from the very first time you make your pup sit, right up to making him do somersaults. It more or less always works too, planning ahead and giving the tricks different sounding commands helps though. The dumb mutt might actually get confused, a quick jab with a stylus rather than a loving stroke is a good solution. It's a lovely part of the game though that really adds to the game.



Each writer uses one method to decide whether something is worth writing about - is it interesting or not? What prompts a game moving from being interesting, to uninteresting and sometimes back again? Is something that has already had a bloody big cardboard display devoted to it in Woolworths still interesting? In the case of Nintendogs, probably yes.

A Nintendogs summary doesn't need many words. It's simply like having a portable, eternal puppy that doesn't smell. In fact, make that an almost unbearably cute, portable, eternal puppy that doesn't smell, because it really is the cutest thing that ever was cute. Admittedly, that was quite a few words in the end but you have got a very good idea about what it is now. Game is probably a loose term too because there really isn't much to do. There are competitions (see "That's good Competin'") and completing them successfully is the only realistic way of unlocking all the dogs. There is also a fair amount of gotta catch 'em all to the items as well - a puppy in a sombrero never gets old. The cuteness has been mentioned, yes?

Nintendogs is, when it comes down to it, just a virtual pet. Much like the Tamagotchi, the fad that left surprising amounts of people spending hours queuing outside Toys'R'Us on drizzly Saturday mornings, Nintendogs boils down to cleaning, feeding



and playing with your new pet. It's also the easiest virtual pet to keep because of the fact it can't die. Presumably angry parents complaining their ten year old daughter is in mourning over her favourite Poodle being much stiffer than when last she left it was more than Nintendo could bear.

That, or it's just not what Nintendogs is about. It has all of the makings of a virtual pet, you feed and water it and so on. It's not the way it is intended to be played though, there is no challenge to looking after the dogs. Nintendogs isn't a virtual pet then. Much like Electropunkton it is just a toy, something to be played with for no real reward. You can't play it non-stop until completion, you can't devote hours of your day to it. You can however, happily devote a steady thirty minutes or so every couple of days

from now until a long way into the future.

In fact, the best way of explaining the game is to sum up those thirty minutes. First - you'll want to give your dog something to eat and drink, and probably give it a clean just to get him in a good mood. Then, probably practice a few tricks and teach a few new ones (See "Sit, Sit, SIT YOU DUMB MUTT") and then go for a walk, to meet some NPC dogs and grab some presents. Maybe get some disc or agility practice. Then you'll come home,

give your dogs fur a bit of a brush, get it nice and spotless and after a quick play with some kind of toy, enter a competition. Win or lose, come home, save and turn the power off. That's it. Next time you play you'll do more or less the same. Maybe a different competition. Perhaps a walk to a discount store, but mostly the same as today.

Trying to stretch it much further, to say, a couple of hours every day would quickly make Nintendogs as boring as colouring in word-count pie-charts. There are odd things you can do to extend the time you play – like keeping three dogs at once but it really boils down to the same thing. It really is a game for quick sessions, the fact it is so unashamed of it's pick up, play and put down nature is to be commended – it's what portable games are for, or at least what they ought to be for. It might not be truly portable, something ruined by the fact that telling Pixie the Chihuahua to roll over while you're sat on a crowded tube line is much too embarrassing. The amount of satisfaction gained from a relatively small amount of play is certainly a good reason to own a portable console – even if you end up playing with it in bed more than out and about.

Nintendogs is interesting. In fact that is a very good way of describing it. If you do take an interest in such things, you'll love it. You'll also love it if you just think cute puppies are ace. On the other hand, if you've got this far and still don't agree that Nintendogs is interesting, this has probably been a waste of your time. As well as a bad call on the part of the writer deciding what is interesting. While an apology probably isn't enough to pay you back for your wasted time, sorry!



that's good competin'

The competitions are as close as Nintendogs gets to being a game. Three competitions are available and each has increasing difficulty levels. Completing them earns money to buy your dog more goodies or just more dogs, but also earns you trainer points to unlock new breeds. Certain breeds excel at certain events but they can all have a go at all three. Discuss simply involves getting more points than the leader by making long catches – practiced in the park. Agility involves leading your dog around a course of obstacles, trying to get your dog around as quickly as possible without any faults is your aim. Finally, Obedience is where you get to prove you've managed to train a well behaved puppy. Or have the dumb mutt embarrass you in front of the crowd, at least.

the tails of bob - by pogo

What ho! Sit back with a chilled martini and allow me to regale you with the adventures of my young Pug dog, Bob. I purchased the young chap from the local pound – where he and his fellow pups were being kept in a lovely free-range environment that any hen would be proud to call her home – for the princely sum of £500. Quite a bargain for a dog of his calibre, let me tell you.

The little blighter is terribly well behaved on most occasions – rarely failing to obey a command – and learns at a speed any tutor would be proud of. By contrast, the Jack Russells under my feet at present can barely comprehend 'sit' three years on.

Bob is also a competitive fellow, and quick off the mark to boot. When he met up with my brother's pup yesterday eve, another pug, by the name of Terence, Bob soon proved himself to be top dog. Whenever an object of dogly delights thrown their way – tennis balls, Frisbees and whatnot – Bob was without fail the first to react and seize the



prize, whilst Terence had to make do with looking on wistfully when he finally stumbled out of his daze and noticed something was going on. If I didn't know better I'd suspect my errant sibling had been slipping him the odd snifter of finest.

Young Bob is also gaining a reputation as quite the whiz at the agility trials. He hasn't managed to place first in the Master Class just yet, but with the way he's risen through the ranks like a rat up a trouser leg thus far he can only be a matter of days off challenging the best of them a Crufts.

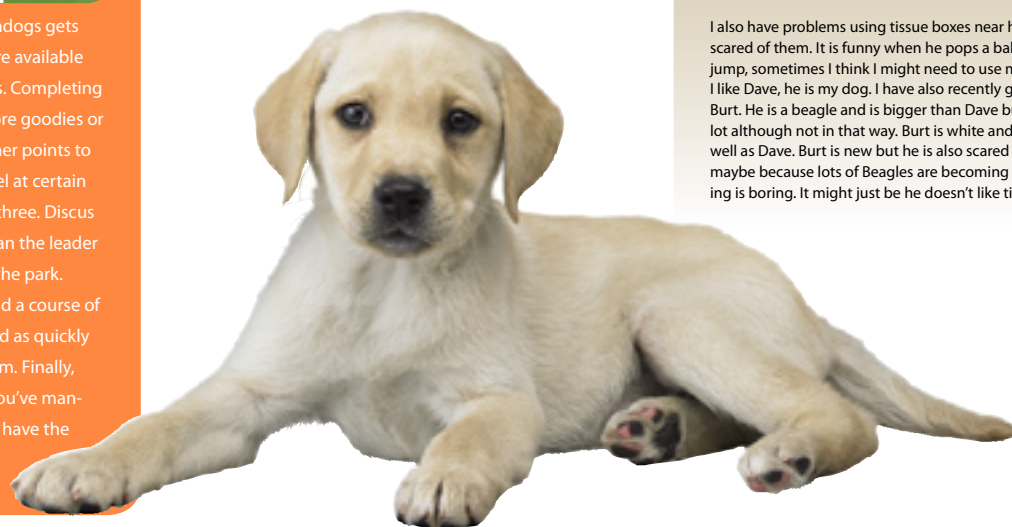
Good show Bob!

all about my puppy dog dave - by rev

Dave is my daschund and he is a puppy. He's small and black although I am saying that to describe him not to say anything about him. I like him because he is my puppy. I have owned him since September and we have been on many walks together. He is a well-behaved dog because he only does a wee when he is outside. This is so the other dogs know Dave is near by smelling him doing a wee. When he does a poo I pick it up and put it in a bag. I call it my poo bag.

He is a very clever dog, he can sit down and he can sit up. When he is sat up he looks like he is a beggar. When I don't remember to clean Dave he gets fleas and becomes very smelly. When he is like that he is even more like a beggar. He can also lay on the floor and spin on his back because he is clever. This makes him look like a small break-dancer so I am trying to get a silly hat for him. Dave likes the blue flying disc I bought him most of all but he is rubbish at catching all of them. It might be because he is small. He is also a bit rubbish at running around obstacle courses because he is small.

I also have problems using tissue boxes near him because he is scared of them. It is funny when he pops a balloon and it makes him jump, sometimes I think I might need to use my poo bag but not yet. I like Dave, he is my dog. I have also recently got a puppy named Burt. He is a beagle and is bigger than Dave but Dave likes him a lot although not in that way. Burt is white and can't do dancing as well as Dave. Burt is new but he is also scared of lots of things. This maybe because lots of Beagles are becoming more dead now hunting is boring. It might just be he doesn't like tissue boxes though.

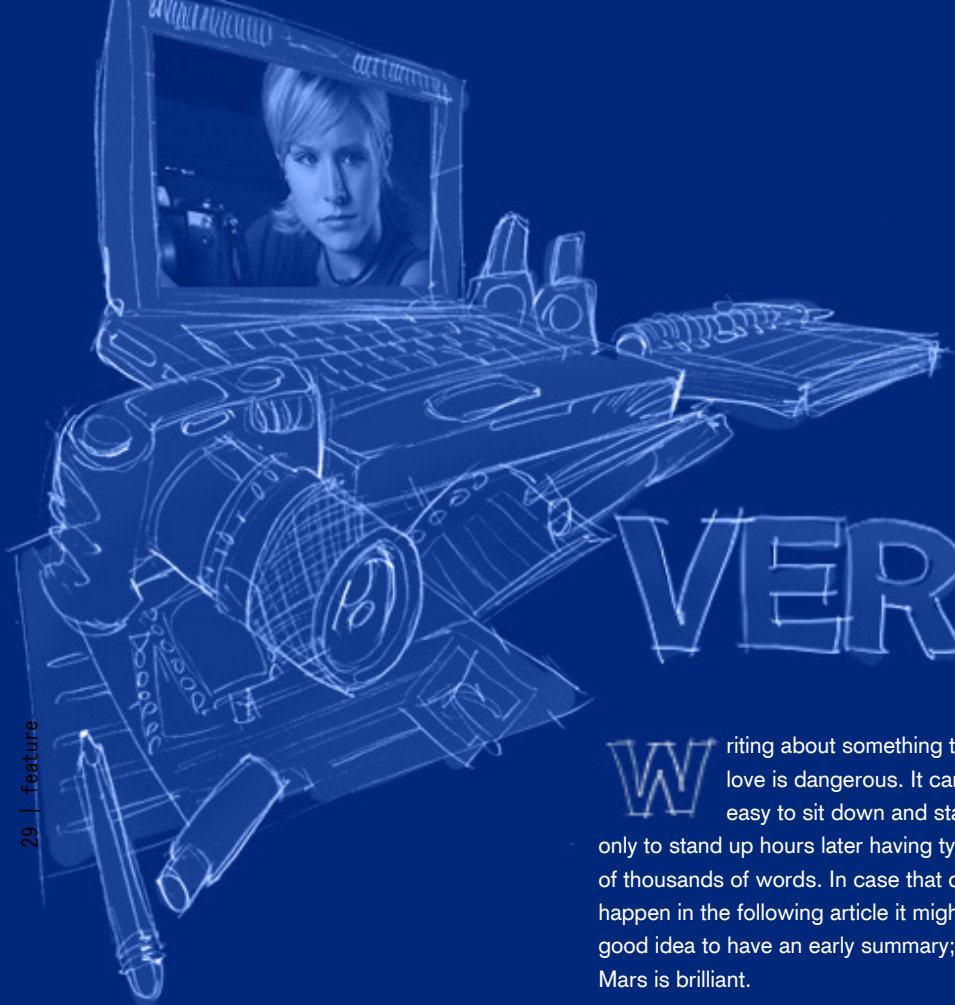


FargalEX

WHO:
DOES:
LOOKS TO:
SEE:
TALK:

SAM "BOH" MILLER
VECTORS
JAMES "COUK" DOWNING, TEAM
FULLMECHA, CEL SHADED GAMES
[HTTP://FARGALEX.8YHOK.COM](http://fargalex.8yhok.com)
[FARGALEX@HOTMAIL.COM](mailto:fargalex@hotmail.com)





“Unlike CSI, the mysteries are solved using real-life technology.”

Words - Andrew Revell Pictures - Steven Pick

VERONICA MARS

Writing about something that you love is dangerous. It can be too easy to sit down and start typing, only to stand up hours later having typed tens of thousands of words. In case that does happen in the following article it might be a good idea to have an early summary; Veronica Mars is brilliant.

Keith Mars, one time Sheriff of California town Neptune was removed from his position after accusing the local loved billionaire Jake Kane of murdering his own daughter, Lily. After a rushed re-election he is replaced and the murder is almost immediately solved. An anonymous tip off lets them know the killer and he promptly confesses to the crime. Keith, rather than fleeing town, as his wife suggests decides to stay and adds his marriage to the cost of fingering Jake Kane for the murder of Lily. To pay the bills, he sets up a private investigation office. His office assistant is his daughter, Veronica.

High-school pupil Veronica Mars used to be part of the in-crowd - dating Duncan Kane, son of Jake and being best friends with Lily. After splitting from Duncan, the murder of Lily and the firing of her father, Veronica is suddenly not so popular and moves from spending her time with the millionaires to spending it with the people that work for them. To afford to live, she works for her father but also helps out other students whenever they find themselves in trouble.

Not far into the show it's obvious that the man who confessed to the murder didn't do it - whoever was the killer is still free and this plotline runs from the first episode to the final episode in series one. While every episode adds more to the on-going mystery, it is very rarely the main focus of an episode as they all feature their own self-contained mystery. Dragging a story on for longer than it can cope with is one of the worst crimes television can commit but it never happens here.

In fact, the story is written well enough for the viewer to believe almost anyone from the main cast could have committed the murder, except the person sat in jail. By the time you find out who did it though, it couldn't have been anyone else. It's this sort of confidence and plain old good writing that the whole series delivers in spades. At the end of the season when all has been explained you can look back to earlier episodes and notice small scenes in previous episodes added much more to the story than you noticed at the time. While they are mostly unobtrusive, sometimes the throwaway conversations might not fit totally into an episode, but the satisfaction at the end is worth it.

To pick out one aspect of the show as the best feature is surprisingly easy in this case. Almost all the dialogue is exceptional. Witty, realistic dialogue is the speciality of the series and brings to mind Clerks, Firefly and even The West Wing.

It isn't scared to drop references, or let the occasional curse in as long as they fit into the story. With such fizzing, vibrant dialogue flowing off the page it gives the actors the chance to work together well and engage properly. It brings humour and emotion in equal parts and brings the whole series together as it means that characters are constantly being developed through conversation.

While Keith is a character crucial to the plot, he never feels like he is in the series for any reason other than the fact that he is Veronica's father, whether he's asking for her help with an investigation or buying Veronica the water bed she's wanted since she was a young girl. Another character, Logan, acts as the villain of the series. His actions, while generally wrong, all make sense and rather than being just a bad guy is slowly developed into one of the most solid and believable characters in the series.

With twenty-two episodes, each with their own mystery it could start feeling like Veronica has a very strange life. Much like the characters of Friends never seemed to go to work, it could be felt that Veronica spends all her time investigating something rather than the vast majority of her time being spent going into school normally. Wallace, introduced in the first episode joins the

school on the first day and instantly gets into trouble with the local biker gang. From a rough start though he progresses to being both Veronica's best friend and investigative partner and by the end of the series he is one of the most popular people in the school thanks to being a natural basketball player. It's a progression that has almost no effect on the main story but it's addition makes the series feel more complete, believable and gives a solid sense of the time passing between throughout the series - as well as padding Wallace out into an excellent character.

This push for realism is carried on throughout the series. Unlike CSI the mysteries are solved using more or less real-life technology, no infinite resolution cameras. When presented with a digital image, one character suggests zooming in on the floor of the basketball court to try and manipulate a reflection to see who is there. Veronica, on the other hand just reads that the trainers in the shot have the players number on them. Veronica does tend to be unbelievably talented at everything, to a ridiculous degree. It's presented in a light-hearted manner though and doesn't become an excuse to have obscure endings to mysteries.

Of course, not everything can be perfect. There are a few characters that don't work particularly well, generally an effect of both the writing and actors. Duncan springs to mind,

by far the weakest character in the story. His relationship with Veronica seems slow and difficult, but never believably - he just seems odd and it is hard to imagine that they had anything in common. He's not the only one either with Wallace's mother Alicia Fennel never seeming anything but artificial. Neither get enough screen time to be too annoying but the good work by the writers and other actors does feel let down in these two characters.

Occasionally the plot seems a little forced together too, as Logan and biker gang leader Eli seem to spend a disproportionate amount of time together. It is needed by the plot, but it is never explained particularly well. Other complaints are few and far between. No, the world probably didn't need another show set in an American high school but when they end up this good it's hard to complain. At least it is a little more reasonable though, as it does feature people from a broad range of backgrounds. It even has the odd ugly person in it. With the Region 1 DVD boxset having just been released, as well as the series starting not too long ago on Living TV it is certainly worth tracking down and spending some time watching a few episodes. Of course it won't be to everyone's taste but most will find it extremely well written, especially in the case of the dialogue and thoroughly enjoyable.

Veronica does
tend to be
unbelievably
talented at
everything

MUSIC PIRACY

Words - Ian Moreno-Melgar Pictures - Steven Pick

Piracy is wrong but are record companies pushing people towards it?

High speed internet connections are offering the music industry a fresh source of revenue, to the extent that in the recent past legal downloads have overtaken CD sales as the major contributor to the singles chart. Unfortunately for the music industry though, this has also offered the potential for people to share music on a huge scale, which if claims are to be believed is costing the music industry millions of pounds every year. Is it the record companies that are fuelling the demand for illegal downloads though?

The best place to start is a true story. Personally, I'm not a huge fan of Turin Brakes. They're not bad and they make a few nice songs. Certainly their first album was worth buying, especially in a sale so you get change from a fiver. Within a week of their second release, a friend and much bigger Turin Brakes fan than me came home from

the supermarket carrying weekly groceries and their new album. After putting frozen food away, but before starting work on putting tinned foods away he meandered to his PC to put his new purchase on to listen to. Thanks to some cunning copy protection ensuring that the CD wouldn't play properly though, he couldn't listen to it and the tinned food was put away in silence.

Rightfully annoyed, and not wanting to keep something that was entirely useless to him and knowing that I owned the previous album, he offered it to me. Music by a band you don't mind that you can buy without having to leave your room, let alone your house is a good thing. Unsurprisingly I accepted it, and equally unsurprisingly it worked in both my CD player and my PC without even the slightest problem. It wasn't bad either; not great but certainly not awful. The original purchaser concurred. Any album you want enough to buy for full price in the week of release you want to listen to, so he pirated it and very easily, proving the copy protection is utterly useless. For this blatant copyright infringement he even earned the option of burning it to a CD so that he could listen to it on any CD player in the land. Upstairs though, the owner of the fully legal copy is stuck with the knowledge that there are machines it won't play on.

To add insult to injury, fast forward about twelve months. Turin Brakes, having already managed to push a fan into piracy decided to complete their work and annoy the rest of the owners of legal copies by releasing a Special Edition, complete with exclusive songs. It gets back onto supermarket shelves and sells more copies. The supermarket is happy. The record company are happy. Even the people who have only vaguely heard of the band in question are happy. In fact everyone except the people that turned up to buy the album on the first day - the fans of the band - are happy.

What choice do they have though? Not buy it and miss out on music from a band they love or rebuy something they already own ninety percent of, with the remaining ten percent being songs that aren't good enough to make it on to the original album? Or piracy? The people who did decide to pirate the first time around will have

a level of smug satisfaction, and can of course pirate the songs from the special edition too.

Suffice to say, the music industry, or more precisely the CD market has got itself in quite a spin in the last few years. By ensuring that each major release features shoddy UK exclusive tracks to ensure their customers aren't try and get a good deal from elsewhere in the world, has special edition re-release to ensure that fans feel the need to buy the same album twice and copy protection to ensure that as few customers as possible can actually listen to it. In fact, it's a market managing to alienate as many customers as possible. Then they dare to complain piracy

It's a market managing to alienate as many customers as possible. Then they dare to complain piracy is occurring.

is occurring. Of course, piracy is wrong. That much is agreed on by everyone pretty much - even those that commit it daily. While there are differing reasons, most people agree on the fact that piracy is inevitable. This inevitability is something that seems to confuse executives who don't seem to be able to understand is that everybody who pirates isn't a potential customer.

Maybe they can't afford to buy it - not a valid excuse if someone was stealing something but when no one is harmed, what difference does it make? Perhaps they can afford to spend a little on CD's and tend to buy them second hand or in

bargain bins. Neither gives the record company a full sale but both are perfectly legal. Maybe they downloaded it as it was getting good reviews but wasn't a style of music they liked? They wouldn't have spent their money on it to find out, so again, no money is lost.

Another major point of consideration is that lots of the people who download large amounts of music do genuinely love listening to music and together are responsible for a large percentage of the sales of niche acts. These people, after downloading and listening to the music will often go and buy the CD in question - a CD they wouldn't have bought before. This can of course work both ways though, as albums are often 'released' to pirates before their actual release date and an album someone was planning on buying goes unsold because it simply wasn't very good.

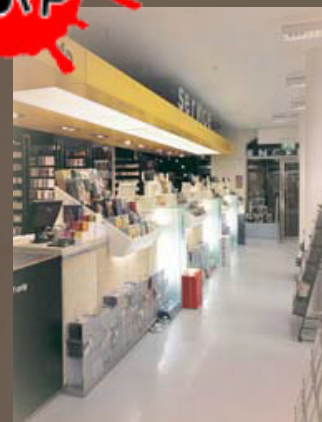
Every download of an album doesn't equal a lost sale, certainly that much can be stated. It is worth remembering that a lot of sales are lost though. It's not the people that are downloading music that are the real problem - it's those making money off downloading music and printing out shoddy covers and making a profit. They sell to people that probably would buy the music normally - they certainly wouldn't download it anyway. It's a problem that is increasing as well as everyone who doesn't mind bending the law realises all you need is a broadband connection, a printer and a CD writer and people will give you money for something that was almost no work at all. Even finding a place to sell them is easy enough, markets, car boot sales and online auctions will always have someone making a bit of money. Surely though, it can't be a hard thing to stop?

It would, certainly take an investment. Selling copied CD's doesn't break the law, the police can do next to nothing to stop it. The only option available is to spend money in sending someone out to boot sales to bring civil action against the people who are profiting from the record

companies copyright. The record companies concerned would seem to prefer spending money punishing, threatening and generally treating their paying customers badly than invest like this though. If they aren't willing to try and cut down the problem that way, forget it. Spend money on promoting live music, spend it on looking for new bands, spend it on advertising old bands that haven't had huge commercial success if they were deserving of it. While the percentage of music that is pirated rather than bought may remain the same, the total amount of sales will increase. It might sound old fashioned, but spending the money on music rather than things that are nothing more than a consumer annoyance might sound crazy, but it might just work. Especially considering that album sales are at their highest in years and have the potential to keep rising.

And no, I'll never be buying a Turin Brakes album again, even if they release the best album of the century. Not until it arrives in a slightly scuffed box in the corner of a charity shop. That's one sale lost and it had nothing to do with piracy.

Selling copied CD's doesn't break the law, the police can do next to nothing to stop it.



In this ocean of madness, occasional islands of common sense occur. Fopp, a nationwide, if still small, music chain offers the option of returning CD's and requires no excuse other than the fact you didn't like it. This doesn't affect piracy as no self-respecting pirate would bother to leave the house to commit copyright infringement. What it can do though is push someone who is undecided about a purchase a safety net and pushes them into a purchase. Combined with a sensible price, £10 for almost all chart CD's and you have a store doing it's very best to increase not only it's sales and profit but the sales and profit of the whole industry while also giving a good reason to not shop online.

Lazy journalism would ask a rhetorical question at this stage, asking whether or not you have ever wanted to be the next Dr.Dre. Much more interesting though, is the real question. COULD you be the next Dr. Dre?

The name-check is irrelevant in this particular case, as Rockstar's beautiful online sequencer Beaterator is so flexible you're not restricted to carving out hip-hop drum loops. The wealth of the sound bank provided means practically anything you can imagine is achievable. The Beaterator is a wonderfully powerful music sequencer and sampler hosted via Flash and found online at beaterator.com. Made by the ever-relevant Rockstar, the machine is as simple as you want it to be, or as complex and intricate as you need it to be.

At the heart of the machine is an 8 track music composer. You can have up to 240 bars of music played at any bpm between 30 and 200, using any of the provided sounds or your own via a built in upload manager. By clicking on the loops section on the right hand side of the machine a range of 'loops' become available. These loops are short segments of music that are designed to be played

over and over to create a song, hence the name. A simple drag and drop interface allows you to quickly add the loops to the sequencer itself. A swift click on a bar to turn it 'on' and the loop is played when the sequencer reaches that bar. Simple. Failing that, a visual demonstration is available to show you exactly how the thing works. The loops provided fall into 5 broad categories; drums, basslines, instruments, synths and miscellaneous. The loops available have been created by musicians such as Juan Atkins and King Britt, and are most are genuinely interesting. Each musician has their own style, and to begin with, songs are sound best by sticking to the same musician. Using this method and the provided loops, you can easily knock up a tune in 5 minutes.

Things really get interesting however when you begin to explore outside of the obvious. To the left hand side of the sequencer is a 'sounds' menu. Opening it up is a little daunting at first, as you're given the opportunity to craft your own loops using any of the thousands of sounds on offer. Again the same musicians provide a great range of styles and also quality. By clicking through and having a

play around, you can soon lose hours at a time trying to create the harshest drum beat ever created. If that's your thing.

The sheer number of individual sounds provided means you can spend days trying to find the right high-hat, or perfect kick sound to compliment whatever it is you're trying to achieve. By dragging an individual sound to the 'loop crafter' at the bottom of the sequencer, you can play around with small chunks of sounds, and mess with them anyway you want, using any sound you can lay your fingers at. The sounds are organised into 7 categories, most of which relate to drums; cymbals, high-hats, snares, kicks as well as synths, strings and miscellaneous. Each sound is selectable through the original musician or as a particular sound, thus allowing you to quickly find a snare sound or anything by Matthew Dear, if you need a similar sound to something you're already using.

If you happen to be particularly talented or just interested, you can also drag any individual sound into

**"THE BEATERATOR IS A
WONDERFULLY POWERFUL
MUSIC SEQUENCER
AND SAMPLER"**

Beaterator's interface is
clean, simple to use and
allows you to get beats
together very quickly.



the provided 2 octave keyboard (handily playable using your PC keyboard) to open up a massive amount of possibilities. Any sound you move into the keyboard gets rendered into a proper scale for you to mess about with, or if you happen to really like something you knock up, for recording to be added to your loop or song. As well as all this, an effects crafter is also provided, giving you the ability to add echo, flanger and various other clever effects to your loops. As a free package, it's quite something.

It's certainly not flawless though. Try using the Beaterator in Firefox. Actually, don't bother, because at some stage something will go wrong. On several occasions, the cursor has been known to disappear or just act erratically, meaning erased bars, moving loops and sounds being dragged about when you didn't mean to. A dialogue box does warn you before use that using Firefox is difficult and Internet Explorer is the recommended browser for this package. The most troublesome aspect of the whole machine is

also one its strengths - the sheer number of pre-made loops and sounds available. It's all too easy to get online and get ready to make something, only to be truly bamboozled by the amount of sounds available, particularly troublesome when you are looking for a specific sound.

As useful as it is having the sounds organised into simple categories such as snare and kicks, you can sometimes have to listen to 100+ samples before stumbling across the one that fits. Snare for example, can mean bleepy, electronic snare sounds, as well as traditional drum skin snare sounds.

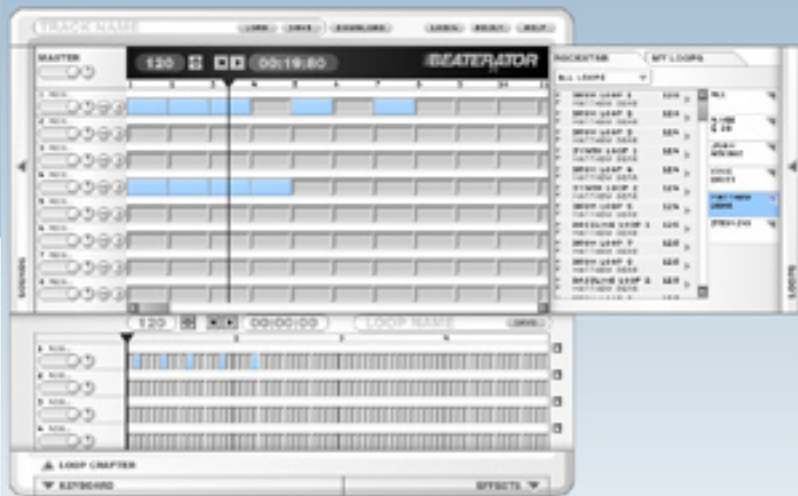
Each sound is allocated a simple name defined by the musician that created it, but Cymbal4 by A.Vee and 3D isn't something that is easily remembered. Without having a pen and paper handy, it's very easy to get confused moving and changing sounds, altering loops and messing with the organisation of an 8 track. For all the small niggles, the package is

comprehensive, generally fun to use and as flexible as you could possibly wish for given that the tool is free and based online. To round the package off, it's possible to save your work to visit at a later stage, or by registering, download your tune in mp3 format, which is a massively welcome bonus.

Such is the power and adaptability of the tool, this wannabe Producer has already knocked up a couple of full length songs and numerous drum loops despite having no musical talent. The ability to add your own WAV samples means that coupled with the consistently useful Audacity, a fairly comprehensive remix package can be acquired for free.

"YOU CAN SOON LOSE HOURS AT A TIME TRYING TO CREATE THE HARSHTEST DRUM BEAT EVER CREATED."

Indeed, we like the Beaterator so much we're having the first Disposable Competition. Use the Beaterator in any way you like to create a 10 second drum loop, a 7 minute long electronica opus, a 3 minute remix, whatever and send it to us. Download your tune, send it over to editor@disposablemedia.co.uk with your email address, your name and song/loop title and we'll decide a winner.



A NAME CAN SAY
A LOT ABOUT
SOMEONE

THE UNSEEN FORCE



IS NO DIFFERENT;
JUST DON'T GET
HIM STARTED ON
THE SUBJECT. "I
HATE THE WHOLE
PROCESS OF
MARKETING AN

IMAGE, BUT I'M NOT NAIVE ENOUGH TO
THINK IT DOESN'T MATTER. I'M AWARE THAT
NOT HAVING AN IDENTITY IS AN IMAGE IN
ITSELF, IF THAT MAKES SENSE?" SO WHY
WITH THE MASK THEN? "THE WHOLE
UNSEEN FORCE THING, THE HELMET, THE
HIDDEN FACE ETC, IS TO SAY 'THE MUSIC
COMES FIRST' I MEAN 90% OF COMMERCIAL
ACTS OUT THERE ARE ALL IMAGE AND NO
FUCKING SUBSTANCE WHATSOEVER.
HAVING A 'COOL' IDENTITY IS FINE, SO LONG
AS IT'S NOT USED TO DISGUISE THE FACT
THAT THE MUSIC'S UTTER SHITE"

Welcome to the world of The Unseen Force, or The Hoarse Force as he is today due to the onset of a nasty sounding cold. Behind the Mask lies a talent, a very real and tangible talent one who represents his ideology incredibly well, a talent who loves hip-hop and all that goes with it. The Force produces, DJs, writes and as his alias The Jackal, is the self made 'Head Honcho' of Jackyl Productions, a Sheffield-based Hip Hop collective set on promoting unheard talent world wide. So for the benefit of newcomers, we ask the man to describe his sound, and a quick response follows, signalling that he's been asked this before. "Like falling downstairs with an armful of records and films then trying to pick the pieces out of your head whilst playing video games. A little bit sinister I suppose. I just try to make music that I'd buy myself". The Force is passionate about what he does, and is quick to point out where his passion comes from. "It's purely a case of loving music, hearing little parts of other people's records and wishing they lasted longer, sampling allows you the freedom to do that, mess things up, chop 'em around and put all the best bits together into a

big cooking pot; it's like being a chef, but with music. I've played in guitar bands but find this much more enjoyable cos you're less self critical; you already know you like it, and that it's good; that's why you sample it in the first place."

It's this kind of quick yet informed response that marks Force out. Immensely knowledgeable about his craft as well as his own limitations, he's an artist who knows what he wants from his music, and how to play with conventions. His description of his work too is incredibly well observed. His early work was sample based hip-hop, influenced by the likes of DJ Shadow, but always with a soulful smile. He often cites Pete Rock as an influence, but when it comes to it, his style isn't described best by comparison, rather his raw passion for music a passion he says that is reflected in his work via the sampling. Does he worry about the sample robbery argument? "I really don't think of sampling as stealing if it's done creatively, it's more a case of showing respect to the sampled artists. To me it's more honest than ripping off guitar bands from 20 years ago and passing it off as

LIKE FALLING DOWNSTAIRS WITH AN ARMFUL OF RECORDS
AND FILMS THEN TRYING TO PICK THE PIECES
OUT OF YOUR HEAD WHILST PLAYING VIDEO GAMES.

something new. It sounds cheesy, but for me it's all about buying 3 quids worth of vinyl from a car boot, listening through piles of crap, then finding that killer loop that just stops you in your tracks; that's the buzz for me"

His recent work has seen less use of samples, and a shift towards emcee based hip-hop. Is there any reason for this? "It's always been my intention to work with vocalists, it's just kind of panned out that most of my work has morphed into full blown instrumental stuff due to no one suitable being around at the time. You start with the raw bare bones of a track then tend to over compensate for the lack of rhymes with tons of little samples; if you're not careful it can come across as sounding too busy, if you know what I mean. I'm also really conscious of not going down that 'coffee table' listening route, which is where a lot of instrumental stuff ends up, being listened to by no one but 50 year old Q readers and Guardian journalists. My first love is pure Hip Hop, that's why the new stuff's getting a little



THIS MIGHT SOUND PRETENTIOUS, BUT I JUST DO WHAT I DO, THERE'S NO REAL THOUGHT OUT MASTERPLAN BEHIND IT ALL; FUNDAMENTALLY IT'S JUST FUN TO MAKE AND LISTEN TO.

harder sounding and less melodic." It's an interesting point and one that shows that this Force isn't likely to stand and wait for people to hear his stuff, rather that he'll make what he wants, and let people come to him. His ambitious streak is obvious. So what are the short-term ambitions for the Force and for Jackal Productions? "I've got a project on the go with some Californian emcees which should be worth looking out for soon and hopefully some more collaborations. I'm also on the look out for remix work; branching out with some local bands. With Jackal Productions ideally we want to be putting stuff out on our own label, we're also looking at downloads; there should be a free UnseenForce sampler available online shortly, stuff from Infinite Soul and there's more artists in the pipeline too." But what about Infinite Soul? (Sheffield based DJ/Producer, and good friend of The Force) You've been worked together for a while now but seem to be more independant than before. Are there any plans for the two of you to do some more stuff, especially now that your own work is getting a rep? "Yeah, there's definitely gonna' be some more hook ups under other aliases and in

THE DEDICATION AND THE LOVE FOR THE ART THAT THE FORCE HAS IS IMMENSE, BUT IT'S ONLY RECENTLY THAT HE'S STEPPED OUT FROM THE UNDERGROUND.

varying genres; stuff you might not expect! Not wanting to get too pretentious, but he's got the whole art thing goin' on as well so there's gonna' be more of that on the Jackal Productions site and possibly some video stuff too" Disposable pushes a little further, noticing a desire to inform and also educate, asking how the Force separates the Unseen Force from The Jackal, is there a different person behind each or is it just a way of separating the artist from the producer? "Jackal Productions is basically a creative umbrella for all manner of musical projects me and my cohorts are involved in. The Unseen Force is just one of many aliases. The alter egos give us the freedom to not stick to any one genre, although our principal focus is Hip Hop" So what do you prefer - straight up DJing, making music or producing others? "It's gotta be the DJ'ing really, I just love listening to Hip Hop; it's an obsession. Nothing relieves stress like a good hour's scratching session. Then again, if I find the right loop I'm lost for days"

The dedication and the love for the art that The Force has is immense, but it's only recently that he's stepped out from the underground. He founded a myspace site last month and as a result is hooking up with all kinds of djs, labels, emcees and producers. Spacetone records in Canada have already approached the Force to provide a few tracks for a sampler they're putting together. Disposable asks what this deal means for the Force as an artist. "Basically I'm contributing a couple of tracks to a

compilation on Spacetone Records in Canada which launched at the beginning of October. They're trying to do a showcase of international artists with a view to getting more investment for vinyl releases etc. It's fucking amazing what can be achieved via the internet these days; I mean this compilations got people from as far afield as Chile involved!" Do you enjoy having to work to get heard then? I mean, you have to put your time and effort into getting your stuff heard... "This might sound pretentious, but I just do what I do, there's no real thought out masterplan behind it all; fundamentally it's just fun to make and listen to. But I've got to give props to Myspace; a week after my stuff went online Spacetone were e-mailing me about a possible link up! I think the UK record industry needs to start paying attention to what's happening online before it wakes up dead one morning!"

The Force is on his way it seems. Literally. His hands move to his pockets and he pulls out some baccy. His fingers begin to roll a tight cigarette. He looks at Disposable and asks if there's anything else. Actually... "We always ask this; watcha been listening to? Anything to recommend, anything that might have passed us by?" Force considers, lights his rollie and answers. "Cage - Hell's Winter, KeepInTime Compilation, Dangerdoom obviously, Sound Directions (Madlib), Kanye, Infinte Soul"

And with that he's looking to leave, coat done up, cigarette leaving mouth. "Cheers" he says and if this was a film, he'd probably disappear in a flash of smoke.

THE UNSEEN FORCE CAN BE FOUND ON MYSPACE.COM/THEUNSEENFORCE, WHERE HIS MASSIVE REMIX OF KELIS' MILKSHAKE CAN BE DOWNLOADED, AS WELL AS OTHER TRACKS AND LINKS TO JACKAL PRODUCTIONS.

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IAN MORENO-MELGAR - editor in chief (smokes cigars all day)

TIM CHEESMAN - design editor (though does nothing of the sort)

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REZ

motivational coaching/constantly badgering us into getting on with things