

# DISPOSABLE MEDIA

ART | MUSIC | GAMES | TV | COMICS | FILM | LIFE

Issue 9



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## THE ROMANTIC

image of a writer - from Shakespeare to Kerouac - features a loner, armed with a typewriter and a bottle of bourbon. They'll find their muse, frantically pound the keys in front of them, and lo and behold, a masterpiece appears.

The reality is somewhat different, but for DM, the aim is the same. We created Disposable Media because we thought we could do as good (if not better) a job than any magazine on the shelves. Not only that, but we're free and available anywhere with net access.

Whether we've achieved our aim is up to you, but we've certainly tried – as much this issue as any other, with articles ranging from the Develop games event, an interview with *Doctor Who's* Gareth Roberts, the second part of our already controversial chat with David Perry, and a look at comic creator Chris Ware.

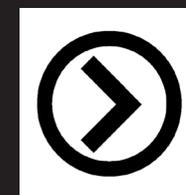
And in return? All we ask is that if you enjoy DM, you pass it on. Email it, post about it on a blog, forum or social networking site, or just print out a copy and leave it on the train. Because every time we get a new reader, or someone responds to an advert, it's another step towards more issues of DM, more content, and proof that passion, time and effort can match anything major corporations can throw money at.

And you can always let me know personally what you like, hate and want to see at the address below.

Roll on our landmark 10th Issue.

**-Dan**

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# //DISPOSED MEDIA

NEVER ONE TO MISS A BEAT, DISPOSABLE MEDIA FILLS YOU IN ON THE HAPPENINGS SINCE LAST ISSUE...



## //games

To be honest, little has happened. It's been summer and no-one bothers with games over summer. As soon as a proper game appeared, *Bioshock*, the world went temporarily insane as people decreed it the best game ever and are already starting to regret it a bit.

Following *Halo 3*, *Call of Duty 4* has followed suit and its multiplayer beta is going down just as well, if not better, aside

from the fact lots of gamers can't get download it. Elsewhere in multiplayer shooting, *Kwari* is starting to get attention, by offering to reward players for kills using a poker like system, even if most people are just wondering why



anyone inept would bother with it.

As far as consoles go, the Wii and DS are still selling like hotcakes despite price drops of both the 360 and the PS3. Meanwhile, the PSP is still trying to convince everyone that 19% thinner is worth paying attention to.



## //music

Obviously the big event has been another disappointing winner for the Mercury Prize, but there are three pages discussing that later in the magazine. Likewise the Carling Weekend. Amy Winehouse being drunk or sober doesn't seem to count as news anymore either, however much tabloids try and pretend it is.

As we don't have an 'Embarrassment' section, the MTV Awards' comeback of a podgy Britney Spears swaying onstage in front of the music industry will have to be mentioned here. Classing it as music does sound a little too much like a compliment though.

In response to hearing that such a disaster was occurring, Led Zeppelin, Blur and (most importantly) Dodgy are all re-forming to avoid having to watch the chubby girl wobble much more. Likewise, the Kaiser Chiefs have also cancelled their American tour to avoid yet more chubby and inept wobbling. Sadly it's to write more songs, but it's the thought that counts.



## //film & tv

*Big Brother* finished but no one really cared enough to call it news. Thankfully, the money raised from it must have been spent, at least in part, on getting *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* a regular spot on More 4. The pilot was worth the fee alone, but the fact

it was axed in America at the end of the first series means it won't be costing a lot in re-investment.

In the land of film, the summer blockbusters have come to a close with *The Bourne Supremacy* probably being the one that gets to look down on the others

smugly, before forgetting why and getting into a car chase, perhaps followed by a robot truck.

And with *Doctor Who* taking a gap year after the next series, both Disposable Media and the BBC will have to find something else to centrepiece at some point.



## //comics

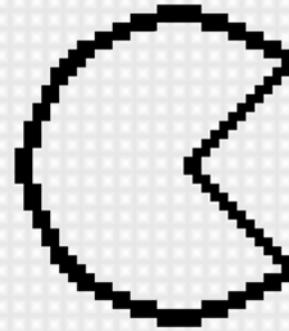
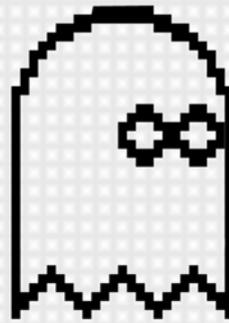
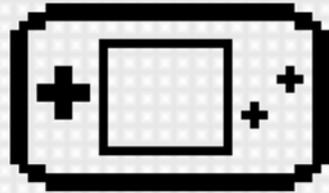
Rather than try and work out what is going on in *Countdown* (essentially nothing), DC has announced a couple of interesting projects. First a new *Vigilante* ongoing series, a character which was host to some interesting stories in the eighties. Second, a super-cute version of the *Teen Titans* for kids. It really is super, duper cute.

Marvel meanwhile seems to have finally managed to get away

from Captain America, focusing instead on *World War Hulk*. It's a pretty simple idea - Hulk Angry, Hulk Smash - but it has provided the summer blockbuster quality that *Amazons Attack* failed to do for DC (see mini-reviews).



And finally, *Suburban Glamour*, McKelvie's pet project to follow his work on *Phonogram* will be launching in mid-September. Of course no-one knows if it will be worth reading yet, but it'll certainly look good.



# games

Whilst it might not be something you would associate with the typical stereotype, Disposable Media's resident game enthusiasts have been watching their weight recently, and some of the hardest decisions during production of this section have revolved around the material that can be dropped in favour of substitutes, postponed for the next issue, or stockpiled for Disposable Media's inevitable expansion beyond these pages.

With the rather disappointing summer forgotten, it's a perfect excuse to be stuck indoors with a gamepad, keyboard or handheld, and we promise to serve as an ideal companion, both now and in the very near future...

**Dan Gassis**

Games Editor

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**currently playing ...**

buzz: the mega quiz / fable 2 / earthworm jim / bioshock / senko no ronde / boogie / elite beat agents





**“ I’M GETTING OLDER:** in fact, I’m turning 30 this year. And yet, oddly, my friends and family are less shocked and appalled by the passing of time than I am. Especially when it comes to the effect it’s had on my gaming.

Working, paying bills and DIY duties not only take their toll on the time I have available for gaming, but paying for food and electricity also means I can’t justify disposing as much of my income on software. It’s particularly annoying that my shortcomings are now publicly displayed on my gamertag, when years of obsessive Amiga, Megadrive and Playstation games only live on in my memory.



## BADGER TAILS

**DM EDITOR DAN THORNTON EXPLAINS WHY ALWAYS DYING HAS GIVEN BIRTH TO HIS NEW OUTLOOK.**

I did think that downloading shorter games from the Live Arcade would solve the problem, as I’d be able to race through games in the precious spare moments I have. But it seems like age has struck again, and my reactions have atrophied to the point that *Street Fighter 2* leaves me as confused as Grandpa Simpson as my opponents pummel me into submission in seconds. Don’t they realise I had the SNES game on import? That I’d mastered it in my teenage years? And by rights, they should be letting me win?

**“IT SEEMS LIKE AGE HAS STRUCK AGAIN - MY REACTIONS HAVE ATROPHIED TO THE POINT THAT *STREET FIGHTER 2* LEAVES ME CONFUSED. DON’T THEY REALISE I HAD THE SNES GAME ON IMPORT? THAT I’D MASTERED IT IN MY TEENAGE YEARS? AND BY RIGHTS, THEY SHOULD BE LETTING ME WIN?”**

Years ago, I’d have said I was good at games. Not one of the best gamers in the world, but able to hold my own against most people. And I did so across a pretty varied range of genres at the same time, due to the hours spent abusing joysticks and joypads. By now my time should have come, as tournaments become more popular and even get televised in the UK. And yet my last competitive tournament was a lesson in *Halo 2* humiliation, as not only did I get knocked out early on, but the clan mates I thought were skilled also fell under the attacks of players half their age. If they can’t even melee a 14 year-old, what hope do I have?

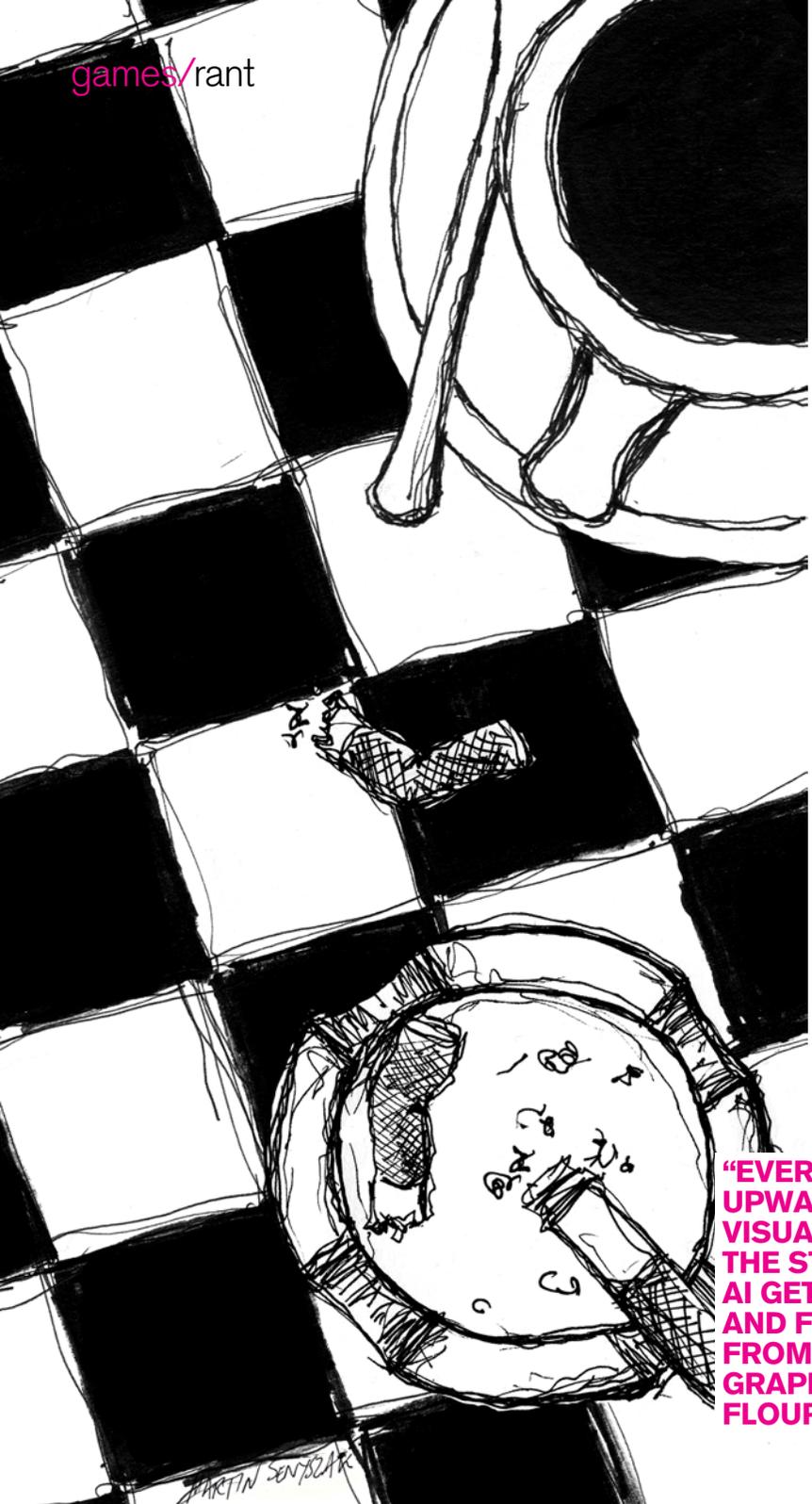
I could try switching to strategy games, but that involves a new PC, patience (which I don’t have), and planning (which I also don’t have). I can enjoy the likes of the *Total War* series, but still sit with a puzzled look when my army gets beaten for no apparent reason.

And strangely, *Championship Manager* has got less involving now - when I’m expected to pay attention to how my 11 dots move around the pitch - than when I could focus on just getting the best players possible for the lowest price.

All this has led to complex negotiations for TV rights, and a focus on just two games. For the few months, only *Forza Motorsport* and *Rainbow Six: Vegas* have received serious attention, and that’s due to the fact I’ve found two groups of gamers who are of a similar age, outlook and skill level. And they don’t mind if I show up late on a Friday night after a few beers and proceed to stumble into every frag grenade.

I’ve now realised that I’m unlikely to produce a concept for a million-selling game, or become a superstar programmer. I’m not going to become world famous for fragging Fatal1ty or winning world *Forza* tournaments. I’m probably never going to complete the games I already own, let alone any new ones. And although I spend a lot of time working on DM, it’s generally spent on organising everything, not reviewing games. So, 25 years after embracing gaming on my ZX Spectrum, I’ve embraced a new approach to video games. It’s called ‘having fun’, and I’m hoping it’ll catch on. If not, could someone start a veteran’s category in tournaments?

”



**“ THE LOYALISTS PREFERRED** using a power drill. A pistol worked just as well, but it was too messy.

Too risky. When you have a man pinned facedown against the concrete, with the barrel of the gun pushing into back of his knee, squeezing right into the spongy gap where the four leg muscles join, the bullet is guaranteed to strike the patella.

Shatter it, cap it right off, but the bullet could fly anywhere. Ricochet back at you, or someone holding him down, or jolt up the leg like a thunderbolt. Could just sink into the concrete. Could kill the fucker. No, too risky. A drill worked fine. A bit slower, but it would eat away at the



# CONFESSION BOX

**ROB CROSSLEY COMES CLEAN: HE WANTS TO FEEL DEEPLY INFERIOR TO AI.**

heads in *Fight Night Round 3*, you can smell the bitter morning air the moment you step onto City 17 for the first time.

But every notch upwards the visual bar goes, the standard of AI gets further and further away from allowing graphics to flourish. We may be able to explore a world brimming with visual fidelity, we may be able to make out the bark on trees, the blades of grass printed onto textures, the flickering image above a fire. But the moment an NPC can't open a door, or can't see you through a window, or can't shoot the flammable oil barrel that *you're* standing next to, all that hard work on rendering and animating is suddenly undone. You're back in the computer game, playing against nothing more than a sophisticated calculator.

And you may feel that we'll never have a referee that tends to let things slip at Stamford Bridge, or an enemy grunt that improvises shoots at the chandelier fixture directly above you, or even a citizen that can tell you, blatantly, look like an assassin. But just look at the distance graphics have traveled throughout the developer's obsession with it. If such enthusiasm and focus shifted to AI, anything could be possible.

Who knows. One day, when you're spraying bullets into a ragdoll corpse to inch it down the stairs, just so you can gleefully watch it tumble, one of his brethren may just be watching from afar. Witnessing it all, programmed to feel ill with anger, programmed to bottle it all up. Who knows, he might then calmly walk to the nearest tool shop, take a power drill, and patiently prey on you until your guard slips.

After all, these things happen.

”

cruciate ligaments, chew 'em right up, which was – obviously – a bonus.

It was used by the Provisional IRA to deter, and control, thieves and dealers. Kneecapping, so it was called, became commonplace in Northern Ireland during the seventies. And since walking and running are daily necessities in the thievery and trafficking businesses, it became a very effective form of deterrence. Some surgeons in Northern Ireland would perform operations to repair the kneecap on a daily basis. The Royal

Victoria Hospital in Belfast fast became the world's most advanced treatment centre for injuries to the knee and leg. It still is today. You ever have a problem, trust me, go there.

**“EVERY NOTCH UPWARDS THE VISUAL BAR GOES, THE STANDARD OF AI GETS FURTHER AND FURTHER AWAY FROM ALLOWING GRAPHICS TO FLOURISH.”**

# TROUBLEWITCHES

## EPISODE 1: DAUGHTERS OF AMALGAM

[CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD](#)



“ EVERY STAGE'S BGM IS RICH AND DETAILED, WITH MANY LAYERS OF RHYTHM AND MELODY ”

Despite the fact *DM* often uses this column to promote low-key, inventively deviant games that would easily be missed by those who don't bother looking for them, it's sometimes just as enjoyable to revel in the kind of games that take a proven formula and polish it until it's lovely presentation and tight gameplay could have you mistaking it for a retail curio on, say, the PSP. This is one such game.

To give it its full title, *Trouble Witches – Episode 1; Daughters of Amalgam* is packed with such vibrancy and detail that its presentation alone is enough to bring a smile to the face of anyone tired of WWII trenches or sci-fi corridors, and the gameplay is engaging enough for the experienced shoot 'em up fan whilst remaining less intimidating than curtain-fire games such as *Perfect Cherry Blossom*. What can intimidate is the initial download – a file size of over 100MB is quite a departure from what this column is used to covering; however, *DM* believes that if the game is worth your time, it will be featured. Introduced with some of the excellent presentation mentioned previously, you can quickly skip through the Japanese dialogue that punctuates the stages and boss encounters (not unlike *Perfect Cherry Blossom* and *exCeed*) and jump into the action without too much trouble. Alleviating the RSI typical of the genre, *Trouble Witches* also has an autofire that fires out shots in bursts, so it's not going to wear out your fingers too much. Such a casual approach to play suits the beautifully saccharine presentation of everything, and while the backdrops and sprites run the risk of stealing the show, the bullets never get lost in the detail.

In addition to the carefree blasting, there are naturally stronger enemies that take a few more hits (but nothing that will trouble you too much), and the action is also occasionally punctuated with mini-bosses who stay onscreen until their health bar is depleted, again echoing *Perfect Cherry Blossom*. There are shops offering various items which can be bought with the gold you collect from fallen enemies (when an

enemy is destroyed coins will spill out and fall rapidly down the screen, so each kill is followed by a dash to grab the coins before they disappear offscreen) – unfortunately, the Japanese origin means that you'll have to experiment with the items you buy. By default, items are activated with the C key. Meanwhile, Z fires your gun as per most games of this ilk, and X toggles a rechargeable shield you have from the outset. Bullets that come into contact with this shield are slowed down, and can then be shot for coins; a masterstroke in gameplay mechanics, as it means that greedy players that try and convert bullet storms into coins - when they could just as easily dodge them - will find themselves in a bullet hell later, with little to no shield power.

Whilst the visuals are immediately arresting and the gameplay welcoming to both veterans and newcomers, it would be unjust to overlook the musical score in this game. Whilst it maintains the cutesy theme laid out by the graphics, every stage's BGM is rich and detailed, with many layers of rhythm and melody culminating in a soundtrack that plays a big part in the arcade-style characteristics of *Trouble Witches*, exemplifying the manifesto detailed in the opening of this article.

However, the game isn't criticism-free: like *Perfect Cherry Blossom* et al, there is an abundance of screamed Japanese soundbites during gameplay that may irritate those who aren't already accustomed to such intrusions; also, the indecipherable dialogue which precedes each boss encounter might be seen as a nuisance to some. There is one small gameplay criticism as well, as this game isn't the kind of bullet hell endurance test so expertly exemplified by *Kenta Cho* and *Shanghai Alice*, and veteran shoot 'em up fans may find that it takes a while to get going. Conversely, one could argue that a frenetic pace would be at odds with the blissful atmosphere created by the presentation, and from that perspective, *Trouble Witches* proves to be a breathtakingly fun shooter that no-one should be afraid to sample.

# DISPOSABLE MEDIA AT THE DEVELOP CONFERENCE

**THE ANNUAL DEVELOP CONFERENCE, A GATHERING SPOT FOR THE BEST IN THE UK GAMES INDUSTRY, TOOK PLACE IN BRIGHTON EARLIER IN THE SUMMER. DM WAS THERE AND TAKING NOTES...**

**WORDS:** JIM MILES AND ANDREW REVELL  
**DESIGN:** ANDREW REVELL

**W**alking down from the train station in Brighton was an experience in itself. Despite not knowing exactly where the event was, it soon became obvious that a certain-type-of-person were all heading in a specific direction. Naturally, all ended up in the same place and all were sharing an auditorium for the first key-note.

There was a common theme between talks, despite some getting bigger attendances than others. Few said that "this is

what you should do" while many said "we think it would have been better if we'd done this" or "we hope to do this" or just "what do you think about this?" It gave it all a much more refreshing feel than something like E3 will ever have.

In fact, chances for the developers to get together, just as they did here, are few and far between. Seemingly every UK based developer had taken advantage of the chance to get their staff inspired a little more, and

likewise the number of people flying in was almost as impressive.

There were also almost as many members of the press in attendance, each on the prowl for a little tidbit of an exclusive. However, the aim here isn't to break news, but rather to give an important insight into what was a thoroughly interesting couple of days via snippets from conversations, talks and interviews.

At Develop itself, the talks were split into

categories - something that's been maintained here in the colours of the talks - keynotes are purple, coding talks are yellow, art talks are turquoise, design based talks are red and production dark blue. Finally, light blue talks are the non-serious events put on during lunch times and the one that brought the event to a close. Handy arrows follow the set path between talks, though boxouts are completely separate.

## NCSOFT - ONLINE GAMING

Featuring: Tabula Rasa

For those who were aware of online gaming before the likes of World of Warcraft and Xbox Live, the name Ultima Online is likely to be instantly recognisable. It wasn't the first online game by a vast margin, but it might have been the first to prove MMOs could be seriously profitable ventures. Knowing now how successful UO became, it's hard to accept that, at the time, everyone was certain it would fail and little money was invested in its development. Once the game's beta test had 50,000 people paying \$5 each and it was considered that it might be a success, Ultima Online went on to outsell the rest of the Ultima series put together.

A decade later, little has changed. "Grinding" has become an accepted term, missions all involve going somewhere and killing something (to the point where people no longer read mission briefings) and any AI is non-existent. With people paying monthly, it should be a genre focused around change and improvement, but it isn't. One use of the money should be new products and subscription schemes, all operating in a unified system to discourage people from moving to the competition.

With so many criticisms raised, most of the talk about Tabula Rasa was simply confirming that it won't suffer from them. Faster, less random combat. AI interaction. And so on. **AR**



## ONE LIFE LEFT

One Life Left is a weekly radio show that spends an hour ostensibly talking about videogames. Significant portions of that are actually spent being quite silly, however. Hosted by Ste "used to work for Edge" Curren and Simon "the columnist in Develop Magazine" Byron, it has managed to become the most popular gaming podcast on iTunes.

This live rendition was no different aside from a change of title and being slightly less organised due to the lack of equipment. An insightful interview with one of the yellow-shirted volunteers helping out, as well as some live music, it provided an entertaining backdrop to the canteen's free sandwiches. **AR**

## RETRO REVISITED

Featuring: Jet Pac Refuelled

This was one of the more confessional presentations and struggled to explain quite how a remake of a Spectrum game took one of the UK's foremost developers 18 months to complete. Of course, with Rare involved, that was always going to be the case. Rather than giving attendees the chance to take a pop at poor timekeeping, the feeling was actually one of respect. Every stage of development - from getting started, to adding multiplayer and deciding on an art style - was an organic process packed with the



kind of trial and error (and fun) that most developers seem to lack. Each challenge was solved individually, but the major breakthrough seemed to come when hiring bona-fide genius Will Overton to create a title screen that went on to influence the entire art style. True to Rare's reputation however, the image didn't actually get to appear on the title screen...

Despite disappointments, such as multiplayer dropping from eight players to four players and finally down to just two, most attendees couldn't help but to leave impressed. Sure, most companies can't afford that form of development even for a small team, but few would argue it wasn't a desirable method for recreating classics. **AR**

## TEXTURES AND SHADERS

Featuring: Project Gotham Racing 4



Of course, people attended the PGR4 talk to hunt for new information regarding the game itself, but talk regarding actual play was smartly side-stepped. What there was, in bucketloads, was maths, Photoshop and a little bit of creative thinking. That isn't to say it wasn't interesting and well presented, but if you didn't know what radiosity was there wasn't much there for you. Take away this thought: Despite every artist having access to their own development kit, it is still almost impossible to convince them that their work is frequently invisible. **AR**

## WRITING FOR GAMES

Seemingly scripted, the way this talk was handled gave it an odd feel. Whilst the three writers conducting the talk were all passionate about games and their input into them, it still managed to feel like hard work.

TV and Film writers might be excellent at their craft, but that doesn't mean they understand games. Games journalists might know about games, but that doesn't mean they know how to write for different characters. And so on. The conclusion was obvious: hire more games writers. But being walked through the whole process made the talk worthwhile. **AR**

## ART FOR CRYSIS

Featuring: Crysis

Being shown a slideshow of tank and personnel pictures doesn't sound that interesting. There were so many iterations, each slightly different, that hearing why each got rejected was utterly fascinating but impossible to convey.

If nothing else, it gave faith that the game will be more than just a technical marvel on release; it will be something that has had a significant amount of creative thought put into the smallest parts of art creation. **AR**



## THE MAKING OF LOCO ROCO

Featuring: Loco Roco

When an astoundingly original and good looking game appeared on PSP, people instantly took notice of it. Long after release, Loco Roco still stands out as being different from the crowd of boring titles that populate the handheld's shelves. This was a talk showing how Loco Roco reached those shelves, from initial work on 3D games (including a rolling demo of a long scrapped title) through showing an initial Flash created video of Loco Roco.

The talk, which ended with the news that there will be a sequel on PSP, was followed by a showing of the PS3 version - Loco Roco Cocorecho! Kouno promised that it will have much greater crowd AI and physics implementation, but it would still keep the series' clean and distinctive style. Disposable Media caught up with him to ask a few more questions...

### DISPOSABLE MEDIA INTERVIEWS: TSUTOMO KOUNO



**Disposable Media:** How did you get into the games industry?

**Tsutomu Kouno:** After I graduated from college, I applied to the games industry to Sony and got a position.

**DM:** Straight away?!

**TK:** Uh-huh.

**DM:** What made you want to work in the games industry, and what did you think you'd be able to achieve when you got there?

**TK:** I wanted to create something that would surprise everybody.

**DM:** You succeeded.

**TK:** [laughs] Not yet!

**DM:** Loco Roco is a very original game and before it many PSP titles seemed too similar. Was it a deliberate decision when you made Loco Roco to think "Let's do something different for the PSP"?

**TK:** Actually before the PSP I was thinking that there are a lot of similar titles in the game industry, even on the PS2 and other

consoles as well. After the PSP was released worldwide I wanted to create something very special for it.

**DM:** So originally it wasn't just the PSP that you thought about this being on, but everywhere?

**TK:** Yeah.

**DM:** Loco Roco looks very different from the other games that were around at the time, do you think that was important?

**TK:** Visual image is the most important part of my titles. Because the user always sees the visual image first of all. For instance, the user watches the TV and sometimes sees the videogame on a TV commercial. They don't understand totally about the gameplay but they are going to get some idea from the visual image so it is a really important part. Also in the retailers they are going to see the packshot, a lot of video images, and footage. They just see a lot of the visuals, not the gameplay. So if you communicate the correct message to the user by the visual images then the title will be a success. Also if the user checks the specialist magazines, there are so many titles, so a title should be outstanding in its visual image preview. I wanted to create a visual image for a very original title. I also wanted to communicate this title to casual gamers and to females.

**DM:** Was it important that Loco Roco was easier to play so that people who perhaps weren't so good at games could still enjoy it?

**TK:** Actually there are three most important factors for Loco Roco. One is the visual

image - we wanted to really surprise people. Another one is the AI. The last one is the gameplay - the controls. I went and created very simple controls. In Loco Roco I used 2D and not 3D because if I created 3D titles some Roco users who are casual gamers cannot make some distances. 3D has deep lengths and heights, but 2D doesn't care about depths and heights.

**DM:** What are the best and the worst things about working in the games industry?

**TK:** The best thing is to have a complete game title! [laughs] to make it so it's different for all users, and get the feedback directly. The worst thing...[long pause]...I don't think about this as my worst thing but usually I have to work in an office in front of a PC and I have to watch the PC always.

JM



## MAKING GAMES FOR MIYAMOTO'S WIFE

Featuring: Buzz

As much as anything else, this was a talk about perception, the theory being that any company should be capable of making games for Miyamoto's wife (the most casual of casual gamers) as long as they think carefully and act with restraint when producing games. Keep to things as simple as possible and only try and sell a concept they already understand - from bowling, to IQ tests, to television quiz shows.

The same applied to games journalists too. IGN were picked out for being less than positive about the first time Buzz was shown and, when it failed to light up the charts, few were surprised. Only when it came back to the top five and stayed there over the Christmas period, selling vast numbers in the process, did people take notice. Worryingly, the suggestion was that all casual games are treated in this manner and that everyone - journalists and developers alike - need to stop looking down their nose at what is an incredibly successful genre.



### DISPOSABLE MEDIA INTERVIEWS: DAVID AMOR

**Disposable Media:** Firstly, how has the conference in general been going for you?

**David Amor:** Great. You tend to develop games in isolation for long periods of time and it is nice when you come to events like these to hear other people talk and realise they are facing the same hurdles as you are. I love these developer oriented events.

**DM:** About Buzz specifically - Which has been your favourite one so far?

**DA:** There is nothing that can compete with the first time, talk about a little developer punching above its weight. Hugely exciting to make a game in twelve months that went on to sell millions and to see it go from being something that no-one really cared about to something everybody cared about. That was fantastic.

**DM:** And to play?

**DA:** To play, I love the Music Quiz anyway because it is inherently fun just to try and guess clips of music. Who the artist is, what the title is. It sounds simple, but it happens to be really entertaining so I really enjoy that. Mega Quiz that came out this year really had a good development time, a full year so all the ideas we had stored up we were able to put those all in so I like that one because it was the product that we wanted to make.

**DM:** There was a big jump in quality, and

perhaps confidence, between the first general knowledge quiz and the second.

**DA:** To be blunt the second one we did [Big Quiz] had a short development time, I think we approached it by saying, fine, we'll take out the music clips of Kylie Minogue and stick in questions about the Eiffel Tower and it will work. But in actual fact when you take out the music and the guessing who it is then it leaves quite a hole. It was tougher than we thought. I think it was still a great game and a lot of people enjoyed it, and was very successful, but it took a lot longer than we expected to make the general knowledge game we really wanted to.

**DM:** How do you feel the Buzz Junior games have been working out as a concept?

**DA:** I think from Sony's point of view it has done very nicely, they sell a lot of them. I haven't been involved in any of them directly, but Robo Arcade is really good and accessible, a well-targeted game. I think they're crazy for trying to do forty mini-games, I would have done far less and not given myself a hard time. But they're very well implemented and popular games.

**DM:** The quiz master mode in Buzz...Do you think people use it a lot?

**DA:** I think the thing we find with Buzz games is that Quiz Master mode is great on paper, but in reality on a drunk Saturday night with all your mates around you pressing all the buttons that make it go quickest to the game so anything that is first choice on the menu really gets played. I don't think it is as popular as other modes, but it is certainly something that will be expanded in future Buzz games.

**DM:** Outside of your own games, what have you been playing recently?

**DA:** A lot on the DS, but Mario Kart is still

the office favourite two years after it came out. I pick up Nintendo first-party titles as a matter of course as there's always something to be learned from them.

**DM:** What do you make of the current range of consoles?

**DA:** I think its early days yet, I was really excited about the Wii, stood in line with all the rest of them to get it as soon as I could. I love Wii Sports, liked Zelda but now I'm just waiting for more games that I want to play on it. Most of the games I want to play are on the PS2, I'm waiting for a decent catalogue of games to exist across all the next gen consoles. More games please!

**DM:** And finally, are you looking forward to the Buzz: The Videogame event this afternoon?

**DA:** Yes and no. When going in front of a bunch of developers I'm conscious there might be bugs in it or the game might crash and that would be a bad thing to happen. It should be good though, it plays well in these kind of events.

AR



## INNOVATIONS IN GAME DESIGN

Featuring: Fable 2

Theoretically, Peter Molyneux was meant to be taking a back seat in this presentation, but that soon proved impossible as many originally expected.

The presentation started with a demonstration of a fighting system tied to the music in the scene. Despite using placeholder graphics and a few glitches, it was still impressive; drums and orchestra appearing as if directly controlled by a director, as was the intention.

The Fable 2 demonstration showed this in action, as well as various other features such as using walls and general positioning in combat. A reasonable amount of the show was spent starting a debate focused on whether a character's death should act as a punishment. After much discussion as to whether or not to show a hitherto unseen feature, the entire crowd were disappointed when



it was shown but was nothing more than the character being altered to appear stronger, as in Crackdown.

Disappointment aside, Fable 2 is looking good and development seems more focused than Fable's ever was.

AR

## OPINION JAM 2007

Much like One Live Left (hosted by the same pair), Opinion Jam was an opportunity for industry luminaries to rant for three minutes about something they felt passionate about. After their three minutes was up, "The Devil's Advocate" Simon Byron was allowed to cross-examine their statements, essentially ripping them to shreds.

Clearly some people didn't like the idea and dropped out, but those that were left argued with varying degrees of seriousness about everything from 'more writers should be employed by games companies' to 'games should just be called games'. Silliness reached a head when Opinion Jam ran out of speakers - even after Ellie Gibson had volunteered. Impulsively, Disposable Media's Andrew Revell went next and argued against over-preparation, despite having done no preparation at all. Entirely daft, but good fun was had by all.

## CREATING GAMES FOR THE NEXT GENERATION Featuring: The Outsider



David Braben's talk concerned the types of games we ought to be making with the current technology, as opposed to the kind of games that are actually being made. A running theme was that of respectability - that the games industry should aim to be making works which command the level of analysis and depth found in older media such as film and literature. Braben described how each wave of earlier consoles had caused big shake-ups in developers' approach to game design, but that this attitude seemed to be tailing off with following generations only offering the same games with flashier graphics. In his own words: "If it was worth doing it then, then it ought to be worth doing it now, if we want to get the most out of the consoles".

Naturally, his talk was largely focused on

his new title, The Outsider, and how it is trying to really use the new technology to make a new kind of experience. Braben showed how modelling muscle structure allows any character to convey complex expressions and body language, allowing a "vast range" of characters to populate a city. Perhaps the most exciting moment came near the end, where a scene from the game was shown, featuring Jameson (the game's lead) under fire in an office and, later, a conversation where he persuades a cop to help him in the ensuing firefight. One of the questions asked after the talk concerned this exchange where it was asked "presumably that conversation is pre-recorded?". Braben's reply was as tantalising as the talk itself: "Well, that's a big assumption". **JM**

**NEXT ISSUE:** A full interview with David Braben about his career, The Outsider and Elite IV.

## PRODUCTION WORKSHOP

Of all the sessions at Develop, Don Daglow's production workshop promised the most to those actually working in development studios wanting to improve their chances of success and long term survival. His talk focused primarily on communication difficulties between studio, marketing departments, publisher, and even the end user. A classic line was from the attitude he believes a marketing department holds: "if you tell them the truth, it will never happen". It was this kind of sagacious understanding of the component parts of the game production process which made Daglow's talk so useful. Accompanied with his friendly manner, throughout the whole talk he treated the audience as fellow developers with experience of common problems in the industry, instead of talking down to his listeners. Despite this, the session was very much a "guru session", an imparting of insights from someone who has been in the industry since he very early days. For anyone ever likely to pitch a game, the long section on talking to publishers and investors would have been invaluable, his

bottom line being "It's very hard to sell games through hand waving. If you're waving your hands people can get the wrong idea".

Following Daglow's session was project manager Jason Evan, from BlackRock. Evan's segment focused on getting things done, stating that "a list makes you lazy" and believing that traditional project management can often lead to "a web of happy lies". Jason's message was about doing, not than saying, giving plenty of advice to avoid such perennial problems as feature creep and satisfying investors. Though Jason's focus on project management was content-filled and gave some superb insights into the Agile development method, it was perhaps a throwaway comment he made which is most precious to a developer working in today's industry: "It's not the publisher's job to decide if something is feasible, you have to tell them what is and isn't". **JM**

## GAMES DESIGN ROOM 101

The Games Design 101 session was a minefield of crude, unoriginal gags and bad improvisation, which was unfathomably well received by most of the audience. Somehow David McCarthy's usual humour failed to translate to the live panel format. Some of the features consigned to the room were SuDoku and unrealistic sword wielding, as well as a few hit and miss suggestions from the floor. Some insightful observations aside, this opportunity for meaningful design analysis was reduced to student humour, instead of touching a level of sophistication commensurate with the rest of Develop. **JM**

## BUZZ: THE VIDEOGAME QUIZ Featuring: Gaming Industry Luminaries

Finally an opportunity for a panel of knowledgeable experts (Molyneux, Cecil and more) to prove that they know less about videogames than the two random volunteers picked out from the crowd.

Hosted, again, by Simon Byron and using a special version of Buzz created by Relentless just for this session using questions created by Develop Editor Michael French. And David Amor must have been delighted that it didn't crash once. Aside from ending too quickly, it was a fun end to the conference. A disappointing lack of heckling, however. **AR**

With the Buzz event brining Develop's proceedings to a close, DM is left to reflect on the free bars, lots of beer, disappearing writers and a jazz band forced to do more encores than they probably ever expected.

Disposable Media must also take this opportunity to thank Alison B, Charlotte L and DM's Rob for making our attendance possible and everyone involved in the conference for putting on a splendid event. Thanks!

# SECOND OPINION

DAVID DOESN'T TAKE HIS WORDS BACK, HE DOESN'T PLAY TONY HAWKS ANYMORE AND HE DOESN'T HATE NINTENDO AT ALL. HERE'S WHY.

WORDS: ROB CROSSLEY DESIGN: RYAN LANDER

“I'm going bowling later, but not on the Wii!” Just a few minutes into our second interview with David Perry, it's surprising that we forgot just how relaxed and spirited he can be about things. It was only five days ago when his comments in regards to the Wii's appeal spread across the internet, and the flaming began.

“I'm one of the few developers that doesn't have a publisher PR department breathing down their neck all the time. So when I get to do an interview, I speak my mind. I just say how I feel, the press appreciate that. And I do a ton of interviews, so the conversations I have about gaming can go just about anywhere.

“500 interviews go by without a blip, but then if you mention something negative about Nintendo, it's pretty impressive the passion that stirs. Do I take my comments back? Hell no. I'm in no way a Nintendo hater. I have a Wii, I bought it the second it came out, I play it often. I've got all their machines and tons of games. There's just many issues with the Wii, and the fans just don't want to hear it.” And the flaming? Suggestions that he hasn't made anything good since *MDK/Earthworm Jim/Sacrifice/Aladdin/Cool Spot?* Is he bothered?

“Well, people can't seem to even agree on that! (laughs) And I do think a lot of the people out for my blood had just read the one line that's been posted around the web. I mean, I've met Miyamoto many times and absolutely love the guy, when I first met him he told me

that Earthworm Jim was one of his favourite western Characters!

“I personally admire how well the Wii has done. I just find it interesting to see how people turn a blind eye to its flaws. Have you tried firing up a Wii, then on the main menu screen holding the pointer and rotating it slowly? The cursor flicks around the screen! And I don't say these things to annoy people, I say this because I want I want things to be better for all of us.

“Games are all about accuracy. If you request something it better happen. The Wii controller adds some slop to the system, and that in turn goes against the golden rule that controls should be tight and perfect, which is something that Nintendo has lived off since it entered the business.

“I'm surprised how unimportant these things seem to be to people, that a slight inaccuracy is acceptable. If Nintendo can't get the jitters out, that worries me personally, as a gamer. So anyway, time will tell. Either the innovation will be enough or heads will turn. My head is already turning after E3.”

As you may have guessed, David isn't intimidated to (shock horror) speak his mind. And in an industry where blunt honesty can often be treated like a criminal offense, DM is happy to abandon the PR politics and chat with David - once again - about anything and everything.

“**I'M ONE OF THE FEW DEVELOPERS THAT DOESN'T HAVE A PUBLISHER PR DEPARTMENT BREATHING DOWN THEIR NECK ALL THE TIME. WHEN I GET INTERVIEWED, I SPEAK MY MIND.**”





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It's always been great to see you encourage new talent entering the industry. In other entertainment mediums, the tools of the trade are fairly basic and readily available; paintbrushes, pens, guitars etc. Videogame design tools are conversely esoteric and out of reach to most gamers. To what extent does this prevent fresh and innovative ideas from entering the industry, and what can be done to help the thousands of gamers with great ideas and no place to put them?

Well, there's two parts to that. One is that the complexity of making games goes up dramatically every year, and I agree that today it's pretty much impossible to enter the industry the way I did. You can't just sit at home and learn everything yourself, from programming and APIs and bump-mapping and five-channel sound and all that stuff.

So these days everything has become very much segmented, like being in a band. Programmers are drummers, artists are lead guitarists, and front men are designers. Game design has got so complex that people can only really master one of these aspects.

However, there is actually so much information available for people that want to be part of this industry. Back when I was entering the industry, you'd be lucky to find a book on programming. And if you did, you'd have to pay for it. These days everything you need to know is there on the web. There's ridiculous amounts of information available and there's a strong community of thousands of people that want to do the same thing.

I looked at a mod competition the other day that had 93,000 developers in it. These are people that are helping each other. The tools are out there, and if you get stuck with something using that tool there are thousands of people that can help you out. There are many other helpful things too, like demo maps you can load so you can begin by tweaking them and then start making major adjustments for yourself.

If you really are serious about game design then you can take college courses, which there never was before. And you can take a course in every field of gaming, design and programming and so on. So, to answer your question, the barriers between game players and makers is always getting thinner. I'd say, if you are willing to put in the effort, you have every chance of entering this industry and contributing your ideas.

Considering that the market usually responds so well to development teams and publishers that take risks, why do you think there's still an overriding trend of sequels and blatant imitations of top selling games?

Most people, in any medium to be fair, will follow the heat. Radio stations see other radio shows using a 'shock jockey' and they think 'hey we need a shock jockey'. Or they see a movie selling well like *Shrek* and think 'oh man we need another *Shrek* movie, so we should reinvent the wheel and do *Shrek 2*'. [laughs] And then they're like 'well, what do we do now?' and some complete and utter genius comes along and says 'we do another *Shrek* but only this time be really clever and call it *Shrek the Third*'.

I look at some developers who take their time, and slowly and carefully develop a game, and that means when it finally comes out people get really excited. And then on the other hand there are games like *Tony Hawk's* franchise. I mean that franchise has been milked beyond belief, it's abusive, somebody should protect games like that from so many sequels. I'm bored of it.

The only exception I would say there is that should be updated annually is sports games, they need to stay fresh as the teams can change as much over a year as the games do. To some extent, in a bizarre way, I really can't play a sports game that isn't fresh or up to date.

But ultimately, you can see how well certain sequels sell and it'd be hard for publishers to ignore the prospect of making money from it.

**Which of the three next-gen consoles would you most like to work on?**

I think the most valuable thing for me as a developer is online connectivity, now it's interesting that all three support online connectivity. Although the Wii doesn't have wired connectivity and when I'm unpacking my things I like to just stick a cable into a console and – boom – you're online.

**You can get an Ethernet adapter for the Wii that-**

If you have to buy it it doesn't count [laughs]. But the point is you can get data at a faster rate with a wired connection and both the PS3 and 360 have that as standard. And then there's the incredible graphical power of

the PS3 which really excites me too. So for me, that's the future of consoles right there. Lots of power and connectivity. Sticking Blu-ray in there I think will show itself to be a very smart move because Blu-ray is winning the format war and I'm sure it will conquer HD-DVD. Both the 360 and PS3 are delivering experiences that I'm interested in.

**What future releases are you most excited about?**

Funnily enough, I think where sequels can shine the most is in the beginning of a console's life because you know what you're expecting from those games and everything else can be a little uncertain. I'm personally very interested to see the reception to *Grand Theft Auto 4*. Of course myself and everyone else will buy a copy, but I just want to see if that's the beginning of the end for the series. Will the games get weaker or will they remain being great? Because I think Rockstar are under more and more tremendous pressure to keep on delivering that standard of game.

**Great game or not, many people feel that *Grand Theft Auto 4* will be harmful to Sony this time round. For many casual gamers, the *GTA* series is a reason to buy a console, and when *GTA4* is released simultaneously on both 360 and PS3, new customers will have a choice between a cheaper console providing more content, or a more expensive one providing less content. Do you feel that such a crowd-puller could hurt Sony?**

I'd have to agree. I'm still kind of surprised that these exclusivity deals don't happen so often. I know it costs a lot to strike a deal but even a month's exclusivity window can make a lot of difference to gamers.

It reminds me of back when the Genesis had *Mortal Kombat*, and Nintendo decided to turn the blood off for their version. Quite simply, if you're perceived as a system that has the 'lame' version of the most popular game, it's a really bad place to be.

**What are your thoughts on Microsoft's Gamerscore and Achievement points system, do you feel there are any dangers to it?**

Not at all. I think they're great, I think

people like them. Gamers want to be ranked against other gamers. Will Wright once said, 'games are the only entertainment medium that can offer pride'. Which is true, you can't feel proud listening to the radio. That's certainly one of the emotional components of gaming that we should always try to embrace.

It's something Nintendo have always done incredibly well. Every time you do something good in a Nintendo game it always makes sure that you're given a good pat on the back. That's a Miyamoto signature, really, in that he's done that consistently and so effectively throughout his long catalogue games.

So I think Gamerpoints and ranking systems are a very good way to create an additional sense of pride in the gamer.

**Do you not think that there's a danger in trying to be better than the next person in a game? It's not unreasonable to assume that the people on the top of the worldwide leaderboards spend an unhealthy amount of spare time playing videogames.**

Those people exist. They play guitar all day every day, they play piano all day every day, they watch football all day every day. These people are out there, all the Gamerscore system is doing is letting them surface. And if anything, if you're a big fan of fishing and there's this guy that catches more fish than anyone else on the planet, wouldn't you like to meet that guy? Wouldn't you like to watch him for a while and see what the heck he is doing that you're not?

In the *Dance!* game that we're doing, I think I can play reasonably well, but I see people that make me think 'how are they actually doing that?' So for me I think it's interesting, I think it's good that they can surface so we can watch them and appreciate and even enjoy what they're doing. I once saw some guy doing it on two dance mats at once! You have to go on YouTube to see this guy, he's on a different level, seriously, it's crazy.

**Have you seen the 'Daigo Comeback'?**

No. (clicks on YouTube for a moment) That's awesome! I love how the crowd go nuts when he pulls off his own super!

“**EVERY TIME YOU DO SOMETHING GOOD IN A NINTENDO GAME IT ALWAYS MAKES SURE YOU'RE GIVEN A GOOD PAT ON THE BACK. THAT'S A MIYAMOTO SIGNATURE, REALLY, IN THAT HE'S DONE THAT SO EFFECTIVELY THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER.**”



There aren't many homebrew titles that get their own production run. 'Homebrew' is a word typically associated with those endless lists of links of downloadable rookie games, which can be uploaded - via a hideously fiddly and tinkering process - to a flash memory cartridge.

When, as with *Blast Arena Advance*, a game comes in its own little case with a sticker on the cartridge, ready for instant play on an unmodded console, just one paypal click away, it's a different story entirely; there's a certain amount of 'I need to buy this in case it becomes a collector's item' hysteria incumbent on the right (wrong) sort of gamer.

Gameplay-wise, *Blast Arena Advance* is all about mastering an 8-way control system in an environment that would be more easily negotiated with an analogue thumbstick or mouse. The player's white square of an avatar must fly around a claustrophobic arena, with very rapid acceleration and an accomplished sense of inertia in any of the eight directions, to collect a small yellow square (a "flange"), which causes another to immediately appear ad infinitum.

The catch is the exploding stars, which launch shrapnel into the arena, threatening our brave white square avatar with instant death. The exploding stars spawn more and more rapidly, turning a leisurely stroll into a frantic sprint around the enclosed space both avoiding the shrapnel and trying to catch the flanges.

There's a compulsive fascination in mastering the simple controls; swooping towards a target, turning just in time to collect it in a graceful arc, or launching oneself at full pelt into a wall to rebound at just the right angle to avoid shrapnel bullets and claim another prize.

Part physics toy, part trancey zone gaming, *Blast Arena Advance* is a very simple idea executed with enough aplomb to feel like a 'real' game, and not the noveltyware that almost all such indie and homebrew titles become within two minutes' play. It's the little details like the audio equaliser background changing appearance in perfect time to sound effects and music which elevate the game above the expected watermark.

# WRITHE IN MY CAGE OF TORMENT, MY FRIEND,

SIMPLE, ADDICTIVE, INDEPENDENTLY MADE, AND AVAILABLE ON ITS VERY OWN GBA CARTRIDGE. **BLAST ARENA ADVANCE** IS HERE TO STEAL THOSE ODD FIVE MINUTES WHEN YOU'VE NOTHING FOR COMPANY BUT YOUR TRUSTY HANDHELD.

WORDS: JIM MILES  
DESIGN: KEITH ANDREW



## BLASTER MASTER

### BLAST ARENA ADVANCE CREATOR MATHEW CARR TALKS TO DM ABOUT HIS BABY, PORTING AND HIS LOVE FOR ALL GAMES, SAVE FOR ONE.

Describe *Blast Arena Advance* in less than 12 words.

[Holds up fingers] A fast paced game of abstract shrapnel evasion on Game Boy Advance.  
[pauses, holds up toes] Boy Advance.

What made you decide to make the game?

I wanted to learn how to program for the GBA, so I started some simple projects with small sprites moving across the screen, then it changed into a sliding block which could collide against the boundaries of the screen. From there I decided to see how I could fit combusteroids into the specifics of the GBA.

Is it correct that the game is essentially a remake of another title? Does that affect your feeling a sense of personal creativity about making this GBA version?

Absolutely. It's heavily based on 'combusteroids', one of the *Blast Arena* series on PC by Edd Biddulph. I enjoy porting things and poking around, I've ported BA as a Java applet before, and that was great fun. It's always a learning experience for me, especially when you try an unfamiliar platform.. I'm just lucky that the final game turned out so well!

Do you have any further plans for *Blast Arena Advance*, or once you've sold the last carts is it "case closed"?

I really have no idea. I wouldn't rule anything out. I'll probably not be doing any more GBA work for a while though.

Do you think *Blast Arena Advance* might become a collector's item, or would you produce more copies if there was ever sufficient demand to make it a much sought-after title?

It's incredibly unlikely that I'd ever make any more of these cartridges, at least using this same method; it takes too long to prepare and test each cartridge. Yeah, I did them all individually.

Do you play a lot of retail big budget games, or are you more interested in indie and freeware?

I'll play anything. Anything at all. Except maybe football management games.

**“IT'S INCREDIBLY UNLIKELY THAT I'D EVER MAKE ANY MORE OF THESE CARTRIDGES - IT TAKES TOO LONG.”**

The game's genius lies in the length of its sessions. Few players will be able to consistently survive more than a couple of minutes each go, making it perfect for burst gaming. The ten minutes of waiting for a bus are reframed as four games of *Blast Arena Advance*; the unrelenting tedium of a waiting room becomes a quest to beat the high score.

Although only offering one game mode (plus a bonus credits game of Snake), there are two score boards: one for longest survival time and one for most flanges collected. Conservativeness is rewarded with a longer game time while the risk-taking speed demon will rule the scoreboard for flange collection but may die rather quickly. This mix gives the player a choice in how they want to play and introduces an unexpected extra layer of strategy.

Such simple games can't remain fresh and exciting forever, and *Blast Arena Advance* is no exception. However, the novelty of a cartridge release does at least grant a week or so of playing time over the "ten minutes, close window, try another" level of attention which hundreds of online games of similar quality must settle for.

Indie games need to stand out to be heard, and in offering a stylishly designed game with professional music, ideal presentation, and a limited hard cartridge print run, *Blast Arena Advance* does just that.

For more details, please go to [www.mrdictionarv.net/blastarenacart/](http://www.mrdictionarv.net/blastarenacart/)



# VIEWTIFUL JOE

CAPCOM'S IDIOSYNCRATIC FIGHTER WON THE HEARTS OF SOME AND CAUSED HEARTACHE FOR OTHERS. DM INVESTIGATES A MISUNDERSTOOD MASTERPIECE

WORDS: DAN GASSIS  
DESIGN: ROB CROSSLEY



Last year, DM wrote a retrospective feature about the nine must-have titles for the Gamecube, commending *Viewtiful Joe* for its incredible visual style, tight dodge-and-counter gameplay and the specials moves that played such an important role in shaping the game's defiant approach to a genre so bloated with forgettable offerings both past and present.

It's rare these days to see a hero that makes a videogame's title. Mario and Sonic aside, only a few mascots are proud to feature in the game's title, but *Viewtiful Joe* is a game that's all about the lead role. Cocky and enthusiastic, showy and stylish, Joe's alter-ego is in a league of his own compared to the Snakes and Fenixes of the common action games.

The Viewtiful one will cheer as you nail successive combos, flex his muscles as you zoom in, and acrobatically dodge fists, feet and fireballs utilising a host of special moves. It all emphasises Joe's confidence and ability to survive, to fight, to perform under pressure. Despite the

emphasis on providing something truly spectacular to stop onlookers in their tracks, *VJ's* controls were never alienating.

Anyone willing to go through the tutorials (which are integrated flawlessly) and experiment with the potential carnage that can be created by attacking someone whilst in a post 'mach speed' blaze of fire, or dispatching multiple opponents in slow motion for a larger bonus, can learn to love this game.

Even if the ratings for V-points (obtained by using VFX powers to overcome enemies), defence and time points were absent, the game would still be deemed worthy of replay. *Viewtiful Joe* made a stronger effort than nearly any other offering in its genre to emphasise the importance of creative power-ups, of player-defined strategies, and of satisfactory feedback.

That said, it seems something of a disservice to commend the gameplay and presentation of *VJ* without giving the narrative style some thought; there are numerous nods to sentai, games and, of course, cinema.

From the parodied names of the game's chapters to the numerous ways in which the sentai production Kamen Rider has influenced the character design of Joe, and through to the inclusion of *Devil May Cry's* Dante as an unlockable character, *VJ* is a game very aware of its influences.

*Viewtiful Joe* celebrates these forms of media in a way that goes beyond the kind of self-conscious jokes about dated mechanics that the worst games fall back on. Indeed, it was a wise move to (primarily) parody a media outside of its own; those aforementioned self-conscious titles nearly always fall foul of the outdated mechanics that they are poking fun at, and only something as abstract as *Wario Ware* has arguably managed to get away with celebrating the nature of gaming in a humorous format.

The choice to portray events in a cel-shaded style also helped emphasise the cocky nature of Joe himself: presenting the game in such an abstract nature helped give him – and even his adversaries such as Hulk Davidson and Fire Leo – tons

of charisma. This was crucial, and played a major part in the game's success as a cohesive whole: whilst the writing and dialogue is excellent, shoehorning the script into a more realistic gameworld such as, say, *San Andreas*, wouldn't be half as effective, and the result is an intelligent acknowledgement of the style and character that permeates through both the gameplay and presentation.

It's a game which urges the player to do well, and is ecstatic when things are going to plan. A game with accessible controls and one-button special powers that encourage improvisation, and reward it with audiovisual spectacle. A game that marries witty observations of movie traits with some of the most memorable bosses of the last generation.

Envisioning *Viewtiful Joe* as a system seller would be inconceivable to most suits in marketing, it's no open-ended urban gang death fest, it's no wildly detailed racing sim. *Viewtiful Joe* is *Viewtiful Joe*, there's nothing like it. Truly Viewtiful.

**VIEWTIFUL JOE IS A GAME THAT URGES THE PLAYER TO DO WELL AND IS ECSTATIC WHEN THINGS ARE GOING TO PLAN.**





ELITE BEAT AGENTS

(DS)

Rhythm-action games are a blossoming genre at the moment and *Elite Beat Agents* (played solely with using the DS touch screen) is a unique addition. Available overseas for a while now, the game finally gets the attention it deserves in Europe and it's funny, entertaining and challenging in equal measures.

Tapping the screen in time to a wide range of songs seems simple at first but turn up the difficulty and it becomes a constant battle to keep the beat. Amusing cut-scenes allow a brief pause in songs and the dancing is well animated - although the

models are a bit suspect. The DS speakers are not really suited to playing music and without earphones it sounds a bit tinny. Nevertheless, apart from slightly poor quality sounds the game is great fun and perfect to wile away long train journeys or slow family holidays.

Jezz Bolton



**"FUNNY, ENTERTAINING AND CHALLENGING IN EQUAL MEASURE."**



POKEMON PEARL

(DS)

Like most RPGs, *Pokémon*'s gameplay is a sophisticated Skinner Box, where participation in mind-numbing battles is paid off with the 'reward' of bigger numbers to look at, and perhaps a new picture every once in a while. If *Pearl* had focused more on the amusing dialogue conversations and the fun fantasy setting then this scathing report would be unfair, but your time with *Pearl* is rarely anything more than abject tedium.

It's tempting to wrap *Pearl* up in a 'for kids' nutshell, but even the most naive mind will see past its blinding

colours and breezy interface. *Pearl*'s sister-game *Diamond* offers an equally grinding experience, one where you have to - again - toll the fields for the rest of your days to momentarily witness some delightful aesthetics and script. Ultimately, neither are worth your time. *Pokémon*; you're a heartless, trite money-spinner. You've out-lived your years, and are not welcome here anymore.

Jim Miles



**"YOUR TIME WITH PEARL IS RARELY ANYTHING MORE THAN ABJECT TEDIUM."**



GUITAR HERO: ROCKS THE 80S

(PS2)

*Rocks the 80s* is a *Singstar*-esque song pack, but priced as though it's *Guitar Hero 3*, and not just a collection of 30 new songs. Lacking the "something for everyone" track range of the other *Guitar Hero* titles, it will be liked by 80s guitarheads or megafans of the series, but only loved by those in the overlap of that particular Venn diagram.

The lack of bonus tracks from lesser-known artists is disappointing, losing the original's long-term appeal after the hundredth play of More Than a Feeling or Sweet Child of Mine, and the 80s restriction forces in a few

chord-heavy and repetitive tracks which feel more like work than play. Combined with the dullness of familiarity throughout, this incarnation often removes the feeling of rock stardom, deflating the entire point of *Guitar Hero*.

*Rocks the 80s* walks a dangerous tightrope between franchise-devaluing cash-in and niche-focused content pack, ultimately underwhelming.

Jim Miles



**"ROCKS THE 80S WALKS A DANGEROUS TIGHTROPE BETWEEN FRANCHISE-DEVALUING CASH-IN AND NICHE-FOCUSED CONTENT PACK."**



BOOGIE

(Wii)

*Boogie* was supposed to be Wii's *Singstar* - a charming, family-friendly song-and-dance number that shared the same professional sheen and perceptive controller use demonstrated by EA Montreal's excellent snowboarder *SSX Blur*.

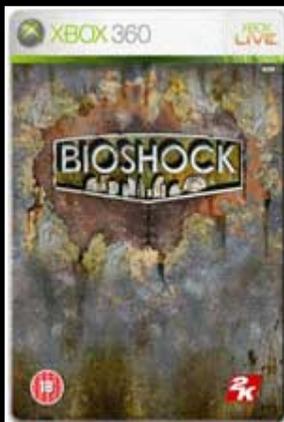
Yet it's the latest in an increasingly long line of disappointments on Nintendo's console. Presentation is typically excellent, but the gameplay is sorely lacking - karaoke isn't so much broken as embarrassingly easy (gold medals for tuneless bawling? Cheers, EA) while some tunes have lengthy sections where you're literally doing

nothing. The tracklist is a mixed bag at best - some songs are entirely unsuited to its tweenie target audience, while many of the covers are flat-out awful. Wiimote-controlled bopping is better, but still way too simple, meaning that *Boogie*'s main plus - the multiplayer party mode - is an entertaining diversion for a couple of hours, but nothing more. It's not the disaster some are claiming, but *Boogie* should have 'for rental only' printed on every copy.

Chris Schilling



**"NOT THE DISASTER SOME ARE CLAIMING, BUT BOOGIE SHOULD HAVE 'FOR RENTAL ONLY' PRINTED ON EVERY COPY."**



**BIOSHOCK**

(XBOX 360)

The first thirty minutes of *Bioshock* are amongst the most impressive the 360 will ever see, graphically, stylistically and atmospherically flawless.

Sadly, it never fulfils its initial promise whilst constantly suggesting more to come. Whilst the history of Rapture, the underwater city, is interesting, the main storyline is dull, contrived and packed full of dislikeable characters. Weapons are traditional whilst the powers eventually unlocked lack any originality - electricity, fire, ice etc. Even telekinesis is limited and over-

simplistic. Despite impressive AI it rarely gets taxed as solitary enemies are the norm outside forced set-pieces. When things do get difficult the unlimited, punishment free, restarts tempt boredom induced laziness too regularly. Over-simplifications for console gamers ruin any attempt at depth or realism.

Despite that, *Bioshock* is still an incredibly impressive game, more than deserving of purchase and completion. After that though, few will choose to return to Rapture.

Andrew Revell



**“BIOSHOCK NEVER FULFILS ITS INITIAL PROMISE WHILST CONSTANTLY SUGGESTING MORE TO COME.”**



**WARHAWK**

(PS3)

Long considered the black sheep of Sony's 2007 release schedule, *Warhawk* has finally arrived in a multiplayer-only format on the PlayStation Network. Yet despite its publisher's seeming lack of confidence, it easily trumps bigger-budget releases like shallow hack-and-slash *Heavenly Sword* and the atrocious *Lair*.

Forget those embarrassing E3 fumbblings a year ago - the Sixaxis manoeuvres work surprisingly well, though they can be exchanged for more regular flight controls for the motion-phobic. And while it's fun to

swoop and dodge through *Warhawk's* busy skies, the ground combat is equally enjoyable, and - more importantly - supremely well-balanced. Best of all, there's next to no lag - even in matches with the full complement of players. *Warhawk* may lack depth - there's only five maps, and it gets repetitive after a while - but this is an accessible, fun online experience that's well worth the £19.99 download fee.

Chris Schilling



**“WARHAWK IS AN ACCESSIBLE, FUN ONLINE EXPERIENCE.”**



**WARTECH: SENKO NO RONDE**

(XBOX 360)

Half 2D shooter and half 3D beat 'em up, this is another hint at diversity for the 360 line-up. From distance your single opponents bullets fill the screen as you dodge and try and retaliate. Close in and the view zooms in to allow a simple beat 'em up to start until players split again.

Unfortunately the copious amounts of bullets make things extremely random, especially when getting started. Easily the most annoying flaw is how slow and unresponsive everything is; it constantly feels as if the game is being played in a vat of custard.

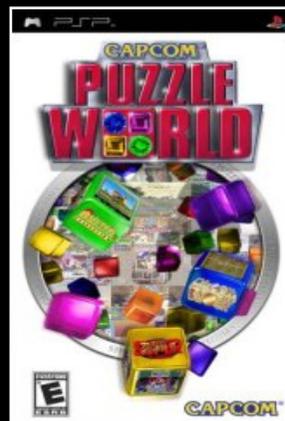
Sadly, online multiplayer isn't quick either, frequently suffering lag, especially against distant opponents. Local multiplayer is the way to play.

Despite its flaws and the fact it feels better suited to Live Arcade than a full release, this is an entertaining distraction from the multitudes of first person shooters.

Andrew Revell



**“THE MOST ANNOYING FLAW IS HOW SLOW AND UNRESPONSIVE EVERYTHING IS.”**



**CAPCOM PUZZLE WORLD**

(PSP)

This really should be renamed *Super Puzzle Fighter Turbo*, and some other games which haven't aged well at all. Of the other games, Block Block is a *Breakout* clone from 1991 which works well for a few minutes, as long as you use the D pad rather than the analogue stick.

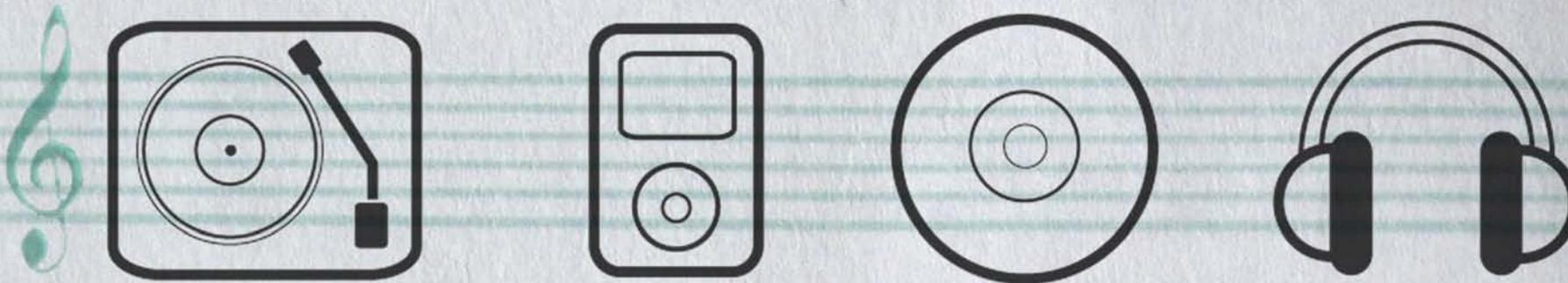
Buster Bros is also diverting for a couple of minutes, as you pop balloons with your harpoon gun, but including the *Super Buster Bros* and the inferior *Buster Buddies* means three very similar games on one compilation.

But it's *Puzzle Fighter* which makes or breaks the deal. Falling blocks, super-deformed *Streetfighter* and *Darkstalkers* characters, and the opportunity for versus and network play mean it's a PlayStation classic that transfers perfectly to a handheld. Ironically *Puzzle Fighter* could have justified a release on it's own, with all original extras, and probably would have come across as better value

Dan Thornton



**“IRONICALLY PUZZLE FIGHTER WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER VALUE ON ITS OWN.”**



**P**atience is a virtue, so we're told. But we've never been more patient waiting for the summer. When it finally materialised for just 4 sweet days, Disposable Media was lucky enough to be in a field just outside of Leeds for the Carling Weekend; our feature will let you know what you missed, whether it was of any consequence and why next year should be a lot different. Plus we tell you why Foals are the UK's best new band.

We take the time out to dissect the Mercury Music Prize for all its faults and we ask the venerable John Earls for his opinion on the judges, the nominees and those winners.

And finally with this issue's mini-reviews we give you what you asked for; a greater range of styles but still with our ever-vital opinion. Enjoy!

**Ian Moreno-Melgar**  
Music Editor  
[ian.morenomelgar@disposablemedia.co.uk](mailto:ian.morenomelgar@disposablemedia.co.uk)

## currently listening to...

klaxons / basquiat strings / new young pony club / foals / !!! / super furry animals / common / ben harper





**“** **SO - LIVE8, THEN.** No, wait - not Live8. The other one. The Al Gore one. What a complete and utter waste

of my afternoon.

I could have gone out. I could have stuck a decent record on. Hell, I could have done my own little bit for the environment, and switched the television *off*. But, no - like a complete and utter fool, I watched Live Earth for hours; waiting and hoping for *just one act* to come on-stage and blow me away. The Chili Peppers were okay. Madonna was bizarre. The morons at the BBC cut Spinal Tap. And I defy anyone to even remember the other acts that took part. Even the Diana Memorial



# JAYAITCH

**OF ALL GLOBAL ROCK GIGS, LIVE EARTHS FAILURE MAY BE ITS BIGGEST SUCCESS SAY JAMES HAMILTON**

concert eclipsed Live Earth in terms of quality.

Think back to 2005, and Live8. Paul McCartney and U2 opened with *Sgt Pepper*. Spectacular performances from world-famous acts: the Who, Robbie, Snoop Dogg, Sting, REM. That unforgettable, magical, reunion of Pink Floyd and Roger Waters. And, well - McCartney again at the end. Even so, it was an incredible concert - and that was just Hyde Park. It was truly a world event - and the world tuned in to watch. 9.6 million viewers in the UK alone. Live Earth, by comparison? An average of 2.1 million. It's hardly surprising; it was a hot, sunny Saturday

**EVERYTHING THAT WENT WRONG STILL STICKS IN MY MIND: THE CUPS, THE ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE, THE CAREFREE ATTITUDE OF THE PERFORMERS, THE PRESENTERS, THE PEOPLE.**

RECYCLABLE

afternoon, and those who did stay in to watch TV were torn between this once-in-a-lifetime global event and live Wimbledon coverage - which says it all, really.

Those gullible enough to believe this concert might have been worth watching - myself included - were plagued not only by painfully mediocre performances from painfully mediocre bands, but also absolutely horrible coverage by the BBC, who didn't seem to know how to handle the event. Bands were cut off mid-act, sometimes for no real reason; the dozens of celebrities and musicians interviewed about climate change barely seemed to know what it actually was. The Pussycat Dolls revealed they had only been told about energy-saving light bulbs at the event, while Razorlight allegedly promised

to make up for their heavy use of private jets during the event by "planting lots of trees". And the few who knew what it meant clearly didn't care either - the vast majority taking a "fuck it"-stance.

If you'll pardon the expletive, you're a step ahead of the other 2.1 million Live Earth viewers - who, rather than taking the time

to pledge their commitment to the cause, instead emailed the BBC to complain about the swearing. Apparently, that was more of an issue than the thousands of plastic cups those environmentally-conscious concert-goers *forgot to recycle*. As a music event, Live Earth was a colossal failure - forever doomed to remain in the shadow of Live8. People will remember the latter fondly for years, while this will be forgotten in months. Or even worse, remembered for the wrong reasons.

But Gore maintains that Live Earth was designed to raise awareness about climate change - and here's the interesting part. Months after the event, all of these issues still bother me. Everything that went wrong still sticks in my mind: the cups, the environmental damage, the carefree attitude of the performers, the presenters, the people. A thousand faux-pas, and each one makes me wonder "why was this handled so shoddily?"

But here's the thing: perhaps ironically, every single flaw has made me more aware of the actual issue; climate change, and what needs to be done. Not a rock concert, for crying out loud, but actual preventive steps that need to be taken. And Live Earth - not through its successes, but through its failures - brought this to light. As a music event, it will forever live in the shadow of Live8 - but Live8 was about Pink Floyd reforming. Live Earth was about climate change - and if it had been organised better, I never would have realised.

**”**



# CARLING WEEKEND

WORDS: IAN MORENO-MELGAR

DESIGN: ANDREW REVELL

**IT SHOULD BE EASY TO ENJOY YOURSELF WHEN YOU'RE SURROUNDED BY FRIENDS, BATHING IN RARE SUNSHINE AND FULL OF CHEAP CIDER. EVEN EASIER AT A MUSIC FESTIVAL FEATURING SOME OF THE BEST AND MOST PROMISING BANDS IN THE WORLD. DM BATTLED APATHY AND TWEENIES IN LEEDS, SO YOU KNOW WHICH BANDS TO DOWNLOAD.**

The 2007 Carling Weekend in Leeds would always be a success as long as it didn't rain, and lo, clear skies and a glorious 25° sunshine ensured that almost everyone was up for a party. Apart from the goth kids, obviously.

For all the usual pre-festival hype, few events could boast a reformed Smashing Pumpkins headlining on the main stage, helping to really strengthen a fairly decent line-up that catered more for the younger fans. But for every Smashing Pumpkins or Chilli Peppers, the always-brilliant Carling Tent competed with a raft of new talent and was worth investigating for an hour or six. With a heavy bias towards the unknown or just plain 'small' bands, this small tent was once again DM's main attraction. But don't think the other stages had nothing to offer, and in the case of a Leeds exclusive, the music began in earnest with local heroes Forward Russia on Thursday night. They played as part of a Dance to the

Radio showcase, that also saw the likes of Shut Your Eyes & You'll Burst into Flames, Sky Larkin and the Thursday highlight, The Grammatics, with their own brand of Bright Eyes influenced twee-pop. The downside was the terrible sound and the sheer size of the crowd; for something that was supposed to be a small opener to the festival, the 5000+ crowd made for an uncomfortably busy gig on the smallest stage, and set a precedent for the weekend.

In recent years, it's been easy to glance at the bands playing on a specific day and label it accordingly; Sunday as Metal Day for example, but this year was a much more

disparate affair with a splattering of styles and genres across all the major stages: the day's headliners dictating the day's trends less than before. This provided a much more balanced weekend, with an almost constant source of musical entertainment if you were prepared to travel across the stages - something that the relative smallness of the Bramham Park site allows you to do, as opposed to somewhere like Glastonbury, whose size almost prevents you from exploring the bands in a tight schedule. The relocation of the Carling Tent also aided this massively, being just a ten minute walk from the main stage, with the chance to wander into the tent whilst waiting for someone or something else. It also provided the real highlight of this year's festival; the 'hidden' Carling Tent Bar. Around the back of the stage and via a black tunnel

**CLEAR SKIES AND A GLORIOUS 25 DEGREES OF SUN ENSURED ALMOST EVERYONE WAS UP FOR A PARTY**

awaited a small bar replete with leather sofas, air conditioning and no bar queue. At all. A genuine treasure trove.

But to heap praise on a bar does the music a disservice. Foals, Blood Red Shoes, The Sunshine Underground, LCD Soundsystem, !!!, Arcade Fire, Brand New, Biffy Clyro, Battles, Unkle, Intepol and Jimmy Eat World (twice!) all contributed to a superb weekend of music. Foals, with their 'dance-music-with-guitars' or 'disco-fretting' as we've now coined it, were immense. Tight, vibrant and as original as any act to grace the stage in the last five years, they're setting themselves up nicely for Klaxons-esque cult-dom. Blood Red Shoes were also plugging away at the toilet circuit and it seemed to be working, a decent size crowd who knew a decent chunk of the setlist added to the atmosphere created by the primal snarling



KLAXONS

coming from the stage. They're often accused of being the English White Stripes, but there's a tremendous noise from just two people that suggests there's more to them than a being a 21st century blues duo.

Brand New's latest LP translates perfectly onto a stage and the intensity reveals another side to a band often dismissed as emo-punksters. Interpol didn't deserve to play on the atmosphere-vacuum that became the main stage, and really should have been allowed a tent to themselves at night, but still managed to pull off a quite fantastic show.

The set was a near perfect blend of old and new, and any questions over the latest material were answered when seen first hand. Other notable performances included Arcade Fire, who are always a sure thing, despite the crowd being made up of 14 year-old Chilli Pepper fans who really didn't give a shit, UNKLE for managing to convince the dance tent that the entire band were playing live (yes, there was some actual miming) and Tokyo Police Club, mostly as they've seen fit to write new material that isn't all 2 minutes in length. Sometimes shorter isn't always sweeter.

It's not all sunshine and hand claps though. From Thursday night it's clear that there are too many people for such a small site, and by Friday evening we're forced out of the Radio 1 / NME tent during LCD Soundsystem's excellent set, to make way for fans of the next

band (Klaxons). Cue much complaining and a couple of unnecessary fights. By the time we head back to our tent at the end of the Smashing Pumpkins gig on the main stage, the Radio 1 tent is at so full it's at least 20 people deep outside and almost impossible to pass.

The crowd is a problem itself - made up of Topshop princesses and children, all the main stage acts bar the headliners really struggle to get any recognition or feedback, the children waiting impatiently for their idols later than day. The obvious solution is to avoid the main stage, but when groups of kids spent a lot of time clumped aimlessly around the site, it's

necessary that the Carling weekend needs to become an over 18s event.

As Disposable Media made its collective way home, hungover, tired, relishing a shower and some vegetables, there's a prevailing sense that it wasn't so much the music that stood out this year. In a period of such rich creativity it felt odd that the established acts had to fight against a strangely apathetic crowd. Instead it was the smaller bands that really made an impression above the awkwardness of the festival's organisation and an audience who were clearly there for the wristband more than anything else.

*Photographs courtesy of James Russell, more at [www.flickr.com/photos/kazaroth/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/kazaroth/)*



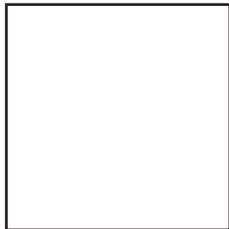
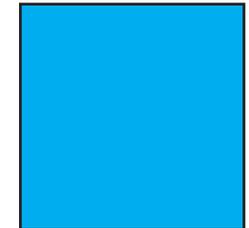
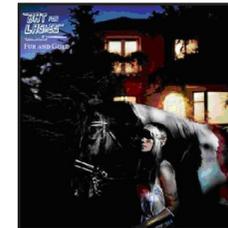
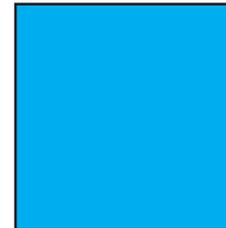
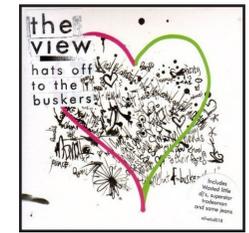
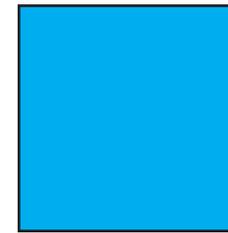
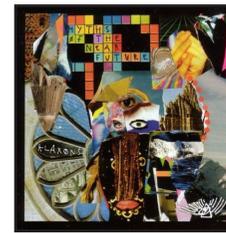
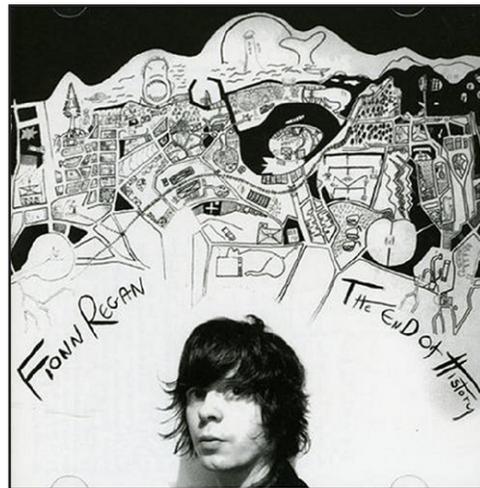
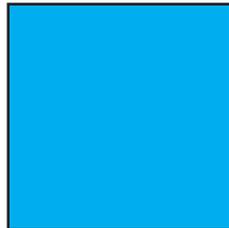
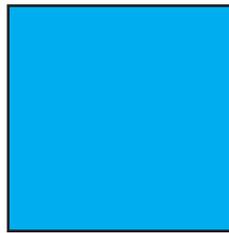
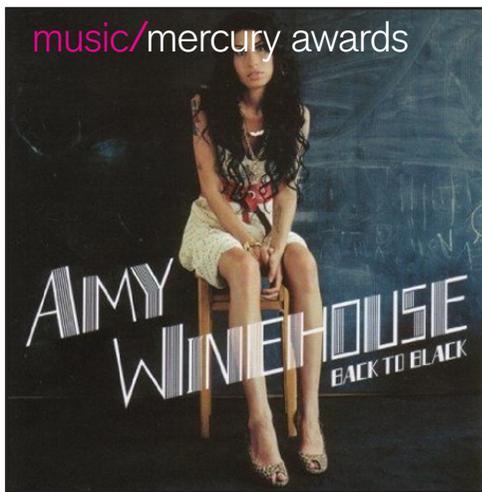
UNKLE



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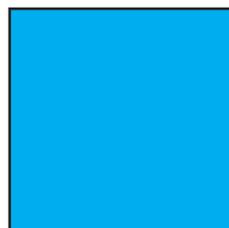
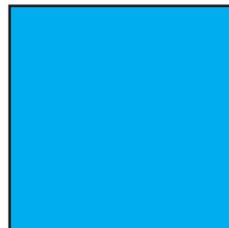
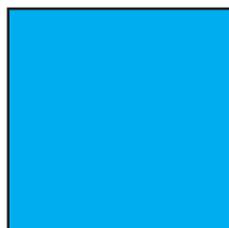
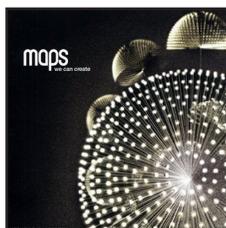
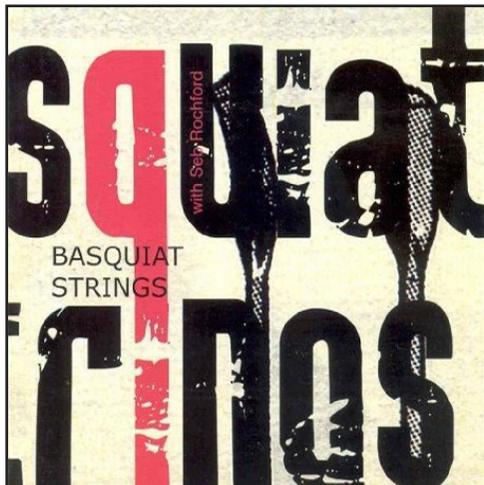
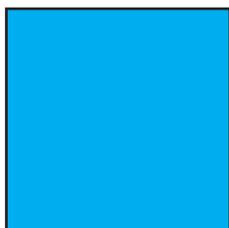
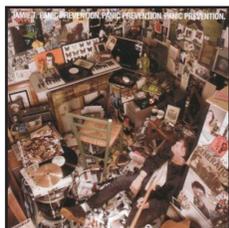
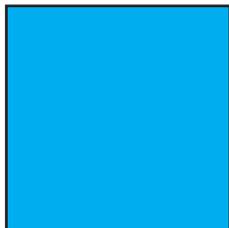


GOGOL BORDELLO



# NATIONWIDE MERCURYPRIZE

**AS THE SUMMER DRAWS TO ITS INEVITABLE CLOSE AND AS THE MUSIC INDUSTRY BEGINS TO BRACE ITSELF FOR CHRISTMAS, AN INTIMATE, VERY BRITISH AWARDS CEREMONY HONOURS ONE SINGLE ACT IN RECOGNITION OF ONE SINGLE ACHIEVEMENT: PRODUCING THE BEST BRITISH ALBUM OF THE LAST TWELVE MONTHS.**



In theory, this award should matter little; the glamour and the frivolous hype of the Brits serves record labels as well as it does viewers on TV, the Ivor Novello awards offer worthy recognition to (mostly) credible artists for songwriting and the various mainstream publications hold their own increasingly frequent awards to venerate their

demographics' favourites. An award ceremony offering one solitary prize then should get swallowed up and practically ignored, overcome with the swell of backslapping and veracious good will of other award ceremonies. That Disposable

Media is dictating more coverage to the Mercury Prize helps to highlight that this award ceremony isn't just another prize but arguably the most respected, argued-over and controversial award in UK music. Its venerability then that belies the simplicity of

the Mercury's nature: 12 nominees, one prize, one winner.

And it's those nominees that once again provide all the controversy.

In DM2 we looked at the 2006 Mercury Prize and compared the Good with the Bad, citing the inclusion of the Kaiser Chiefs' debut LP *Employment*, as an example of where the Judges fail to look beyond the obvious 'indie albums'. However, we praised the inclusion of The Go! Team's schizophrenic debut *Thunder! Lightning! Strike!* as an LP full of inventive ideas, quirky hooks and a strong identity all produced in a wonderfully confident and polished manner. And this is what The Mercury Music Prize does so well; the unpredictable nature of the nominations, the judge's odd inclusions and insistence on not following the mainstream instead seeking to honour those who pushed boundaries and put music before sales, promotions or making money. The somewhat small £20,000 prize

for the winner is hugely indicative of the Prize's original aims; would Amy Winehouse, signed to a major and with a massively-selling LP behind her, financially benefit from £20,000 in the same way that Maps, one James Chapman could do, given that he made his LP in his bedroom? It's unlikely.

It's often been said that the Mercury judges are too self-aware and that, to an extent, it's not too difficult to predict the majority of the nominees - indeed, LPs are commonly coined as 'Mercury Albums' by critics upon release owing to their sound which seems to fit the profile of previously nominated albums. Critics of the Prize often accuse the judges of tokenism when nominating 'specialist' LPs, namely jazz, classical, folk and blues artists. What music fan though could possibly reject the opportunity to be exposed to some invigorating and fresh musical styles? The artists could certainly not complain: it's often reckoned that a Mercury Nomination can double sales figures for even the most minority of acts. In recent years it's doubtful that the likes of Talvin Singh, Polar Bear, Kate Rusby, Eliza Carthy or Seth Lakeman would snub the exposure that the prize has offered them. Similarly, their fans, new (after the nomination) and old alike, are probably unlikely to criticize the judges' choice, tokenism or not. For genuine music fans, critics and artists alike, the Mercury's conscious decision to eschew the obvious, popular choices and instead reward the more obscure albums that



are able to benefit from a critically respected award is something to applaud and pay attention to.

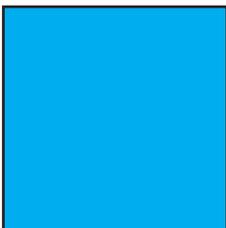
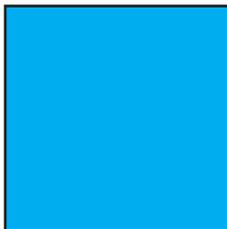
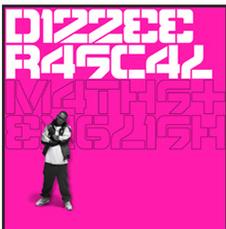
That's not to say the judges always ignore the popular artists: the Spice Girls, Robbie Williams, Simply Red, David Bowie, Take That and Van Morrison have been nominated. M People even won the award in 1994. Despite the odd surprise nomination and the controversial winner or two, the Mercury Prize has always excelled in its ability to transcend critical and commercial success with its decisions, rightly or wrongly. Roni Size's controversial win over the often lauded 'greatest album of all time' *OK Computer* was certainly a brave decision and, as an example, highlights that the Mercury Prize isn't afraid to reward individuality with its own unique interpretation of 'Best Album'; here is an award that always appears to dictate taste rather than follow it. Perhaps that's why the prize is so controversial; its critics able to question the nomination of 'token' speciality

acts or because the judges feel that they ought to portray a diverse range of styles for the sake of it? It's for this reason then, that this year's nominations have failed quite spectacularly. Instead of seeking individuality and rewarding the truly innovative albums, this year's nominations could be for any award, they could just as easily be the Brit nomination for Best Album. It seems that the judges have seen fit to reward the artists who have already achieved some success; they've chosen to nominate people who have won the award before, nominate albums that are built on hype and even artists who, arguably, lack a genuine ability. Whilst these claims are obviously subjective, it is the plain fact that at least half of the nominees have been nominated because of their success already, as opposed to their lack of it. This year's nominees are the weakest in a very long time and it's difficult to offer a real reason as to why the judges have played it so safe and nominated (mainly) bands and artists who have produced successful, rather than groundbreaking albums. Where are the albums of ambition? Where are the albums of a unique creative view? Where are the real pop albums? Where are the dance albums? As we currently enjoy a period of rich creativity coupled with success for serious artists, particularly for guitar based music, it's a shame and a waste that the most controversial, idiosyncratic music award has mostly chosen albums of high production values, high marketing budgets and well crafted PR campaigns rather than albums of genuine musical integrity, ability and vision.

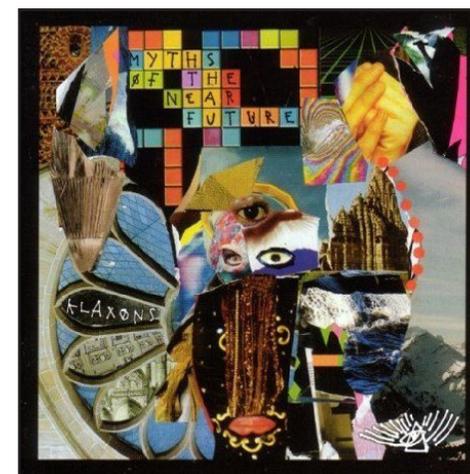
The decision to award the prize to the Klaxons was met with some consternation, but does at least, when considered out of context, highlight that the judges can try to aim in the right direction. It might be one of the year's

biggest sellers but it's impossible to criticise them for not innovating, despite all the shallow genre tags attached to them from the media. That their songs are essentially three minute pop songs but done with such creative flair illustrates why their album has crossed into the mainstream with relative ease; a technical ability more than marketing and it's unfair to criticize the judges for their decision in this case. Whilst some may argue that Amy Winehouse had the better LP, sometimes a superb voice and some canny production aren't what make a Mercury winner. Again, whether the judges have awarded the Klaxons the prize purely on merit or because they felt they ought to is for another discussion.

In the end then the 2007 Mercury Music Prize may have been awarded to the most suitable nominee given the shortlist, but with the current success of the UK music scene as a whole, perhaps it's time for the Prize to undergo a major overhaul.

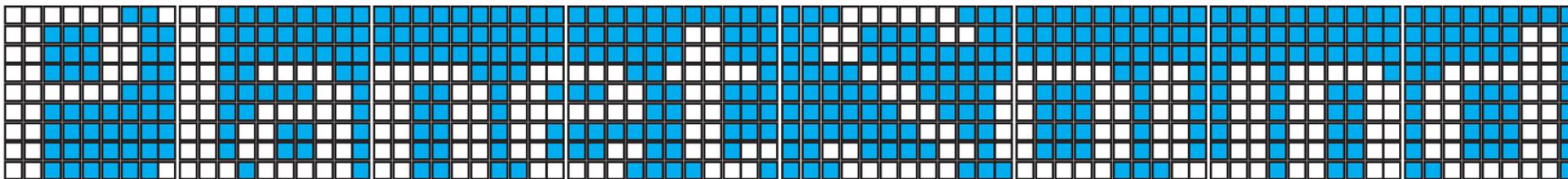


**WHERE ARE THE ALBUMS OF AMBITION?  
WHERE ARE THE ALBUMS OF A UNIQUE CREATIVE VIEW?  
WHERE ARE THE REAL POP ALBUMS?  
WHERE ARE THE DANCE ALBUMS?**



**NATIONWIDE  
MERCURY  
PRIZE  
2007  
WINNER:**

**KLAXONS:  
MYTHS  
OF THE  
NEAR  
FUTURE**



## DISPOSABLE MEDIA CATCHES UP WITH JOHN EARLS TO SEE WHAT HE MAKES OF THIS YEAR'S MERCURY PRIZE.

WORDS: IAN MORENO-MELGAR DESIGN: ANDREW REVELL

While the Mercury Music Prize generates plenty of discussion, few individuals or publications can be said to have such a vocal opinion on the prize than John Earls, writer from the wonderful teletext pages *Planet Sound*. A staunch critic of the prize throughout the years, his vitriol is always carefully considered and worthy of attention, especially given his tendency to suggest alternatives for nomination. It's for that reason then that we had a few questions to ask him about this year's prize and he certainly didn't hold back on denouncing most of the nominees, previous winners and the judges...

**Disposable Media:** We'll cut straight to the point here John; this year's Mercury Nominations: do you think it's a list which contains the 12 best albums of last year?

**John Earls:** There's probably not a single person in the country outside the judges who think this year's list is the best 12 UK/Irish albums of the past year. More than any other past shortlist, this year's contenders call into question what the prize is actually for, and is instead representative of how worryingly homogenous our music scene has become.

I use "scene" advisedly – the NME/Q artists have begun to dictate broadsheet music coverage as well as radio airplay. If you're not in their gang, forget it. Can anyone with functioning ears really say that an album as patchy as The View's is better than The Aliens', Candie Payne's, Cherry Ghost's? At least Hats Off To The Buskers has some cracking singles on it. Outside of a few

fashionistas, who cares a flying one about New Young Pony Club? Other than the singles, is Jamie T's album really that strong as a whole?

**DM:** Were you surprised by any of the nominations as opposed to disagreeing with them? Do you think there are any obvious omissions-what albums should have been on the list and why?

**JE:** While there are some worthwhile choices – Klaxons, Amy Winehouse, Maps – there are fewer than ever before. I can't think of a time when it's been easier to draw up a whole 12 alternative candidates to the ones the judges came up with. It's not the large-selling albums that are the sticking point, as Klaxons and Winehouse are good traditional Mercury contenders. It's the bland, safe, mid-ranking ones that are galling. Yes, you could say they're a fairly generic lot. Even dance music, at a time when Simian Mobile Disco are representative of how healthy it's become again, is to the judges as relevant as Token Singer-Songwriter (Fionn Regan) or Token Jazz (Basquait Strings).

It's a particular scandal The Twilight Sad's album Fourteen Autumns And Fifteen Winters

was overlooked – a band who are garnering a Mogwai/Sigur Ros-ish cult status in the US, yet totally overlooked by the media here because... why? *The NME* don't rate them? In the past, they'd have been perfect to get the kind of profile boost the Mercury offered, but they don't get a look in as The Young Knives – decent as they are – appear to be Token Oddball Indie.

**DM:** How lofty is the prize in your opinion-is it the pinnacle (in terms of awards) for many artists do you believe?

**JE:** The musicians themselves I interviewed who are on the shortlist do regard the Mercury as the one with the most artistic kudos. But, to a certain extent, they would, wouldn't they? I wonder what The Aliens make of it...

**DM:** With many of the acts being successful already, do you think the prize should serve to the more unknown acts; the equivalent award in America, The Shortlist Music Prize, only honours albums with sales below a certain amount, could this work for the Mercury Prize? Does it need to?

**JE:** The idea of making it like Shortlist isn't a bad one – and there should certainly be a wider variety of judges, including musicians as vote

for Shortlist. They get Sufjan Stevens on the judging panel, we get Edith Bowman. I'm not sure if I'd do Shortlist's sales category, but if you've been nominated before I think it should bar you in future – it looks peculiar to have Dizzee and Arctics up against Basquait Strings.

**DM:** And finally, who do you want to win this year, and who do you think will win this year?

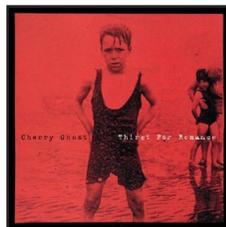
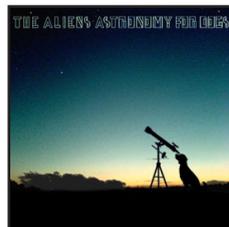
**JE:** I hope Klaxons win, as at least they're exciting and trying something new. But in some ways, I wouldn't mind if Basquait Strings got it, as the equivalent of the spoiled ballot paper.

### AND ON THE WINNER:

**JE:** As poor as the shortlist was, at least the best of the 12 albums won. Jamie Reynolds has come in for some criticism for saying it at their winners' press conference, but *Myths Of The Near Future* is the most forward-thinking album of the nominees.

Like the FA Cup, no-one remembers the losers and, in years to come, Klaxons will look decent winners and maybe few people will remember how shambolic the shortlist was – if you compare Klaxons next to Ms Dynamite or M-People's win, maybe people will remember 2007 as a good year for music.

Which it has been, if not exactly reflected by the other 11 names.



# PETER, BJORN AND JOHN

IS THIS THE PUREST PIECE OF POP SINCE THE 60S, OR THE MOST ANNOYING THING TO BE RELEASED IN THE LAST TWENTY YEARS? **GOOD VS. BAD** TRIES TO DECIDE...

WORDS: IAN MORENO-MELGAR  
DESIGN: ANDREW REVELL



**GOOD** This is a song that - given the right exposure and marketing - would be as big as any Umbrella. A song so catchy it could carry diseases and wipe out entire nightclubs. A song of such enormous joy that it could turn every My Chemical Romance fan into fans of Junior Senior.

This is a song that, once heard, will not leave your psyche for months and you'll be glad of it. A song so perfectly and immaculately conceived that it's been the biggest underground hit that everyone has heard at least once, but probably assumed that it's some classic 60s pop song. Its mere existence helps to alleviate the suffering

forced upon our ears by the likes of James Morrison, Paolo Nutini and Newton Faulkner, whose dour drones seem to be infecting the mainstream in a most laborious manner. This song is their total counterpoint: full of vitality, intelligence and just plain happy. This four-and-a-half minute wonder could quite possibly stop wars and have thousands of soldiers pursuing their lips in unison, downing weapons and dancing clumsily to the dizzying happiness it imbues.

This song has been used by Kanye West to rap over at his live shows, and on one of his mixtapes. It is currently enjoying some heavy rotation on MTV Dance and has been covered by Bluegrass artist Dawn Landes. This is a song that crosses boundaries, styles and genres so effortlessly that it's difficult not to

believe it's some sort of hymn or some form of scientific experiment to create the perfect pop song. Either way, everyone seems to love it. Clubs across the world over have been playing this song for more than a year since its original release and with its re-release on September 17, it gives the remaining 2% of the world who have yet to be intoxicated by it another chance to fall in love with it. This song, Young Folks by Peter, Bjorn and John is Disposable Media's favourite song since our inception. It is a modern pop miracle and you should all buy it. Twice.

# YOUNG FOLK

**BAD** This is a song that has been released once already, and now has to be re-released, despite apparently being everywhere. Barely making an impact on the British Top 40 when it was released, this is a song that was played in a hundred indie clubs but never moved outside at the end of the night. The re-release is getting more publicity and success, but for what real purpose? Surely it only really serves to annoy everyone who heard it the first time round?

Here is a song so mercilessly cheery that its twee-ness embarrasses Belle and Sebastian fans. A song so plain and obvious, that it uses whistling as its main hook and

repeats the trick so many times that by the end you've forgotten that there was even a song surrounding the whistling. Clocking in at four-and-a-half-minutes, it's at least two verses and two minutes too long to be even close to a 'proper' pop song, never mind a classic one.

It's ubiquity, forced by blanket coverage in the US via the 'paid-for' radio stations (if you catch our drift there) is as annoying now as it was in the first place and even more people will now be irritated by its incessant and tiresome chirp. That it has been covered by a multitude of artists says nothing more than its been heard everywhere and shoved down millions of throats by some clever PR, but has still failed to really take off. This song has featured in adverts for AT & T, Sky Movies,

Napster, Telnet, Budweiser, American Eagle Outfitters, iPhone, 3 and Belgacom. There's selling out and then there's making Moby seem afraid of adverts.

This song, Young Folks by Peter, Bjorn and John is the single most frustratingly catchy song this millennium. It does not need a re-release, it never took off as a pop song in the charts and despite it's all the mixtapes, adverts and radio coverage, it never will be. Even if you all buy it twice.



**COMMON**  
FINDING  
FOREVER

**F**inding Forever is many things. It sounds like sitting down to watch Dead Presidents. It's a bit like waking up from a 1970's hangover and finding that things haven't moved on. It feels like a caring look from a stranger during a depressing work commute –

Common's A-line about seeing how he's touched those less privileged than he leaving its mark.

It's as if Gil Scott Heron never used a needle. It puts its listeners on first name terms with Kanye, Talib, Bilal, D'Angelo and Primo. It sounds glossy, brown. It sounds like

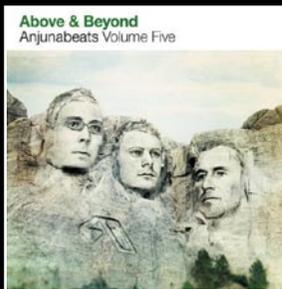
Lauren Hill in Sister Act.

It sounds like having sex with the Galaxy Caramel bunny, on a Sunday. It sounds like going for a milkshake with The Supremes. It sounds like three different rooms in an apartment block in Chicago at once. It sounds perfectly outdated and, after this, it will probably sound a little underrated.

Adam Hutcherson



**"IT SOUNDS LIKE HAVING SEX WITH THE GALAXY CAMEL BUNNY, ON A SUNDAY."**



**ABOVE & BEYOND**  
ANJUNABEATS:  
VOLUME FIVE

**A**njunabeats: Volume Five's cover art - the three faces of Above & Beyond cemented into Mount Rushmore - couldn't be more out of step with the series' grounded approach to dance music. This latest release, like the four before it, is a product of a scene where trance is generally pitied and pounded in equal measure. Anjunabeats has none of it.

Unapologetic and unmoved by any need to be either commercial or credible, this ensemble of tracks sourced from the Anjunabeats label

is one focused on melody and is accessible to all – a hive for lovers of any genre. Above & Beyond's typically amenable approach to what qualifies as trance serves up an audible celebration of the ethos behind dance music and adds a fair amount of spice to two CDs of accomplished and driving mixes. Attention all newcomers: this is the open door you've been looking for.

Keith Andrew



**"ANJUNABEATS IS A PRODUCT OF A SCENE WHERE TRANCE IS GENERALLY PITIED AND POUNDED IN EQUAL MEASURE."**



**BEN HARPER**  
LIFELINE

**I**t's hard to find a track on *Lifeline* that stands out - the whole album feels like a 45 minute block of generic "man sings sensitive songs slowly while playing a guitar" mediocrity. It's a CD you find among Bryan Adams and Dido in the cars of 25 year old girls who have never heard of PJ Harvey or Goldfrapp. But the problem is not Harper's style so much as the insincerity running through *Lifeline* - this is the same safe sound Harper's made for 15 years, and he knows it.

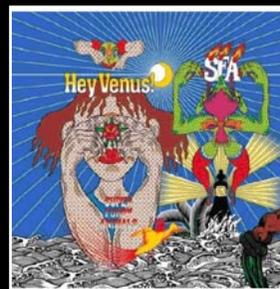


**"LIFELINE'S LYRICS ARE UNPROFOUND AND THE MUSIC FORGETTABLE, BUT WORST OF ALL, IT'S JUST TOO SAMEY."**

While the track in the centre of the album, *Say You Will*, has a jazzy, gospel dancability that will temporarily break even the hardest Harper critic, the presence of one good, original-sounding track is simply not enough.

*Lifeline's* lyrics are unprofound and the music forgettable, but, worst of all, with one exception, it's just too samey.

Jim Miles



**SUPER FURRY ANIMALS**  
HEY VENUS!

**L**istening to *Hey Venus!* is like getting a headache when you still have half a bottle of wine and a good DVD left to go - you feel like you should be enjoying yourself, but the only sensation is a polluting discomfort.

*Hey Venus!*'s problem is that the blurry sound gives the album a melancholy which clashes with otherwise energetic drums and guitars. There is also too much happening in each song, creating a sense of "did I just hear a bell ring?" paranoia, which, combined with the trademark psychedelic style,

contrives the musical equivalent of a bad trip.

There are standout tracks, following the general rule of the simpler the better – *Run-Away*, the best, has an optimistic and anthemic repetition that at least offers a catchy chorus and heroic riffs running throughout.

*Hey Venus!* is an interesting album with concept pretensions, which unfortunately just isn't very fun to listen to.

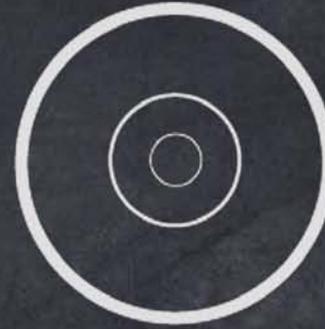
Jim Miles



**"THE PSYCHEDELIC STYLE CONTRIVES THE MUSICAL EQUIVALENT OF A BAD TRIP"**

DIRECTOR

CAMERAMAN



**E**ver wanted the chance to talk to your heroes? In these heady days of post-Perry DM (most notable for a certain website's misspelling of the word 'Disposable'), doors are being opened. When the opportunity of interviewing Doctor Who writer Gareth Roberts for this very issue popped up, I was first in line. Though, when you consider that it was ultimately my decision in the first place, that line was a pretty redundant one.

To balance such (personal) happiness, we've also decided to treat you to a look at some of the team's saddest films – perfect for moistening you through the long Indian summer that's apparently just waiting in the wings. If that's not enough, there's a look forward to two shows currently making waves across the the Atlantic.

No need for hot weather when the TV set is working.

**Keith Andrew**

Film/TV Editor

[keith.andrew@disposablemedia.co.uk](mailto:keith.andrew@disposablemedia.co.uk)

**currently watching ...**

doctor who / the bionic woman / sarah connor chronicles / seventh seal / 1408

film  
& tv





## “ THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

is that 'honesty is the best policy', but sometimes this doesn't always hold true. For instance, whenever I suffer from a bout of writer's block, the people I confide in tell me it's not a problem - it happens. You're never running at 100 per cent and you never reach your pinnacle.

That's depressing, at the best of times. It's also a nugget of useless information that doesn't serve you well if it slips out during a job interview.

In that situation, admitting that there is always a way to improve translates at "I've not this got job, have I". And if by any bizarre chance one of my former interviewers is reading this, I do



# REMOTE REHAB

**KEITH ANDREW ASKS WHETHER WE REALLY WANT TO RUIN THE MAGIC OF TELEVISION.**

How this kind of direction would manifest itself in reality is what *really* interests me. Would the schedules become clogged up with a series of 15 minute specials running after every programme, with the explicit intention of letting the viewer know how the show that preceded it was made? Isn't this what BBC Three does already?

Bazalgette's assertion was that, the young aside, a large proportion of British television viewers aren't au fait with the procedures employed by the glitterati of production companies and editors up in London and beyond. In effect, audiences are being 'conned'. The BBC, as a national institution, should set about levelling the playing field with its public; it should play the trick but make the strings visible at the same time.

Personally, I think just a little bit of ignorance is bliss in some cases. Blatant lying notwithstanding, any strings that the BBC pulls that you and me aren't already aware of are more than likely purely superficial. Trawling over every detail, the ins and outs of every procedure, will kill television rather than save it.

Neither the BBC, nor television as a whole, has been embarrassed by this debacle. The BBC's decision to essentially put itself on trial is one that will involuntarily secure a glut of headlines for months to come, but it's the sections of the press that continue to stick the knife in - eager to take down what they see as an almost imperialist thorn in the side of an otherwise commercial industry - that gives the media a bad name.

The print press has been active for far longer than the BBC. Could you honestly say it's getting any better? Writer's block strikes again, perhaps.



**“BAZALGETTE'S ASSERTION IS THAT THE BBC, AS A NATIONAL INSTITUTION, SHOULD PLAY THE TRICK BUT MAKE THE STRINGS VISIBLE AT THE SAME TIME.”**

apologise. I still haven't become accustomed to bullshitting anyone, whether it's readers or interviewers.

Something that I've pondered on recently is whether the same excuse can be used when it comes to television. The BBC has been transmitting television, in some form, for almost eighty years now, so it could be assumed that the corporation's output in 2007 - eight decades of experience on - is, without question, in a different

league to those early, grainy, broadcasts.

It would be very easy to dismiss such a notion right now, given the furore currently surrounding the Beeb,

# MODERN DAY Shakespeare

WORDS AND DESIGN: KEITH ANDREW

AS A WRITER, PAYING HOMAGE TO ONE OF THE TRADE'S FOREFATHERS ON SCREEN COMES WITH A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF RESPONSIBILITY - ONE THAT ONLY MULTIPLIES WHEN SAID HOMAGE IS DUE TO AIR ON PRIMETIME BBC ONE. **DOCTOR WHO** SCRIBE **GARETH ROBERTS** TELLS DM JUST HOW HE TURNED WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE INTO A SEXUAL PREDATOR AND GOT AWAY WITH IT.

“ I'M GLAD IF PEOPLE FANCIED SHAKESPEARE. ONE OF THE THINGS I REALLY WANTED TO GET ACROSS WAS THAT HIS PLAYS ARE NOT BORING, SEXLESS HIGH CULTURE. ”

The life of a *Doctor Who* writer is certainly an interesting and varied one – the diversity of the show's writing and the mediums through which it was published seemingly exploded following the cancellation of the TV series in 1989. After *Who* made its final broadcast in its original run, more so than at any other time, Whovians gravitated towards the series' book collections – a natural outlet for the show, unconstrained by falling budgets or the challenge of special effects that tainted so many sci-fi series in the 1980s.

Feeling betrayed by the BBC during the six years when British sci-fi was sorely missing in action, fans could, instead, open up the scores of books and turn to the page for their TARDIS trips. Gareth Roberts had the esteemed position of penning some of those very adventures that helped the show's band of aficionados through the aforementioned 'dark times' – tales of such quality that Gareth was later asked to add his talents to the pool spawning *Doctor Who*'s third run since its return.

In April this year - with a mix of Shakespeare, a resurrected alien race of 'witches' from a bygone time and Dean Lennox Kelly displaying a startling amount of chest hair - an audience topping 7 million tuned into BBC One's primetime Saturday night slot. Families sat together in their droves to watch the next installment of the Doctor's journey, written by Gareth Roberts. It's a far cry from those days when owning a *Doctor Who* novel was, for many, a dirty little secret.

In his take on the series' transition from a much-loved TV relic to an indispensable BBC icon, Gareth talks to DM about his experiences writing for what has become a born-again staple of British television, his take on its most recent outing, and just who he would cast as the next Doctor.

Many *Doctor Who* fans will have seen your work on the New Adventure and Missing Adventure book series before *The Shakespeare Code* aired. From a writer's perspective, how different is writing an episode for television than taking charge of a book?

Television's harder because everything has to be upfront and on screen. In a book you can let the reader know what a character's thinking by describing their internal thoughts, and that option isn't available on TV unless you're writing *Peep Show* or *Sunset Beach*. So you have to make each TV character's feelings clear in their dialogue without it sounding cheesy. Writing for TV is a much more collaborative process than writing books. On *Doctor Who*, obviously Russell [T. Davies – showrunner] has a big say, as does Julie [Gardner – executive producer] and Phil [Collinson] the producer, but right the way through the filming you'll be asked for changes, often for technical reasons. So TV writing is more social, writing books is very lonely. And you get much less money.

It has been said that Russell assigns one word to each episode when he pitches it. How did he present *The Shakespeare Code* with you, and how did you run with it?

He just said "Shakespeare". At that point it was all open, and we thought about it and discussed all the possibilities – when in his life would we see him, what should the monsters be, etc. I love Shakespeare so I was very happy, and one of my first ideas was to use the lost play *Love's Labour's Won*. It's nice if you can tag a little real-life mystery to the historical character you're using.

What was your working relationship like with Charles Palmer [*The Shakespeare Code's* director]? How much input did you have on the final look of the episode – did the end result differ much from what you'd originally envisaged?

It looked exactly as I'd imagined! That's the first time that's ever happened to me in television, so I was very pleased. I didn't have much time to interact with Charlie during the shoot because I was already working on *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, but I knew as soon as I visited the set that he was a bit of a genius on the quiet.

Presumably before you started writing *The Shakespeare Code* you hadn't seen Freema's performance as Martha Jones on screen.

How hard was that?

I knew that Martha was bright and capable in a different way to Rose – she's a few years older, and that makes a big difference. Also, Russell told me to give Martha a really fantastic, happy time in the episode – something to contrast with the strain she's under later in the series. It wasn't too hard because on TV you're always writing for characters that haven't been cast, and if the character has been clearly defined you'll know instantly if something doesn't sound right.

It's been said by a lot of the show's fans that Martha had some of her most endearing moments in your episode – her wondering whether stepping on a butterfly will change the future being a highlight, and the way she deals with the Doctor's assertion that "Rose would know what to do" also remains very

“I'M REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING HOW MARTHA'S CHANGED WHEN SHE RETURNS. UNREQUITED LOVE'S LIKE A BIG DARK CLOUD, WHEN IT'S LIFTED THE REAL PERSON STEPS OUT.”

poignant. What kind of mark do you think Martha left on the third series of 'new Who' as a whole?

She gives a whole new spin to the series. One of the reasons the *Doctor Who* format is so strong is that the leads change every so often, and it feels like a different version of the same series. That's why it lasted so long on its original run, and why it's gonna last just



as long if not longer this time around. Martha's story in series 3 was very nicely plotted by Russell, I think. She's in love with the Doctor, and ends up proving herself and saving the world, which forces her to grow up and walk away from that unrequited love. It's a very human, everyday story but played against this enormous weird sci-fi backdrop. And I'm really looking forward to seeing how Martha's changed when she returns. Unrequited love's like a big dark cloud, when it's lifted the real person steps out.

How much say did you have over casting? You do realise that William Shakespeare is now a major sex symbol for millions, don't you?

Dean Lennox Kelly [who played Shakespeare in the episode] was perfect casting, though his name hadn't crossed my mind – that's



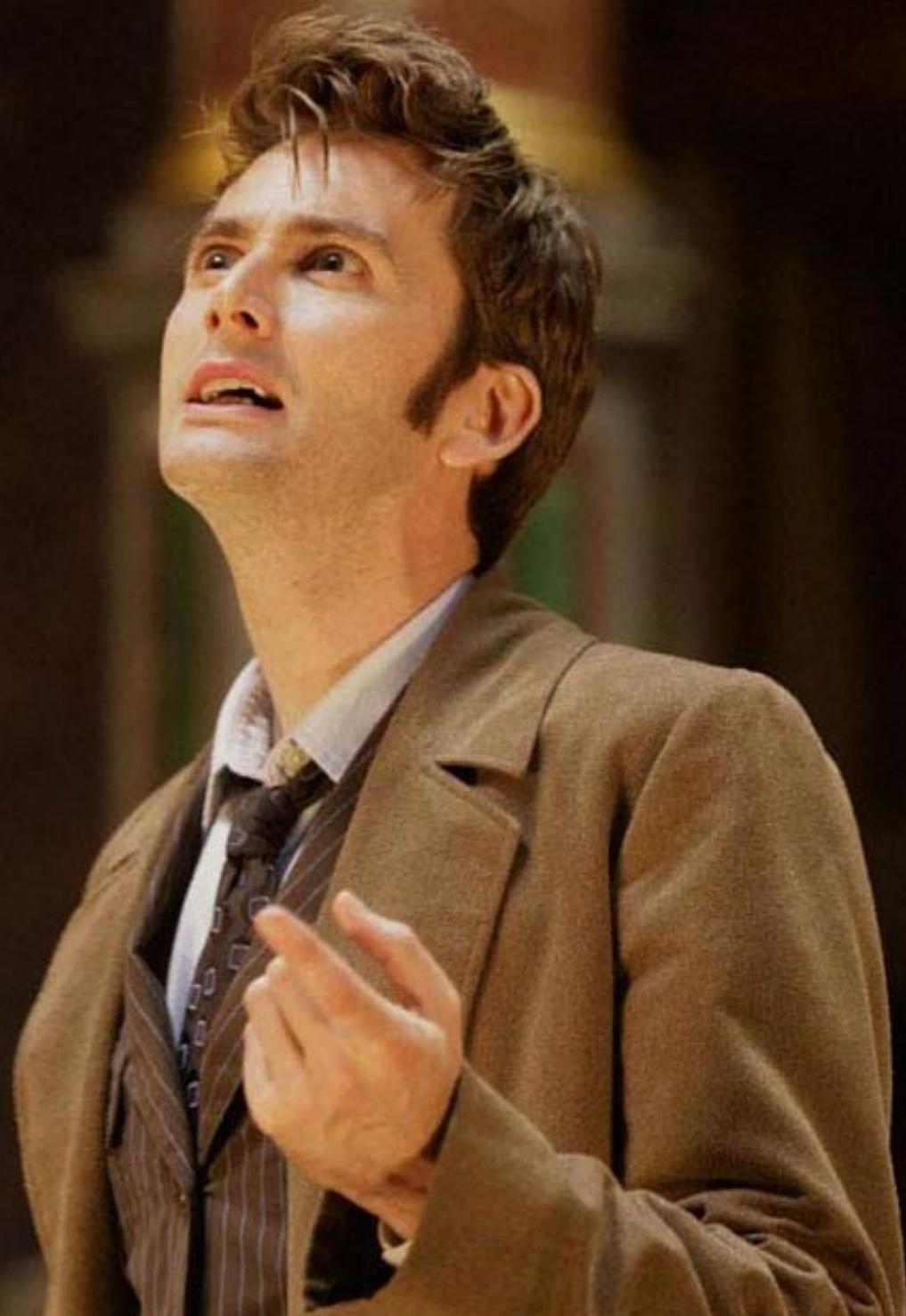
why you have clever casting directors. I prefer to be surprised by casting rather than make suggestions. I'm glad if people fancied him, as one of the things I really wanted to get across was that Shakespeare's plays are not boring, sexless high culture.

A SEXY SHAKESPEARE on a Saturday evening isn't *Doctor Who's* only modern-day achievement – it's also become a homestead to the talents of some of the country's most intrepid and innovative writers and directors; the aforementioned Charles Palmer just one of the 'quiet geniuses' who have made all three series' visuals as iconic as the script. Gareth is certainly part of a motley, yet gifted, crew.

As with any sci-fi show, however – family orientated or not – the fans always have a lot to say. Hell, at the moment, just about everyone has something to say about Russell's take on the show. According to Gareth, all comments – scathing or orgasmic – go unnoticed when it comes down to the writers tapping away on their keyboards.

Three series in since *Doctor Who* made its return to Saturday night primetime, how do you think it has done? Obviously it's been a massive commercial success for the BBC in a slot where it's previously been found wanting – recharging the public interest in adventure

“ ONE OF THE REASONS THE DOCTOR WHO FORMAT IS SO STRONG IS THAT THE LEADS CHANGE EVERY SO OFTEN. THAT'S WHY IT LASTED SO LONG ON ITS ORIGINAL RUN, AND WHY IT'S GONNA LAST JUST AS LONG THIS TIME AROUND. ”



“ I LIKE THE ACTOR HARRY LLOYD, WHO PLAYED SON-OF-MINE IN HUMAN NATURE. HE'D MAKE A GOOD DOCTOR, I THINK. ”

and TV for all the family in the process – but how do you think the 'sci-fi fraternity' have received it?

It never really crosses my mind how the 'sci-fi fraternity' will receive it, and I think I can speak for everybody else on the series. Real hardened fans make up a tiny, tiny percentage of the viewers. But there again, I think most of the internet sci-fi fans enjoy it.

It's abundantly clear that the mainstream press were surprised at just how seriously BBC Wales has taken *Who* since it returned – the casting of heavyweights like Christopher Eccleston and David Tennant signifying a real desire for talent rather than cheap headlines. But how do you think David's era will be viewed in terms of the long history of the show in a decade or two?

I think he'll be regarded as a classic Doctor. You say 'Doctor Who' to a person on the street in twenty years time, they'll think of David. But then I strongly suspect *Doctor Who* the TV series will live forever now, so they might well think of whoever the Doctor is by then. It's hard to give a more general answer because who knows what the series will be like in five, ten years in comparison to how it is today. It has a uniquely flexible format, so it could be an experimental opera about a dairy maid. But I doubt it.

Apart from *The Shakespeare Code* – of course – what other episodes really stand out for you in series three?

It's really hard for me to say – I loved them all in their different ways. I like the dark, emotional stuff in *Human Nature* and the series finale, but equally I love the more upbeat, fun adventure stories like *Gridlock* or *The Lazarus Experiment*. I used to find it really easy to rate stories in order of preference with the old series of *Doctor Who*. Nowadays I think the tone and the standard is much more even.

You've got another episode in next year's series, what have you taken forward from your experience with *The Shakespeare Code*?

It's difficult to take a lot forward, because on *Doctor Who* every brief you get is so different. Russell's right when he says he finds each episode brings a new challenge. What I'm much better at now is getting right into the heart of the story very early on in the script. And to pay even more particular attention to writing crackling dialogue from the very first draft.

Are you consciously aware of what people have said about your work in the past, both good and bad, when you start something new?

Not really – as I've grown up as person and a writer, I think my stuff's got a lot better, but I think that's a natural process. One thing I've learnt is never to be too subtle. The emotional threads in some of my earlier work were quite restrained and British, with a read-between-the-lines quality. One of my old *Who* books was actually a romantic comedy - but nobody noticed. You can almost get away with that in books, but on TV you need to keep it upfront without spelling it out clumsily.

Okay – here's a nice closer for you. Russell and his entourage are away on some holiday or other, leaving you in temporary charge. David Tennant announces he's leaving, lapping up acclaim from both the critics and the general public. The BBC needs you to act swiftly, signing up someone to play the Doctor as soon as possible. Who do you approach?

I like the actor Harry Lloyd, who played Son-Of-Mine in *Human Nature*. He'd make a good Doctor, I think. Michael Sheen would be fab. You need someone magnetic and charismatic, warm but a bit spooky, and nowadays you need someone fairly young, or in fine fettle, for the filming schedule. But the likelihood of me casting the Doctor is very low, so you should send your CV to anybody but me.

# BATTLE OF THE ROBOT WOMEN!

WHO WILL SURVIVE,  
AND WHAT WILL BE  
LEFT OF THEM?

DISPOSABLE MEDIA REFEREES A FIGHT TO THE DEATH  
BETWEEN TWO NEW US SCI-FI SHOWS!

WORDS: CHRIS SCHILLING

DESIGN: ANDREW CAMPBELL

**"IT WOULD BE FITTING TO DESCRIBE THEM BOTH AS THE TELEVISUAL EQUIVALENT OF B-MOVIES. WHICH, IN THIS INSTANCE, IS NOT INTENDED AS A SLIGHT!"**

The meaning of 'B-movie' has changed somewhat over the years. It's now commonly used as a criticism - a film with a trashy or clichéd conceit, or a straight-to-video thriller starring Wesley Snipes, for example. But in the golden age of Hollywood, a B-movie was simply a low-budget film, often specially made to play prior to a major film on a traditional double-bill.

*The Sarah Connor Chronicles* and *The Bionic Woman* are two US TV pilots that - depending on who you believe - were deliberately released as a promotional exercise or accidentally leaked onto the internet. It would be fitting to describe them both as the televisual equivalent of B-movies. Which, in this instance, is not intended as a slight. Both, especially in the former's case,

contain influences from films with budgets that would dwarf theirs. Neither contains what you would consider a big name star. Yet both pilots show enough promise to suggest that their shows' initial runs might





**“THE SARAH CONNOR CHRONICLES TELLS THE STORY OF THE TITULAR HEROINE STARTING FROM THE END OF THE SECOND TERMINATOR FILM, AND HER ATTEMPTS TO KEEP HER SON SAFE FROM HARM.”**

not be curtailed in a similar manner to many recent sci-fi series.

That's not to say that there aren't elements of the more modern definition of B-movie, however. *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* tells the story of the titular heroine starting from the end of the second *Terminator* film, and her attempts to keep her son - the man who will eventually lead the resistance against the machines, remember - safe from harm. Its concept of the heroes having to frequently move on to a new hiding place brings to mind the 70's TV adaptation of *The Incredible Hulk* - the only thing missing from the end of the pilot is a wide camera shot of a morose-looking Bill Bixby wandering into the distance as the sombre piano theme kicks in. In essence, this is the main problem behind the idea - how to keep fresh the story of a mother and her son, constantly on the run. While it seems as if the pursuant enemy Terminator in the first episode might give way to a more realistic grounding (Richard T. Jones' FBI agent is named as one of the principal cast, as opposed to Owain Yeoman's T101-esque Cromartie), the producers and writers will need to somehow vary the approach to prevent repetition. The series appears to be in good hands, with Josh Friedman - the man behind the 'motherfucking snakes on the motherfucking plane' line in the Sam Jackson vehicle, and scribe of Brian de Palma's *The Black Dahlia* - as creator and executive producer, while the casting is excellent. Lena Headey makes for an efficient, no-nonsense

Sarah Connor, while *Heroes*' Thomas Dekker is easily the least irritating John Connor yet. Meanwhile, Summer Glau as good Terminator Cameron - her name a nod to the director of the first two films (with her line of "come with me if you want to live" making it two references for the price of one) - brings the same otherworldly mystique

to her role as her stint as River in Joss Whedon's *Firefly*. It's to be hoped that she doesn't suffer from the seeming curse affecting her co-stars, with Adam Baldwin and Nathan Fillion's recent vehicles *Day Break* and *Drive* both getting the chop shortly after their launch.

Coming from Fox, you'd expect *SCC* to look the part, and the effects are reasonably good, with a superb sequence involving Cromartie - acting as John Connor's supply teacher - cutting into his leg to reveal the weapon underneath his flesh. The only real false note is struck in the line he utters at an

agog group of pupils - "class dismissed" he growls, proving that its low-budget feel (at least compared to the films) isn't the only reason it could be classed as a B-movie. Still, with the series not officially starting until January, there's plenty of time for a script polish. Meanwhile,

the modern-day remake of *The Bionic Woman* is due to start much sooner, and surprisingly its pre-air pilot seemed by far the more incomplete of the two, with several effects sequences unfinished and an entire character since replaced. It's unclear why Jaime Sommers' sister was altered from a deaf, resentful sibling to a computer hacker who respects her only guardian, but it's not the only thing that's muddled about this show. *The Bionic Woman*'s main problem seems to be that it's a feature-length opener condensed into half its natural runtime. What this means is that there's little time to develop the protagonists before the accident that causes Sommers' broken body to be rebuilt, with added anthrocytes for Wolverine-speed healing, as well as the traditional bionic limbs and eye. It's a shame because Michelle Ryan

**“MICHELLE RYAN IS ACTUALLY SOMETHING OF A REVELATION AS THE CHARACTER, WITH A MORE THAN PASSABLE AMERICAN ACCENT AND ONLY ONE OR TWO CLUMSY MOMENTS BETRAYING HER SOAP ACTING ORIGINS.”**

is actually something of a revelation as the character, with a more than passable American accent and only one or two clumsy moments betraying her soap acting origins. Coming from the pen of David Eick, producer on the critically-acclaimed revival of the *Battlestar Galactica* franchise, you'd expect a more solemn approach, and indeed *The Bionic Woman*'s fantastical ideas seem slightly at odds with its po-faced seriousness. That is, until Katee Sackhoff's rival bionic woman shows up for an impromptu kung-fu scrap, the *BSG* pin-up vamping up her role to a degree where it appears she's acting in a

different show to everyone else. Meanwhile, Miguel Ferrer and Molly Price as two of the Bionics scientists simply fade into the background, their limited time on screen making their characters mere ciphers. Yet, obligatory attempted rape sequence aside, *The*

*Bionic Woman* is well-scripted, with some superb - albeit overly tricky - direction. The climactic fight is decently choreographed, and again there's plenty of potential.

So who comes out on top in the battle of the robot-women? For *Disposable Media*'s money, *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* nicks it, if only because Fox's chequebook is a little larger than NBC's. However, of the two, *The Bionic Woman* stands the best chance of a decent run, if only because of the indecent haste with which Rupert Murdoch's company puts a halt to any underperforming show. An honourable draw, then.

**The Sarah Connor Chronicles is scheduled to start its 13-episode opening season in early 2008, on FOX. The Bionic Woman will run for 14 episodes from September 26th.**

# SAD SUMMER

**DISPOSABLE MEDIA** RECOUNTS THOSE LONELY SUMMER NIGHTS, WHEN A BOX OF TISSUES AND A SAD MOVIE ARE A WRITER'S ONLY FRIENDS.

WORDS: DANIEL THORNTON  
DESIGN: KEITH ANDREW

Summer might be a time of sunshine and happiness, but for some people, it provides the perfect balance for evenings watching films that tug at our emotions and leave us feeling maudlin. For many, it's the traditional tearjerkers, from *Bambi* to *Titanic*. Other films slowly grind you down with unrelenting misery, such as *Lukas Moodyson's Lilya4eva*, which is an unrelenting, unremorseful journey into darkness.

But just as everyone has a mindless comedy as a guilty pleasure, we all have certain films or genres that have the opposite effect. And to give an insight into the fragile minds that create Disposable Media, we reveal those films that make us turn away from our partners with a lump in our throat.

**Daniel Thornton, Editor**

“THERE ARE TWO genres which always have an effect on me, and the first is pretty usual for most males. When heroic epics and tragic male figures succumb at the end of a film, it always affects me.

The ending of *Leon* still leaves a lump in my throat, as Jean Reno walks slowly towards the light, unaware of his fate, in the form of a rabid Gary Oldman, walking up behind him.

The other genre would interest a psychologist, as it's always those stories of teens having fun which leaves me with a sense of emptiness. Stories of high school, like *Dazed and Confused*, always leave a memory of wasted summers, lost friends, and time that will never return. When the gang head off at the end of the film, to the strains of Kiss, part of me sees a celebration, whilst the other mourns the loss of a past I didn't have.

And there's one film that combines a tragic hero with the ghost of past memories. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* sees Kaufmann and Gondry create a masterpiece which evokes every relationship, every mistake, and every emotion, without giving you the comfort of finality.

”

“STORIES OF HIGH SCHOOL, LIKE **DAZED AND CONFUSED**, ALWAYS LEAVE A MEMORY OF WASTED SUMMERS, LOST FRIENDS, AND TIME THAT WILL NEVER RETURN.”

- **Daniel Thornton, Editor**



**Jim Miles, Writer**

“ **WHEN THE TOPIC** of saddest film comes up, there is one film that always rises to the top of my list - it's so heart-breaking I simply can't bring myself to watch it again, though I often try to pluck up the courage to get through it a second time.

The film is Studio Ghibli's *Grave of the Fireflies* - the story of an orphaned boy and his sister in WW2 Japan, trying to survive under the strain of poverty and a lack of adult support in a world that has suddenly become dangerous and competitive. The scene where Seita (the boy) steals under-grown vegetables from a farmer is a classic example of desperation and the lapse of morals in difficult circumstances.

An oblique attack on the suffering caused by war and a criticism of a certain kind of very Japanese pride, *Grave of the Fireflies* shows the viewer a life that is painful even to contemplate, let alone live first hand. The conclusion certainly puts other tearjerkers to shame with its unapologetic bleakness. Tip: don't expect a happy ending.

”



**Adam Parker, Writer**

“ **THERE'S A SCENE** in *Forrest Gump*, before Forrest and Jenny are married, where a post-Vietnam, millionaire Forrest is staring out over the garden of his childhood home, and he hallucinates, seeing Jenny running towards the house for a brief moment. When she disappears, all you see is simple, decent Forrest just stood there, alone.

You can just imagine how many times he's visualised her with him, and tortured himself about where she might be and why she isn't there. It's only a brief moment in the film, but it says a great deal about what's going on in Hanks' character's head. Of course it's all resolved in the end, but it's just one of many poignant little moments in that film that make it a truly moving movie.

”



**Keith Andrew, Film&TV Editor**

“ **EVER WONDERED IF** all those urban myths were true? Jon Shear's *Urbania* takes those tales of city dwelling and recounts them over the course of one night; some actually happen, while some are portrayed through 'he-said-she-said' anecdotes - but all have an effect on film lead 'Charlie', played by Dan Futterman.

Told in a manner that will be familiar to anyone who has watched *Memento*, Charlie's trip around New York City - his encounters with others and their urban myths littered throughout - initially feels like a routine hunt for cock. Charlie eyes a muscled-up beauty in a bar and purposely tracks him across the city, but what appears to be lust is in fact a thirst for revenge - said muscle-man, we discover later, is a closeted gay-basher who had murdered Charlie's boyfriend, Matt, on the city's streets just previous.

Melancholic, but with a touch of black humour throughout (the depiction of an old woman drying her cat from the rain in the microwave - and the accompanying explosion - remaining fresh in my mind), *Urbania* made me weep; once because of the senselessness of Matt's demise, and secondly because of the lesson hammered home at the end - revenge is never quite sweet enough.

”



**“URBANIA MADE ME WEEP BECAUSE OF THE LESSON HAMMERED HOME AT THE END - REVENGE IS NEVER QUITE SWEET ENOUGH!”**

**- Keith Andrew, Film&TV Editor**



**Dan Gassis, Games Editor**

“ I’LL BE THE first to admit that I’m a bit of a bonehead when it comes to tear-jerking movies, since the majority of them were either movies that I had seen when I was a lot younger - *ET*, *Bambi* - or ones that, arguably, aren’t that emotionally sophisticated (Arnie’s exit at the end of *Terminator 2*.)

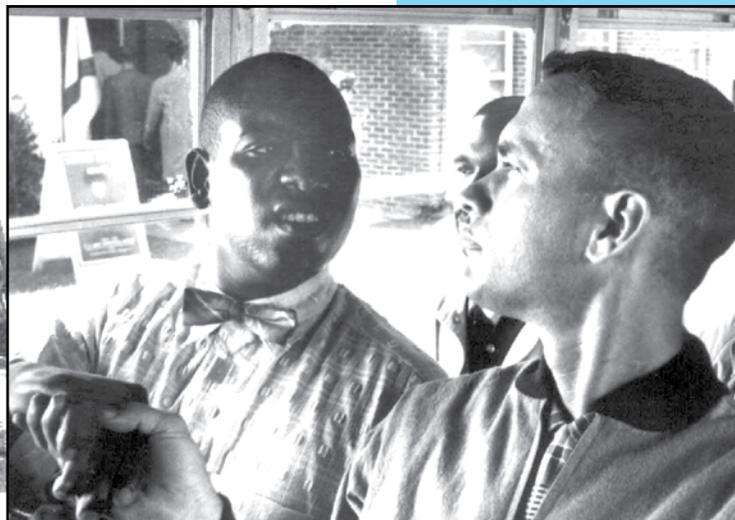
However, I’ll admit that I was...well, maybe not brought to floods of tears, but certainly moved by, a number of moments in *Forrest Gump*. Despite the attention that slowly surrounds Forrest and his stories - the significance of his numerous achievements sinking in to those listening - his life has been full of saddening moments.

From Jenny’s anger at Forrest after she loses her job at a strip club - a consequence of Forrest trying to stop the men who were harassing her - to her turning Forrest’s marriage proposal down, or from Forrest being bullied at a young age, to the speech he made after meeting Abbie Hoffman - there are plenty of moments that make you feel sympathetic towards Forrest and his honest, well-wishing nature.

For me, however, the standout moment was Forrest’s efforts to rescue Bubba and the other platoon members in Vietnam. Whilst many war movies can attempt to be poignant and end up one-dimensional, by this time the film has developed Gump’s selfless, well-wishing character magnificently, and the way in which he risks his life to rescue the other soldiers, even before he’s found his best friend Bubba, epitomises the theme of one man defying expectations even when so many people he tries to help are against his actions.

It’s this resistance and lack of thanks, coupled with the simple character of Gump himself, which makes this a somewhat affecting film.

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“TRUMAN REACHED HIS DESTINATION,  
HOPELESSLY SLAPPING AND CLAWING AT  
WALLS, DESPERATE TO FORCE HIS WAY OUT  
OF PRISON. I COULDN’T HELP MYSELF,  
AND THE TEARS FLOWED.”  
- Chris Schilling, Writer



**Chris Schilling, Writer**

“ I REMEMBER THE first time I saw *The Truman Show* in the cinema so vividly.

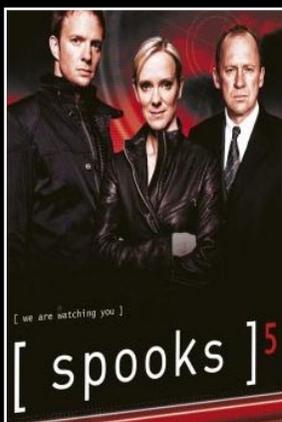
In front of us sat two families - four adults, four kids. They’d obviously been expecting a typical Jim Carrey comedy, and all seemed fairly bemused as to why Carrey wasn’t gurning or pulling pratfalls to make them laugh.

Meanwhile, Philip Glass’ beautiful score swelled while Truman heroically hoisted his sail back up, having barely survived show producer Christof’s attempts to kill him. This show of immense courage, determination and sheer guts - from a man whose very existence was about to be revealed as lie - absolutely floored me.

I tried to stifle my tears, but then Truman reached his destination, hopelessly slapping and clawing at walls, desperate to force his way out of his prison.

With such a heartbreaking mix of sadness and fear in his eyes, I couldn’t help myself, and the tears flowed.

”



**SPOOKS: SERIES 5**  
(15)  
bbc/  
kudos productions

Anyone who was gripped by *Spooks*' fourth run will know it was the series where the show finally graduated from a soap-opera with high productions values into something all the more real. It purred. In series five, *Spooks* explodes. Every episode. Almost literally.

Adam Carter (Rupert Penry-Jones) and his entourage – this series joined by Hermione Norris as Ros, who proves a much more fruitful addition than her spell in *Cold Feet* would indicate – mingle in a world that entirely befits 24

hour scrolling news channels and a press able, albeit unknowingly, to be held to ransom.

Tackling Mossad agents posing as Arabs for political gain, an attempt by MI6 to quietly overthrow the British Government and an attack on the Thames Barrier by environmental activists, the fifth series of *Spooks* is not afraid of running the headlines very close – or even making a few of its own.

Keith Andrew



**“SPOOKS IS NOT AFRAID OF RUNNING THE HEADLINES VERY CLOSE – OR EVEN MAKING A FEW OF ITS OWN.”**



**TRUEDAREKISS: SERIES 1**  
(15)  
bbc

*True Dare Kiss* is an interesting one. Heavily pushed by the BBC during its run at the start of June, it was – perhaps – a commercial flop. But sagging ratings were more to do with mis-promotion by the corporation than a lack of quality. In short, *True Dare Kiss* is a quirky little bastard of a show.

What at first appears to be the humdrum tale of four sisters in a typically Mancunian family turns out to be... well, anything but typical. The sisters – headed up by Dervla Kirwan – have been tricked by their

parents. Tested and tried. Of course, none of this becomes clear until the series' finale.

The question is, will an audience parting with their cash have the patience to stick with it? Let down by some disappointingly sterile direction, *True Dare Kiss* still has a beautifully idiosyncratic story at its heart for those who hang on.

Keith Andrew



**“TRUE DARE KISS IS A QUIRKY LITTLE BASTARD OF A SHOW.”**



**TRANSFORMERS**  
(12A)  
//director:  
michael bay

A film based on a toy does not fill one with much hope. However, when directed by Michael Bay - essentially Hollywood's most immature director – *Transformers* retains a sense of fun and awe that's been missing from film for a while. Bay has created a superficial, shallow film, akin to him fiddling with the *Transformers* in his own bedroom – albeit, that's if his bedroom was full of destructible buildings and screaming civilians.

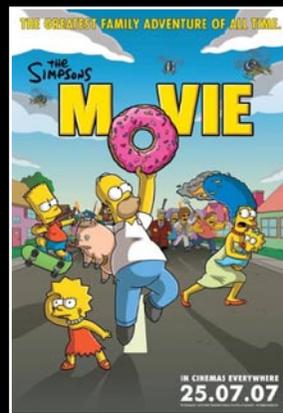
The action scenes are immensely impressive, as are the *Transformers* themselves, changing from car to

robot with an organic mechanism that seems incredibly tactile. Conversely, the plot is absolute drivel – something Bay has consistently been guilty of in the past, but it barely seems to matter once the action starts. He gets away with it, purely because robots battling robots is pure, unadulterated fun and never tires - a rare feeling amongst modern blockbusters.

Jezz Bolton



**“BAY HAS CREATED A SUPERFICIAL, SHALLOW FILM, AKIN TO FIDDLING WITH THE TRANSFORMERS IN HIS OWN BEDROOM.”**



**THE SIMPSONS MOVIE**  
(PG)  
//director:  
david silverman

It's hard to blame anyone for falling out of love with *The Simpsons*, given the standard of recent episodes. But if you were ever a fan of Groening's family of misfits, you owe it to yourself to catch their big-screen debut. Amazingly, it does not disappoint.

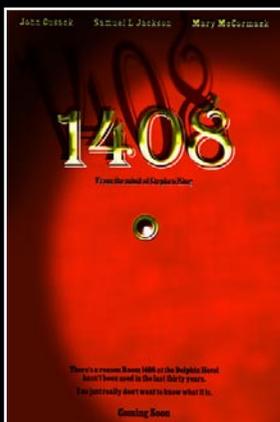
Miraculously defying cynics across the world, *The Simpsons Movie* has proven to be more than just a good film: it's a ball-achingly funny return to form for the franchise. Not one joke feels overdone or overly cheesy. It relives the golden era of earlier seasons

with vitality and style - and for that alone, it deserves praise. As with (too) many films today, “environmental issues” are addressed - but rather than taking the preachy, heavy-handed approach of most modern flicks, *The Simpsons Movie* deftly handles them with humour and tact, allowing the film to shine where it matters most - the comedy.

James Hamilton



**“IT RELIVES THE GOLDEN ERA OF EARLIER SEASONS WITH VITALITY AND STYLE - AND FOR THAT ALONE, IT DESERVES PRAISE.”**



1408  
(15)

//director:  
mikael hafstrom

It's just an evil fucking room" Sam Jackson's hotel owner warns John Cusack's cynical horror writer Mike Enslin as he prepares to check in. He's not wrong. Shortly after Enslin opens the door, the radio suddenly starts playing The Carpenters' "We've Only Just Begun", while the taps run freezing cold, then scalding hot, without warning.

And there's plenty more to come, like a man in the hotel opposite who looks (and moves) frighteningly like Cusack, and one of the most terrifying moments in recent movie history.

**"AFTER A FOREHEAD-SLAPPINGLY AWFUL SEMI-TWIST, THE FILM RALLIES FOR A DECENT LAST FIFTEEN MINUTES."**

Sadly, after such an efficient opening, director Mikael Håfström bottles it, eschewing creeping unease for CGI spooks and scenes more reminiscent of a disaster movie as the room becomes more malevolent. After a forehead-slappingly awful semi-twist, the film rallies for a decent last fifteen minutes, which is the least Cusack's likeably energetic performance deserves.

Chris Schilling



THE BOURNE ULTIMATUM  
(12A)

//director:  
paul greengrass

The Bourne Ultimatum outdoes just about every other summer blockbuster this year within its opening twenty minutes. And after the bravura sequence where Bourne guides a nery journalist through Waterloo Station to avoid the NSA agents tailing him, Paul Greengrass' second stab at the franchise amazingly gets even better.

Hand-to-hand scraps are brutal and urgent, the obligatory car-chase is blisteringly intense, and there's an extended pursuit that's simply breathtaking.

**"DIRECTED AND EDITED TO WITHIN AN INCH OF ITS LIFE, ULTIMATUM IS PRECISION-BUILT TO EXCITE."**

Directed and edited to within an inch of its life, *Ultimatum* is precision-built to excite, meaning the plot can feel slightly undernourished. Fortunately Damon's word-shy, brooding Bourne and David Strathairn's ruthless NSA chief are two utterly compelling performances. A low-key denouement may disappoint some, but its deft avoidance of cliché and the beautifully circular climax make for a hugely satisfying ending to the *trilogy*.

Chris Schilling



DIE HARD 4.0  
(15)

//director:  
len wiseman

Brought out of retirement after 12 years for this seemingly pointless fourth instalment in the Die Hard franchise, John McClane is back. With a comically dated plot, McClane is charged with saving America from a group of computer hackers determined to bring the country to its knees by hacking into the 'system'.

When compared to the taut, claustrophobic action of the previous films, *4.0* feels extremely far removed from the *Die Hard* universe. Far flung and very preposterous throughout, one could

**"WILLIS EASILY SLIPS BACK INTO MCCLANES VEST (OR SHIRT IN THIS CASE) AND IS AT HIS WISECRACKING BEST."**

actually question whether the film has anything to do with *Die Hard* at all - were not for the films saving grace: Bruce Willis.

Willis easily slips back into McClanes vest (or shirt in this case) and is at his wisecracking best. Genuinely fun to watch in the action sequences, unlike the film, McClane suddenly feels a lot more invincible then he once was.

Jezz Bolton



FANTASTICFOUR 2 : RISE OF THE SILVER SURFER  
(PG)

//director:  
tim story

When the first *Fantastic Four* film came out it was seen as the idiot cousin to the comic book family - lacking the politics of the Xmen films or the human drama of the Spiderman series. However, this sequel shows the franchise to be much more like the peppy, enthusiastic girl next door, embracing its lack of deeper meanings. Indeed, it turns it into a veritable strength.

At a family friendly length of just ninety minutes, the film is a breath of fresh air amongst the summer's other offerings; boasting pure

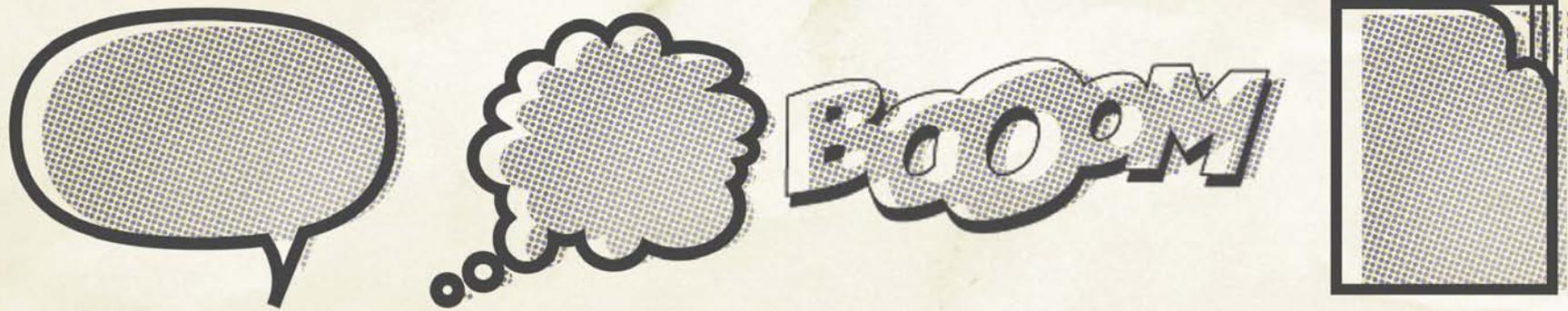
**"IT HAS NO PRETENSIONS OF BEING 'DARK' OR 'EPIC', AND SO BECOMES A PIECE OF PURE ENTERTAINMENT."**

action, laughs, gorgeous effects and nothing more. It has no pretensions of being 'dark' or 'epic', helping it to become a piece of pure entertainment.

Of course, this makes *Rise of the Silver Surfer* incredibly shallow and forgettable, but it still manages to be far more enjoyable than the plodding nonsense nature of some of the summer's other blockbusters.

Jezz Bolton





**A**utumn might not be known for new things springing to life, but the comics section is the exception that proves the rule. Running from the front of the section, we've got a new column to welcome readers, a new regular series looking back at previous work of well-known creators and a comics version of the Doormat, previously found in the music section.

Old favourites are still in place though, with both Indie Comics (Walking Dead) and Retrospective (Death in the Family) and the mini-reviews all appearing where you'd expect them.

At least it gives you plenty to read while the weather gets even worse...

Thwip and Snikt,

Andrew Revell,  
Comics Editor

[andrew.revell@disposablemedia.co.uk](mailto:andrew.revell@disposablemedia.co.uk)

## currently reading ...

jimmy corrigan / walking dead / a death in the family / halo: uprising / spider-man: mythos / usagi yojimbo





WHEN I'VE TOLD people I've recently taken over the Comics section of DM, some people have responded by asking what I'm reading. The answer tends to involve Bill Willingham's work on Shadowpact. Has a major-superhero-event-spin-off-comic, packed with previously rejected characters ever flowed off the page with such confidence? Unfortunately though, the inquiring minds are overwhelmed by two more common responses.

**Person 1, "Comics?!? Like The Beano?"**

If you happen to have a copy of the 1957 Webster's New World Dictionary to hand, the



# START HERE

**ANDREW REVELL LOOKS AT WHAT THE REST OF THE WORLD THINKS OF BEING IN CHARGE OF THE COMICS SECTION. START HERE ONE: PERCEPTION**

foreword boasts "there are included a large number of widely user terms that have been overlooked by other dictionaries such as (...) comic books". The definition they were so proud to include? "A paper booklet of extended comic strips, sometimes of a sensational or violent nature", which the most recent Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, almost fifty years later has expanded to "A light or amusing paper, a periodical with narrative mainly in pictures (orig. and chiefly for children)"

**"A PAPER BOOKLET OF EXTENDED COMIC STRIPS, SOMETIMES OF A SENSATIONAL OR VIOLENT NATURE"**

So when people assume you're reading something immature or childish, it isn't hard to see what made them think that because, for a fair amount of time, it was true. And quite brilliant, for that matter. But it isn't the case anymore, of course. I'd strongly advise you not to put anything Garth Ellis has been involved with into the hands of children. I wouldn't even let him read Winnie the Pooh to a child, just in case that also turns into a blood-stained, sex-heavy tale of survival in a cruel forest..

**Person 2, "You mean graphic novels?"**

At least it is more accurate, but usually a symptom of being a snob. "A full length story in the form of a comic strip published as a book" says the Shorter OED this time, which doesn't quite tell the whole story. For the most part, graphic novels are collections of comics. Palestine? 12 issue run.

V for Vendetta? That appeared in 26 issues of Warrior, then ten DC comics, then a "graphic novel". There are stories that only appear in fully-fledged form, but due to the much smaller risk of releasing individual comics, they are such a small minority they are relatively easy to ignore.

Reading graphic novels, or trade paperbacks, is always neater than having vast numbers of comics laying around and usually cheaper. Unfortunately, despite what The Guardian might suggest, reading graphic novels doesn't make you an alternative, arty person. It does, however, make you a comic book fan. Sorry.

When both sets of people have such a stubborn and determined view of what comics are, discussions can be frequently infuriating. My infuriation stems from people dismissing a form of art due to its early history, and the fact that, sadly, many of the stereotypes about comics are true. Comics, on the whole, are still mostly bought by young boys that like breasts - something too temptingly simple for the industry to ignore.

Despite all that, normally, this would be the part of a column which explains how to turn these people to comic book fans. That won't happen here, as it's an idea that's almost offensive. Why try and make someone develop a love for something that they aren't interested in? Sure, they're missing out on some good stuff but they probably already know that. Just leave them alone.

There are other people though, those that are interested. Welcoming someone to a whole new medium, packed with its own genres and sub-genres, master-pieces and worthless failures is something to take pride in. How best to do it? That'll have to wait until next issue..



unhappiness and insecurities are untreated by the cures available in his time and whose personality hence appears to belong in a bygone era.

Artists with such symbiosis between style and content are rare and, for all the care taken in his art, Ware sometimes comes across as believing that his pictures shouldn't be analysed. Occasionally he creates the impression that they are simply a neat way to shortcut ideas to a brain which, in his own words, "[sees] the black outlines of cartoons as visual approximations of the way we remember general ideas". It is a common mistake, when reading Ware's statements and voyeuristically studying the Acme Novelty Datebook reproductions of his sketchbooks, to think that he is apologetic for his art, belittling his own work with self-doubt and explanations as to the 'reading' of pictures. From an artist whose work is good enough to hang in a gallery for sheer beauty of form, this self-deprecation can be grating and it frequently feels like Ware wants to be the first and most destructive critic of his own work to pre-emptively defend from real critics. At his very worst, he comes across as appearing to say 'this is probably rubbish, and I'm a dreadful artist' while secretly knowing just how damn good he really is and hoping to have this deprecation returned triply in protesting praise. The insipid self-attack is most present in the long-winded and text-dense sections of Ware's books, where he inserts spoof advertisements and articles under auspicious headings such as "Meaning of Life". These sections are usually about one tenth as clever and satirical as they think they are. Despite their clear demonstration that Ware is a

### A SCENE DRAWN BY WARE IS LIKE A WORK OF ELEGANT MATHEMATICS: A TRULY CREATIVE AND ORIGINAL PIECE, WHERE EVERY DETAIL IS PERFECT

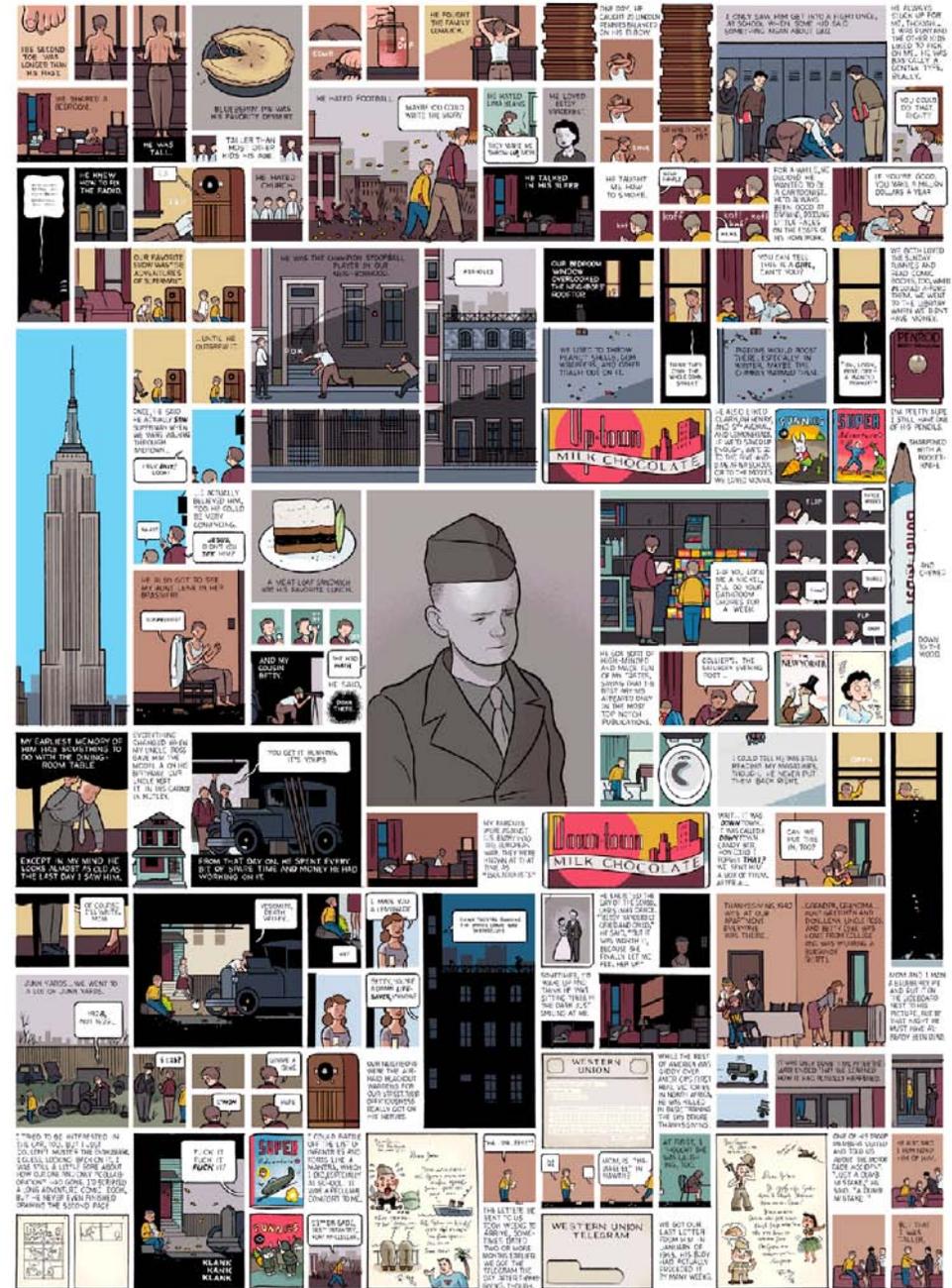


graphic genius not a wordsmith, there are, however, stand out pieces which make perfect use of his ability to frame depression in retro contexts, even without the aid of pictures.

It's this sense of nostalgic despair which characterises Chris Ware's work thematically, in the same way that his distinctive style characterises the aesthetic side. In Jimmy

Corrigan we were treated to a complete novel, but the majority of the output is in single strips, most of them huge, larger-than-A4-sized sheets. Almost all of these strips end on the kind of disharmonious chord which causes the reader to question whether the pieces can be meant simply as enjoyable fun, or as discomfiting shocks designed to provoke a reaction. For example, in a one-off strip called Frank Phosphate,

Man of the Air we are told a simple six-panel story of an airship disaster gone explosively wrong. The final frame shows the limbs of the eponymous Captain Phosphate divorced from his body in a pool of blood while his only marginally more fortunate sidekick crawls on the floor with one leg and one hand, murmuring "Cap'n - oh - I'm dyin' ... bleedin' t'death! \*ag\*!". On one level this is simple emotional provocation, a tragic accident presented as depressingly as possible, but more deeply it's a comment on the nature of companionship, that Captain Phosphate is the big shot, big name, big adventure hero with a sidekick so loyal that even in his last moments of a life cut short by the irresponsibility of his master he still looks up to the captain for guidance. It's Ware's ability to capture such complex sentiments in just six frames, five speech bubbles and two sound effects that makes him a master of his art.





# ZOMBIES!!

**OFFICER RICK GRIMES GETS SHOT BY AN ESCAPED CONVICT, WAKING UP A MONTH LATER IN A SUSPICIOUSLY SILENT HOSPITAL. SILENT UNTIL HE OPENS THE CANTEN DOOR AND DISCOVERS A ROOM FULL OF ZOMBIES HEADING STRAIGHT AT HIM, AT LEAST...**

**WORDS:** ANDREW REVELL  
**DESIGN:** TASHA CAINE

**G**eorge A. Romero might have created some near-perfect zombie flicks, but there is only so much that can be done in film. Capturing the drama of a zombie apocalypse means there is already so much occurring that the monotony of everyday survival inevitably has to happen off camera. But when an ongoing format, such as monthly comics, takes a look at the aftermath it has the potential to go much further. When the writer pledges for it to continue for a very long time and it is still running four years after it first launched, it suddenly becomes one of the most essential pieces of zombie entertainment around.

Despite the fact *The Walking Dead* is about survivors, not zombies, it still needs the rules setting out. By the end of the second issue, the reader already knows the majority of the zombie characteristics. Zombies move

I THINK WE'VE GOT SOME GOOD PEOPLE HERE... I THINK WE'RE GETTING BY OKAY... BUT HONESTLY... I JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT ANYONE'S THINKING.

TO ME, THAT'S SCARIER THAN ANY HALF-ROTTEN GHOUL TRYING TO EAT MY FLESH.



slowly, it takes brain damage to kill them, and it only takes one bite for them to make you one of them. And aside from a couple of little additions later on, such as being able to hide by smearing blood and entrails on oneself, the story is allowed to progress without needing to focus on constantly explaining why and how events are taking place.

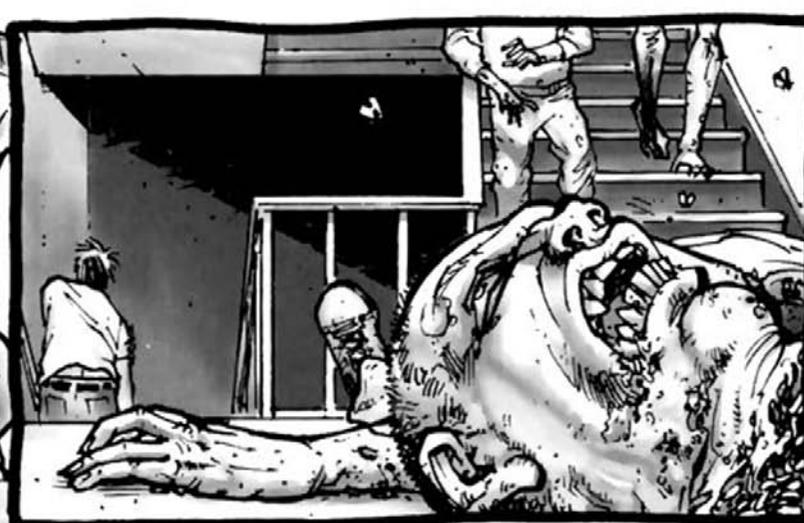
Perhaps the most impressive aspect of *The Walking Dead* is the way the story is told. Too many comics try and pretend that they are novels or movies, but *The Walking Dead* never falls into that hole. The plot progresses effortlessly through well-planned dialogue and through the artwork, never relying on narration. When action scenes start, pages can be flicked through in seconds but when something terrible happens, and it regularly does, you'll instantly be stopped in your tracks. Such control over the tempo, and therefore the dramatic tension, means almost every single issue is a satisfying read all on its own.

Of course, it helps to have decent artwork. Starting in the hands of Tony Moore, *The Walking Dead* weathered the sometimes awkward switch of artists early. Issue seven saw Charles Adlard take over and he has been there ever since. It might not be the most

gloriously attractive book on the shelves, but it always manages to work perfectly with the writing style and maintain the atmosphere being created.

Despite such quality on the technical side, it would have meant nothing without a strong story. The first couple of issues are busy, trying to explain as much as possible in the





shortest amount of time, but once the protagonist Rick has met up with a group of survivors things settle into a steady rhythm. The need to find food and gasoline frequently forces them to keep moving, making much of the story a road trip from hell. Zombies are dispatched dispassionately when they make themselves known, but survival is the key factor.

The plotline offers almost no information on what happened to cause the zombies or how the disaster will end. The entire focus is on the characters involved, the concerns at how to raise children in such an environment, the moral implications of murder (and how justice should be dealt out), infidelity and much smaller problems, such as coping with people having smelly feet laying end to end in the same bed. There is even a point of etymological interest as different groups name the zombies differently, one group plumping for roamers, others biters and so on.

How many other zombie stories have got the time to show the women of the group doing laundry and discussing a new detergent? A movie couldn't include it, even though it is used to explain how Rick got with his wife. But equally panels and panels are filled with zombies being shot in the face, bashed with axes and battered with hammers. It is all quite messy, in fact.

Combining the two elements, the living and the living-dead, is what gives both aspects of the story their life. Either alone would be unimpressive, a soap and a splatter-fest respectively, but working together gives both life. Anyone can write a comic about the earth being filled with dead people saying "braaaains", but convincing a normally sane person that it is a real possibility is a much more difficult task. The fact Robert Kirkman manages it with consummate ease is why everyone should read it.

That and the fact that zombies are cool, of course.



# COMICS

# THE DOORMAT

THE PAGES WHERE A BUNCH OF TALENTED PEOPLE SEND THEIR COMICS SO THEY CAN SEE WHAT **DISPOSABLE MEDIA** THINKS OF THEM...

WORDS AND DESIGN: ANDREW REVELL

No, you're not lost. The Doormat has now appeared in the comic section, reviewing just as much as we can fit in like it did in the music section. The rules of inclusion are simple; ask nicely and we'll try and fit your work in. From strips drawn in your spare time to the output of smaller publishers, everything is welcome. And no preference is made for print comics over their web counterparts, as both are equally worthy of attention.

In fact this Doormat starts with a web comic, named **WEWATCH**. The story opens with a young man waking on a desert island, hungry and with the number three carved into his back, knowing very little about what is going on. Which is a strong start to an immaculately presented comic. And although it doesn't particularly need innovation, the readers are able to vote for the perils the group will face in the next issue. Thankfully that isn't anywhere near as tacky as it sounds,

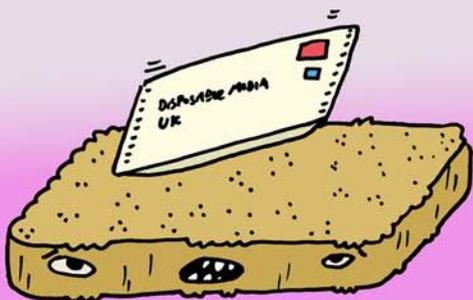
it keeps the story fresh and it fits in with the story. The only real problem is that the text is translated from German to English and it shows, as although the writing is acceptable, it's completely lacking in flair. Worth a look.

**WILDSEED**, from IK Comics, is somewhere between web comic and print comic, in that it is a print comic available to buy and read on the web. It is very much a straight superhero tale, but sadly reminiscent of Rob Liefeld's Youngblood series. Both seem fun to start with, but the limitation soon becomes a little depressing. The "twist" here is, according to some of the blurb, that "this is the first time you will have a group of mostly young African American heroes placed in a

**WILDSEED IS A STRAIGHT SUPER-HERO TITLE BUT IS SADLY REMINISCENT OF ROB LIEFELD'S YOUNGBLOOD SERIES**

science fiction life-or-death situation" and then goes on to namecheck both angst and hip-hop. In the thirteen, splash heavy, pages that follow the only evidence for this is that one of the characters says "da" every now and again. Despite a wealth of extra content, thirteen pages is still too few to judge the book and not enough to be worth even the single dollar being charged. The dedicated digital viewer helps, although it really would benefit from being able to fill screens bigger than 1024x768. But ultimately, the story just seems to finish before it has started. Despite that, it is worth having a look at their site for a range of other comics and a demo of the viewer.

**SCORN**, the first title from new publisher Septagon Studios, is actually the only comic on this page available to buy in print. Concerned with a man's reaction to a random shooting that killed his best friend, it is a suitably dark and brooding comic to suit the title. Vigilantism on a small scale summarises



the rest of the book, never as destructive as Punisher or as morally correct as Batman, but intended to be more realistic than either. The art style is almost purposefully vague, which, while it suits action scenes well, seems a little hard to follow in simple panels. But that doesn't mean the whole effect isn't stylistically impressive. Despite a few flashes of brilliance, ill-planned vigilantism ending in a broken leg after jumping off the roof they are balanced out with poor moments such as a female character suddenly stripping at the end.

It needs work, but it has enough potential to be a very good book.

Sadly not quite reaching print yet is **SHADES**, an eminently readable UK created comic. Fitting roughly into the superhero genre, the tale drops so few hints as to

how it will develop that describing the story in anything other than vague terms feels like denying the reader some of the fun. Essentially, a group of people involved in the last war are suddenly under threat and being informed by their former tailor. Not many comics lead with an old man and a young Asian boy, but not many comics are this good either. Not only does it look great, each character being well drawn and instantly recognisable, it also is packed to the rafters with interesting moments and features some of the best writing not only on this page but in the whole comic section. There is even a

**SHADES IS PACKED TO THE RAFTERS WITH INTERESTING MOMENTS AND FEATURES SOME OF THE BEST WRITING IN THE WHOLE COMICS SECTION**

relatively large amount already available online and all for free. In short, read this. If you don't read any other comic off this page, read this one. It is really quite fantastic.

Last up this issue, **SAMMY THE SKUNK**, Issue 1 - Election Day. On quite the other end of the professional scale, featuring hand-written lettering and black-and-white line drawings, it is a fun enough tale. The book is part cartoon, part noir and part superhero and really quite different from anything else.

Concerned with a world where chocolate is an illegal substance, with frequent gang wars and cute inhabitants, it features a character created to do the dirty work. The cute aesthetic belie an occasionally darker tale, but it is never pointlessly offensive. It doesn't look great outside of the main character and it is sometimes zany for the sake

of it - making it hard work to read - but it has good ideas frothing over the side on almost every page. It needs work but the well-intended originality makes it worth a go.

Conveniently, as if planned, that last comic is only available to view at ComicSpace, the URL being elsewhere on the page. Well, Disposable Media has its own ComicSpace page now - <http://www.comicspace.com/disposablemedia/> and that is an ideal place to make your comic known to us, or simply email [andrew.revell@disposablemedia.co.uk](mailto:andrew.revell@disposablemedia.co.uk) with a link to your project or to get the address to send a print copy to. Until next time!



[wewatch-comic.de/en/](http://wewatch-comic.de/en/)



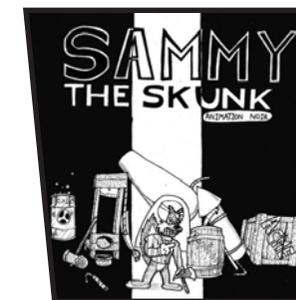
[ikcomics.com](http://ikcomics.com)



[septagonstudios.com](http://septagonstudios.com)



[brokenvoice.co.uk](http://brokenvoice.co.uk)



[comicspace.com/warpedwenger](http://comicspace.com/warpedwenger)

**NOT EVERY LASTING-MEMORY WILL BE A GOOD ONE. AND, IN A SIMILAR REGARD, NOT EVERY RETROSPECTIVE WILL BE A ROSE-TINTED REFLECTION ON WHAT WAS ONCE SO GREAT. SO DM TAKES A LOOK AT HOW DC COMICS TURNED BATMAN'S TRAGEDY INTO A FARCE OF EPIC, EPIC PROPORTIONS.**

# BATMAN: A DEATH IN THE FAMILY

**WORDS:** DAN THORNTON  
**DESIGN:** ANDREW REVELL

“IT WOULD BE A REALLY SLEAZY STUNT TO BRING HIM BACK”  
DENNY O'NEIL, EDITOR,  
BATMAN COMICS, 1989



When Frank Miller, creator of both *Batman: Year One* and *Batman: Dark Knight Returns* describes something as “the ugliest thing I've seen in comics, and the most cynical” it must be something deserving of a second look. With DC comics currently going through a period of reinvention, including a starring role for Jason Todd, now seems to be the time to look back at how he met his end the first time around.

The reason for this criticism is clear. Batman's original sidekick, Dick Grayson, was a successful solo character and leader of The Teen Titans. His eventual replacement, Jason Todd, hadn't been as well received, and DC Comics wanted to try out a new technology for the first time. So the first three issues were set up to build to a cliff hanger ending, with the fate of Jason unresolved after an explosion.

Readers then had 36 hours to take part in a phone vote to decide whether Todd lived or died, with two versions of the final issue of the story ready and waiting. Todd's fate was sealed by a margin of 5,343 to 5,271. A total of 10,614 calls, and a decision made by just 72 votes.

The death haunted Batman for the next ten years of comics, symbolised by a shrine containing Robin's costume in the Batcave. Robin reappeared in 2003, and was permanently resurrected by Judd Winick in 2005, continuing the unfortunate trend of death being meaningless for mainstream comic characters. “I was less interested in the how and the why and the what of Jason Todd returning from the dead than I was about what Jason's return would do to Batman.”

Ignoring the fact that it voided the decision of an audience dedicated enough to vote, and once more destroyed any hope at comic book continuity, at least the resurrection of Todd's Robin only damaged a story that was, at best, mediocre.

Writer Jim Starlin had poignantly captured the final days of Captain Marvel in 1982, but six years later he crammed every panel with enough text to fill a novel, overwhelming the reader and beating out any emotion

with a blunt object. The fact that Jason Todd discovered his dead mother was not his real parent, and that there were three possible living mothers happily led him to Beirut and eventually Ethiopia at the same time as Batman visited in pursuit of The Joker, setting up an obvious and unmoving set piece as Todd discovered his real mother was in league with the crazed villain. And having barely met, there was no clear reason for the trip.

Even the appearance of Superman and the typically enjoyable interplay between the world's strongest man and the world's biggest brain could only lift the mood temporarily, while the art and even quality of the paper used suggested a company not overly proud of their work. Add in some Iranian Ayatollah asking the Joker to become the Iranian ambassador to the U.S, and, even allowing for the almost 20 years which have passed, it still seems crass and ill-judged.

Cynical comic fans commonly point to The Death of Superman in 1993 as the most obvious cash-in on a popular character, but at least that story came from the interesting idea of removing a character that the world took for granted - to imagine if he hadn't existed. But Jason Todd was no such high sacrifice, as revealed in the postscript to his death: “We had a character whose popularity was, at best, uncertain, and we had a telephone experiment we wanted to try.” As such, Superman's rebirth paved the way for Todd, Green Arrow, Elongated Man and Hal Jordan to return from the grave, amongst others, and DC's continuity nosedived in a way not seen since someone decided to double the number of heroes by creating a second Earth.

If you want to see a dark and almost hideous world of Batman, opt for Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's *The Killing Joke*, which may have done little except shock, but did it in a more artistic and visceral way. And most importantly, it didn't rely on a 1-900 telephone poll.



**HALO: UPRISING,  
#1  
(MARVEL)**

The story forming the Halo game universe features frequently awful pseudo-religious babble mixed with talking plant life. And yet it's held together with enough interesting ideas for it to still be one of the more interesting sci-fi universes created in recent years.

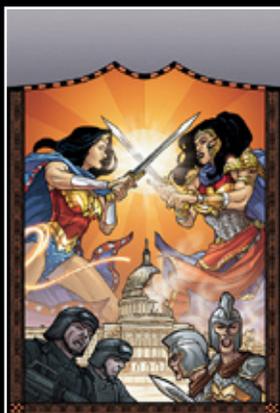
This new four-parter plugs the gap between Halo 2 and 3. And with Brian Michael Bendis and Alex Maleev pairing up, as they did on Daredevil v2, quality is almost assured. Dialogue works predictably well and the art is truly gorgeous.

But that isn't enough. The core action of the game is translated poorly to comics form and as a solution Master Chief is seemingly defeated within the first five pages. The story then switches to a random nobody on earth. It gives a chance to develop the story, albeit slowly, but despite name dropping never feels like it's true to Halo. It might get better, but it isn't worth fighting the Covenant for...

Andrew Revell



**"IT MIGHT GET BETTER, BUT IT ISN'T WORTH FIGHTING THE COVENANT FOR."**



**AMAZONS  
ATTACK 1-6  
(DC COMICS)**

With fantastic covers, strong interior art and good marketing, this is a mini-series that many looked forward to. Such a shame, then, that the writing fails on every level.

The USA is under attack, people are being slaughtered, the president was briefly kidnapped. Terrorists are exploding bombs and burning crops. Despite such a series of unfortunate events, there are no consequences shown; this is insultingly simplistic enough to be a children's story. The actions of superheroes not only make little

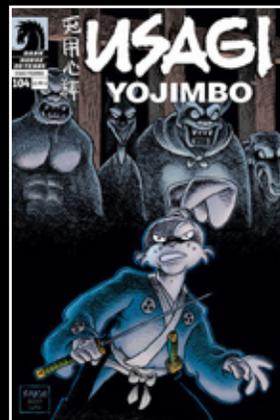
sense but are frequently out of character, action is badly scripted and the plot is dire.

Those who suffered through to the final issue were treated to an ill-planned twist that was never foreshadowed. This tale is a mess. It could have been great, but it never came close. Disappointingly disastrous.

Andrew Revell



**"MILES FROM THE HIGH BUDGET, HIGH-QUALITY CROSSOVER PROMISED."**



**USAGI YOJIMBO  
#104  
(DARK HORSE)**

Stan Sakai has a difficult task in keeping his series fresh, given the saturation of the "Samurai in feudal Japan" genre. Whether it's his native comic book format, or creeping out to films, one can't help feeling, upon picking up each new Usagi Yojimbo, that it's all been seen before.

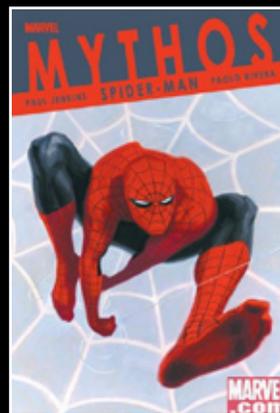
What a good thing then, that Sakai's series has developed such a self-contained economy of storytelling in each issue, single issues never threatening to outstay their welcome with the "tune in next week folks" serialisation that plagues

most comics. Sakai has made the mini-story his best friend, #104 a classic example: a girl's illness is cured by a priest's unwise bargain, leading to the trademark demonic rampage typical of recent Usagi. In Sakai's hands, comic violence becomes comical violence, the gory details delivered with a brazen flippancy that complements the plot-silliness and reveals each issue as the short shot of adrenaline and drama that it is.

Jim Miles



**"COMIC VIOLENCE BECOMES COMICAL VIOLENCE, THE GORY DETAILS ARE DELIVERED WITH A BRAZEN FLIPPANCY."**



**MYTHOS #1:  
SPIDER-MAN  
(MARVEL)**

To the outsider, Marvel's obsession with repackaging its past must seem like a cynical cash-in operation. For the fan, however, superhero comics are modern mythology - the same stories retold endlessly with new embellishments and interpretations changing over time. The truth is somewhere in between and this version of Spidey's origin provides plenty of interpretive elements, few of which add anything to the story we already know.

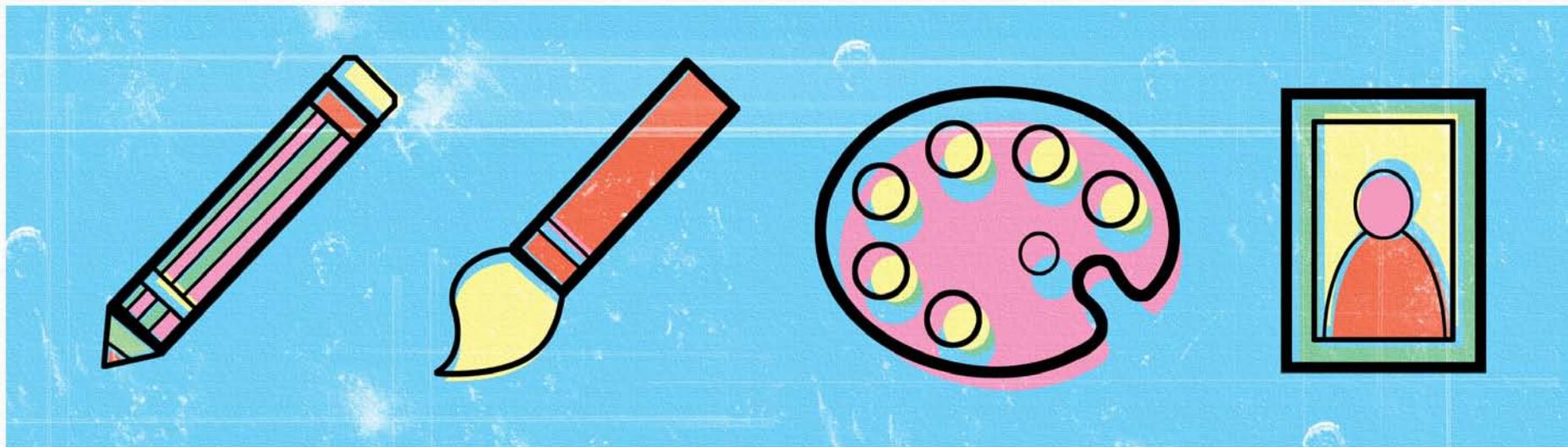
Peter is caricatured as a greater dork at the start, and becomes more of a badass when he gets his powers.

Little details, such as a cyclewear-garbed training sequence, try hard but will only excite the hardcore Spidermaniac. The comic is saved, just barely, by the lovely painted artwork and the way it shows, as if a new historical analysis, the intricate way Peter's family life contributes to his early rapaciousness and need too express himself. It's a needless respinning of an old story, but at least it looks good.

Jim Miles



**"A NEEDLESS RESPINNING OF AN OLD STORY, BUT AT LEAST IT LOOKS GOOD."**



welcome to the disposable media gallery...

/ charlene chua / jingna zhang / zhu hai bo / florent auguy





# charlene chua

WHAT: XEROX/GLASS  
WHO: CHARLENE CHUA  
WHERE: WWW.CHARLENECHUA.COM



# jingnazhang

**WHAT:** THE MOMENT AFTER...  
/THIS SIDE UP. II  
**WHO:** JINGNA ZHANG  
**WHERE:** [HTTP://ZEMOTION.NET](http://ZEMOTION.NET)

# zhu hai bo



**WHAT:**  
**WHO:**  
**WHERE:**

MARILYN MONROE / SHE LOVE BUMBLEBEE / AUDREY HEPBURN  
ZHU HAI BO  
[HTTP://ZHUZHU.DEVIANTART.COM](http://zhuZHU.DEVIANTART.COM)

# florent auguy

WHO:  
WHERE:

FLORENT AUGUY  
WWW.AUGUY.NET



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