

# GSO

Gamestyle Offline #3



Rare | EA uncovered | Phantagram Interview | Importing Zelda  
Super Monkey Ball 2 | Metroid Prime | Unreal Championship

# Contents:



Those of you with a keen eye might notice a slight overhaul, visually, in this issue. Whilst the improved screenshot quality in Issue 2 was a result of reader feedback, this time the extra splashes of colour are purely because we wanted to add them.

Despite desperately trying to convince our readers that the first two issues were not based on a certain popular multifomat gaming magazine many of you were adamant that the styling (if you'll excuse the pun) of the earlier magazines had that certain familiar 'edge'.

This wasn't the case, at all, and in fact the magazine was based around a computer graphics publication and this editor hadn't read a copy of the aforementioned gaming rag for 6 months. Still, to avoid any further confusion, we've decided to alter the look of Offline over the next couple of months - we're heading back to the roots of videogaming.

Not just in a greater emphasis on retro gaming (as you can no doubt notice from the main feature in this magazine) but also with regards to the increased characterisation of the writers - the mugshots of whom are just there across the page for your, er, delight.

There's no point producing such a magazine if you can't have fun along the way - none of us receive a single penny for doing this, it's our love of gaming that keeps us from trashing the folder marked GSO on the desktop each evening. We'd like to think it's a similar passion that keeps you downloading and reading the magazine each issue, too.

Of course, Gamestyle is not just about Offline - far from it. If you've never visited gamestyle.net you'll have missed out on years of dedicated, hardcore gaming news, reviews and features - we're not just another independant site (as this magazine will verify) - we're here for the long run.

With unrivalled support and recognition from all the major publishers and PR companies, an ambitious and ever growing writing team and even a brand new design coming in the next few weeks (depending on when you read this) there isn't a site quite like Gamestyle.

Enjoy the magazine, then, but please don't be shy - we want to know what you think. Email us at [offline@gamestyle.net](mailto:offline@gamestyle.net) and we'll gladly take on board whatever you have to say.

Alex, Offline editor.



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**Gamestyle Offline #3**

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# News:

Here another round up of the best bits of all the news that hit Gamestyle over the last few weeks for all of you that may have missed it.

If you've played any of Link's previous adventures you'll be glad to know that the controls and weapons are identical, there are few items you'll not be able to use right away.

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## Release Dates:

Gamecube:

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# Preview:

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# Feature: Zelda for importers

Alex explains why you really should think about importing the latest Zelda game if you get the chance, even if you don't read Japanese.



Sure, you might miss out on some of the text, but the amazingly drawn facial expressions give away more emotion than words in any language - it's never hard to work out what Link is thinking

Miyamoto's Ocarina of Time is the stuff of legends, if you'll excuse the wordplay. Those of us lucky enough to be a part of it when it was originally released will still retain highly fond memories, and if we're fortunate enough to speak with someone of similar taste these days we'll instantly pull up scenes and sections from Link's greatest ever adventure and tunnel the conversation towards tales of Dodongo's Cavern and the Temple of Time. I've played through the game several times and it never even shows hints of getting tired - it still plays fantastically, the dungeons a masterpiece of level design, and get this - looks just as good now as it did back then.

There have been other Zelda games since, of course - Majora's Mask was good, and the two Capcom-produced GBC games were quite brilliant too, but now Miyamoto's back behind the green hood, and Link's latest outing is out now to buy for the Japanese Gamecube. Japanese. It's that horribly squiggly stuff that you read upside down, or something, right?

Well, if you're not prepared to wait until June/July for the PAL release (or even March if you can play US games) you don't really have the choice - import the

Asian version of the game, or sit whilst the lucky few get to experience the magic without you.

For me, this was too much to miss out on. For someone who's Japanese language skills stretch no further than the basic Katakana needed to sort out Automatic from Manual on his Dreamcast F355 import, I was well aware I would in for a challenge with a text-heavy game like Zelda. So, armed with a switched US Cube, a skeletal walkthrough of the overworld bits and a wallet full of twenties, I decided to take the plunge and purchased my very own cute little plastic Wind Waker. I like those Japanese Gamecube boxes, why can't we get those over here? This isn't going to be a review of the game, though - for Gamestyle's impressions of the game head on over to [gamestyle.net](http://gamestyle.net) - and I can't promise that it'll be entirely spoiler free, although I will try to stick to at least the standard Zelda game principles, which if you've read this far already I'm quite sure you'll be more than familiar with but there will be mention of the story progression which I will clearly mark. What I will try to do, though, is balance out whether importing such a huge game as this is actually a good idea for those of us too lazy to actually learn the language.

Of course, if money's not an issue then I can say unreservedly yes - now - go and get the game; if only for the sheer hell of it - being able to witness those graphics: the incredible blend of cell shading and realistic special effects. If you though the visuals on Starfox were good then this will blow you away. It's not as smooth, mind, The Wind Waker's locked at 30 frames per second (half the rate of Rare's title), but what Nintendo have pulled off here is quite astonishing. There's not a game around that manages to create such a believable sense of depth perception, clever use of depth of field blurring and intelligent camera angles mean that the game creates about as 3 dimensional a view as possible given the inherently flat output device in front of you. Get it for the music - whether it's tasteful remixes of some classic Zelda tunes, or whether it's the brand new tracks, TWW doesn't disappoint. The sound effects are equally great, and the way the battles noises of steel against monster add to the music, Rez-style, is quite incredible and certainly something Miyamoto did well to keep secret until the game's release. Everything just sounds as spatial as it looks, too, huge chambers have a convincing echo effect and the Pro-Logic II surround sound means that the Gamecube has never sounded better.

Sadly, we're not all made of money, so back to the point of the feature. Zelda games have always been a 2-sided affair. Firstly, you've got your vast overworld - generally massive open areas full of houses, shops, lairs and so forth, and then you've got your dungeons. The dungeons tend to follow set rules - you won't know where you're going until you get the map, then you need the compass to highlight treasure chest and your location, and then there's the boss key to open the final door, where you'll face that particular dungeon's head honcho.

The bits of the Zelda games outside of the dungeons were always the most free-roaming, less linear if you like, but you were always pointed in the right direction eventually by whoever (or whatever) it was that was charged as your guide. Of course, when they're going on in several forms of (complex) Japanese it's hardly clear what to do next, in fact, without some kind of guide you'll struggle even getting off the first island - TWW is much more focused on the player triggering cut scenes that advance the story and if you're not sure what you're supposed to be looking at through the spy-glass, or hitting with the grappling hook you'll be running around in circles for hours.



If you've played any of Link's previous adventures you'll be glad to know that the controls and weapons are identical, there are few items you'll not be able to use right away.





TWW plays very much like Ocarina of Time - one larger 'overworld' (this time mainly water) and several 'dungeon' areas. Be ready for a large amount of exploring in the 2nd half.

With that in mind, I'd certainly recommend you getting hold of JL Lee's basic guide over at GameFAQS ([www.gamefaqs.com/console/gamecube/game/3447.html](http://www.gamefaqs.com/console/gamecube/game/3447.html)) and glancing over it - it doesn't give away anything that the characters don't ask you to do in the game itself, so in that respect you can't really call it cheating. If you can, try and stick to just the bit marked Walkthrough - it doesn't list any of the objectives, locations or even boss tactics in each of the dungeons neither, and if you can avoid the temptation of reading ahead of your location, you'll be fine.

It really is little more than a very basic translation guide - if one of the characters suggests you make jumps up and around the Deku Tree it would be lost on you despite the game offering some pointers with little cutscenes, but that's all the guide tells you: "make the jumps" - leaving you to work out how, exactly. You can read the other bits, and he explains the various items and weapons excellently, but stay away from the boss tactics section if you can!

So, you'll make progress - I did - and you'll eventually get through the game. I seriously wouldn't suggest you try and get through the game without a guide such as this, there would be far too much aimless wandering around, and you'll still be getting your money's worth as you're still left to work out the details yourself. Of course, should Mr Lee update his guide to include more of the details then it's entirely possible that you might well end up spoiling the game a little - I downloaded version 1.2 (dated the 20/12/02) but later versions are likely to expand on various areas.

Although you're quite able now to make progress through the game, you're missing out on one of the game's biggest selling points: the storyline. That's something that really can't be helped as the Zelda games have always started off with fairly unassuming plots before ending up with Link saving the world. The prolog of the game revolves around the back story of OoT and Majora's Mask and a strangely unnamed 'Hero' (presumably so you can

use your own name) but makes them more of a myth than reality, with Ganon ruling the land. There's then a big flood, and that's where the story starts.

For the record, the storyline progressions of TWW goes a little bit like this:

There's a bird flying around Hyrule that kidnaps a strangely familiar girl dressed as a pirate. She escapes, but when the bird strikes again it captures Link's sister instead. You then set sail with a pirate crew to rescue her and to do requires 3 orbs, and you'll get one orb per dungeon. When you've got all three stones, a huge temple arises from the sea - the Temple of Time and that's the first section of

the game done. Upon removing the Master Sword from the pedestal it all kicks off, and Link's Triforce of Courage is broken into eight pieces which you'll have to recover from the depths of the sea. Sadly, there aren't another 8 dungeons, only a couple in the second part of the game.

You'll get most of this through cut-scenes, of course, but TWW has a huge amount of text to wade through, and because none of it makes sense if you can't read the language, you're going to be missing out on the subtlety and storytelling. It's here that you've got to make the decision on whether this is that important to you or not - I've already stating that it's not impossible to get through the game, especially with a guide, but without that crucial understanding of Japanese most of the game will undoubtedly be lost on you - and that also includes the huge wealth of sub games and side-tasks that are there in every Zelda game.

Keep an eye out for the 'password' bit, though - the guide I talked about before mentions it but it's proving to be a frustrating section for anyone not really paying attention. Basically, a cutscene in the back of one of the shops after you've completed 2 dungeons reveals a password that you'll need to repeat to enter a door a little later on - you need to write down the word in red that the characters in the scene repeat a few times, but if you're unfamiliar with the various Japanese character sets you should take your time in this section - pay attention to any accents over the characters (which can be added in the password entry section by first selecting the base character then selecting the accent) and make sure you get the right word - if you miss the password it can be a bit of a nightmare getting the game to repeat it to you again, so best you don't save the game until you get through the door, eh?

I don't want to put you off, however, as I enjoyed TWW massively regardless of not really getting to grips with the details - the dungeons play perfectly well without any English, it's just the main overworld and the storyline that's the problems. Of course, with the US release only 3 months away now it's becoming less of an issue to wait for a native language copy of the game, but for real die-hard Zelda fans and anyone remotely interested in some amazing level design and those stunning graphics and sounds, there's only one thing you can do...



There are new characters in The Wind Waker (this is your Grandma) but you'll have to make the decision as to whether it's entirely important to understand every thing they say or not.

# Feature: Realism in games

Stefane takes a look at the increased amount of realism in today's games and asks whether such a thing can be called an improvement.



Sega's Virtua Tennis series (now available on PS2 too) offers realistic players mixed with an arcade style of gameplay. It works brilliantly and is a superb example of multiplayer addictiveness.

The 70s, the dark ages, an enormous box, a black and white display, two small vertical bars, a tiny square bouncing back from one bar to the other: a tennis game, or "Pong", is creating a small revolution, and entertaining people world-wide.

The 90s, a small grey box, a colour TV, four cartoony players with rudimentary animation: another tennis game, or Super Tennis, is one of the first titles available on the Super Nintendo. It goes fairly unnoticed, a good little game though.

The year 2001, an even smaller grey box, a widescreen TV, two players, animated and recreated to perfection -well I can clearly see that they represent Tim Henman and Carlos Moya-, Virtua Tennis on the Dreamcast.

**"Bloody hell, this one really looks good" I say.**

**"It's crap" answers my friend. "Look at Moya's face, and his hair! Virtua Tennis 2 is way better!"**

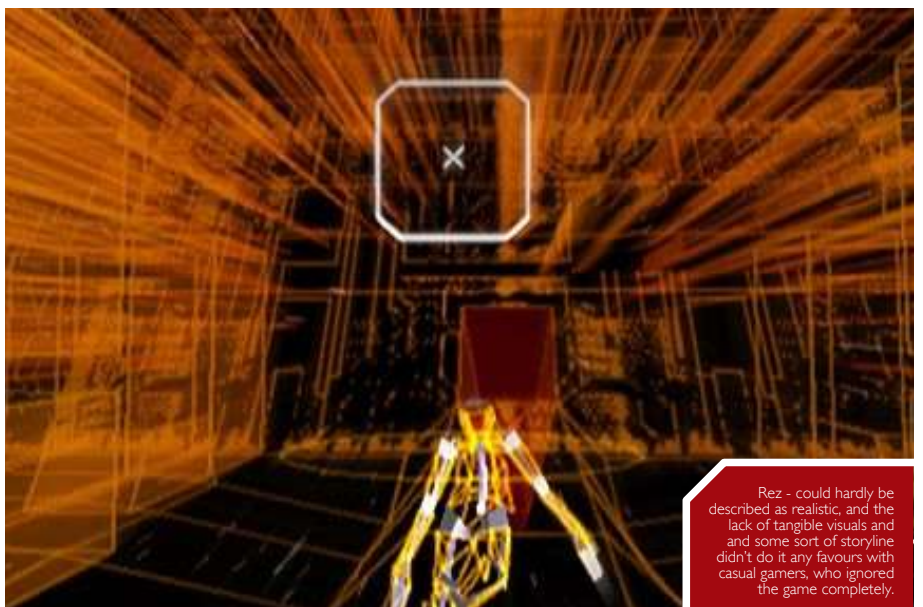
And he's right, Virtua Tennis 2 is way better, and yet it runs on the same machine... Even weirder is the fact that I thoroughly enjoyed the first Virtua Tennis last year, but now, why would I play it? The -at this time- new one looks better and plays better.

The problem is that, while wanting more realism in a tennis game is understandable and is the right way to go, this approach has been the same for all genres, and is showing its limits. Indeed, recreating reality limits creativity and therefore imagination. One genre that has been really affected is the platform genre. Looking at how the last Mario Sunshine game under-performed sales-wise shows just how, despite Mario being an icon, the public will overlook anything that hasn't got fancy graphics. And fancy here means photo-realistic.

How many teenagers will play anything with tits, explosions and foul mouth dialogs and laugh at you if you mention Super Monkey Ball because of its "kiddy,



Mario Sunshine didn't sell as much as Nintendo would have hoped - was that due to a change in direction for the series, of the cartoony visuals that it's currently fashionable to dislike?



Rez - could hardly be described as realistic, and the lack of tangible visuals and some sort of storyline didn't do it any favours with casual gamers, who ignored the game completely.

colourful graphics". "A game for little japanese girls" said a review I read in Kerrang. I won't even mention Rez or Jet Set Radio, it would make me cry...This morning, the news on the radio talked about video games. Probably for the first time ever! What was the game that caught their attention? The Getaway, "a movie budget", "the most realistic game ever made" said the voice. While it is a tempting route, and a successful one looking at the sales for GTA3, GTA Vice city, and I'm sure The Getaway, one can only wonder where to go once you've reached the end of this road. What's at the end of this road, you ask? Probably this thing everyone has been talking about for ages, this "interactive movie".

**The characters will be actors, driving games will be like the real thing, you'll probably even have the congested roads.**

Action games? Shooting games only, but you should see with what level of realism your enemies cry and bleed under the impact of your bullets! Hmm, very exciting... Nintendo will probably have capitulated with their funny ideas of making games that can appeal to all, and will develop real kiddies games, only if it's worth it financially, mind.

If and when the games reach the mass market, will there be much space for the nerdy games, these endless RPGs set in middle-earth (Lord of the rings will be back to its "uncool" status by then) or whatever similar imaginary world? Is it not more viable financially to publish "Coronation Street – the game" instead?

Think hard, 200,000 demanding nerds, or 3,000,000 brainless customers, that you can easily get into the habit of buying your updates every year, as long as the next instalment is visually more impressive than the last? The nerds will not only look at the graphics

but they will also try to know how they play, study the magic system, the AI, the novelty, talk about a nightmare !!!

I'm not against trying to have more realism in games, games like Rainbow 6 and its sequels, or more recently Splinter Cell, introduce a new dimension in games, use realism to build tension and immerse the payer in the game's environment, you hold your breath, you move in the shadow, knowing that one single mistake might be fatal. The point is that these games also have an intelligent gameplay, and realism is only one their assets.

**What worries me is how the public seems to only care about that realism and will choose games looking at the four tiny pictures at the back of the box. Take their ice-cold reaction when they realised the new Zelda will use cel-shading.**

What is the problem with a cartoony Link, why not accept Myamoto's vision for his character, why should all videogame characters look the same? Link's world is one of fairytales, of princesses and monsters, yes it is colourful and "childish" but then what? People seem to happily embrace the orcs and elves in LOTR or the bestiary of Harry Potter but will overlook the same thing in games.

In a way the situation for these games is similar to where the Disney cartoons were in the eighties and early nineties. Whereas the old Disney cartoons appealed to everyone, these ones were seen as childish, with annoying, moralist songs. Then Aladdin came and changed that, thanks to its witty humour,

by the way it appealed to an older audience while still pleasing the kids. The movies that followed had evolved, had learnt from what Aladdin demonstrated, and were successful again.

Maybe these more traditional games have failed to make that change, have lost their appeal to the older, more critical gamers, and a game is needed to turn things round. Games like Jak and Daxter or Ratchet and Clank have done that but I don't think that they've had the impact necessary to change things.

The coming years are going to be critical for that matter. If the most successful games are only the likes of Soldier of Fortune, Grand Theft Auto and all the sport/extreme sport licences then a major part of gaming might disappear.

And even if it doesn't completely disappear it will only make the publishers even more conservative... Zelda: the Wind Waker should give us a good (or bad) indication when it is released next year. Let us pray.



The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker sports cartoony cel-shaded graphics. They're quite beautiful, but sadly also considered childish. Will this affect it's sales when it's finally released over here?



The Getaway, Vice City and Soldier of Fortune all sold well to the somewhat cliched PS2 market - mid teens to early 20s. Something's right, though, Vice City alone has sold millions of copies.

# Review: Super Monkey Ball 2

Everyone loved Super Monkey Ball, and Alex thinks the sequel is even better. The only problem is that it's still not out over here yet.

Super Monkey Ball wasn't what you'd call a Sega game, if you will, it was most definitely a Nintendo game, despite it's developer. Not literally, of course, but beyond the hedgehog-hued logo on boot up, the shining playability and inspired game mechanics and control screamed not only Nintendo, but Miyamoto, such was it's overwhelming perfectness.

If you're lucky enough to live in the States or Japan you'll have no doubt picked up the sequel already, then - but for us PAL gamers it's just another title pushed back into 2003 as Starfox and Eternal Darkness head up the Gamecube's (rather subdued) Christmas push in Europe. However, there's nothing stopping us grabbing both an American machine and the game, barring some grey-import issues, and that's just what I did thanks to the lovely guys at CA Games in Glasgow - and thankfully, Super Monkey Ball 2 is worth every single penny, or cent, if you're being pedantic.

If you've not played Super Monkey Ball, you'd better climb out from under that rock. Yes, you can play it with one hand (in fact, one opposable thumb is just about enough) and yes, the concept really is as simple as rolling a ball around various bizarrely themed 'levels' towards a goal - but look beyond what might originally seem childish, simple, boring even, because it's none of those adjectives. No, really. Because it's brilliant - utterly addictive and hard as hell.

**Super Monkey Ball 2 will take you to the cleaners (and back). It sucks you in with some deceptively simple introductory levels, then hits you like a sledgehammer.**

You think you're hardcore, you think you're good at games? You're not, not until you've beaten every last level on Sega's latest, and that won't come soon. Sure, you'll breeze through the first set of



The main one-player game returns but it's much better this time around with more structure and a clearer path to your ultimate goal. It also looks a lot better too, with more variation in the levels.

levels in Story mode (which is a brand new addition which lets you select the order in which you want to tackle each board in that particular difficulty level, and gives unlimited retrys) and you'll probably not struggle with the 2nd and 3rd areas, especially if you've played the first, but once you get inside the whale the evilness of Amusement Vision starts to shine through.

The levels are so much more diverse, so much more rich, solid, 3 dimensional even, than in the first - the levels just move so much more: there are switches and spinning things, bending sections, seesaws, curling parts, tumbling goals and even huge animated spiders walking around - it's so far ahead in terms of creativity that it's almost a completely new approach to the series. Whether it's partly because of the improved graphical engine (which also extends to the now quite gorgeous looking 3 dimensional backgrounds) or whether it's just AV assuming you've played (and beat) the first game, I'm not sure, but it's certainly more hardcore.

Which, to be fair, is much needed on the Gamecube. Mario Sunshine might have provided some challenge but it didn't last very long, and whilst Starfox lasted somewhat longer, the difficulty curve was flatlined throughout. So here's Monkey Ball 2 - and it's hard. But too hard? No, because Sega know that not everyone lives, breathes and eats games; and so there's 12 (count them) mini games in there - six of which are tweaked versions of the original ones - Race, Fight, Target, Golf, Billiards and Bowling, and quite brilliantly, six are totally brand new - Tennis, Soccer, Dog Fighting, Boat Race, Shot (Virtua Copy style) and Baseball.

**These mini games aren't just little asides to the main game, in this instance they've actually managed to shine even more than the gargantuan challenge of Story mode - in fact, there's so much substance in those 12 games that it almost covers the cost of importing in one fell swoop.**

They're all professionally produced, multi player, and every bit as pretty and addictive as the engaging main game - if you've got a few mates some of the games (mainly Target, in which all the players now play simultaneously, and Bowling) are well worth the asking fee alone.

Without going into too much detail about each and every game, it's worth mentioning a select few to give you a taster. The aforementioned Target (or Target 2, really) involves you rolling your monkey (in it's ball) down a steep ski-jump style slope - once you're airborne tapping A will open the ball and then you've to guide it towards the targets

marked out with score numbers, much like an archery bullseye.

Of course, it's not entirely that simple - there's the wind to take into account, and there's an all new bonus system where you can pick up multipliers and magnets whilst up in the air, and with other players now battling for airspace it's superbly well done and as the rounds count down the atmosphere becomes tense as you struggle to land on the ever decreasing targets.

Other games of note include Golf 2, which is now a step away from the mini-golf of the first game and is actually a full sized 'real' 18 holer; and Soccer and Tennis, which take the best bits of Sega hits Virtua Striker and Virtua Tennis and wrap them up in simplified, colourful simian fun. Fantastic stuff.

Whilst the remixed original games are available at first, the new games require you to play through the main game and win points before they become unlocked, which retains some reason to go back to those hellish Story mode levels.

**Graphically quite brilliant, locked at 60 frames a second, it certainly looks the part - there's even a widescreen mode.**

And whilst the music and sound effects can get a little jarring, presentation is through the roof - everything loads instantly, high scores and beaten levels are autosaved discretely - it's just a wonderfully produced game from start to finish.

Sadly, it's not out over here yet, but it will be, soon - if you can't wait, however, grab that credit card and treat yourself to a shiny new US Gamecube, there's not a more rewarding, challenging and downright addictive game out there at the moment, and it's certainly worth the upgrade if you own the original.



Bowling was one of our favourite games in the first game and Monkey Bowling 2 is even better, with some brand new moving lanes to test even the best monkey bowlers.



Whilst it's not going to challenge FIFA as the best footy game on the Cube, Monkey Soccer is quick and easy and a perfect post-pub multiplayer game, even if it is only 2 players.

Version	Final NTSC
Developer	Amusement Vision
Publisher	Sega
Format	GCN
Players	1-4
Verdict	
Presentation:	10
Graphics:	9
Sound:	6
Lastability:	10
Gameplay:	10
Overall:	9 / 10

# Review: Unreal Championship

**Xbox LIVE has already arrived, although not officially until the middle of March. That hasn't stopped Jas kicking hell out of folk on Unreal.**

Now that ID is concentrating on Doom III, the Unreal series has the opportunity to seize the first person mantle from Quake and establish itself at number one. We may have enjoyed conversions of Quake games on several formats but Unreal hasn't done itself justice: the Dreamcast version of Unreal was average, whilst the Playstation 2 release was shocking. Time to set the record straight, and Unreal Championship has the advantage of being specifically developed for the Xbox. So has Digital Extremes finally brought the bacon home?

For those of you who believe that all first person shooters are strictly thinking mans affairs such as Deus Ex or mindless blasters along the lines of Red Faction, then prepare to be shocked. There are a series of games within the genre, which champion combat and the pure adrenaline rush it provides, with little regard for stories or complex set pieces. You and your gun have to kill everyone else to survive. Simple, addictive and highly competitive: welcome to the world of Unreal Championship.

**The single player experience is broken down into various sections, but for a quick kill, you can go to the Instant Action or Play Live modes.**

Before engaging the enemy in single player you need to select your team mates and other options, and then you are confronted by five game types, each broken down into a series of challenges. Progression is obviously rewarded with each subsequent mode becoming available, and is an ingenious way of forcing the player to experience each and every possibility: before being humiliated online. The menu system could have been a little better implemented as this is one part of Unreal which hasn't changed much over the past few years. A tutorial is also included for those who have never visited killing fields such as these before.

Now we're all certainly aware of the plaudits rained down upon Unreal Championship when discussing the



The main one-player game returns but it's much better this time around with more structure and a clearer path to your ultimate goal. It also looks a lot better too, with more variation in the levels.

graphics. However the hype is exaggerated, raising the level of expectation too high, in other words hyperbole. Unreal certainly looks sweet and has a myriad lighting effects, smooth frame rate and huge levels. Yet for all I've heard beforehand I was expecting more, perhaps the mistake of playing Quake III Team Arena on the PC recently has removed some of Unreal's shine.

Regardless, online I would be very impressed but offline I was lead to believe things would be greater. For all the glorious visuals, some of the textures look flat and bland in comparison to their neighbours. The frame rate is solid, however it lacks the pace and urgency of Quake, here you feel as if you are plodding around each arena, rather than tearing up everything. For those able to enjoy Dolby Digital, then you will be suitably impressed with Unreal Championship, even though after a while the taunts and unrelenting industrial music becomes rather tiresome.

For all these minor points, the combat on Unreal is as strong as ever, featuring new additions for console owners. The array of weaponry is well balanced and constantly available – perhaps a little

too much. The AI is efficient without every rising to the standards offered elsewhere; certainly Unreal Championship is not the hardest game, the genre has to offer. Yet games such as this only come alive with friends: online or offline. When trying to play the game offline on a split screen mode there is perhaps too much detail, which is wasted on such a small confined space. Again a stripped down variant with more emphasis on speed would have been preferred, but in such a mode there is no disputing the technical skills of the developer. Regardless of how the offline element plays, it is the online side of the game where all of Digital Extreme's and Microsoft's hopes are resting. Fortunately however, the end result is startling good fun and a great insight into the Xbox's future.

Online access is incredibly straightforward and easy to setup. Simply choose to play live and you are then offered a choice of options. Quick Match will immediately take you to the next accessible game, otherwise a quick fiddle around on the Opti Mode will see you tailoring a match to suit your own needs. A few seconds later and you're thrust into the intense, frantic, wonderfully satisfying experience that is Xbox Live.

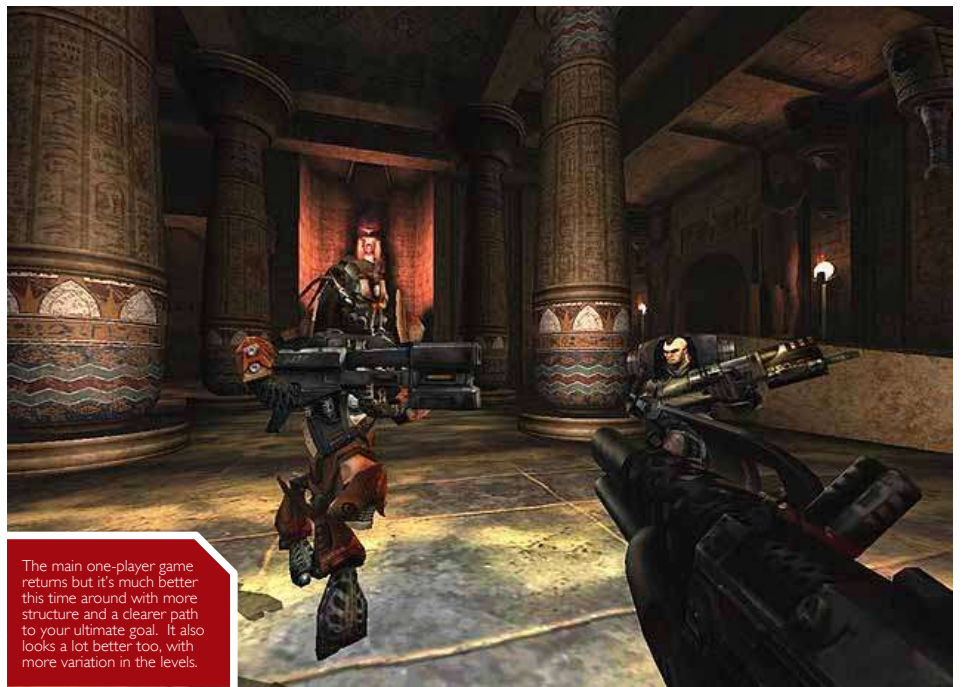
As expected your human opponents are cunning adversaries with battles against more experienced players resulting in you quickly leaving your current session and looking for a more balanced setup. Don't worry this takes no time at all.

Blowing the hell out of your fellow man is not only extremely rewarding, but increases twofold once you realise you can taunt/talk to your fellow players. To keep things simple and coherent, you share a channel with up to 3 other players. Barring the odd excited gamers, (mostly, but not always Americans) who decide to use the often unintelligible voice masking, speech is surprisingly clear.

**Never is this more apparent, than when you leave the standard Death Matches and take your place in the team events. All of a sudden you realise how important the Xbox communicator actually is, and the end result is some of the most fun you can currently have online.**

Play through a dedicated server - you are given a choice of rating between 1 and 4 stars – and there are hardly any visual differences to the offline version. The much-rumoured dodgy frame-rate only rears its ugly head on the 1 star setting (which as a result is unplayable).

Otherwise only a few of the guns (the link in particular) suffer from any of the lagging caused by too many people on the American servers.



The main one-player game returns but it's much better this time around with more structure and a clearer path to your ultimate goal. It also looks a lot better too, with more variation in the levels.

Fortunately, however, this should cease to be a problem once the European servers go live in March. To be honest though, in all my times playing, I've never felt that a lost match was due to anything more than a lack of incompetence on my part. Overall Unreal Championship is a game of 2 halves. While the offline mode does have its moments, they are few and far between and as already stated the game adds nothing new to the saturated genre. If you are not intending to purchase Xbox Live anytime soon, you may want to try before you buy. Having said that though, if you are one of the lucky guys or girls to already own Xbox live, this purchase is simply essential. It becomes a loud, brash, in your face experience, that simply elevates the game to a whole new level.

Now excuse me, I have some fragging to do.



The main one-player game returns but it's much better this time around with more structure and a clearer path to your ultimate goal. It also looks a lot better too, with more variation in the levels.

Version

Final PAL

Developer

Epic

Publisher

Infogrames

Format

Xbox

Players

1-16 (LIVE)

Verdict

Presentation: 7

Graphics: 9

Sound: 5

Lastability: 7

Gameplay: 7

Overall: 7 / 10

# Review: Metroid Prime

The UK Cube scene is quiet, so here's Darran's take on the US version of Metroid Prime, is it really the best game so far on the Gamecube?



Despite these screens Metroid Prime is not a first person shooter in the usual sense. Think of it as a 3D version of the previous Metroid games and you'll be much closer to the truth.



It isn't just the bosses that are visually stunning, even the smallest bugs are perfectly modelled and animated, and there's no shortage of eye-candy throughout.





Version

Final NTSC

Developer

Retro

Publisher

Nintendo

Format

GCN

Players

1

Verdict

Presentation: 10

Graphics: 10

Sound: 8

Lastability: 8

Gameplay: 9

Overall: 9 / 10



With only a few basic weapons you might think there isn't much to Prime, but you'd be wrong - you're constantly upgrading your kit, Zelda style, which is repeatedly rewarding.

# Feature: Electronic Arts

Jason takes a long look at the World's richest games company - Electronic Arts, and finds out just what they've done for gaming.



EA are all about franchises: Nightfire is the latest 007 licensed game that does little to further the genre. This trend looks highly likely to continue due to healthy sales across the formats.

Today Electronic Arts is the largest and most dominant independent developer and publisher in the world, possessing undoubted riches (\$1.7 billion in revenue for 2002), influence and employing almost 4000 worldwide.

Its decisions can make or break a format i.e. Dreamcast, and therefore Microsoft, Nintendo and Sony treat it with the up most respect. One in every four games sold worldwide is an EA release. The post Christmas period has served only to confirm this further, with the company dominating the charts, television, print and prominent storefronts. If anything now is the time to understand Electronic Arts – its origins, practices and most importantly of all – where does it see itself in the future?

Electronic Arts began like any other fledgling developer when a small group of programmers founded the company in 1982, with a certain Trip Hawkins who had left his role as a director of product marketing with Apple to realise his dream. Even in these early days the company stood apart from its competitors because it realised the potential of the industry and the importance of presentation, hence the name Electronic Arts. Despite initial releases on the Apple and Atari formats things did not really begin to develop until Hawkins invited Larry Probst to join the company.

**Probst brought a professional and business approach to the company, which competitors are only now beginning to adopt.**

He left his sales job in 1984 and headed west to join Electronic Arts, fully aware of the market potential after witnessing Pong in action, joining as the Vice President of Sales. Immediately his retail and sales experience transformed the company and took it from the cottage industry into the real world. The normal business model for a publisher/developer is that a separate company handles the distribution, and in turn deals with the retailer. This model may remove responsibility from the developer, which to small firms is advantageous, however potentially you lose control, influence and a

chunk of the revenue. Probst recognised this as an area for development and began to make changes after becoming Senior Vice President of EA Distribution from 1987-1991, which remain in place today.

Electronic Arts handles its own distribution and deals directly with the retailers – one of the few companies to do so. It has built an efficient mechanism, which ensures that its games are available on the shelves (stock control and supply) and gauges demand very effectively. An example of its success is that it handles distribution for rival developers such as Namco in Europe.

As we are fully aware having games available is one thing, but promoting them inside and outside the store is something, which Electronic Arts leads the field in. An advantage of its distribution is that it allows EA to deal directly with each store and retailer. Representatives visit branches and exercise "friendly pressure" as one store manager put it, to ensure that EA product is highly visual in shop fronts

and on the shop floor. They even go as far as to take photographs of the displays as proof that EA product is represented in each store. Consumers are quite often lazy, especially so around Christmas and in most cases want to immediately walk into a store, see the game on sale, buy it, and then leave.

**Quite often prominent in-store displays are a highly effective tool in purchase decisions and are, as EA realise, well worth the additional cost.**

Take the test, walk into a store and look, I find it surprising that few other publishers have woken up to this fact. Practically every video game store I visit has at least one EA release on prominent display, quite often the only one on the shop floor.



And Medal of Honor is a hugely popular series, and whilst the PS2 version was initially impressive in its day, little improvements have been added to the Xbox and Cube versions despite their delays.



The key word when discussing the business practices of EA is control, because the company likes to keep every aspect of the game cycle firmly under its control. Each game is carefully planned and developed with a definite release date in mind as few EA games miss their launch dates – the Playstation 2 version of The Sims was put back until 2003 not because the game wasn't ready, in fact the market wasn't as EA put it. Normally when a game is finished and ready for sale, this spells the end of the involvement of the developer as they hand over control to the distributors and marketing companies. Not so with EA who as mentioned handle their own distribution and marketing. The common practice for video game reviews is that the PR firm will send out the finalised version to the applicable magazine or website, with the review then being published when ready.

**Again EA differs from the normal approach demanding that they see the finalised review before it is published, and even going so far as to suggest changes or pointing out more favourable reviews.**

Some have even gone as far as to allege that EA pay for good reviews, which is something that has never happened at Gamestyle. However when you compare the constant positive reviews that EA games receive in the mainstream press compared to fan based sites, which have little to do with the company, it does raise questions – despite a recent apparent increase in the quality of EA's major key titles.

Whatever the truth may be it is unquestionable that EA do have different business practices in comparison to other publishers and PR firms, but these achieve results as more than fifty EA games have sold over a million copies in the last four years.

After the departure of Trip Hawkins in 1991 who surprisingly left to form 3DO of all things, Probst has driven EA forward, eventually assuming the title of President shortly after his departure and then elected as Chairman in 1994, a role, which he still occupies today. These years have seen a rise in the awareness of the EA brand and most importantly of all an increase in the franchises, which have become the central cog in the machine. Looking more closely at the corporate biographies of the current EA board reveals an average age of almost 44 years. Of the eleven listed several have worked their way up through EA over a period of time, but only Don Mattrick (President, Worldwide Studios) has any background in software development. The rest collectively feature an employment history that includes Amazon, Haagen-Dazs, Pepsi and Pizza Hut. Whilst the current board possesses excellent business sense, I cannot help but feel that the balance struck between this and a software background is extreme. As I will discuss later, the industry is changing and EA is not best equipped



to adapt unless they suddenly change a core principal, which Probst firmly believes in.

Whilst EA may not set new trends in game design, instead happy to maintain a certain air of predictability, it does innovate in other areas. For several years the company has aggressively snapped up promising independent developers and added them to its growing roster. Not only does the studio become an asset, but EA does not need to contract out development on its growing portfolio of franchises. In the UK a power base was created in Chertsey, Surrey, after the acquisition of Bullfrog in 1995, despite many of its employees leaving after the take over, a specially designed complex for the creation of games was built. Everything is kept firmly in-house, despite studios being scattered across continents. Only recently have its nearest rivals (Activision, Acclaim, Take-Two) adopted a similar strategy aggressively purchasing developers including Angel Studios, DMA Design, despite EA acquiring Distinctive Software way back in 1991 and Maxis in 1997. Centralisation has allowed the company to invest in and develop some of the best animation and programming techniques, which are used by all of its studios to create realistic players and environments.

Acquisitions do not merely stop at promising studios, as EA has maintained and built up a fearsome catalogue of licenses and intellectual property. Games such as FIFA, SSX, NBA, Madden, Medal of Honour, James Bond and Harry Potter are almost a license to print money – and firmly linked to EA in the minds of the consumer. The success of such a ploy is helped by the five EA Brands, of which three (EA Sports, EA Sports Big and EA Games) are specifically found on its releases.

When the license for creating video games based on the Harry Potter films became available (a cool \$25 million) there was only one company in the running – no one can outbid or even compete with EA on a financial basis. As the saying goes – the rich get richer. So don't expect Madden, FIFA or James Bond to appear anywhere else in the foreseeable future, as all parties are extremely happy. This can be perceived as an extremely unhealthy advantage in terms of competition, but it has forced competitors to look, and invest elsewhere – sometimes striking gold as Activision

did with Tony Hawk. Licenses are where EA excels and through mass marketing and annual releases, it has created what Geoff Keighley called "bullet proof franchises." The beauty of the EA business model is that it has a specific team solely concentrating on a specific series. The FIFA team is based in Canada; the Madden team is based in Florida and each has the aim of making the next instalment the best yet – on time of course. The advantages of such an approach are obvious, as are the technological gains and economies of scale, which EA enjoys over its rivals.

The trend of having specific teams to focus on specific releases is growing in popularity throughout the industry as Rockstar North now seem content with making Grand Theft Auto an annual series as well. In total such annual releases account for 70% of EA's annual income, meaning that the need for new franchises and chart successes is reduced in comparison to others.

When discussing the future of Electronic Arts you realise the plans Probst has for the company as shown in a recent interview he gave to Business2.

Many would believe that the logical progression is for EA to enter the hardware market and establish itself as a competitor to Nintendo and Sony, but nothing could be further from the truth. In fact the one factor, which EA dislikes about the video game industry, is the fact that every five years new platforms arrive, which they must adjust to and harness.

## All it would take is one bad decision, backing the wrong format and the financial implications could be disastrous.

The Playstation 2 currently accounts for 66% of all sales, but imagine if EA had decided not to support the format? If anything EA wishes to break free from the confines of the industry and establish itself as a major player in other areas. It seems that the business of interactive home entertainment software (video games to you and I) is not enough to contain the ambition of Electronic Arts.

The future of video games is very hard to predict however there is no denying that the role of connectivity, online gaming and communication is growing in importance. EA realises that such a development could endanger its policy of annual releases through the availability of downloads and updates. This is why it invested heavily in EA.com, which is one of its five brands and has lost \$368 million in the process. Currently it's only purpose is that of providing information regarding the company and its releases, but after the success of Playstation 2 online Madden release, its role will grow especially with The Sims Online due shortly.

However all is not well because the average video game consumer is changing rapidly: we are growing older and our tastes are changing accordingly. The two biggest releases of 2001 and 2002 have come from the same series: Grand Theft Auto, which has dominated charts worldwide. Even with a mature

rating (18 in UK) gamers young and old aspire to play the game and enjoy the mature content. The signs are clear: the next generation of games will feature mature content and will sell in vast quantities, as discussed in my BMX XXXX feature. Lara Croft is the sure fit hit in Eidos' catalogue, however despite this the publisher realised that she needed to grow, become darker, more mature and Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness is a direct response to the growing trend.

The publishers of Grand Theft Auto (Take Two) are a young, dynamic and aggressive company not hindered by a code of family values as shown by the ageing Electronic Arts. Probst realises the demand for mature content but "culturally, our executive just can't get comfortable with the content in a game like Grand Theft Auto." Chief Creative Officer Bing Gordon explains the position as "management only wants to sell stuff that we'd be proud to have in our homes in front of our families." Analysts feel that EA is letting personal preferences obstruct the potential growth, yet Probst is unsympathetic: "we have an obligation to get EA's

share price as high as we can, but that doesn't mean we have to prostitute ourselves or violate our code of ethics." The reason for such a stance is that Probst is following the example of Disney whom he believes Electronic Arts should aspire to. With no reservations Probst explains the goal of EA is "to become the greatest entertainment company ever."

This means moving into other areas which its expertise and healthy bank balance (\$900 million) can be put to use, particularly entertainment and fields such as film, television and music. Squaresoft may have been brought to its knees after the disastrous Final Fantasy movie but EA seems undeterred.

Certainly if one company can break out of the video game industry into other forms of entertainment, it has to be Electronic Arts.



2 shots from the PS2 version of EA's Lord of the Rings game. The game has just been released on Xbox and Gamecube. EA prove that money can buy anything, especially film licenses.



# Feature: Phantagram Interview

**Our man with the mic  
Darran spoke with  
Phantagram about  
their mech battler,  
Phantom Crash.**

We liked Phantom Crash, it's an involving, fun blaster with plenty of customisation and stacks of story. Possibly a little too niche for most gamers, sadly, but if you like your action fast it's very good.



## What inspired you to create Phantom Crash?

In Japan there are many Mech type games and TV shows. But the trouble in the game department is most of them are very typical with the Military style, and they can't always capture the speedy swift movements. We took a different approach with Phantom Crash, a battle royal style tournament that differentiate from the rest. With the oppression here in Tokyo, it doesn't make it hard for us to imagine what it would be like if everyone left it behind. So we thought "What is Tokyo was like this? What if everyone was like that?" From that we came up with Phantom Crash and just kept applying more ideas in the game as time went by.

## Xbox live - thoughts and possibilities?

Xbox live is a good way to go to experience games on a fresh level. Though this experience has been encountered for many years on the PC, but on a console I think Microsoft image pushing of Xbox LIVE is good and innovative for the console world. It's this area we wanted to use for Phantom Crash, but we didn't had the tools to make use of it at the time.

## What are your thoughts on the Xbox controller?

It's great for 3D world games, but for fighting titles I believe the digital directional pad needs more work. Though the size of the controller is arguable, the colour button positions isn't. Controller S resolve some of these problems but I believe it still isn't well thought out enough, like the black and white buttons. Anyhow this is strictly my opinion and not in reflection to many others from Genki.

**The game contains a massive selection of music from a variety of Japanese artists, is there anyone you may have wanted to include like the Boredoms for instance but couldn't?**

There are always artists that we want to include but in the end of the day you have to ask yourself does the ones you've selected in budget feasibility is

sufficient. I believe the ones we have caters for majority of audience tastes.

**From Software are known for their Armored Core spinoffs without being direct sequels, do you have any ideas on where to take the story next?**

We have many ideas that we have for the sequel of Phantom Crash, but before we're for sure of anything we have to see the sales of the current version first.

**How much feedback have you had from the release, and what have you learned from it?**

We've learnt a great deal during the development and from feedback from our fans and Publisher, Phantagram. These feedbacks we'll consider and take note for future references, as they're very good.

**Phantagram are a new publisher, how was it working with them on the project?**

Phantagram has been extremely cooperative and supportive during the development of Phantom Crash.

**Microsoft have received criticism for delays in responding to Japanese coders development problems how was it working with them in comparison to the other hardware manufacturers?**

We've been working closely together with Phantagram, not Microsoft. But I must say that the delay of receive Xbox Live tools was problematic in not making our ideas in support for this feature becoming a reality.

**Who did the mechanical design for the game, and why were they chosen in the first place?**

They were chosen as we felt they're the best way for the player to feel part of controlling a strong machine/robot, but still will all the swift style of play of an arcade type game. So we wanted to bring simulation and arcade to a balance. This resulted

with a deep learning curve in a game, where the player skill levels would really show through their Scoobie handling.

**Phantom Crash holds many similarities to From Software's Armored Core series, was this intentional or accidental?**

We didn't have the title Armored Core in mind whilst in development of this game.

**Do you think you should have cut out a lot of the text for Western versions?**

Not really... The storyline is deep and involving for those who reads it. But those who not bothered at all we have enable a shortcut activation to skip the text completely. But we've considered this aspect for the next version.

**Why didn't you default the view to the far superior and involving first person mode?**

This is only an opinion and even then during the main game you can switch between first and third person perspective. With such accessible options that's in place, you have to ask is it really necessary whether it start in third or first person viewpoint? I don't think so.

**Any chance of there being PS2/GC versions?**

No comments... But I can say putting Phantom Crash 2 on the PS2 seem an interesting idea. But this is just an idea.

**And finally, where is the new Tokyo Racer?**

New Tokyo Racer? What's that? LOL, No comment.

We'd like to thank Gavin at Phantagram for his valuable time in speaking with us.

# Feature:

## Juro Watari Interview

Ollie Barder  
talks exclusively  
for Gamestyle  
with Juro Watari about  
the future of the  
Virtual On series

Juro Watari

In 1995 SEGA released a very interesting title for their Model 2 range of arcade boards. It was one of the first games to fully utilise a 3D environment, and in a novel way at that. The game was "Cybertroopers Virtual On". Since then there have been two other games released in the series, "Virtual On Oratorio Tangram" and "Virtual On Force". All have been, initially, multiplayer arcade games. However with the upcoming release of the latest game in the saga, "Virtual On Marz", all that appears to be changing.

We managed to secure an exclusive interview with the creator and producer of the groundbreaking series, Juro Watari, after this year's "Tokyo Game Show". I hope you enjoy the fruit of our labours.

**Ollie Barder: Where did the idea of "dash attacks" and high speed spatial reasoning based combat originate from, as well as the game's control through the use of TwinSticks?**

Juro Watari: When I started to think about the game, I had a mental image of gigantic human shaped robots fighting high speed battles in a 3D space. The current state of the game uses all the necessary factors to realise that.

**OB: What is your favourite incarnation of "Virtual On" and why?**

JW: As a creator none of them satisfy me entirely. When I create something, the process necessitates

the creator to choose or abandon some ideas. This mostly derive from technical problems or the time limit game development produces. But the frustration caused by such moments has been the motivation to make more games.

**OB: What do you attribute to "Virtual On's" success in Japan, compared to its relative obscurity abroad?**

JW: In Japan we have had a rich robot anime tradition for the past forty years. Therefore in the mind of many generations of Japanese people the image of gigantic robots jumping about and fighting is a rather cool one. This impression and picture which are imprinted on their collective consciousness heightens the desire to drive and to "control big robots". Hence they seek games that offer this.

This sort of mentality is creating the potential, so in a way the success of "Virtual On" was promised, simply because it satisfies these needs. On the other hand, abroad there is no cultural foundation as such. Therefore it is naturally obvious that the road to success will be a difficult one.

**OB: What has normally been the most difficult part in development for each incarnation of "Virtual On" and why?**

JW: Balancing the attributes for each VR, so as to keep the game balanced, and the development of the game engine.

**OB: The arenas and game environments play a big role within the game, how are these areas designed in such an optimum way?**

JW: Due to the nature of the versus combat, I suggested what was necessary and the arenas were designed accordingly.



From the outside, the Virtual On series is often overlooked, but once you're a fan you're hooked. The one on one mech battling is unsurpassed and has many fans.

**OB:** Is there a chance that we'll be able to see a home version of "Virtual On Force"?

**JW:** No. If the technological abilities of consoles increase then there is a point of making one. However, as the situation is now, it is very difficult to convert "Virtual On Force" to a console.

**OB:** How closely do you work with Hajime Katoki on virtuaroid (VR) design? How much of an influence does he have on the game?

**JW:** The main concepts of VR design come from me, it is extremely rare that Hajime Katoki says anything about the game content.

**OB:** What drove the decision to develop "Virtual On Marz" for the PS2? Are there any plans to develop the "Virtual On" series on other game consoles?

**JW:** I chose PS2 as I was forced to choose a platform that is more widely available to most consumers. As for other consoles, there are no plans at present.

**OB:** Will "Virtual On Marz" have any large changes or additions to actual virtuaroid (VR) operation?

**JW:** From the beginning I thought about a control setup that didn't rely on TwinSticks, and would work well with an AI consort.

**OB:** Now that "Virtual On Marz" is based around a mission mode, how will the AI of the opponents change, considering that up and till now the game has been focused on human multiplayer?

**JW:** There was no need for any fundamental changes in the AI. Simply because it is programmed from the beginning so as to cope with various eventualities. The AI was made to be versatile from the outset. So, because the AI is versatile, when the environment changes the behaviour of the AI changes accordingly. For this reason when you play the game you may feel that the AI "has changed".

**OB:** Who is responsible for "Virtual On's" plot? Will the likes of "One Man Rescue" and "Fragmentary Passage" be used as reference in "Virtual On Marz"?

**JW:** I am responsible for the story, and the small amount of information released thus far will be reflected in "Marz" in some way.

**OB:** The story for "Virtual On" has been very enigmatic, will "Virtual On Marz" cast any specific light on the murky nature of the series' plot?

**JW:** It was very rare that the story was explained in any detail before. We felt that it detracted from the action orientated nature of the game. On the other hand as "Marz" is taking a new direction for the series we are thinking about producing a more detailed story.

**OB:** What sort of multiplayer modes are planned for "Virtual On Marz"? How will players connect to each other for battle? Will there be online play?

**JW:** There will be no online play. This is because within the current internet infrastructure the super

fast performance that "Virtual On" requires is not possible.

**OB:** Will there be any chance of zero-gravity arenas in "Virtual On Marz", like the final stage of "Virtual On Oratorio Tangram"?

**JW:** I am planning to create a stages that will surprise you, but in a different way to "Virtual On Oratorio Tangram".

**OB:** In what ways besides the dramatic/story mode do you plan to extend the life of the game itself?

**JW:** We are planning to allow the player to unlock many VRs and a "Time Attack" mode after you complete the mission mode. There is a possibility there maybe human versus combat, but with certain limitations.

**OB:** Will there be a TwinStick peripheral for "Virtual On Marz"? If so, will it be a USB based device and what kind of improvement work has been made upon the possibility of future TwinStick design?

**JW:** "Marz" is a new series which has taken a different direction to the current "Virtual On" series. In "Marz" TwinSticks will not be used.

**OB:** Were there any sacrifices or improvements in visual quality in relation to "Virtual On Force"?

**JW:** Graphics always relies on hardware. "Force" operated on SEGA hardware whereas "Marz" operates on Sony hardware. This is to say that these games rely on different hardware, so naturally the graphical characteristics of these games will be different. However we are always making efforts in appropriating our way of expression to the type hardware we rely on. In this sense it is not about improvement or downgrading, it is about us doing our best with what we have.

**OB:** Which virtuaroids (VRs) will be available for the player to pilot in "Virtual On Marz"? Will there be any customization options similar to those in

"Virtual On Oratorio Tangram M.S.B.S. 5.66"? Will there be any new unlockable virtuaroids (VRs) in "Virtual On Marz"?

**JW:** We are still debating on how many VRs that will be available to the player.

**OB:** Is there any chance of seeing a US or European release of "Virtual On Marz"?

**JW:** We are currently debating whether to release the game in the US and Europe. As a developer, it would be great if we could release the game in the US and Europe. However we cannot directly publish our games so I cannot guarantee the possibility of a release.

**OB:** What do you see as the future direction of "Virtual On"? Many people have commented that "Virtual On Force" is similar to the original "Virtual On" in its very experimental and limited state. Will there be another "2x2" (team based four player) "Virtual On" which will fully flesh out the versus future as you see it? Will "Virtual On" ever return to the arcade?

**JW:** The future of "Virtual On" will synchronise with the technology of the future. The "Virtual On" system has the strength that can take in new methods of expression that is made possible when technology advances and overcomes technical difficulties. "Virtual On" can also take in new types of play that can be realised by the advancing understanding of software technology. As for the arcade whether a new version appears, or not, depends on the direction of the arcade market. Therefore it is difficult to give a clear answer. The arcade market is shrinking. As a result, the technological improvement of arcade hardware has been postponed over the last ten years. Some consider the situation to be in an extreme state of stagnation. Therefore optimism may be difficult in this case.

Thanks go to Mr. Watari and Mr. Sasahara (Hitmaker) for making this interview possible. Translation by Ohno Yukiko. The full, unedited version of this interview can be found at [gamestyle.net](http://gamestyle.net).



# Feature:

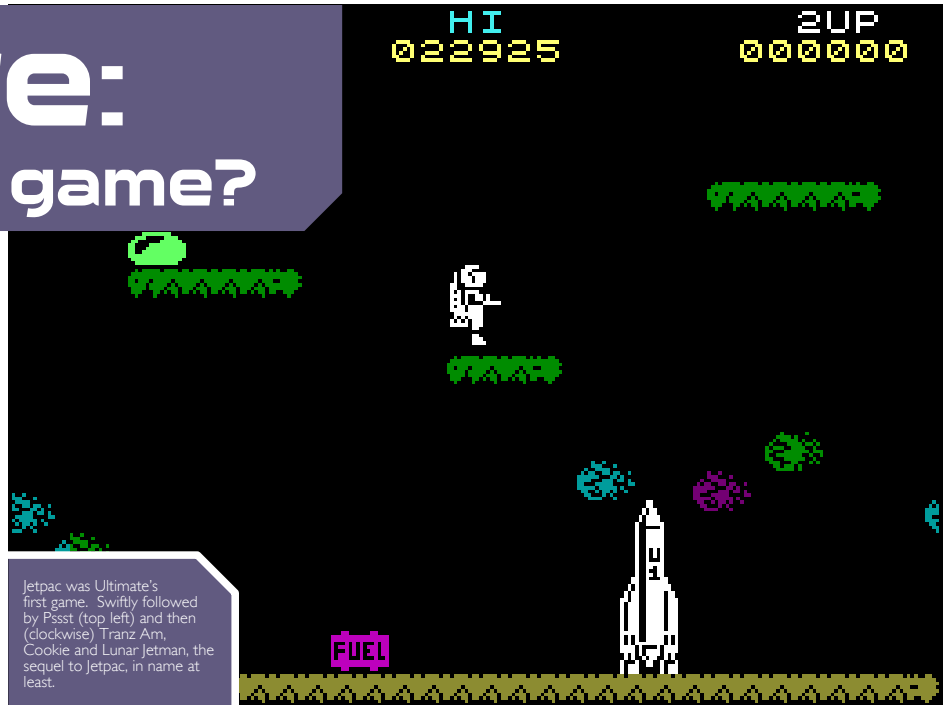
The best gaming moments ever





# Feature: The Ultimate game?

The first part of our look back at one of gaming's finest stories as Alex plunders the Ultimate Spectrum back catalog.

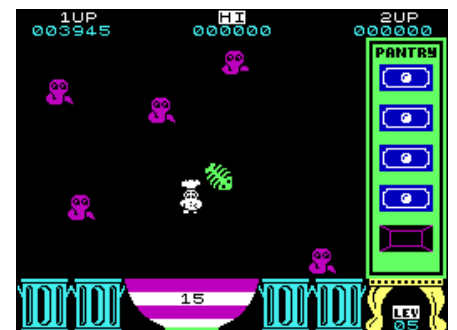


Jetpac was Ultimate's first game. Swiftly followed by Psst (top left) and then (clockwise) Tranz Am, Cookie and Lunar Jetman, the sequel to Jetpac, in name at least.

In my opinion one of the best things to happen to the current generation consoles is the Xbox. Not because of the groundbreaking graphics capabilities, the amazing 5.1 surround sound, or even the ample processor leg-room to finally enable some believable artificial intelligence, but the fact that it's basically a 586-based chip and a familiar graphics card. If this isn't immediately obvious why it's such a blessing then you might want to check out the huge amount of homebrew software that's currently floating around on the internet. I'm not saying one way or another whether the introduction of pirated commercial software is a good thing or a bad thing, that's for another day, but the arrival of the Xbox mod-chip has certainly unlocked another side of Microsoft's console.



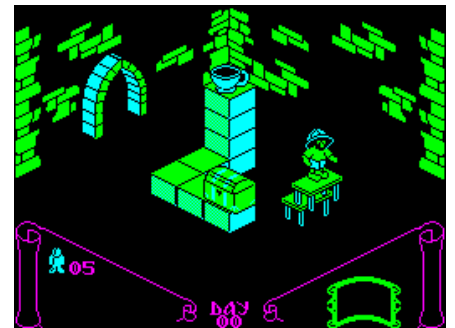
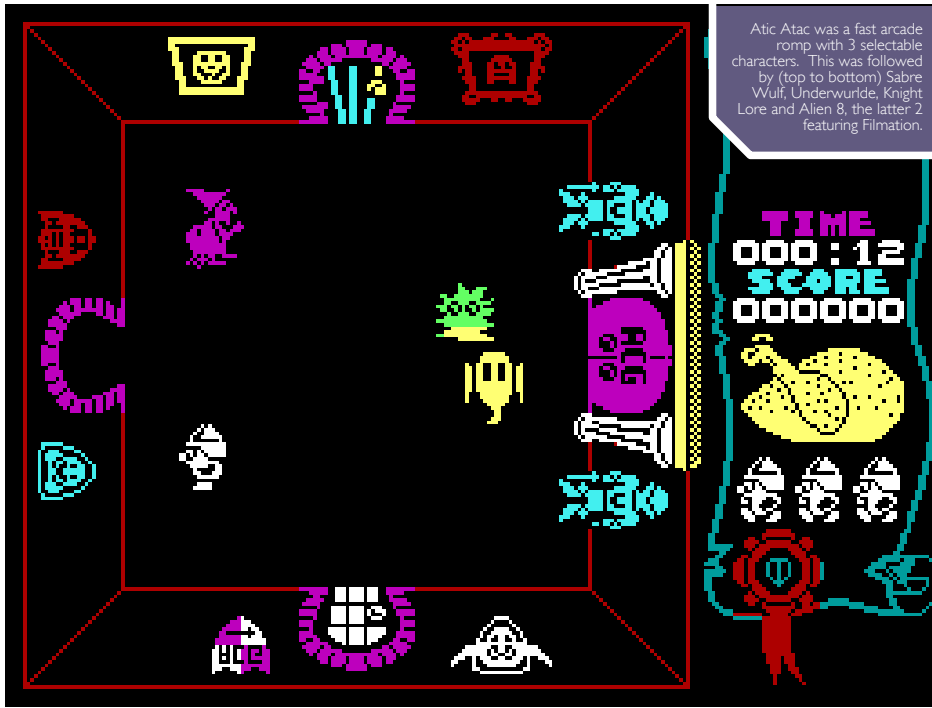
Whilst the PlayStation 2 shipped with a rudimentary BASIC programming language on the demo disk, it was hardly going to bring forth a revolution of bedroom coders; the Xbox, through no moves of it's own, has done. The sheer ease of porting Windows software (and famously, Linux) to the Xbox isn't going to make anybody any money as such, but it has enabled groups to realise Xbox code for the infamous MAME (Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator) amongst others. Of course, with the arrival of affordable DVD writers you're only a few steps away from having thousands of pre-1990 arcade games running through your big black box. It's this reviewer's opinion that this is a good thing. The roms are obsolete, abandonware, and few of us will ever own one arcade machine at home, never mind a thousand.

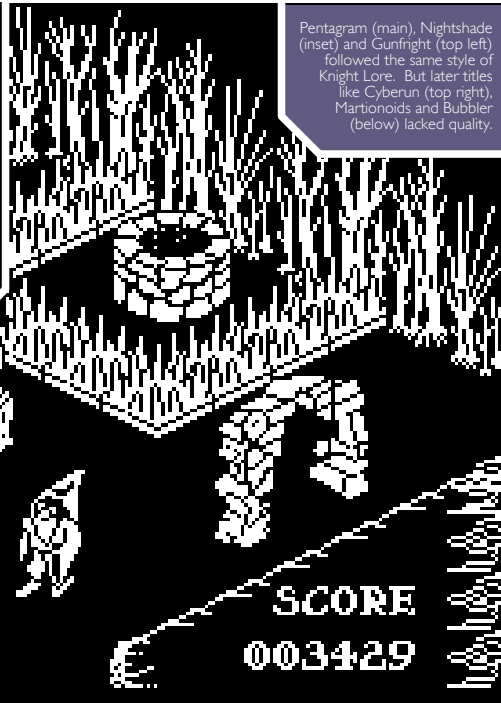
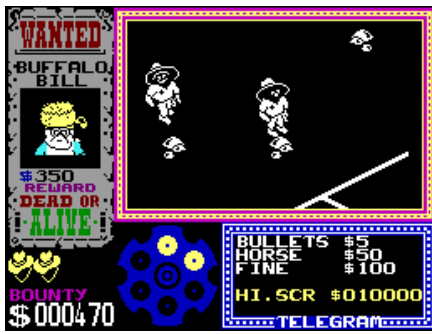


A working Sinclair Spectrum emulator is just around the corner, and whilst there certainly won't be a problem fitting every single 48K game onto one 4.5 gigabyte disk, I'm not going to go anywhere near it. Whilst my argument regarding the MAME disk holds (to me) some weight, I don't believe you could ever replicate the whole Spectrum thing with a controller S. To many people, being in possession of an original rubber-keyed 48K Spectrum with a few original games is something to be proud of, and if those games bear the Ultimate badge, well, cherish them.

See, to an outsider those horrible low resolution 8 colour displays did nothing to tempt them into buying into the whole Sinclair scene. Perfectly happy with their Commodore 64s, they'd sit, sniggering at the Spectrum game cases just like old-school fanboys, whilst those in the know - those that picked up a copy of Jetpac in 1983 - would be so enraptured in their games to notice.

I actually remember buying Psst first, but quickly picked up the aforementioned side-on shooter after remarking on the unheard of production quality of Ultimate Play the Game's second release. The colours were shockingly bright and vivid, and both games just screamed quality, and more importantly, potential. These guys were going to be good.





Pentagram (main), Nightshade (inset) and Gunflight (top left) followed the same style of Knight Lore. But later titles like Cyberun (top right), Martionoids and Bubbler (below) lacked quality.



# Retro:

## Classic game ad #1

48K SINCLAIR ZX SPECTRUM



"KNIGHT LORE" recommended retail price £9.95 inc VAT  
Available from W.H.SMITHS, BOOTS, J.MENZIES, WOOLWORTHS  
and all good software retail outlets. Also available from  
PLAY THE GAME, The Green, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire LE6 5JU  
(P&P included) Tel: 0530 411485

Ultimate's Knightlore was the defining moment in their 8-bit career, introducing the isometric perspective dubbed Filmation by the Stamper Brothers. Years ahead of it's time, Knightlore was stunning.

# GSO: Gamestyle Online



**GSO:**  
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